THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

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LIVING STREAM MINISTRY

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PREFACE

This book is composed of messages given by Brother Witness Lee in February 1956 in meetings held in Taipei, Taiwan. These messages speak of what the church is and has, the building of the church, and the coordination, order, and authority of the Body of Christ.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BODY OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Gen. 1:26-28; Psa. 8:4-8; Heb. 2:6-15; Matt. 1:23; 16:15-19; 18:17-20; Eph. 1:22-23; 1 Tim. 3:15-16; Rev. 21:2-3, 10-11, 22-23; 22:1-2, 5b

THE BURDEN FOR THE LORD'S MOVE

In the Old Testament times God's people gathered together three times a year, but in the New Testament God calls His children together whenever the church makes a turn. Our experiences in the recent years confirm this principle. Whenever God leads the brothers and sisters from various places to gather together, we know that God is moving further in His church; He is making a turn in the church. Many brothers and sisters can testify concerning this. The churches in Taiwan are now spreading in an unprecedented way. More than fifty local churches have been raised up, many people have been brought to salvation, and many believers have been raised up by the Lord to learn to serve Him.

Therefore, we strongly feel that the Lord is moving once again, but we must not have outward spreading only; we must allow the Lord to work in us more deeply. Our work should not take care of man's need only, according to man's present condition; it should also take care of God's need, according to God's eternal plan. Thus, we have an unprecedented burden that we would see the Lord's purpose for the church according to His further move.

As we have contacted the saints in various places, we have been impressed with two matters. On the one hand, we worship the Lord that He has bestowed much grace on this island; on the other hand, we strongly feel that the Lord has not gained what He is after, and many who serve the Lord still need a deeper, more crucial seeing. Our zeal is commendable, and our love and pursuit of the Lord are precious. However, if the Lord opens our eyes, we will see that He has been unable to move further in us. Let us see what God is doing on the earth today.

GOD'S PURPOSE BEING TO GAIN A CORPORATE MAN

Our God has a unique purpose in the universe. This purpose is to gain man. He desires to gain man so that man can manifest Him and reign for Him. To manifest God is to express God Himself, and to reign for God is to deal with God's enemy. In order to accomplish this twofold purpose in the universe, God must gain a group of people.

God's Image and Authority Being Manifested in Man

The Bible reveals that in order for God to accomplish this twofold purpose through man, He must enter into man to be joined and mingled with man. When God enters into man and is united with man as one, man can be His expression and can represent His authority. According to Genesis 1, when God created man, God said that He would make man in His image; then He said that He would let man have dominion over all things, especially over the earth and the things that creep upon the earth (v. 26). This means that God created man so that man would first bear His image and then represent His authority. Here we see a sequence; first there is image, and then there is authority.

Image is before authority because image is a matter of life, and authority is a matter of function. Man must have God's life in order to function according to God's desire. In other words, man must have God's image to be like God before he can have God's authority to reign for God. In order for God to accomplish His purpose in man, on the one hand, He must enter into man to be man's life, and on the other hand, man must allow God to enter into him to be his life. This is seen in Genesis 2 with the tree of life and God's giving man a free will (vv. 9, 16-17). In order for God to enter into man as life, man must choose God and cooperate with God. Only when man is willing to allow God to enter into him to be his life will God's image and authority be manifested in man.

The Corporate Man Being Like God and Reigning for God

We should also see that God desires to gain a corporate man, not just one man or a few men. In relation to the creation of man, Genesis 1 speaks first of image, then of authority, and finally of multiplication (vv. 26-28). Multiplication implies a corporate entity. God wanted to gain millions of people through Adam's multiplication. Some may ask, "If God wanted to gain millions of people, why did He not simply create millions of people instead of

one man? Why did God create in this way?" According to His purpose, God wants the man He created to become a corporate man so that millions of men would have only one man as their source, with one life within them. Therefore, in the eyes of God these millions of men would be one man, a corporate man.

Let us use a family as an illustration. Usually, there is a father, a mother, and some children. Outwardly, a family may seem to have many people, but in a normal situation others can sense that the "many people" are one. In a large Chinese family five generations can live together under the same roof, but others can sense that they are one. They have one family name, one source, one language, one disposition, and even one kind of living and habit; they have one life within them. Consequently, when we are with them, even though we see many people, we sense a oneness among them. They are one because of their birth, not because they are united or organized. In the same way, God does not want man only to have His image and authority, but He wants man also to become a corporate man. This corporate man is neither united nor organized; he is corporate by birth.

We must be clear that all humanity has come out of the life that God put in Adam. Even though we were all born at different times, we were not created at different times. We were created at the same time that Adam was created. When Adam was created and received the human life, we were created and received the human life. Adam's life is our life; our life is the same as Adam's life, so we and Adam possess one life. The entire human race has only one life, not many. We may number in the millions, yet we do not have millions of lives; we have only one life. We are all human beings, and we all share one life. This is God's thought concerning man.

God does not want to gain a single man, nor does He want to gain many individual men. God wants to gain a corporate man; we can say that this corporate man is many men or that he is one man. Being like God and reigning for God cannot be accomplished by a few men or by an individual man; it can be carried out only by a corporate man. Only such a man can be God's expression and God's representative; only a corporate man can be like God and reign for God.

When we rise up to pursue the Lord, we often have a concept that we hope to be like God and reign for God individually. Even though our desire is good, the concept is wrong. Strictly speaking, an individual believer can never

totally express God's image nor reign for God; only a corporate man can be like God and reign for God.

The Church Being a Corporate Man to Accomplish God's Purpose

In the four Gospels the Lord spoke of the church only in Matthew 16:18 and in 18:17. In both instances He spoke also of authority. In Matthew 16:18 the Lord said, "Upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." He then went on to say that whatever the church binds on the earth shall have been bound in the heavens, and whatever the church looses on the earth shall have been loosed in the heavens (v. 19). This shows that the church has heavenly authority. In Matthew 18:17-18 the Lord spoke of the church and also spoke of authority. This shows that the authority the Lord spoke of is not the authority of an individual but the authority of the church. So the principle of the church is that it is a corporate man. In the same principle, image is altogether a corporate matter in the church.

Let us consider God's thought from the beginning. God wanted to gain a corporate man. God has no way to accomplish His purpose without man, but unless this man is a corporate man, God still cannot fulfill His intention. In order for God's purpose to be accomplished, there must be a corporate man. God does not want to gain one individual man after another. If we have spiritual insight, we will see that in the garden of Eden Adam was not an individual man; he was a corporate man. Millions of people were in him. Even his wife Eve was in him; she came out from him and went back to him. In the same way, God wants to gain a corporate man.

HOW GOD GAINS A CORPORATE MAN

How does God gain this corporate man? Genesis shows that in order to gain a corporate man, the first step in God's work was to create man. Whenever we look at God's work in man, we cannot neglect God's creation. However, creation was a preparation, not the completion; creation was a preparation for the completion. Creation prepared the material and laid the foundation for the completion of God's work to fulfill His purpose.

The Bible reveals that God created man with three parts—spirit, soul, and body; in this way we are different from all other creatures. The Triune God

created a tripartite man. God's purpose is to enter into us so that we may have His image to express Him and His authority to deal with His enemy. In order to accomplish this purpose and carry out this work, God created a tripartite man with a spirit, soul, and body so that He could enter into such a man.

God Creating Man with a Body

Let us consider God's creation of man with a body. God created man with a body so that through this body there would be a framework, an appearance, and an expression. We usually become acquainted with a person through his body. We see the body of a person and become acquainted with him through his build, appearance, demeanor, and actions. Our body is our concrete expression. *Concrete* means having a shape or form, referring to a practical expression. God created us with a body for our practical expression. However, we must keep in mind that this body is to express God, not ourselves. Therefore, the Bible says that consecration is to present our body (Rom. 12:1) and that we should glorify and express God in our body. The body is for expression.

God Creating Man with a Soul

God created us also with a soul. Our personality is in our soul; it represents our person. We were not created as passive and indifferent beings before God. Man is an active creature, with a strong will, mind, and emotion. Take a look at all the living creatures on earth; there are millions of creatures, yet man is the most capable. Man dominates the earth today because man has a personality, is living, and has a will, ideas, preferences, and thoughts. Since man has such a personality, he can cooperate with God's need. If God had created a passive and indifferent man, this would indicate that He was not very great or beautiful. However, God created man with freedom and a personality so that His greatness and beauty would be expressed.

God desires a living, capable man to cooperate with Him. Some say that man cannot know the things of God. On the one hand, this is true, but on the other hand, it is not true. Actually, there is not one person who is unable to know the things of God, because God created man so that man could know Him. Romans 1:19 clearly says, "That which is known of God is manifest within them, for God manifested it to them." Animals, such as cats, dogs, cows, and sheep, cannot know the things of God, but man can know the

things of God. Although it is difficult to know the things of God from the spiritual side, man nevertheless has the capacity to know the things of God. The reason man thinks of God is that he has God's concepts, thoughts, and preferences. We need to remember that God created a soul for man so that man would have a personality to match and complement God.

This can be compared to God's creating Eve to match Adam. God first brought all the animals He had created to Adam, but nothing matched him. Then God created Eve to match him (Gen. 2:18-23). We all know that this typifies Christ and the church, but it also typifies what man is to God. Man is God's counterpart in the universe. After creating all things, God felt that it was not good to be alone, yet He could not find a counterpart in the universe. Thus, He created man to be His counterpart. Of course, man must first receive God's life in order to match God. In order to make this match, God in His creation laid the foundation and prepared the material; He created man with a soul so that man would have a personality and be able to respond to God.

Regardless of how smart an animal is, it will not respond to the preaching of the gospel, because animals were not created with such an ability. However, the most uncivilized, uneducated, and ignorant person, or the most corrupt and extreme atheist, can respond to the gospel. God created man with this capacity; this is the preparation God made, the foundation God laid. Regardless of how much we may speak to a table, it will not respond, because our speaking cannot enter into it. However, our speaking can enter into a microphone because a microphone is designed with special devices to receive our voice.

We need to thank God that He created us with "special devices." We have a personality, a will, thoughts, emotions, and preferences. These "special devices" give us the capacity and ability to respond to God. God created all these items for Himself, not for man. For this reason the Bible not only requires us to consecrate ourselves but also to obey; consecration is of the body, and obedience is of the soul. Our being must be defeated and obedient so that we can match God. Our will, our thoughts, and our emotions should all match God. A simple analogy would be marriage; we are marrying God. The best marriage is when a couple matches each other; any unmatched marriage is not perfect. God created us so that we would match Him. To

match God in our soul is a matter of obedience. Our taking captive every thought unto the obedience of Christ is a matter of the soul (2 Cor. 10:5).

God Creating Man with a Spirit

God created man not only with a body and a soul, but He created man also with a spirit. We all know that the spirit is used to contact God. Man's will can choose God, man's emotion can love God, and man's mind can think of God. However, man still cannot touch God with only these functions of the soul. For example, it may be very pleasing to our eyes to look at a flower, but we cannot touch a flower with our eyes; if we want to touch the flower, we must reach out with our hands and contact it. Another example would be a table of delectable dishes set before us. Although it may appeal to our eyes, we cannot eat unless we open our mouth.

If God had created us only with a soul, we could choose Him, love Him, and think of Him, but we would be unable to touch Him and receive Him into us. God made us with a stomach to receive food, with ears to receive sound, and with eyes to receive color. In the same way God created us with a spirit to receive Him. The spirit is a specific organ, just as man's stomach is a specific organ. Our spirit is for receiving God and is for God.

The outermost part of man is a body for expressing God; within man is his personality, his soul, which can cooperate with God; at the center of man is the spirit, which is able to receive God. This can be compared to a light bulb. The exterior part is a glass bulb, the body through which the lamp is expressed. The innermost part is a filament, which possesses a special property that allows it to receive electricity, absorb electricity, and be compatible with the flow of electricity. When an electrical current flows in and through a filament, light is emitted, and through the bulb on the exterior this light is expressed. In the same principle, God is Spirit; He as the Spirit is able to enter into us and express Himself through us because we were created with a spirit, with the ability to receive Him as the Spirit. He created us with a soul so that we may choose Him, desire Him, love Him, meditate on Him, and comprehend Him. He also created us with a body so that we may express Him. This is God's creation.

THE THREE STEPS OF GOD

The creation of man was God's first step; it was merely the preparation for fulfilling His purpose, not the completion. To accomplish His purpose, the creating God must enter into the created man. However, before God could enter into man, the swift-footed Satan entered into man and damaged man through the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This is the story of the fall of man. After this God Himself became a man in the flesh. His body was exactly the same as that of the created man, but inside of Him was God Himself. This incarnated God is Emmanuel (Matt. 1:23), Jesus Christ the Nazarene, who is our Savior. This was God's second step. Now God had gained another Adam. This Adam was not the first Adam but the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45). However, because the last Adam was one man, not many, God wanted Him to multiply. Just as in the beginning God created the first Adam and told him to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth, God also wants the last Adam, Christ, to beget millions of "Christs," a corporate Christ, the church. Therefore, we need to see that after incarnation there was another important step—the producing of the church.

Those who know the Bible know that the first step God took among men was to create man, the second step was to enter into man, and the third step was to produce the church. There does not seem to be another step besides these. God created man, entered into man, and produced the church. We may have heard this many times, but I must ask, how did God produce the church? In John 12:24 the Lord said, "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." This means that the last Adam, Christ, had to pass through death and resurrection in order to be multiplied; through death and resurrection He could beget many people who are the same as He is.

Those who are out from Christ are inseparable from Christ, and they are also inseparable from each other. Though they are many, God does not want them to exist individually. As soon as these many grains were produced, they became one bread (1 Cor. 10:17), which is the church. Therefore, the church is not many grains; the church is one bread. Although the church is composed of many grains, it is not a pile of many grains. The church is the mingling of many grains into one bread. Though we are many, we are still one bread produced from the one grain. The one grain produced a corporate grain, the one bread; this is the producing of the church.

THE ULTIMATE CONSUMMATION OF THE CORPORATE MAN—THE NEW JERUSALEM

May God show us that the first step He took among men was to create man, the second step was to enter into man, and the third step was to produce the church through death and resurrection. This church was created by God, entered into by God, and produced out of God. The first step is creating, the second step is entering, and the third step is producing. After passing through these three steps, God can gain a group of people to be one Body, one bread; furthermore, this bread, this Body, is the church. This is what God desires to gain in the universe.

Let us now consider the line of authority in the Bible. In Genesis 1 God gave Adam authority. However, Adam failed and lost this authority, but God did not stop. Eventually, in Psalm 8 God again spoke of man and the matter of authority (vv. 4-8). God restated His desire to accomplish His purpose in man. In Hebrews 2 we are shown that the words in Psalm 8 have been fulfilled. God's purpose for man was accomplished in the Lord Jesus. In the Lord Jesus as a man, God's authority was expressed.

Hebrews 2:8 says that all things have been subjected under the feet of Christ. Ephesians 1:22 shows that God subjected all things under the feet of Christ in the church. At this point authority has come to the church, which is not many individual men but one corporate entity, one Body. This Body is produced from Adam through Christ. Therefore, Hebrews 2 continues by saying that He tasted death on behalf of everything to lead many sons into glory and that the ones whom He leads into glory are His brothers; these many brothers constitute the church (vv. 9-12).

The man God created in Genesis 1 was not an individual man but a corporate man. In the New Testament this corporate man is the church. When the church was produced, a corporate man who has God's image and who reigns for God came into being.

We can say that there is still one final step in relation to the work of God, that is, the manifestation of the holy city, New Jerusalem. All who know the Bible know that the manifestation of the holy city is not something God will do apart from the church. It is the consummation of the church, the ultimate

aggregate of the church. All of God's work is toward this city. The goal of all that God has done is to produce this city.

In the Bible a city denotes a place of ruling. For example, at Babel men rebelled against God's authority and wanted to establish their own authority; therefore, they rose up and built the city of Babel. The city of Babel not only reveals man's self-made living; it also reveals man's self-established authority (Gen. 11:1-9). In the same way, when God's authority is established in those who are saved, a city will appear, and that city will be the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2-3, 10-11; 22:1-2). No doubt, a city denotes a place of ruling. The greatest city represents the greatest authority. The king of Babylon said, "Behold, the great city of Babylon!" (cf. Dan. 4:30). He said this to display his great authority. God's work on earth or in the universe has always been to build a city, to build up His authority. Therefore, Revelation says that when the New Jerusalem is manifested, God's authority will be fully established; at that time we will reign forever and ever (Rev. 22:5).

Furthermore, this city is mingled with God; God is the life and nature within and the glory expressed without (21:22-23). The issue of the man God created in Genesis 1 should be authority and glory. This issue is not many individual men but a city; the issue is a corporate man. May God's children see that God desires to gain a corporate man. This corporate man will ultimately be expressed in the church.

SATAN'S THREEFOLD ATTACK ON THE CHURCH

May God have mercy on us to see that the church is a corporate man, a corporate expression, one bread, one Body. For this reason all of Satan's work throughout the ages is focused on damaging the church. This work of damaging the church focuses on three matters.

First, Satan always brings outside elements into the church. This refers to items that are not of Christ, not from Christ, and are not Christ Himself; rather, they are items of the world, of men, and of earth. Satan is constantly thinking of ways to bring in outside elements in order to damage the church. Many problems throughout history have been caused by the enemy bringing outside elements into the church. We need to come out of the denominations and forsake organized Christianity because the church cannot have anything that is apart from or not out of Christ. For two thousand years Satan has been

bringing into the church items such as man's ways, views, opinions, the tide of the world, and the elements of man and the world; these items are apart from Christ and are not Christ. This damages the Body, causing the Body to become sick, weak, and even paralyzed so that the Body can no longer express God and be God's authority.

Second, Satan wants to divide the Body. If our physical body is divided, it is finished and becomes nothing. For two thousand years Satan has been working to divide God's children, to tear down the Body of Christ, causing it to be fragmented. When this happens, the Body of Christ is no longer a functioning Body that can accomplish God's purpose.

Third, the members who have not been divided by Satan have been damaged by him to the point that they have lost their function. This can be compared to ears that cannot hear, eyes that cannot see, and hands that cannot do things. This prevents the Body from being properly used by God.

Although we cannot speak in depth concerning these three points, may God grant us spiritual insight to see whether we give Satan the opportunity to work in these three areas. Have we thoroughly dealt with what is of the world and what is of man? Are we divided from the children of God, or are we in oneness with them? Are we in the spirit or in the flesh? Do we function as members? Are we living members who are able to function? In order to answer these questions, the severe requirement of the breaking of the cross is needed. All that we are and do must be dealt with by the cross. We must accept God's dealing through the cross to break our natural man. Only then can we withstand Satan's threefold attack.

Satan is very deceitful; if he cannot succeed in these three points, he will change his way and stir up persecution to kill the believers and devastate the church. Church history has never lacked such examples; even today it is still this way in certain places. Many who are faithful to the Lord do not want the things of the world or the things of man; rather, they are willing to forsake themselves and serve God in one accord. When Satan is unable to carry out those three points, he persecutes Christians, killing them through the authorities on earth, repeating the scene of the persecution of the church in Jerusalem. May the Lord be gracious to us so that our eyes may be opened to see Satan's schemes and to fight to the end for God's eternal will.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CHURCH HAVING GOD'S IMAGE AND AUTHORITY

Scripture Reading: Matt. 16:18-19; 18:17-20; Eph. 3:16-21; Rev. 12:5

There are two important books in the New Testament that speak of the church. One is Matthew from the Gospels and the other is Ephesians from the Epistles. In the four Gospels the Lord Jesus spoke of the church only in the Gospel of Matthew. We should pay special attention to the fact that the Lord spoke of the church in the Gospel of Matthew, which is the gospel on the kingdom. In the Gospel of Matthew, a book on God's dominion and kingdom, the Lord Jesus spoke of the church. Furthermore, when the Lord spoke of the church in 16:18 and 18:17, He also touched the matter of authority. After saying that He would build the church upon Himself as the rock, He spoke of the kingdom of the heavens, telling Peter that He would give him the keys of the kingdom of the heavens (16:18-19). A kingdom involves dominion; the kingdom of the heavens concerns God's dominion. The keys of the kingdom of the heavens denote the authority of the kingdom of the heavens. In verse 19 the Lord said, "Whatever you bind on the earth shall have been bound in the heavens, and whatever you loose on the earth shall have been loosed in the heavens." These are matters of authority.

In chapter 18 after speaking of the church a second time, the Lord again spoke of authority (vv. 17-20). Some people believe that in chapter 16 authority was given only to specially designated apostles. This view is advocated by the Catholic Church. But chapter 18 shows that the authority given to Peter by the Lord in chapter 16 was also given to the church. This means that the authority of the church does not belong to the apostles individually; the authority of the church belongs to the church corporately. The Gospel of Matthew shows clearly that the kingdom is related to the church. If there is no church, there is no kingdom. This also means that God's dominion and authority have been given to the church.

In order to see God's authority, we need to look at Genesis 1; however, we will not fully understand Genesis 1 unless we understand the Gospel of

Matthew. Since God wanted a man to rule for Him on earth, He created Adam so that He would have someone who could be entrusted with His authority on earth. In Genesis 1 God's authority was entrusted to a man; however, in the Gospel of Matthew authority was entrusted to the church. As God gains the church, His authority can be exercised on earth. In Matthew 16 the Lord Jesus referred to the keys of the kingdom of the heavens and the church, which the gates of Hades cannot prevail against. God has entrusted the keys of the kingdom to a group of people on earth; this is the church.

In Genesis 1 it seems as if an individual man has been entrusted with God's authority. However, in Matthew we see that this man must be a corporate man, the church. An individual man cannot be entrusted with God's authority; this man must be the church built upon Christ as the rock in order to be entrusted with God's authority. For God's authority, dominion, and kingdom to be exercised on earth, the church must be built upon Christ. The church is entrusted with God's dominion; it is also the place where God's authority is linked to heaven and exercised on the earth. Perhaps we have not yet seen the extent to which the kingdom is related to the church. Without the church, God's authority cannot be realized on earth.

In Matthew 6:10 the Lord prayed, "Your kingdom come." How can God's kingdom come? Revelation 12 reveals that God's kingdom comes to earth when the church rules for God (vv. 5, 10). Matthew reveals that God's authority comes to earth through, by, and in the church. In order to understand authority in Genesis 1, we must understand the Gospel of Matthew.

The church's preaching of the gospel is also a matter of authority. In Matthew 28 the Lord said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and disciple all the nations" (vv. 18-19a). The church has both the obligation and ability to preach the gospel because of this authority. The real preaching of the gospel is our bringing God's authority to every man, every place, every family, and every group of people. We can "go...and disciple all the nations" based on authority, with authority, and for authority. In order to know authority, we must know the church; the church is where God's authority is exercised. This is what the Gospel of Matthew shows.

The book of Ephesians concerns the church as well. However, this book does not present the church from the aspect of authority but mainly from the

aspect of image, the aspect of life. In other words, Ephesians emphasizes the church being filled with God's life and nature. The book of Ephesians does not emphasize the aspect of authority. This book presents the content of the church, which is the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected Christ, who is God Himself. When Christ indwells us through faith, we are filled unto all the fullness of God. This means that all that is of God is within us, and we can be like God. This is what it means to be like God and to have God's image. Therefore, in order to understand Genesis 1, we must also understand the book of Ephesians. In Genesis image and authority are presented. This image is made clear in Ephesians, and this authority is made clear in Matthew. Image and authority are seen in the church.

GOD'S RULING BRINGING IN GOD'S GLORY

These two matters, authority and image, are related. According to the order in Genesis, image is first and then authority; however, in the New Testament authority is always mentioned before image. We must pay attention to this important principle in the Bible—God's image is God expressed; only when God is expressed can there be His image. For example, when God is expressed in Revelation 4, there is an image, and that image is glory (v. 3). Ephesians speaks of God becoming everything in man and of God being glorified in the church (3:16-21). Whenever God is expressed, He is glorified. When God is glorified, His image is expressed.

Suppose God is expressed in our daily living as a result of our thorough fellowship with Him. People may sense that God is glorified in us, or that God is glorified through us; they may even feel that they see the likeness of God in us. The glory that is expressed is the image of God. The New Testament speaks first of authority instead of image. God can be expressed only through those who submit to His authority. When we submit to God's authority, His glory can be seen in us, and His image will be expressed in His glory.

This is also the sequence of the last sentence of the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:13: "Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." Where there is God's ruling, God is expressed, and God's image, God's glory, is present. At the end of Revelation we see that the entire New Jerusalem is an expression of God's image. In Revelation 4:3 the God who is sitting on the throne is like a jasper stone in appearance; in 21:11 the light of the city New Jerusalem is like a jasper stone. This shows that the expression

of the New Jerusalem is the image of God, the glory of God. God being glorified through the New Jerusalem is based on the establishment of God's dominion on the earth. In other words, His glory is upheld by the city; the city is God's dominion, God's authority. Whoever damages the city damages God's glory; whoever damages the city prevents God's glory from being expressed. Here we see the relationship between authority and image.

Image and authority, however, are the outward expression, not the inner source. Authority is an outward expression, and glory is also an outward expression; neither authority nor expression is the inner source. The inner source is life. Revelation 21 and 22 show that outwardly the New Jerusalem is an expression of glory, but inside the city there is a river of water of life and the tree of life. In Genesis 1 there are outward image and authority (vv. 26-28), and in chapter 2 there are the tree of life and the river with four branches (vv. 9-14). This shows that in order to have authority and express glory, there must be life within; we must allow life to flow within us. God's life proceeding out of God's reigning throne brings authority with it (Rev. 22:1). The divine life brings authority into whomever it flows. Only when the divine life flows into man with the divine authority can man rule for God, and only then can God's glory be expressed through man.

We must see that God intends to gain a place and a means on earth for His authority to be exercised so that His image can be expressed and He can be glorified. The church is the place and the means. It is impossible to obtain God's authority and image if we disregard the church. Without the church we do not have God's authority; without the church we do not have God's expression. Both God's authority and expression are in the church; without the church God's authority and expression are absent.

Let us now consider our condition. Everything in a church depends on authority; it does not depend on location or numbers. It does not depend on whether we are powerful, excited, lively, or zealous. Rather, everything in the church depends on God's authority. This authority is God's ruling; it is the authority of God expressed through man. We may be zealous but not express God's authority. We may be excited but not express God's authority. We may even seem to be very spiritual but not express God's authority. We may be this or that but not give others the feeling of fear, awe, and God's dominion.

For example, we may attend a concert and feel excitement, liveliness, and happiness yet not have a sense of authority. However, if we walk into a presidential palace, we may sense something entirely different from a concert hall. In the president's office we will immediately sense authority. This should be the situation in the church. In a proper church meeting we should sense God's authority. Regrettably, some people may feel as if they have entered a concert hall, or even worse, they may feel as if they have entered a place of contention. They can only sense man's opinion, dissension, and the flesh; they cannot sense God's authority. Of course, all opinion, dissension, and the flesh should be condemned. However, even seemingly good things like liveliness and harmony may still be below the standard if they do not convey a sense of God's dominion or God's authority.

THE CHURCH BEING ENTRUSTED WITH GOD'S RULING

Quarrels and opinions in a local church are the issue of human relationships and the flesh. However, a church that is lively and in full harmony yet does not give others the sense of God's dominion and ruling may also contain only the element of man and the things of man. It may not have the element of God. It is proper to love, but love must be with authority. Love without authority is either leaven or honey; it does not come from God or from God's authority. Real love is neither leaven nor honey but salt.

When the saints in a local church love one another in God, others can sense God's authority. This can be compared to salt in the meal offering. The salt in the meal offering is something of God and of the cross; it is something eternal. It is neither leaven, which is corruption, nor honey, which is of the emotion. Behind real love is authority. Whoever touches such love touches authority; wherever this kind of love is, there is God's authority.

The brothers and sisters may say, "We all love one another, and the church is full of love." However, if everybody is happy and loose, this kind of love may simply be of the emotion. The love that is of the spirit and that comes out of the Lord's love is the embodiment of authority; love is the embodiment of authority. Any proper expression in the church should also be the embodiment of authority.

Whether a church is normal or meets God's requirement can be tested by authority; it can be tested by the presence of God's authority and ruling in the

church. When people touch the church, do they touch God's authority and sense that God is ruling and enthroned? Or do they sense the ruling of the will of man and the things of the world? This is a test to the church. Many times man's zeal, excitement, or even man's working for the Lord is "enthroned." In the church life we often touch these things instead of touching God's dominion. It is only when we are enlightened before God that we can truly see that the church is entrusted with God's ruling.

We should allow God to rule in our work, in our love for the brothers and sisters, and in our zealousness for the church life. There is something within us that flows out from the throne in the heavens; this flow brings God's authority into us and among us. When people touch us, they should touch God's ruling. May we all see that this is the church; this is the proper condition of the Body of Christ on earth. In this condition we have God's glory and image, and we can also sense God's presence.

However, people may not sense God's presence when they touch zeal. For example, we may touch people who work fervently and serve diligently in the church life, yet we may not sense God's presence with them. I believe we all have had this experience. However, whenever we touch God's authority, we immediately bow our heads and worship the Lord, saying, "Lord, I worship You because You are here." When we touch authority, we touch the Lord Himself. Zeal cannot represent the Lord, neither is it the Lord. We should all be clear that authority not only represents the Lord, it is the Lord Himself. The normal expression of a church involves the presence of authority.

THE LORD BEING ENTHRONED AND REIGNING IN THE CHURCH

Some responsible brothers may say, "We are the authority in the church." This word should not be spoken lightly; those who speak in this way need to be dealt with and disciplined because they are speaking nonsense. According to the revelation of the Bible, the responsible brothers in themselves are not the authority. When they allow God to reign in them, the God who is expressed through them is the authority. When they and the church in which they serve allow God to reign, the expression of God's authority is among them. This is the authority in the church.

Authority is nothing other than God expressed among us. Any local church that does not have the expression of God does not have authority. The exercise of man's authority by organization, arrangement, or having a name or position is shameful and hypocritical. The real authority comes when a group of God's children submit themselves under God's lordship and allow God to reign. When God is enthroned in our midst, there is authority among us. The responsible ones in the church are deputy authorities established by the Lord, but if the Lord cannot sit on the throne and reign in a church, that church will have no authority. There may be responsible ones, but there will not be any authority. The real authority of the church is in God's having the position to reign in the church. Then authority will automatically be expressed in the church.

May the Lord give us grace so that we do not think that we have obtained the light after simply reading a message on authority or listening to a message on the Body of Christ. May we be inwardly touched by the Lord's grace and enlightened to see our real condition. How much of God's authority is truly being expressed among us? How much of God's authority is in our meetings? God is asking these questions, and we also should ask ourselves these questions. We must see this basic principle—God's authority is not expressed in an individual man but in a corporate man; this man is the Body, the church. We must not remain in Genesis 1; we must proceed to the Gospel of Matthew to see that authority is expressed in the church. There must be a group of people who are saved by God to become the church entrusted with His authority. In other words, only a group of people who are built up as the Body of Christ can express God's authority. The requirement of authority is on the church.

THE AUTHORITY OF GOD DEPENDING ON THE ELEMENT OF CHRIST

Some brothers and sisters may think that as long as there is a church, there is authority. Actually, it is not this simple. The standard of the church is quite high and strict. The standard of the church requires that we abandon sin, the world, and the flesh; it also requires our complete termination. Although there are opinions among the churches in Taiwan, generally speaking, the saints are in one accord. However, we should still confess that we have not touched much authority.

We have not touched enough authority in the churches, because there is too much of our forbearance, patience, meekness, gentleness, or any other human virtues in the church. These virtues are all out of man and belong to man. It is possible for all these positive virtues to simply be the elements of man. If this is our situation, God's salvation in us is still superficial and lacks depth. Our person, our self, must be subdued, broken, and crossed out by God because we still have many things in us that are not built upon Christ as the rock and instead are outside of Christ.

When there are elements outside of Christ that are present in us, there is no authority. We may have good things, gain the praises of others, be gentle and mild, and even be zealous in our work yet have no authority. Authority is in the church, and the church is upheld by Christ. In other words, the church is built upon Christ, and Christ Himself is the material for the building of the church. The extent to which the element of "man" is present in the church is the extent to which authority is diminished. The amount of the element of Christ in us determines the amount of authority we have. Some may think that if they pray much, they will have authority; this is wrong. They might receive some power after much prayer, but they cannot receive authority. Real power lies in authority. Please remember, authority issues from what is built upon Christ; the amount of authority that we have depends upon how much we have been built upon Christ.

To be built upon Christ is to build with Christ as the material. The amount of authority present in the church depends upon how much the church is built with Christ as the material. We must not only put aside the bad things in us; we must put aside even the good things. We must learn to be dealt with and broken by God. This should not be simply a matter of doctrine but a matter of experience. As the Lord enlightens us, He will touch us little by little, showing us that some things that are good and correct in us are not built upon Christ; that is, they are not built with Christ as the material, and they are not built up by Christ from within us. They may be good, but they still come out of us, not Christ.

Some saints say that it is difficult to be in one accord because the more capable ones do not have much regard for them. Even if there was such a "one accord," it would not be worth anything. The real one accord depends upon how much we have been touched by God; if our capability, weakness, ability, and inability have been touched by God, there will be the real one accord.

Only the part of our being that has been built upon Christ, that is, built with Christ as the material, is of real value. Only the part of our being that has been broken by God is related to the church, and only in this part is there authority—a sphere in which God rules.

THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCH WITH CHRIST AS THE MATERIAL

Theoretically, all saints should be very clear concerning this point. However, after serving in the church for a period of time, we will see that we still have the element of the self. We may not seem to have much sin, the world, or even the flesh, yet the elements of our very being are present in us. The Lord must show us that our being is the greatest enemy of Christ and the greatest obstacle to Christ; we prevent God's authority from being expressed, and we nullify the church so that it cannot be formed.

A certain local church has been generally commended to be truly wonderful, and we also feel that it is quite good when we go there; however, it does not have much of the element of Christ. What does this mean? It means that although the church is good, all the things there contain the element of man. Although they are not bad things, they all contain the element of man. We sense that man rather than Christ is there and that the church there is built with man rather than with Christ as the material.

We all need to learn to pass through the cross and be filtered by the cross. When we feel that God is touching us, we should have dealings according to that feeling; this is valuable. We should let the Lord deal with us when we have a feeling about a certain matter. As we are experiencing God and serving Him, we may have the feeling that He is touching something within us, making us aware of a particular element of our self. He shows us something that is not built by Christ, not built with Christ, and not built upon Christ. If we do not neglect this feeling, the light within us will become brighter. If we can take a further step to deal with this feeling, we will be delivered. We may experience this at critical junctures in our life as God takes us through these situations. Even if we fall and cannot get up, the grace of God will come to be our supply to enable us to stand up once more.

Regrettably, when God enlightens us and touches our feeling, we are often negligent and let the feeling pass in a light way. This is the reason, to a large

extent, that the services and activities in the churches are still full of the elements of man. Not many have been touched by God or have prostrated themselves before God. We should be willing to say, "Lord, forgive me. This is of me; I am using myself as the material. I am neither building upon Christ nor through Christ." If we would say this more often, all the churches would be different. Any church in which we can touch God's authority is a real church, a church that is built with Christ. There is no church if the saints in a locality are not built by Christ, upon Christ, and with Christ. They may meet together and conduct activities, but the reality of the church is not present.

If the reality of the church is not present, there is no authority. We cannot separate the church from Christ, nor can we separate the church from authority. Only when we touch Christ and live Him out will the church be present. Only when we allow Christ to be built up within us will the church be real. These are words of experience, not doctrinal expressions. Doctrinally speaking, the church always exists; however, experientially speaking, the church does not exist if we are built only with items of the self, items of man, and not with Christ. We do not need to be stirred up in our flesh or to be involved in disputes to nullify the church; as long as we build with the self, the church is not present. When the church is not present, authority also is not present, and people will be unable to touch authority in the church. May the Lord show us that there can be authority only in the church that is built through Christ, by Christ, and with Christ as the material.

BEARING RESPONSIBILITY

TO BE SHOWN MERCY AND BE ENLIGHTENED

In addition, we need to pay special attention to one matter. Since our meeting together is a time of blessing, we often sense some excitement; it is difficult to totally avoid a lively atmosphere, because we are human. However, we need to bear in mind that this liveliness, this excitement, is often a veil to keep us from being enlightened. In Matthew 11:29 the Lord wanted us to be meek and lowly in heart, to take His yoke, and to learn from Him. When we gather together, we must not be too excited, because this can easily cause us to be loose. Just as we drop our personal duties and household chores to come together to meet, seek God, and learn something of God, we should be willing to avoid unnecessary conversations that can become distractions. Of course, this does not mean that we should neglect any real spiritual needs.

Being enlightened depends on God's mercy; it may not come by our asking. Nevertheless, we need to bear some responsibility for being enlightened. On a clear sunny day some receive sunshine, but others do not. Receiving sunshine is man's responsibility. If we are overly excited, talk too much, or are too lively, we build a "high wall" that prevents "sunlight" from shining in. We must all learn to be calm. Of course, this does not mean that no one can pray loudly, but we should be careful if our voice causes discomfort in others' spirit. The Chinese often say that poetry is the most beautiful form of writing; in spiritual matters, prayers and praises are the most beautiful things. Words of praise are beautiful words, but words of anger are ugly words. If our voice is too loud or too high, it will disturb the spirit. The spirit is the most tender and delicate part within man. If impulsive things come out of a released emotion, the spirit will not be released. However, when we are in the spirit and touch the spirit, there will be an echo of this spirit deep within the saints.

Hopefully, this word will help us realize that we lose the Lord's blessing because we are often distracted. When we attend meetings in various localities, we should not spend much time shopping or visiting relatives and friends. These things may offend the Lord and cause us to lose the Lord's blessing. We will lose the Lord's blessing if all our time is spent shopping or visiting our relatives and friends. We need to understand that our willing and our running do not change God's mercy. Rather, we need to bear some responsibility to be in a condition that is conducive to being shown mercy. May the Lord grant us His grace.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CHURCH BEING THE MINGLING AND ENLARGEMENT OF GOD AND MAN

Scripture Reading: Matt. 16:13, 16-19; 1 Tim. 3:15-16

THE CHURCH BEING THE MYSTERY OF GOD MANIFESTED IN THE FLESH

First Timothy 3:15 says, "If I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth." This is a great mystery of godliness; then verse 16 continues with, "Great is the mystery of godliness." Confessedly, this is a great mystery. This great mystery of godliness is God manifested in the flesh. Therefore, the church is not merely the pillar and base of the truth; it is also the mystery of God manifested in the flesh.

THE CHURCH HAVING TWO NATURES IN THE MINGLING OF GOD AND MAN

The man created by God in Genesis 1 is fully manifested as a corporate man, the church, in the New Testament. God's authority is entrusted to the church, and His image is expressed in the church as the corporate man. All Bible readers agree on the basic principle that every matter mentioned the first time in Genesis is like a seed; the growth of this seed is developed in the New Testament. Therefore, it is only in the New Testament that we see the full growth of the authority and image sown in Genesis 1. One particular matter in the New Testament is that the church is always spoken of in conjunction with authority or in conjunction with items that pertain to image, such as God's nature and life. The New Testament never speaks of the church apart from God's authority and image. In view of this, we know for sure that the man, created by God with His image and authority in Genesis 1, must refer to the church.

What is the church? What is the nature of the church? The church is a corporate man as the mingling of divinity and humanity. This corporate man

is a particular man, not a common man. He is neither the man God created in the beginning nor merely the man who fell and was redeemed. The church is not only redeemed; the church has two natures as the mingling of God with man and man with God. Therefore, the church is a very particular matter: the church is man plus God, God added into and mingled with man.

To use an analogy, the man created with God's image and authority in Genesis 1 was merely a drawing on paper or a photograph; he did not have the life of God. There was a need for the divine life signified by the tree of life in Genesis 2 to enter into the created man to enliven this "photograph." This is related to regeneration, not to redemption. Even if Adam had not sinned and was in no need of redemption, he would still need to be regenerated with the life of God; the created man still needed to receive this uncreated life. After the created man received the uncreated life, that is, after man was mingled with God, an entity with two natures involving the mingling of God and man, the church, was produced. The church has two natures produced by God mingling with man. This is something very particular in the universe. Anyone who does not realize this does not yet know the church.

The church is produced by the mingling of the Creator with the creature, the mingling of God with man. God, with His life, nature, and everything, with the fullness of the Godhead, mingles with us, without annulling our God-created humanity. Humanity as created by God in the beginning is fully preserved, but the sin, defilement, and corruption of fallen man are not preserved. The complete God mingled with man is the church. This can be compared to the mingling of water with grape juice to produce a beverage; the beverage is a product with two natures. The church came into being through the mingling of the full and complete God with man. If we do not have a clear understanding concerning this point, we will encounter many difficulties as we proceed on the path of the church. However, many problems will be solved if we have a thorough understanding concerning the church.

CHRIST BEING THE MINGLING OF GOD WITH MAN AND MAN WITH GOD

The churches throughout Taiwan must have this understanding in order to solve our numerous difficulties. We can say that our journey has come to a juncture with numerous difficulties that cannot be solved by any method.

When we are brought to the point of seeing the church, our seeing will be able to deliver us. This realization will solve many of our "unsolvable" problems.

The church is the enlargement of Christ; Christ enlarged is the church. What is the significance of Christ? Let us consider the significance of Christ according to spiritual reality, not according to theology. From Adam to Christ, for approximately four thousand years, God was God, and man was man. This was not because of man's fall or because of his sinning against God. God and man were not joined. During those four thousand years no man was mingled with God.

Four thousand years after creation a man was born in Bethlehem; this man was named Jesus, and He was also called Emmanuel. He was the mingling of God and man; He was God mingled with man. In this One there was man, and there was God. This man was "Emmanuel"; He was God yet man and man yet God. From that time onward, a person with two natures was present in the universe. He was the mingling of the Creator with a creature and a creature with the Creator. This is the story of the incarnation in Bethlehem. A most wonderful event transpired in the universe—the uncreated was mingled with the created, the intangible with the tangible, the invisible with the visible, the heavenly with the earthly, the eternal with the temporal, and the infinite with the finite. This was a great event in the universe; this is the story of Bethlehem.

An extraordinary event took place in Bethlehem—not only a Savior named Jesus was born, but a person with two natures called Emmanuel, God with us, came into being. We need to pay attention to the fact that Jesus was the name given by Mary's husband, as instructed by the angel (Matt. 1:21), whereas Emmanuel was the name by which men called Him (v. 23). When people would come to know Him, they would say, "Oh, this is God and man together; this is God with man." This word was first fulfilled in Matthew 16, where Peter, with opened eyes, said to the Lord, "You are...the Son of the living God" (v. 16). Peter's calling the Lord the Son of God equals his calling the Lord Emmanuel. Because his eyes were opened, Peter saw that the Lord was not only the Son of Man but also the Son of God. Peter recognized this universal mingling of God and man. This aspect of the significance of Christ is the principle of incarnation, the mingling of God with man. The Gospels would be more meaningful if we read them with such a view. The record in the Gospels shows God mingled with man.

There is another great principle in the Gospels. There was a perfect man; he had a resolute will, abundant emotions, clear logic, and rich thoughts. For four thousand years mankind had never seen such a man. He was a man who was intelligent, wise, and loving, who was truly and fully man, a noble man, a man above all men. This man always chose God by His will and was fully mingled with God. His incarnation was God mingled with man; His living on the earth was man mingled with God. He had an emotion that loved God, a mind that cared for God's interest, and a will that stood with God, chose God, and desired God.

This lovely person always placed Himself in God. In John 14 He said, "The words that I say...I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works" (v. 10). This reveals that He was completely mingled with God, and God was mingled with Him. The four Gospels portray the living of this Lord Jesus. In this living we see God mingled with man and man mingled with God. The living of this Nazarene, Jesus, was man living on earth and God living on earth. When He moved, God moved, and man also moved. He and God, God and He were mingled to the point that They were inseparable; this is the meaning of Christ. It is heresy to say that Christ was merely God. Likewise, it is heresy to say that Christ was merely man. Therefore, the Gospels show us a unique story. The Lord must open our eyes for us to see this. This unique story is that there is a person with two natures in the universe who is the mingling of God with man and man with God; this is Christ.

THE CHURCH BEING THE ENLARGEMENT OF THE MINGLING OF GOD WITH MAN AND MAN WITH GOD

What is the church? The church is the enlargement of Christ, the God-man, the One who is God mingled with man. When the church is in a normal condition, we can see God and man mingled together. On the day of Pentecost those in the church were uneducated, insignificant men, but we can see that they were mingled with the almighty God. When Peter and the eleven apostles stood up to speak, although it was Peter's voice, God was speaking. God was not merely among them; even more, He was mingled with them. They were inseparable from God. This is the church, the enlargement of Christ, the enlargement of the mingling of God with man and man with God.

Formerly, this mingling could be seen in only one person, but now it can be seen in millions of people. Formerly, this mingling involved only the Head, but now it has been enlarged to become the Body. With respect to time, this enlargement is extending; with respect to space, this enlargement is spreading. For two thousand years this enlargement has been ongoing throughout the earth; it keeps extending and spreading over the whole earth. This is glorious. This enlargement is the church. A genuine church not only preserves its nature and keeps its ground, but it has God within. The nature of the church is God mingled with man and man mingled with God.

The church is a group of people whose mind, emotion, and will may be quite strong and active; however, God is mingled with them, and they are mingled with God. Although Peter was a fisherman, he was a very strong and capable man. However, Acts shows that this man was mingled with God and that God was mingled with him. If there is a group of people who are mingled with God and allow God to work on them, then that is the church; this is how the church is produced. The moment we are saved, we become the church in fact, but the proper condition of the church has yet to be manifested. When Peter recognized that the Son of Man was the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord said to him, "Upon this rock I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18). This means that He would build the church upon the Christ who is both the Son of Man and the Son of God. This is to build upon the One who is the mingling of God with man and man with God.

Concerning Matthew 16, the Roman Catholic Church says that the rock refers to Peter, but most fundamental believers say that the rock refers to Christ. It is not wrong to say that the rock refers to Christ, but this is still inadequate. We must further ask, who is this Christ? What is the significance of Christ? The Christ in Matthew 16 is the Son of Man who is also the Son of God; He is the Son of God who is also the Son of Man. The Lord desires to build the church upon the Christ who is God yet man and man yet God. The Lord Jesus uses this as the base and material for building the church.

THE MINGLING OF GOD WITH MAN AND MAN WITH GOD WORKING AND BUILDING IN US

The Lord not only desires to build the church upon the mingling of God and man; He also desires to build this mingling into the church. How much of the element of Christ as the rock is in us? How much ground does the One who is

God yet man and man yet God have in us? If there is not a sufficient amount of the element of the mingling of God and man in us, there cannot be much of the element of the church in us; only that which is built upon this element can be considered the church. The church is nothing less and nothing more than the building of the element of Christ, the mingling of God with man and man with God, into us and out of us. Theoretically speaking, our gathering as three to five hundred believers in the Lord's name is the church, because the Lord is among us. Nevertheless, the amount of the element of the church in this gathering depends upon how much we have allowed Christ to build in us. The amount of the element of the church that we possess depends upon how much we allow the One who is both God yet man and man yet God to mingle and build in us.

A brother said that he had seen a corporate, not individualistic, vision of the Body and that after seeing this vision he felt to no longer act individualistically but rather to work with the brothers and sisters in coordination. Although these words sounded quite impressive and moving, his later actions proved that it was not the reality. Seeing the church is not the same as having the church. Rather, we must allow the element of God with man and man with God to be mingled in us and built up from us; only then will we have the reality of the church. The church is built upon the mingling of God with man and man with God. The church proceeds out of this mingling. The extent to which we are the church in reality depends upon how much this mingling has been built up in us. We may understand doctrinally that the church is a corporate entity, not individual entities, and that serving the Lord should be a Body matter, not an individual matter. However, in reality, we may still not live in the light of the church or in the mingling of God and man.

When we, by the Lord's mercy, allow the mingling of God with man and man with God to work and build in us, we will have the reality of the church. With resoluteness we should receive, consider, concentrate, desire, and turn our whole being toward the mingling of God and man within us. Then we will have more than a doctrinal understanding or seeing, and within us will be a genuine building work. The extent of this building work determines how much the church is expressed. We will not need to profess that we have seen the Body and that we should not be individualistic; we will spontaneously live in the reality of the Body and not act independently. When the mingling of God with man and man with God is built up within us in a considerable way, many problems in the church will spontaneously disappear.

God mingles Himself with man in order to be man's life. We have experienced God as the Spirit entering our spirit to be our life and nature, but this is not enough. In many of us this is only an occasional occurrence because we have not fully allowed God to be our life and nature. We have not allowed God to mingle with us sufficiently. The mingling of God and man does not mean that our person has been fully annulled. Even though Paul did say, "I am crucified with Christ," he went on to say, "and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh..." (Gal. 2:20). "I" is still here; it has not been annulled.

Peter's Epistles show that he was not annulled. In reading his Epistles, we can immediately recognize that they were written by Peter. The same is true with Paul's and John's Epistles; we can immediately recognize who wrote a certain Epistle. Peter, Paul, and John were not annulled; their particular characteristics were retained. In the New Jerusalem their characteristics will not be annulled; their names will still be there (Rev. 21:14). Salvation would not be very meaningful if our characteristics were annulled.

God's salvation is to mingle Himself with our person. We have a will that has surrendered to His will, an emotion that is occupied by Him and gained by Him, and a mind that is being renewed, ruled, controlled, and occupied by Him. Once we were strong only in ourselves, but now we have been mingled with God. Every apostle had a strong character and was very capable. Yet they all had one characteristic in common—they were mingled with God. We should never think that our personality has been annulled because we are mingled with God.

In God's eyes it is beautiful for Peter to have the element of God within him. However, it would not be beautiful if Peter was annulled and only the element of God remained. On the twelve foundations of the wall of the New Jerusalem are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (v. 14). This shows that the particular characteristics of the twelve apostles remain. The foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every precious stone (v. 19); although the light that shines forth from them is the same expression of God, their colors are different. These different colors are their personalities, and these personalities reflect the mingling of God with man. This is the principle.

RECEIVING THE BREAKING

BY SUBMITTING TO GOD'S RULING

Some brothers may be silent in the meetings, but this silence may be a virtue that is not mingled with God. Some people are outgoing by nature; whenever there is an opportunity, they are always speaking, continually expressing their opinions. Most sisters have this disposition; it seems that all the time in the world would not be sufficient for them to express their opinions. This is absolutely devoid of God. There are other brothers and sisters who can keep their mouths shut even if they sit with others for three days. They, like those who love to express their opinions, also do not have God in their disposition.

Those who do not speak may condemn those who love to speak. Yet while they condemn the talkative ones and inwardly approve their own prudent speech and careful conduct, the Holy Spirit may touch them, asking, "Is this of one nature or of two natures? Is this only of yourself, or is God mingled with you?" Some people are quick by nature, and others are slow; however, slow-natured people are generally praised for being gentle, and quick-natured people are condemned for being irritable. Referring to Exodus 28:33-35, people say that the priest could not allow the bells on the priestly robe to be noisy when he ministered; they say this to indicate that it is unacceptable for fast or hurried movements to cause the bells to rattle incessantly in the presence of God. However, slow people must also allow God to touch them in order to know whether their slowness comes out of one nature or out of two natures, whether it comes out of themselves or out of their mingling with God. This is a very sober matter.

If we all would allow God to touch us, the slow ones would prostrate themselves, realizing that they should condemn their slowness, and those who do not open their mouths will realize that they should condemn their silence. This is because our natural disposition kills the church, causing the church to be improper. Our natural disposition prevents God from being mingled with man. It is the strongest element of our human nature, and it does not express the mingling of God and man; it is not dual-natured. Hence, our natural disposition needs to be broken and torn down by the cross. Dealing with sins and the element of the world is not the greatest problem in the church life today. Rather, our greatest problem is that we have too many elements of the natural disposition that are praised by men and regarded as virtues. This is the greatest difficulty in the church life today.

The two natures of God and man are built upon Christ and upon breaking; building needs breaking. In relation to Christ, there is building; in relation to us, there is breaking. Breaking is different from nullifying; breaking involves the submission of ourselves under God's hand. If by nature I am a quiet person in the meetings, I should ask myself whether it is God in me who is being quiet or whether it is I who am being quiet. I should learn to submit to God's ruling. In the same principle, a talkative person should also submit to God's ruling. If we would do this in our meetings, others will be able to sense that we have God's presence in our speaking and in our silence, in our quickness as well as in our slowness. All our problems are related to how much God has mingled with us and how much we have mingled with God. Only the building of the two natures of God and man is the building spoken of in Matthew 16.

THE BUILDING OF THE TWO NATURES OF GOD AND MAN IN US

The gates of Hades cannot prevail against such a building. However, if we continue to live in our fallen and earthly personality and disposition, the gates of Hades will overcome us, because these traits will actually be in Satan's hands. Our gentleness and our irritability will be in the hands of Satan; our silence and our speaking will also be in his hands. Everything natural is in Satan's hands; they are earthly objects for Satan to devour. When we live in God, when our natural element and personality are broken, and when we allow the mingling of God and man to be built within us, the building cannot be overcome by the gates of Hades. This is the church that has authority.

Matthew 16 says that whatever the church binds on the earth shall have been bound in the heavens, and whatever the church looses on the earth shall have been loosed in the heavens (v. 19). Some saints often quote Matthew 16 and 18, saying that as long as two or three are gathered into the Lord's name, whatever they bind on the earth shall have been bound in the heavens, and whatever they loose on the earth shall have been loosed in the heavens (16:19; 18:18, 20). If we apply these verses in this way, we will be greatly disappointed. We may loose, but He will not loose, and we may bind, but He will not bind. It is not as if these words are a kind of "magic spell" that require the mere utterance of them for them to be fulfilled. This is not the case. It all depends upon whether the one who utters these words has been broken,

whether God has been built into him, and whether he has been built into God. This is the crucial point. If Peter, John, James, and Paul met together, they could say that their binding was the heavens' binding, and their loosing was the heavens' loosing. What they said could be fulfilled because they were persons built with the mingling of God and man; however, what we say may not be fulfilled because we do not have enough of the mingling of God and man within us.

Acts 19 recounts how some traveling Jewish exorcists named the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches," but instead of the evil spirit leaving, the man, in whom the evil spirit resided, leaped upon them (vv. 13-16). We must be careful, because we may desire to bind the enemy, but instead we may be bound; we may desire to loose people, yet in the end even we are not loosed. This is not a matter of doctrine or of uttering certain words. This is a matter of whether we have been torn down and broken, whether the mingling of God and man has been built into us. Is the mingling of divinity and humanity in us? Is our living a living of the mingling of divinity and humanity? This is the root of all our problems.

THE ENLARGED CHRIST AND THE GLORIOUS CHURCH

Only what has been torn down and built up as the mingling of God and man is the church, and against this the gates of Hades cannot prevail. Only this shows the authority of God and the image of God. This is the enlarged Christ, the enlargement of the mingling of God and man. When people touch this, they touch something that is of both God and man. When people touch the building of God, they will touch not only Christ and God but also all the other lovers of God, including even Paul and Peter. This is something wonderful and special; this is the consummation of the man created in Genesis 1. The full consummation can be seen in the New Jerusalem in eternity. In the New Jerusalem whatever is of man will have been torn down and broken by God, and whatever is of God will have been built into man. In this way, God will be able to shine forth His splendor through man.

Although gold is an exceedingly precious substance in the world, the "gold" we have today is not transparent (Rev. 21:18, 21). However, one day this "gold" will be transparent, and God will be able to shine through it. The Lord said, "Upon this rock I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18). In that day the building

will be completed; it will be the completion of the building in Matthew 16. When the building is completed, the New Jerusalem will be manifested. Hebrews 11 says that the building is still in the process of being built (cf. v. 16). Ephesians 2:20-22 shows this building on a small scale; however, it will be enlarged to be a city in the future.

Please remember that the church is not a matter of name, position, or stand; neither is the church a matter of belief or organization. The church is a group of people who allow God to be mingled with them and who are mingled with God. This was the situation with the early apostles. They were truly Galileans, but they were also truly one with the God of heaven; they had the appearance of Galileans, but they also had the expression of the God of heaven. The glory of the God of heaven was expressed in uneducated, common people. Uneducated, common people were still present, yet the glory of the God of heaven was also expressed. This is the church. The ignorance disappeared, and common people were broken. A glorious and great God was now mingled with common people, shining forth and being expressed through them. The church had the authority and image of God. If this were our situation, all the problems in the church would be gone; there would not be the problem of speaking or silence, of being open or closed, or of being quick or slow. All these problems would be gone.

Everything that is compatible in a natural way is not the Body nor in the principle of the Body. The believers are not manifesting the principle of the Body if they get along with each other simply because they have the same taste. Some may argue and say, “No, they sing with the same rhythm. When one sings, another joins in; when one shares, another says Amen. They are in such harmony.” However, this does not show the Body; in fact, it may be more in the principle of the flesh than of the Body. The principle of the Body is that our person is broken, defeated, and torn down by God and that we are giving God the opportunity to mingle with us and shine forth from within us. This is Christ being born again in the world; this is Christ being multiplied among us; this is the church, the enlargement of Christ. Whenever this is practiced, wherever this is present, there is the expression of the church on the earth—a church that is real, practical, actual, and powerful. Thus, the church with authority and image is a reality.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CHURCH BEING THE PILLAR AND BASE OF THE TRUTH FOR THE EXPRESSION OF GOD'S IMAGE AND AUTHORITY

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 3:15-16; Eph. 4:24; 2:21; Col. 3:10

The authority God gave man in His creation in Genesis 1 is manifested through the church in the Gospel of Matthew; the image God gave man in His creation is expressed through the church in the book of Ephesians. This shows that authority and image are manifested in the church. God's image and authority are both expressed through the church. We should never consider that an individual or a small number of people can express God's image or authority; God needs the church to express His authority, and He needs the church to express His image.

THE HOUSE OF THE LIVING GOD

First Timothy 3:15-16 uses a very particular expression to help us know the church: "That you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth. And...great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh." These verses speak of the church being a house. In Chinese, English, and Greek, *house* refers to a dwelling place and can refer also to the members of a family. Although *house* in 1 Timothy 3 has these two meanings, more of the emphasis is on the second meaning because, spiritually speaking, the house in which God dwells is His household, His family.

When the Bible speaks of the New Jerusalem, it is referring to a group of people; God dwells in the New Jerusalem, and the twelve apostles are the twelve foundation stones in the New Jerusalem. In the church age the church is the house of God; in the coming age of eternity when God's purpose is completely fulfilled, the New Jerusalem will be an enlarged city. The house in 1 Timothy 3:15 is the temple in Ephesians 2:21. This temple will be enlarged

in the future to be the eternal city. Therefore, whether it is the house, the temple, or the eternal city, God's dwelling place is a group of people, and this group of people becomes the place where God dwells.

First Timothy 3:15-16 says that the church is a house of mystery, the house of the living God. Here, *the living God* indicates that God has a particular work. He is not an objective God; He is a subjective God. He dwells and lives in this house; He is neither a dead God nor a dead doctrine. The living God who lives in the church, the house of mystery, is a living and subjective God; He is not a doctrinal and objective God. He moves and works within us. In a normal condition the church is the place in which God lives and moves.

THE PILLAR AND BASE OF THE TRUTH

The house of the living God is also the pillar and base of the truth. We must properly understand the meaning of this word. The understanding that God has entrusted all the truth to the church for her to spread and to uphold is too objective and does not touch the thought of the Holy Spirit. We need to understand what *truth* refers to when we say that the living God lives in the church, the pillar and base of the truth. Truth and doctrine are different in meaning. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word." The term used in the Chinese Union Version for *Word* can be understood as doctrine, but the Word is the expression of God; the Word is God Himself. God expressed is the Word—this is marvelous! The emphasis on doctrine is teaching, not God; the emphasis on the Word is God Himself. The word *truth* in 1 Timothy 3 is God manifested. John 1:17 says that truth—reality—came through Jesus Christ, and in 14:6 the Lord said that He is the truth, the reality. The Word is the manifestation of God; truth is the manifested God, the reality manifested by the Word. Something concrete is manifested by the Word for us to receive, and this is God Himself, who is truth.

In 1 Timothy 3:15 *truth* does not refer to doctrine or theory. Rather, it refers to the reality of the manifestation of God, the manifested God. In the same way that God received by man is grace, God manifested and touched by man is truth, reality. Therefore, the church being the pillar and base of the truth does not mean that the church contains a large number of doctrines but that the church upholds God Himself as the truth. God rests on the church.

Every building is supported by pillars. Our large meeting hall is also upheld by pillars, or we can say that it rests on pillars. A large roof must be supported by pillars in order for it to withstand the test of storms and even earthquakes. In the same way, God is great and weighty; nevertheless, He rests on the church. The church is the pillar of God as the truth. Although the covering of the church is great and heavy, the pillar is thin and small; this is the true condition of what the church is to God.

The weight and the greatness of God are infinite and far surpass our imagination, but it is wonderful that this infinite God rests on the church. The God who rests on the church is the truth. Everything in the universe will pass away, because it is not real. Only God Himself is real. God Himself will exist even if heaven and earth pass away. Everything is false, vain, and empty; only God is real. The building we are in today may not exist tomorrow because this building is not real. In the universe only God is real. Everything is changeable; only God exists forever and is forever unchangeable. He is true and real. God manifested to be touched by man is truth, and this truth rests on the church. The testimony that the church bears is not doctrines that are preached and taught by the church; rather, it is God who rests on the church.

The church can still preach the word when she is in an abnormal condition. However, people will receive only doctrine, not God. History shows that the more abnormal the condition of the church, the more doctrines she has; when the church is in confusion, she has the most doctrine. When the church is normal, people touch truth, not doctrine; they touch God Himself. If a person hears only doctrine in a locality, the church has deviated from the mark. As long as there is doctrine, there is opinion; we who serve the Lord must not dispute with others concerning doctrine. Debating with others concerning doctrine proves that our condition before the Lord is not proper. God does not give doctrines to the church; rather, He gives Himself as the living and true One to the church. If the church is in a normal condition, when people touch the church, they touch the truth, God Himself. In a normal condition a person may not sense that the saints are clear in doctrine when he contacts them, but he will sense that God is in their midst. He will be inspired to worship God; he will bow his head and say, “God, I praise You.” This is the church as the pillar of the truth; this is the manifestation of the church upholding God before man.

God is abstract to man because He is Spirit. He is abstract, just as radio waves are abstract. However, the church as the pillar is the concrete expression of the abstract God. In the universe God can certainly be found in the church. God is in the church; God rests on the church as His expression. The church is God expressed in the universe; people have reality only when they touch the church.

Paul spoke of the church not only as the pillar of the truth but also as the base of the truth. The top portion of a building is upheld by pillars, and underneath a building is a foundation as its base. A building needs to be upheld by pillars, and it also needs to be firmly placed and built upon a base. The church is not merely the pillar that upholds God; she is also a base upon which God places and builds Himself. The church is the foundation, the groundwork, the base, on which God can fully place Himself. In a building the base upholds the pillars, and the pillars uphold the entire structure; this is what the church is to God. May we all see that the church is the pillar on which God rests and the base on which God is placed. This is the mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh.

THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS— GOD MANIFESTED IN THE FLESH

Although 1 Timothy 3:16 speaks concerning the Lord Jesus, it is connected to verse 15 concerning the church as the pillar and base that upholds God. This shows that the mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh, does not refer only to the Lord Jesus but also to the church, which is His enlargement. Verse 15 speaks of the church, and verse 16 speaks of incarnation, because incarnation was enlarged when the church came into being. Whenever the church is manifested, incarnation is enlarged. In Bethlehem God was manifested in the flesh on a small scale in one man; in the church God is manifested in millions of people. Although the scope is wide, the intrinsic principle is absolutely the same. The Lord Jesus was God manifested in the flesh, the mystery of godliness; the church, composed of millions of people, is still God manifested in the flesh, still the mystery of godliness.

Godliness means God-likeness; it is to have God's form and to have the ability to express God. For example, we would say that a person who acts justly is righteous, a person who is undefiled by the world and separated from

everything is holy, and a person who is meek and humble is modest and good-natured. Likewise, we would say that a person who is like God and expresses God's image possesses godliness. The mystery of godliness in 1 Timothy 3:16 is a group of people who are like God; God is now manifested through them, not just through Himself alone. This is a mystery.

When the Lord Jesus was on the earth, He was a mystery. God was within Jesus the Nazarene, yet God was not openly manifest to men. For this reason Jesus was a mystery. The church is also a mystery on earth, and everyone who is part of the church is a mystery. If we genuinely live in the church life, others will be baffled and puzzled by us. Everyone in the church life seems ordinary, and no one is special, yet there are many special stories. What is this? This is a mystery. This mystery manifests godliness and manifests God before men. A person may not see anything of God in this group of people, but even though he may sense a condition of love, meekness, and holiness, it is a condition that surpasses any love, meekness, and holiness that he has ever known. This is the mystery of godliness.

Do we have the mystery of godliness in the church life? If we do, nothing less than God is being manifested in the flesh. The manifestation of God that began on a small scale in Bethlehem will be enlarged and completed in the church. Truth is upheld by the church as the pillar, and truth is set on the church as the base. The church is God manifested in a group of people in the flesh.

THE NEW MAN BEING CREATED ACCORDING TO GOD, ACCORDING TO REALITY

Ephesians 4:24 says, "Put on the new man." This putting on implies that the new man has been accomplished. The verse continues, "Which was created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the reality." The creation of the new man was according to God. *According to God* and *in...the reality* refer to the same thing. Therefore, what is created according to God is created in the reality. Ephesians 4:24 speaks of putting on the new man, and Colossians 3:10 says, "And have put on the new man, which is being renewed." These two verses seem to contradict each other. On the one hand, the new man is to be put on, but on the other hand, the new man is being renewed. It seems as if we have put on a garment, yet the garment is gradually being made only after we have put it on. This is what the Bible says regarding the

new man. We have put on the new man, but the new man is growing and being built in us. We have all put on the new man, but judging from our living, this does not seem to be the case. We need to remember that we usually put on a garment after it is made, but the new man in Ephesians and Colossians is being made after we have put it on.

The church as the house of the living God is the pillar and base that upholds the truth, manifesting the truth of God. We are being built in truth. He is building us in truth. He is building us in Himself. The church is the pillar and base of the truth, but the amount of truth that can be manifested in the church depends upon how much the church allows God to be built in her. Ephesians speaks of putting on the new man, and this new man was created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the reality, the truth (4:24). Colossians speaks of having put on the new man, which is being renewed unto full knowledge (3:10). In Colossians the new man has not yet been accomplished; it is being renewed according to the image of Him who created him. If we put these two verses together, we see that the image, which is in the church, is created by God in the truth. The manifestation of God's image in the church depends upon how much she allows God to create her in the truth. The truth is God manifested, and it is the reality of the manifested God. This reality, which is manifested, is the image of God.

A church in a certain place with an appreciable amount of God's image proves that God has done a considerable amount of building there. God's building work is in truth. The truth is God Himself, God manifested; to build in truth is to build in God as the truth. Whatever is not of God, whatever is different from God, and whatever is not of the truth will be torn down by God. God desires to build Himself into the church and to build according to Himself. God is building Himself as truth, as the reality, into us as truth, that is, He is taking truth as the sphere, the material, and the model of His building. He is also building us into Himself as the truth, as the reality.

In our experience our temper may not have passed through much of God's building. We may have a good-natured temper that has not passed through God's building; this means that there is no truth, no reality, no God, in our good-natured temper. Truth does not refer to doctrine but to God Himself, to God as the truth. If God as the truth is not in us, we do not have the expression of God's image. If we lose our temper and act in our flesh, we do

not have God's image; likewise, if we are good-natured, meek, and humble but have not been built in God, we do not have God's image.

This building is according to God, is in God, and takes God as the sphere and the model. For this reason we need to be completely remade when we enter into the church life. Formerly, there was not one part of our being that had God or was like God; even though we may have been "godly," we merely had the appearance, not the reality, of godliness. The reality of godliness is God Himself. God was neither in our hatred nor was He in our love; He was neither in our indifference nor in our zeal. Inwardly, we were filled with the self, the image of Adam, and did not have the image of Christ. For this reason we need to be essentially remade in every part of our being—our preference, will, mind, emotion, character, and disposition. We need to be completely remade according to God's image, with God Himself as the sphere and the material. We should not think that the little amount of dealing and stripping we have suffered is a harsh thing; some people say, "I cannot bear this kind of church life." However, we must bear it, because this is the necessary path to be remade; we all need to be remade from within, from the very core of our being.

THE GENUINE CHURCH BEING THE PLACE WHERE GOD'S AUTHORITY AND IMAGE ARE EXPRESSED

Even though we have put on the new man, we still need to be transformed into the image of the Lord. This means that although we have put on the new man, God's image has not been fully manifested in us. We still need to go through the process of building. This building work is according to God's image, in God, and with God as the sphere and the model. We need the Holy Spirit to speak to us and enlighten us in an intense way so that we may see how much of God's image and God's element we have and so that we may see how much the church expresses the image of God. A genuine church is where God's authority and image are expressed. This expression repeatedly passes through God's building work that is in Him, according to Him, and with Him as the sphere and material. The church expresses God's image, having the righteousness and holiness of the reality. Righteousness is to be properly related with everything, and holiness is to be set apart from everything other than God. When the church expresses God's image, she is in full accord with God. When this happens there is no discord, no friction, no natural man, and

no worldly mixture in the Body of Christ. Everything belongs to God and matches God; everything is righteous, holy, and true, thereby manifesting God's image spontaneously.

When people touch such a church, instead of praising the good points of men, they worship God Himself. Does the church in our locality inspire others to praise us or to worship God? Does the church in our locality cause others to touch our good points—zeal, diligence, love, and labor—or does the church cause others to touch God Himself? The answer to these questions is that we have the church, and we are the church only when God is manifested among us; the church is not our natural love and zeal. The result of this building is that we are full of the truth, full of God. It is possible for us to be good and even praised by others before we have been built, because we may be full of the good-natured life and the self; however, we are the church only when God is built up in us, thereby being manifested in the flesh.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ENLARGEMENT OF THE MINGLING OF GOD AND MAN

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:23; 2:22; 4:12-13, 16

THE MINGLING OF GOD AND MAN PRODUCING THE HEAD AND THE BODY OF CHRIST

God came to the earth to be mingled with man, in the man Jesus Christ. Hence, Jesus Christ is the beginning of the mingling of God and man. This mingling made the production of the Body of Christ, which is the church, possible. Christ is the Head of the Body, the church. The church is the enlargement of the principle of God being mingled with man. This enlargement results in the Body of Christ.

In the Gospels the mingling of God and man produced the Head, Christ. In Acts the enlargement of the mingling of God and man produced the Body of Christ. God mingled with the man Jesus, a Galilean, and this Jesus became the Head of the Body; God also mingled with many Galileans, and they became the Body of the Head. May God enlighten us in our reading of the Bible to enable us to see that the first five books of the New Testament show a clear picture of a great person. The four Gospels show this great person, and the book of Acts shows the enlargement of this great person.

The book of Acts is a record not merely of the activities of the apostles, but it is a record of the activities of the Body of Christ on earth. We need to connect Acts with the Gospels to see a complete man, the Head and the Body. This man is a mysterious, universal man, who is God yet man and man yet God. He is also the mingling of divinity and humanity. There are many instances in these five books that show the mingling of God with man and man with God. The Gospels speak of Christ on earth; however, His Body was not yet produced. In Acts Christ as the Head is in the heavens, but the Body He produced is on earth. We need spiritual eyes to see that this great person as the Head is in the heavens and that His Body is on earth. However, the Head is not separate from the Body; rather, in this universe they are

connected from the heavens to the earth and from the earth to the heavens. The book of Acts is a record of the enlargement and continuation of the mingling of God and man. Christ is not a person with a group of associates; He is the Head with a Body.

THE BODY OF CHRIST
BEING THE MINGLING OF GOD AND MAN

The truth concerning the Body of Christ is exceedingly mysterious. Our knowledge of this mystery is very limited, and our experience is almost negligible. Therefore, to use a Chinese expression, when we speak of the Body of Christ, we are measuring the ocean with a spoon. We cannot comprehend the Body of Christ with our mind; we can only comprehend and speak concerning the Body of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit within us. What is the Body of Christ? Some may say that the Body of Christ is the church, and others may say that the Body of Christ is the aggregate of all the believers, all who belong to Christ. These definitions are not wrong doctrinally, but they fall short of experience.

There may be a group of believers in a locality, but there might not be the practical church life, the practical Body life, the expression of the Body of Christ, in that locality. This means that we may all be believers, who are saved by grace, but in terms of experience and practicality, we may not have much of an expression of the Body of Christ; we may not have the reality of the Body of Christ.

The church is the enlargement of the mingling of God and man, the enlargement of Christ. If there is no mingling of God with man and man with God, there can be no church. Though many believers have God's life in them, this mingling is not seen in their living; the practical expression of the mingling of God and man is not among them. I believe it is easier for us to understand the Body of Christ from the perspective of the mingling of God and man. We may be genuinely saved, zealously serving the Lord, and diligently caring for the church, but the mingling of God and man may not be present within us. Many children of God preach the gospel zealously, but the mingling of God and man is not present within them; instead, man's zeal and diligence are present. They preach the gospel out of themselves; the element of God is not in their gospel preaching. They may even speak of God while

they preach, but in their actions and speech there is only man's element, not God's.

In the Gospels we cannot find one instance in which the Lord did something out of Himself as a Nazarene; God was in Him in all things and did everything with Him. We can say that the Lord made every move with God; the life He lived was the living of the mingling of God with man and man with God. In the same principle, the move of every apostle for the preaching of the gospel in Acts was the moving of God and man, the move of God mingled with man; God could not be separated from man's move. When Peter moved, God moved; when Paul moved, God moved; when Stephen moved, God also moved. We cannot separate the apostles from the Lord; every aspect and detail of their move in the gospel and work were mingled with God. When they stood up to speak, God was within them doing His works. This is similar to the experience of the Lord Jesus when He was on the earth (John 6:57; 5:19). The apostles could say that their preaching of the gospel was not their own work; it was the work of the One who died, resurrected, and was living in them. Therefore, if there is the mingling of God and man, there is the Body and there is the reality. This reality is the expression of the Body.

THE BODY OF CHRIST IN EXPERIENCE

Experientially, it is possible for us to preach the gospel and speak concerning Christ yet not have God mingled with us in our preaching and speaking. Even though we are saved, we may not have the reality of the Body of Christ. On the one hand, as believers, we belong to Christ and are members of the Body of Christ; on the other hand, we should ask whether the Body of Christ is expressed among us. Our Christian life is often a living out of ourselves, which lacks the mingling of the element of God.

We may have seen that the church is the Body of Christ and that, as members of the Body, our service should be corporate, not individualistic. However, this may merely be a "seeing"; we may not have been delivered into this reality (Rom. 6:17). Our not being individualistic may be something worked out of ourselves; it may not be an expression of the mingling with God. Our coordination with the brothers and sisters may still be something out of ourselves; it may not be of the element of God within. This is not a matter of being individualistic or of being in coordination but a matter of having the mingling of God within us. All our problems lie in whether there is the

mingling of God within us. If we do not have the mingling of God, our being individualistic is of the same value as our being in coordination. The crucial point is whether God is mingled with us. Is our service today a move out of one nature, that is, out of ourselves, or the move of two natures, that is, out of the mingling of God with us? Is everything according to ourselves, or is it according to God mingling with us? When the Lord mingles with us and practically lives in us, we live in the Lord. As such people, we are not individualistic but are in coordination with others. This does not require our effort; rather, it is an inevitable and spontaneous result.

No one living in the Body of Christ can be individualistic, and no one living by the life of Christ can stay away from coordinating with others who also live by the life of Christ. Without the Christ who lives within us, without the God who is mingled with us, we are individualistic, even if we do not desire to be individualistic, and we are unable to coordinate with others, even if we so desire. This is not a matter of being individualistic or being in coordination but a matter of God being mingled with us and we being mingled with God. Whenever we have this mingling within us, we have some amount of the reality of the Body of Christ; whenever we have this mingling among us, the Body is expressed.

Doctrinally, we may not understand how it is possible to be saved yet not be the Body of Christ. According to Ephesians, the church is the one new man. On the one hand, we put on the new man when we were saved (4:24), but on the other hand, it is still being renewed (Col. 3:10), even after we have put it on. One puts on a garment after it is made; however, the "garment," the new man, we put on is still being made. In the same principle, the believers in the Body of Christ have been made one Body in the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit is still doing a building work in them. All believers are a part of the Body, but the Body may not have much ground within them, and they may not have much reality of the Body. We must see that if we do not have the building of the Body, we do not have the reality of the Body. From the perspective of the Body of Christ, if there is no expression of the element of God's mingling within us, we may not have much building, even if God's life is working within us, causing us to reject sin and deal with the world.

Paul was full of the element of Christ, the element of the mingling of God and man; this mingling was the expression of the Body and the reality of the Body. Paul can be compared to the wall of the New Jerusalem, which is

exceedingly high, because God's building was within him. The Body of Christ comes out of God's building in man and His mingling with man. The Body is not merely a group of believers; rather, it is Christ built up from within them. The Body of Christ, as the building, is the issue of God being mingled with man.

We need to ask ourselves, as believers, are we the Body of Christ in our experience? To what extent is the Body of Christ expressed among us? If we see the light and have understanding, we will bow our heads and confess that we do not have much of an expression of the Body of Christ. There is not much of the building and mingling of the Body of Christ among us, not much of the element of God living out from man, and not much of Christ mingling with man. We may serve God zealously and be in "one accord," but our serving might be out of ourselves and not out of God being mingled with us. Ephesians 1:22-23 says, "The church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all." We are the church, the Body of Christ, but are we the fullness of the One who fills all in all? A person's body can be a body because he is mingled with the body; the value of a body depends on the living person who is mingled with that body.

The church as the Body of Christ is the enlargement of Christ, the enlargement of the mingling of God and man. It is a group of people who are mingled with God inwardly and in whom Christ has been built up. They have been mingled with God and built up to the extent that it is difficult to distinguish whether it is God or them. Their speaking and moving is God speaking and moving within them. This is the record in the book of Acts, and it is also the realization of the fullness of the One who fills all in all. Therefore, a group of believers might not express the Body of Christ if they do not have the reality of the Body of Christ.

We must ask the brothers and sisters, who are learning to serve the Lord, how much of the Body of Christ is among them. You may serve zealously, be in "one accord," and never quarrel, but you may not have much of the element of the Body of Christ. It is possible that all your work is thoroughly and completely of the element of man, not of the element of God. My emphasis is not on the matter of being broken or torn down. Rather, according to Ephesians 1, we would ask: Does our zeal have the element of God? Does our diligence have the element of God? Does our "one accord" have the element of God? Do all the services come out of ourselves, or are they the issue of the

building of God? If we are the source, we do not have the Body; only that which comes out of God's building within us is the Body.

THE MINGLING AND BUILDING OF GOD WITHIN MAN PRODUCING THE BODY OF CHRIST

In Ephesians 1 Paul says, "The church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all" (vv. 22-23), and in chapter 2 he speaks of building (v. 20). From this we can see that God has been doing the building work after our salvation (vv. 19-22). In chapter 3 Paul bowed his knees and prayed that Christ may make His home in our hearts through faith (vv. 14, 17) and that we would be filled unto all the fullness of God (v. 19). We have been saved, yet we may not be filled; without the filling there is no Body of Christ. In experience, if people are saved but not filled, they do not have the building. Christ is in them, but He has not made His home in them. They have not touched much of the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ. The fullness of the Godhead in Christ has not been built and constituted into them; hence, they remain the same, still living out themselves.

The Body of Christ is the issue of the believers being built up with Christ, being mingled with God, and being constituted with Christ. If a person is saved but does not have this building, mingling, and constitution, there is no Body of Christ; even though he is in the Body, the Body is not seen in him. Hence, Ephesians 4 has a twofold building—the building up by the ministry of the gifts and the building up by the Body itself.

Someone may ask, "Since the church is the Body of Christ, can people touch the Body of Christ in the various localities?" This is a crucial question. When people meet in Taipei, they may contact many Christians, but will they touch the Body of Christ? Whether they can touch the Body of Christ depends on whether Christ is built up in Taipei, whether God and man are mingled in Taipei, whether God is able to come out of man, and whether man's move is the move of God mingling with man. If this is not the situation, even though there may be believers, the Body of Christ is not present. Without these matters, our coordination is the coordination of "corpses," within which there is no life, only death.

We may have a very good coordination that is void of life. What we have may be doctrines, regulations, organization, and a coordination by

arrangement rather than by our living in Christ. Perhaps our submission is merely the submission of man and not the submission of Christ lived out from us; our submission to authority may be merely human effort, which comes from education, teaching, training, and cultivation but not from Christ growing within us. If our submission is of the element of man and does not come out of the mingling of Christ within, then it is not of the Body of Christ.

There is a kind of coordination in submission that has passed through God's working and dealing and has been built by and mingled with God. Such a coordination through Christ is living, full of vitality, and fresh, and it causes people to smell the flavor of God. Once people touch this coordination, they feel that they have touched Christ and that they worship God, sensing that God is present. The church as the Body of Christ is the fullness of the One who fills all in all, the issue of God mingling with man and of Christ building in man. Therefore, it is not enough for us to be saved and have the life of Christ; we must also live out Christ, allowing Christ to move through us and fill us up so that there may be a living expression. Only this is the Body of Christ, the expression of God's image in the universe, and only this can reign for God on earth.

THE FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH— THE BODY OF CHRIST AND THE HOUSE OF GOD

The function of the church is of two aspects. One aspect is that it is the Body of Christ, and the other aspect is that it is the house of God, or we may say, the dwelling place of God, the temple of God. These three—the house of God, the dwelling place of God, and the temple of God—are one. The significance of the church as the house, the dwelling place, and the temple of God is in God being mingled with man. This means that God has found a people on earth that He can be mingled with. This is the great mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16); this is also the mingling of God and man. When a person lives in a house, it could be said that he is "mingled" with the house, but because the house is "dead," it cannot be truly mingled with a living person. However, our God is living, and we are living; God is Spirit, and we have a spirit. Therefore, God and we can be thoroughly mingled. The fact that we are the dwelling place of God, the temple of God, and the house of God means that God dwells in us and causes us to be

mingled with Him as one so that we may be filled unto all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:19).

The church as the Body of Christ refers to our relationship to Christ. Our body is not only our expression; it is also the house of our person. Second Corinthians 5:1-4 tells us that our body is our dwelling place, our earthly tabernacle. Our body is our dwelling place; although it is temporary, we can be mingled with our body. Thus, our body becomes our expression. Whatever we do is by the body and through the body. Today Christ also needs to gain a means by which He can move and act on earth. Without the Body, all of Christ's work on earth would cease, and He could not gain an expression. Therefore, how much the Lord can be expressed and how much He can move and work on earth today altogether depend upon His Body.

All of God's children need to see that the Lord's expression of Himself and His work on earth do not depend upon our zeal and diligence but on whether we have the expression of the Body of Christ among us. If Christ is built up in us and God is mingled with us, there will be a practical result, which is the expression of the Body of Christ. Today all of God's work depends upon His Body. Hence, all the churches should pay attention to whether we have the expression of the Body of Christ. Wherever there is the building of God and the mingling of God, there is the Body of Christ, there is the expression of God, and there is the work of Christ. Therefore, the Body of Christ is a strict obligation to us.

CHAPTER SIX

THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCH

Scripture Reading: Eph. 2:14-16, 18, 20-22; 4:11-13

Ephesians 2:14-16 says, "He Himself is our peace, He who has made both one and has broken down the middle wall of partition... that He might create the two in Himself into one new man...and might reconcile both in one Body to God through the cross." Verse 18 says, "For through Him we both have access in one Spirit unto the Father." Verses 20 through 22 say, "Being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone; in whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit." According to grammar, *being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets* and *being built together* denote a building work in progress, not one that has been completed.

THE CHURCH BEING GOD'S BUILDING

In this chapter we will consider the building of the church. The first time the Bible speaks of the church, it also speaks of building. Matthew 16:18 says, "Upon this rock I will build My church." This verse speaks not only of the church but also of building; while it takes the church as the subject, it also takes the building as the subject. The church is a great matter, and building is an even greater matter in the eyes of God. In other words, the church is God's building project in the universe. In English, *building* can be both a verb and a noun; in Greek the word *building* in both its verbal form and noun form have the same root. In its verbal form it means "God is building"; in its noun form it refers to the church as "the building of God." First Timothy 3:15 says that the church is the house of God; *house* in Greek refers to *building* as a noun.

First Corinthians 3:9 says, "You are God's cultivated land, God's building." The Bible very clearly shows that the church is God's building; the church is a matter of building. When we speak of the church, we cannot neglect the matter of building. Without the building work, there is no building, no church. At the end of the Bible there is a city that is built stone upon stone and stone joined to stone. There are also different kinds of material in the city. There are

three major groups of material: gold, pearls, and precious stones. There are twelve kinds of precious stones, which are the twelve foundations, and the surrounding wall is jasper. Every detail of this description shows that the church is God's building.

THE APOSTLES' BUILDING WORK AND GOD'S BUILDING WORK BEING ONE

In the Epistles the apostles repeatedly speak concerning building. In 1 Corinthians 3:11 Paul speaks of the foundation "which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Today all the Lord's workers are building upon this foundation; all who serve the churches should do a building work upon this foundation. According to the Greek, the references to building in the New Testament are not references to edification as a matter of spiritual improvement but to edification as a matter of building. An apostle working for the Lord, a prophet exercising his gift, and a teacher carrying out his ministry are for the building up of the house of God. Ephesians 2 clearly shows that in Christ, the believers are being built together with the apostles and prophets (vv. 20-22); this building work is now in progress. Peter says that as living stones we are coming to the Lord and are being built up as a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:4-5). When we come to the Lord, we are living stones; the Lord will build these living stones up little by little and piece by piece. The result of this building is that we become a dwelling place, a spiritual house, for the Lord. Hebrews 11:16 says that God has prepared a city for us. To this day, God is still working on and building this city.

God has only one building work. We should not think that the church, the house, that the apostles were building is not the holy city that God is building. The city that God is building is the house that the apostles were building. It is a house today, and it will be an enlarged city in the future. The house is the temple; when the city appears, the temple will no longer be seen. No temple will be seen in the New Jerusalem, because the New Jerusalem is the enlargement of the temple (Rev. 21:22). The temple today will be a city in the future. This is the issue of God's work throughout the ages in the universe.

GOD'S CREATION BEING FOR THE PREPARATION OF MATERIALS FOR HIS BUILDING

God has been carrying out this building work since the creation of the world. In eternity past God had the blueprint for His building, and God prepared the materials according to this plan, this blueprint, through creation. We should not consider God's creation to be His building work; His creation prepared the materials for His building. The created man was the material that God prepared for His building. For example, with a physical city the materials for the building of the city must be prepared before it can be built. God made man from the dust of the earth in order to prepare the material for His building; the created Adam, the created human race, is the material that God uses for His building. Therefore, creation is a preparation for the building.

God's building follows creation. While creation was accomplished through God's power, building is accomplished through God's life. In other words, whereas creation comes out of God's handiwork, building comes out of God's nature. After God's creation was completed in Genesis, God began to enter into His building work, into His building. In the Old Testament, even though God did not begin the building, He used types and figures to describe the building He desired. For example, the tabernacle, the temple, the coordination and service of the children of Israel, their becoming a kingdom of priests, and the service recorded in Nehemiah and Ezra after their return from captivity are all shadows and figures of God's building.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE BUILDING BEING LAID BY THE LORD AFTER HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Through incarnation, death, and resurrection the Lord laid the foundation for the building. Through incarnation, death, and resurrection He became the foundation stone (Isa. 28:16) and the cornerstone (Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7). The significance of His being the foundation stone is that everything is built upon Him; the significance of His being the cornerstone is that everything is joined together through Him. After the Lord's resurrection the Holy Spirit descended and entered into man with God's life and nature. The effectiveness of the Lord's death and resurrection is also included in the Spirit in order to do the building work. On the one hand, the Holy Spirit uses God-created and God-redeemed people as material and gradually builds them into God; on the other hand, He gradually builds God's life and nature into them. This is the building of the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected Christ into His

redeemed people. At this point God's building becomes a major focus of the New Testament revelation.

The Lord first spoke of the building when those with Him began to realize that the Son of Man is the Son of God. God's building work began with this revelation. God's building work began when some realized the mingling of God and man and the coordination of God and man. Whenever and wherever there are some who see this mystery, the building of this mystery begins. The building began in Matthew 16 as a result of such a seeing. From that point onward, there is a central line in the New Testament that continuously speaks of this building.

THE BUILDING WORK RESULTING IN THE PRODUCING OF A CITY

On the one hand, God is working, building in heaven; on the other hand, the apostles, those who have a ministry, are building on earth. The Body of Christ is also building up itself. This twofold building work, in heaven and on earth, is actually one building work that results in the producing of a city. The building is the dwelling place of God, the temple of God, and the house of God. When the building is completed and enlarged, it becomes a city. We know that the city is this dwelling place from Revelation 21:3, which says that the holy city is the tabernacle of God with men. The tabernacle is a dwelling place. Before the holy city appears, the church is God's dwelling place on earth. In the future the holy city will be the enlargement of the ultimate completion of the church, the consummation of God's building. This shows that the church is related to building.

Therefore, we cannot merely teach and edify the church; we need to build up the church. The church does not merely need teaching; the church needs building. Genuine, solid, and weighty teaching should build. Every work that is of value is a building work. Today in Christianity there is too much instruction and teaching but very little building; there is much teaching but almost no building. God is not emphasizing teaching in the church today; any emphasis on teaching should be for the sake of building.

GOD'S UNIQUE WORK IN THE UNIVERSE

By the Lord's mercy we have seen a little concerning God's building work. This is not a small matter; it is not merely a matter of doctrine or Bible study. We have touched a great matter, which is God's building work in the universe. Apart from this building, God is not doing anything else in the universe. This is a great work. When I first saw this, I prostrated myself before the Lord, saying, "Lord, this is too great. I can neither do this work nor speak concerning this work." The great, eternal, and infinite God is doing a building work in the universe. This building is the only thing He desires in the universe.

Although creation is great, it is merely preparation for God's building. If the work of preparation is great, how much greater can the building work be? This is the reason we say that the building is a great matter. We should never consider the building as a doctrine or a matter of Bible knowledge; we need to see that the building is a great matter in the universe. We were shown mercy to have a part in this building work; we are a part of this work, and we are a worker in this work. Perhaps our feelings concerning the building are not so strong; however, our work should not be according to our feelings but according to the fact of God's work. We should all know that God has a great work; God is building a dwelling place in the universe, and we have a part in it.

I deeply feel that I am not worthy to speak concerning this great work; not only am I insignificant, but my understanding concerning this work is limited, and my function in this work is even less. However, I still feel to speak with God's children concerning this matter because God has opened my eyes and shown me something. Although I have not seen much, what I have seen grieves my heart and is a heavy burden within me. If by God's mercy we see the building and then compare the building with our condition and that of the rest of Christianity, we will be brought to tears. Only the Lord Himself can make us joyful.

If we closely observe the condition in Christianity and the situation among us, we will be deeply grieved because we do not see God's building. We see mainly human works, human discussions, human activities, human zeal, and human service, but we can see only a little of the building of God. As a result, the vision of the building is a heavy burden within us. It is difficult for us to speak concerning the building, and when we speak, it seems as if we are condemning others because our speaking contradicts others and negates all

they have done. However, this is not a matter of negating or affirming but of whether our work and living are a part of God's building. This is a very sobering question that does not depend on our perfection or goodness, or even on our spirituality. Our virtues, such as diligence and meekness, are of no value; the key is whether the building of God is in us and among us.

Only the mingling of God, the building of God, is the Body of Christ, the church. If we do not have the building of God, we have the church in name but not in reality. Even if we have the ground of the church, we do not have the reality of the church. Everything depends on the building of God. Only God mingled with man and God built into man are the building of God, the Body of Christ, the church.

THE FIRST STEP OF GOD'S BUILDING WORK— THE BREAKING DOWN OF THE CROSS

The first step in God's building is the work of breaking down. In relation to the building, God speaks of breaking down the middle wall of partition through the cross in Ephesians 2:14-16. The middle wall of partition is the law. The law has the flesh as its basis; thus, the breaking down of the law is the breaking down of the flesh. With the Israelites and the Gentiles, the flesh is something of the old creation. If we did not have the old creation, there would be no flesh and no law, and without the law there would be no middle wall of partition. Ephesians 2 clearly shows, however, that there is a middle wall of partition, a division, between Israel and the Gentiles, because they are both in the old creation and thus have the flesh. The law was given according to the flesh.

Romans 7:5 shows that the law is related to the flesh. The law and the flesh are like a couple. One is the husband, the other is the wife, and the two are always together. As long as the law is present, the flesh is present; when man lives by the flesh, he desires to keep the law. Those who are well behaved keep the law; those who are not well behaved break the law and condemn themselves before the law. We cannot separate the flesh from the law. If man had not fallen and become the flesh, God would not have needed to give the law; it would have been sufficient to have God as life. The life signified by the tree of life in the garden of Eden is God. The law at Mount Sinai was added by God so that man would know the flesh and so that the flesh would be

condemned (v. 7; 5:20). Therefore, to abolish the law is to abolish the flesh, and to abolish the flesh is to abolish the old creation.

The first step in God's building work is to break down the old creation. All the distinctions between Jews and Gentiles are in the old creation. Once the cross breaks down the old creation, the distinctions between Jews and Gentiles are over, and the two become one. Among us it seems as if there are many "Jewish" and "Gentile" distinctions. For example, we often hear some say, "He is a Gentile; I am a true Israelite." The sisters feel that they are "Israelites" because they are meek and that the brothers are "Gentiles" because they are rough and wild. The sisters are like Jacob, who dwells in tents, and the brothers are like Esau, who hunts in the fields (Gen. 25:27). These are "Jewish" and "Gentile" characterizations. You should not think that I am joking regarding these distinctions among us. When problems arise among the brothers, they often say, "We cannot be one; we cannot coordinate together." This indicates that there are distinctions of the flesh among them. It also means that these distinctions have not been broken down by the cross.

THE CROSS BREAKING DOWN EVERY LAW OF THE COMMANDMENTS IN ORDINANCES

In the past some have stood up and exhorted the brothers and sisters in tears, saying that the requirement for us to receive the blessing is the one accord and that if we are not in one accord, the blessing will trickle away. But we have discovered that the more people exhort, the less the brothers and sisters seem to be in one accord. Exhortation cannot cause us to have the one accord. There is only one way to have the one accord—the breaking down of the cross. We need to see that the cross has already broken down the ordinances. It has broken down all the grounds that we use to justify ourselves and to condemn others. Furthermore, it has broken down the basis, the foundation, of the ordinances, which is the old creation. Such a seeing will cause us to have the genuine one accord.

In the church life those who are willing to speak may feel that they are "non-Gentiles" and that those who do not speak are "Gentiles." Those who always open their mouths to "fellowship" in this way often secretly justify themselves for being good and weighty. However, others among us who do not speak as freely may simply be swallowing words that are on the tip of their tongue. There is a kind of self-justification and condemnation of others in this

as well. There are too many situations like this among the brothers and sisters. We do not quarrel, argue, or fight outwardly because we love the Lord, fear Him, and desire His blessing. However, our countenance often changes, and our manners are unnatural. We are merely trying to suppress ourselves. What is this? This shows that we are not in harmony and are unable to coordinate with others. Any change in countenance and manners is an expression of discord that comes from the old creation, the flesh, and the ordinances of self-justification.

When the Holy Spirit comes and breaks down the old creation in us, our person will be broken down. Those who do not speak will speak, and those who love to speak will shut their mouths. Those who do not speak will no longer condemn those who speak, and those who love to speak will no longer condemn those who do not. For example, saying that the sisters should cover their heads and keep their place is a dead ordinance enacted upon the flesh. This is an expression of the old creation and needs to pass through the breaking of the cross. Once the sisters have been broken by the cross, they will no longer feel that they are sisters; this is not to say that they forget they are sisters but that they will no longer remain in ordinances. In the same way, when an elder who has been broken by God speaks with the smallest brother, he will not feel that he is an elder speaking with a mere brother. The elder will not forget that he is an elder; he simply will not act out of a sensation of "being an elder."

An elder may feel that others should speak to him in a manner, tone, and expression which reflect his "superior position," because an "elder ought to be respected by all." What is this? This is the flesh; it is a commandment of the flesh that is of the old creation. After the Holy Spirit works to overturn this elder, breaking down the old creation within him, he will still be an elder, but he will not have the "sensation" of being an elder. We will no longer feel that he is an "elder"; rather, we will feel that Christ is in him, the building of Christ is in him, and God is in him.

In the church life young people among us often complain, saying, "All the elders do is step on us and look down on us. Don't they know that the young have a potential for greatness? Even though we are young, they were once young as well. So why do they think lightly of us? They should help us, cultivate us, lead us, and teach us what we do not know." Thus, the law, the Ten Commandments, is present among us. However, in speaking of the

qualifications of an elder, Paul did not establish as many laws as these young people; these young people make one law after another. When the Holy Spirit works and breaks down these young people, they will say, "O Lord, have mercy on me; it is not a matter of the elders either regarding me or looking down on me; it is a matter of my person being broken down and of Christ being built in me. O Lord, fill me." When this happens, there will be building; there will be the work of God among these young people. Even though they may be young, a portion of the church, a portion of the Body of Christ, a portion of something spiritual, is expressed in them nevertheless.

Sometimes the older ones may say, "Look at our church; it is truly a pitiful family. The young men are improper. When they see us on the street, they are arrogant and do not even greet us. When they see us standing by a door in the meeting hall, they ignore us and simply pass by us. Is this appropriate?" This kind of speech indicates that there is a lack of the breaking down by the cross in the church life; once there is the breaking down of the cross, all the ordinances will disappear. All traces of self-justification, condemnation of others, and self-approval will disappear. When the cross works, the flesh is broken, and the old creation is torn down. The cross has broken down the middle wall of partition between brothers and sisters, between older and younger, and between differences in nature and disposition; everything has been broken down by the cross.

We must see that the first step of God's building work is the breaking down of the cross. We must know that all our criticisms, differing views, and feelings that we are right and others are wrong are the flesh. These become the basis for establishing laws similar to the laws given on Mount Sinai. These feelings are laws that put up a wall of partition between others and us, causing us to feel different from others and to think that they are wrong and that we are right. Even though we are believers, there can be a wall of partition between us. This wall of partition is neither from Christ nor the Body; it is from the flesh and the old creation. The breaking-down work of the cross must abolish the wall of partition in us.

EXPERIENCING THE BREAKING DOWN OF THE CROSS FOR THE BUILDING UP AND EXPRESSION OF GOD'S AUTHORITY AND IMAGE

We sincerely believe that the saints who serve together are not sinful and have forsaken the world. However, the old creation and the flesh are still present, and our person is still whole and complete. There is still a wall of partition among us that needs to be broken down by the cross. Everything of the old creation is not built upon Christ nor is it joined to Christ; it does not have Christ as the foundation nor the cornerstone. Whether we are the old creation can be determined by looking at whether we are built upon Christ and joined to Him. There is no need for others to say anything; we should be very clear within. As long as our heart is not hardened, the feelings of the Holy Spirit within us should be very clear.

In the Holy Spirit we can clearly sense our self-justification and self-righteousness, as well as our criticism and condemnation of others. We will realize that these feelings are not of Christ, not in Christ, and not joined to Christ; rather, they come out of ourselves. We may be able to condemn others based on our reasonings, but the Holy Spirit within us will not justify what we do as coming out of Christ and of being joined to Christ. On the contrary, the Holy Spirit will show us that these feelings are natural, only coming out of our knowledge, learning, and education. They have been cultivated by our environment. As such, they are merely out of our earthly view and disposition. The Holy Spirit will also impress us with our need to be broken.

If we allow the Holy Spirit to work within us and to break us, we will see the building of God in us. To have the building is to have the Body, the church, the image of God, and the authority of God expressed through the building. Ultimately, when the city appears, all the nations will submit to the authority of the city; this is an expression of authority. Furthermore, we will also see God's glory expressed in the city; this is the image of God. If a brother, a sister, or a group of saints would allow God to break them and build them in this way, we would see the authority of God and the image of God in them. This is what God is after.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE FULLNESS OF THE ONE WHO FILLS ALL IN ALL

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:22-23; 4:12-13

THE CHURCH BEING THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST

Ephesians 1:22-23 says, "The church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all." John 1:16 says, "Of His fullness we have all received." *Fullness* in these two verses is the same word. Since the church is the fullness of Christ, the church can be the Body of Christ. Ephesians 4:12-13 says, "For the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ, until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Here *fullness* refers to the fullness of Christ and is the same Greek word for *fullness* in John 1.

These verses show that Ephesians speaks concerning the fullness of Christ twice—at the end of chapter 1, where it speaks of the church being the fullness of Christ, and in 4:13, where it speaks of the church growing to the point of reaching the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The fullness of Christ has a stature.

BEING ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN LOVE TO APPREHEND WITH ALL THE SAINTS WHAT THE BREADTH, LENGTH, HEIGHT, AND DEPTH ARE

Ephesians 3:17 says, "That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith." Here *make home* and *hearts* are very emphatic words. In the entire New Testament only Ephesians 3 points out clearly that the Lord is making His home in our hearts; it does not say that the Lord "is in our hearts" but that the Lord is making His home in our hearts. Verse 17 continues, saying that we are "being rooted and grounded in love." Our love and our hearts do not have much value; consequently, we should be rooted and grounded in His love so that we may apprehend with all the saints what the

breadth, length, height, and depth are and so that we may know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ (vv. 17-19).

THE BREADTH, LENGTH, HEIGHT, AND DEPTH BEING CHRIST

In the universe there is a breadth, length, height, and depth; however, it is difficult for man to describe these. Exactly how broad is the breadth? How long is the length? How high is the height? How deep is the depth? We cannot explain these. However, when the apostle speaks concerning the fullness of Christ, he describes it with these four immeasurable words. What is the length? The length is Christ. What is the breadth? The breadth is Christ. What is the height? The height is Christ. What is the depth? The depth is Christ. The love in which we are being rooted and grounded (v. 17) is God and Christ; the breadth, length, height, and depth in verse 18 are also God and Christ. Therefore, verse 19 speaks of the "knowledge-surpassing love of Christ." We can say that the love of Christ in verse 19 is the same love that is spoken of in the phrase *being rooted and grounded in love* in verse 17. We can also say that the love of Christ is the breadth, length, height, and depth, because the love of Christ is God, just as Christ is God. The result of the breadth, length, height, and depth is that we are filled unto all the fullness of God.

THE FULLNESS OF GOD

In Ephesians 3:17-19 there are four items: love in verse 17, the breadth and length and height and depth in verse 18, the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, and all the fullness of God in verse 19. The first three items issue in the fourth, the fullness of God. The love is the love of Christ, and the love of Christ is the breadth, length, height, and depth of the universe. This is a figurative expression. What is the breadth of the universe? It is the love of Christ. What is the length of the universe? It is the love of Christ. What is the height of the universe? It is the love of Christ. What is the depth of the universe? It is the love of Christ. When this love fills us inwardly, we will be rooted and grounded in love. When this happens, Christ, the embodiment of love, makes His home in our hearts. This ultimately results in our being filled unto all the fullness of God.

THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST

We all know that the church is the Body of Christ and that the Body is filled with Christ Himself. Christ fills this Body to the extent that it becomes the fullness of Christ. In the Bible the phrase *the fullness of Christ* is very mysterious. Many of us have seen this phrase when we read the Bible, but we neither know nor understand what the fullness of Christ is in actuality.

There are at least three places in the Bible that speak of the fullness of Christ. John 1:16 says, "Of His fullness we have all received." Ephesians 1:23 refers to the church as the fullness of Christ. Then Ephesians 4:13 says that the fullness of Christ has a measure of stature. The Greek word for *fullness* is a very emphatic word, but regrettably, many Bible translators do not have this realization.

There are two other places in the Bible that speak of the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:19 says, "That you may be filled unto all the fullness of God," and Colossians 2:9 refers to "all the fullness of the Godhead." The Chinese Union Version is a good translation of the Bible; however, it lacks spiritual revelation in the translation of these verses. As a consequence, the true meaning of the original text is overlooked. The Bible speaks of the fullness of Christ three times and the fullness of God two times. Both references to the fullness of God are related to Christ.

The Bible first speaks of the fullness of God in Ephesians 3, which says that when Christ makes His home in our hearts, we will be able to apprehend the dimensions of the fullness of Christ. Furthermore, when we know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, we will be filled unto all the fullness of God. This shows that the fullness of God and the fullness of Christ are inseparable. Colossians 2:9 says, "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." This clearly shows that the fullness in Christ is the fullness of God. The fullness of Christ is not separate from the fullness of God. The fullness that is in Christ is the fullness of God; the fullness of God is in Christ.

The book of Ephesians speaks of something in the universe that is called the fullness of Christ and that the fullness of Christ is the church. The church is the fullness of Christ; hence, the church is the Body. Without this fullness there is no Body; the Body is the fullness. In other words, the church is the overflow of Christ.

We are all the descendants of Adam. If someone were to ask us concerning the size of Adam's family, we would say that Adam's family is very large, because every person comes out of Adam and is Adam. We can say that mankind is the fullness of Adam, the overflow of Adam; all human beings are the children of Adam, the descendants of Adam. Adam was a man who lived in the garden of Eden six thousand years ago, yet he has a fullness. This fullness is his descendants.

Perhaps someone would call himself a Chinese or an American; however, whether he is a Chinese or an American, he is a man in the world. If we know the truth, we would acknowledge that we are the descendants of Adam, a small part of the fullness of Adam, the overflow of Adam. If we have offspring, our offspring are our fullness, just as the descendants of Adam are the fullness of Adam. We are not only the same as Adam, we are Adam. So strictly speaking, it is wrong for us to take Chang, Wang, Lee, or Liu as our last names; we should take Adam as our last name since every one of us is Adam, and we are all the overflow of Adam. All people throughout the generations are the overflow of Adam; this Adam is great.

However, Adam was but a type, a miniature, of Christ. Christ is the reality of the type of Adam. If the created life of Adam has an overflow of so many descendants and such a fullness, how much more will the uncreated life of Christ be unlimited and immeasurable in His fullness!

"OF HIS FULLNESS WE HAVE ALL RECEIVED"

Paul could only describe this fullness with "the breadth and length and height and depth," because it is truly indescribable. The breadth, length, height, and depth show immeasurability; the fullness of God is immeasurable. Although the fullness of Adam is great, it is measurable; only the fullness of God is immeasurable. However, the fullness of God is hidden in Christ, and the fullness of God in Christ is the fullness of Christ. We, the believers, have all received of His fullness; we have received the fullness in Him. This fullness is the life of God, which is Christ, and is also God Himself.

Regrettably, many of us have only a small amount of feeling concerning the fullness of Christ. Our only sense is that we were sinful and should have perished, but God loved us, forgave us, saved us, and gave us His life so that we may become His children. We have no other feeling. Even though many

believers have made much spiritual progress, they still do not have a deep, inner feeling concerning the point called the fullness. We do not merely have life in us; we have the fullness in us. When we were saved, we not only received life from God, but we also received the fullness from Him. This fullness is immeasurable.

However, many of us have no feeling concerning this fullness. We do not sense that we have something within us called the fullness; at the most, we know that we have life within us, the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, Christ making His home in us, and God living inside of us. We do not have the sense that this God, this Christ, this Holy Spirit, and this life are an immeasurable fullness. This is not a doctrinal understanding; it is a sense in the spirit. We must ask for the Lord's mercy that we would truly sense and realize in our spirit that we have something within us called the fullness.

Even if we are a new believer, we must ask the Lord to show us that we have the fullness within since we have received Christ's life: "Of His fullness we have all received" (John 1:16). We have been made full in Him (Col. 2:10), and His fullness is all the fullness of the Godhead (v. 9). As believers, there is something in us called the fullness. This fullness is the fullness of Christ, and this fullness, which is all the fullness of the Godhead, was first expressed in Christ and is now expressed in the church. The church is the Body of Christ because the church is this fullness (Eph. 1:23).

In experience, are we full? Many saints would probably say, "We are truly empty; we are not in the least bit full." We need to know that without the fullness there is no Body. Though we are the church, we do not manifest much of the Body because the fullness has not been manifested in us. Though we have received of this fullness, we do not allow this fullness to be manifested; this fullness cannot be seen in us. Though we partake of this fullness, it is as if we have not received of this fullness; we feel that we are still empty and void. It seems as if we have nothing within us, and we are too poor.

This is not a matter merely of feeling; this is our actual situation. We need to look at our condition. We can say that our services, our prayers, and all our spiritual conditions are in utter destitution and that we are weak and poor. This is similar to *Hymns*, #1032, which says: "Poor and wretched, / Weak and wounded, sick and sore." This is our condition. Where is the Body? Is the church manifested? Can God's authority and glory be seen? We see poverty

and weakness, we see emptiness and weariness, and we see that the saints do not rise up. This means that we suppress and push aside the fullness that is in us. We are people who have the source, the fullness, yet we live as if we do not have this fullness.

Of His fullness we have all received, and we have been made full in Him. However, are we truly full? Why are our prayers so weak? Why are we so poor when we stand up to speak? Why are we so empty when we fellowship with others? Why do we have nothing to supply others with when we visit them? This shows that there are problems and difficulties within us; there are bondages and hindrances within us. This is an abnormal condition.

On my fourth trip to Manila to hold a conference, I stayed in an elderly sister's home. One evening after the meeting, while we were eating snacks in the living room, I said, "This snack is quite rich." The sister responded, saying, "You are right; this is quite rich. Your messages this time are also quite rich; they are not a repetition of the previous messages. I thought that in this conference you would have nothing more to say." Upon hearing this, I put down my cup, looked at her, and said, "Do you think that there is so little in me that I can only pour out three cups of water? No! Don't you realize that the fullness is in me and also in you?" Of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. Even three hundred conferences could not exhaust His fullness. We need to see that we have been attached to a source within us that is immeasurable in eternity—immeasurable in time and immeasurable in space. This source is called the fullness, and it has been attached to us inwardly.

A co-worker in Hong Kong once asked me, "I find it extraordinary that whenever I see you, you are always fresh. Could you please tell me the secret?" The secret is that we have the fountain in us, and of His fullness we have all received. We have also been made full in Him. If we do not sense the fullness in us, but instead we feel void, empty, old, weak, and poor, there must be a problem in us. There is something that is being suppressed by us. This is the reason that people cannot see the Body. Although we are Christians, we do not have the expression of the Body among us. Please remember that the church is the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

Some may ask, "What does it mean to say that the church is the Body?" I have heard people pray in the Lord's table meeting: "O Lord, we are Your

Body, but our praises are too poor and weak." This makes me feel uncomfortable, because the Body is neither poor nor weak; if it is poor and weak, it is not the Body. What is the Body? The Body is the fullness. In the Lord's table meeting we should overflow with praises, saying, "O Lord, this bread shows us Your Body." We can say, "Hallelujah, we are here as Your church, Your Body." This praise should gush out, flow out, and overflow from us; it should rush out, grace upon grace. It would be unseemly to break the bread but say, "O Lord, this is Your Body, but please overlook our weak condition." Please remember that the Body is the fullness of Christ; the overflow of Christ in and among us is the Body.

We all acknowledge that we are still in the flesh and have our weaknesses, but inwardly we have been attached to a source called the fullness. This source is also called the breadth and length and height and depth; it is an immeasurable motivating power within us. Many times when we are depressed, this source uplifts us, and we rise up. Many times when we can no longer bear a situation and have exhausted all our means, this source uplifts us as if a thousand pounds have been removed from our shoulders. A Christian who always wears a sad face does not look like a person who has the fullness. If a person has the fullness, the fullness within him will certainly overcome his sad face.

One day a brother asked me, "Why have I never seen you sorrowful?" I looked at him and said, "Why should I be sorrowful?" May the Lord cover me with His precious blood; it is not that I do not have heavy burdens or that I do not have difficulties, but I can praise Him and say that there is a source within me that is called the fullness. Whenever I contact this source and let this fullness uplift me even a little, all my sorrows are gone. This is God being expressed through man; this is the fullness of Christ, the Body of Christ.

MANIFESTING THE MEASURE OF THE STATURE OF THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST

We need to see a basic principle: all believers have been inwardly attached to a source, which is called the fullness. In a normal condition this fullness should always be flowing. Today this flowing has stopped in many of us; this source seems to be blocked. Therefore, it seems as if there is the church but not the Body. For this reason we are unable to say that the church is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. We are the church, but we do not

have the fullness. The Body cannot be expressed because we do not have the fullness.

We need to be shown mercy to see that the fullness should come out of us. When this fullness is manifested, the Body is manifested. John 1:16 says that we have all received of His fullness. Colossians 2:10 says that we have all been made full in Him. However, Ephesians 4:12-13 says that only through building can the church arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Without being built, the stature of the fullness cannot be manifested; only through the building can the fullness within us be built up and manifested.

The *measure* in the *measure of the stature* in Ephesians 4:13 means "dimension, measurement." So the measure of the stature is very concrete, having a form, a measurement, a dimension. In John 1 we have merely received of this fullness. In Colossians 2 we have been made full; we have obtained this fullness. However, this fullness has not yet grown within us. It has not yet reached the measure of the stature, and it does not yet have a figure, a shape. It is only after the constant building work that the stature increases continually to the point of having a definite form. In this way the building continues to a point that the fullness of Christ has attained a measure of stature in a group of people. This is called the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

When we look at our situation, we find that we do not have the fullness and that we do not have the measure of the stature. For example, we may only be able to say that a new believer who has been blessed by the Lord has been attached to the Lord inwardly. This is because we may feel that the measure in this believer is formless, shapeless, vague, and indistinct. It would be incorrect for us to say that he does not have the Lord within him, yet the Lord within him is almost without shape or form. However, when we meet a brother who is quite deep in the Lord and has been built up by the Lord to a good extent, not only do we feel that the Lord is in him, but it also seems that we can see something that is concrete and with a measure in him. There is something in him called the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Of course, this measure of stature differs from person to person. In one believer we may see some measure, but in another believer we may see an even greater measure.

This is not an individual matter but a matter of a group of people. However, we can often know the condition of a group by looking at a person in the group. This is often the case in a locality, a church. For example, the brothers and sisters in a locality may be very zealous, fresh, and living, but the Christ among them, or the fullness of Christ among them, may not be concrete. The fullness may not yet be formed and may not have much measure. Afterward, we may go to another locality where we not only touch freshness and livingness, but we also touch something with a measure of stature, something concrete among them. That measure may not be very high or great, but in any case, it has a small amount of form and measure. This is the church expressing its measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Once the church has a measure, the church has an expression. Being the church depends upon having a measure. We must ask the Lord to speak a clear word to us, touch us thoroughly according to our condition, and enlighten us so that we may all see the Body of Christ.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE PRINCIPLE OF GOD'S BUILDING

Scripture Reading: John 14:2; Matt. 16:18, 24

WITHOUT GOD'S BUILDING, THERE BEING NO CHURCH

The primary matter concerning the church is building; without God's building, there is no church. On the one hand, the church is produced by regeneration; on the other hand, the Bible clearly reveals that the church is produced by being built up. The Bible rarely speaks of begetting the church, but in many places it speaks of the building up of the church. God not only spends much time and effort in the building of the church, but He also speaks much concerning how He builds the church.

THE MAIN EMPHASIS OF BUILDING BEING GOD'S TEARING-DOWN WORK IN US

In order for God to build up His church in us, He must first do a tearing-down work in us. This is altogether related to the tearing down of the old creation. It is the tearing down of everything that does not belong to Christ and God, that does not match God, that cannot be mingled with Christ, and that usurps, occupies, and replaces the position of Christ in us. All these things must be torn down by God. In addition to this, everything that can match God and be mingled with Christ must also be torn down. In other words, everything that is natural in us, whether it is good or bad, able or unable to match God, must be torn down by God.

THE LORD'S DEATH TEARING DOWN THE HUMANITY THAT HE PUT ON

A person who knows God will see that every item used for God's building must be torn down; even the humanity that the Lord Jesus put on in His incarnation needed to be torn down. The Lord's entering into death signifies that the humanity He put on was torn down. Even the sinless humanity our Lord put on was brought into death and passed through death. The Lord was not only incarnated, but He also died and resurrected. In His incarnation He

put on human nature; in His death this human nature was completely torn down. Whatever the Lord put on in His incarnation was brought into death and torn down completely. We all know that death is a tearing down in the strongest sense. Whatever dies becomes nothing. The Lord's entering into death resulted in the tearing down of His humanity.

In reading the records concerning the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus in Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, Matthew 27, and John 19, we can see that when the incarnated One died on the cross, everything that He put on was completely torn down. On the cross we see a man at His death. There was not one man whose circumstances at death were more severe than that of the Lord Jesus. Hebrews 2:9 says that when He died, He tasted death on behalf of everything. When a man dies, he simply dies, but when our Lord died on the cross, the process He went through was very thorough. On the cross death did everything it could do to a man. Death may not have done all that it can in some people, but death exhausted everything it could do on the Lord Jesus. The humanity that our Lord put on was truly torn down by death.

THE PRINCIPLE OF DEATH AND RESURRECTION BEING TO BRING MAN INTO GOD

However, our Lord did not remain in death. He died and resurrected. The Lord's resurrection brought everything into God that was torn down by death. All who know God's redemption realize that the Lord's greatest work consisted of two steps. The first step was His incarnation; that is, God came into humanity. The Lord's incarnation was divinity putting on humanity. In simple words, it was God entering into humanity, God mingling with man. However, if there was only the step of incarnation, we would see God entering into man, but we would not see man entering into God. If there was only incarnation, we would see God mingled with man, but we would not see man mingled with God.

We must be clear that God's entering into man is one matter, and man's entering into God is another matter. Although these are two aspects of one thing, these two aspects are still distinct. God's mingling with man is different from man's mingling with God. For example, I may love Brother Huang, but I also want him to love me. If I love him as a brother but he does not love me, there is a problem. Therefore, these are two different matters. Incarnation brought God into man. If God's work stopped with incarnation, God would

have entered into man, but man would be unable to enter into God. Therefore, the Lord Jesus had to pass through death and resurrection.

The principle of death and resurrection is to bring man into God. Our Lord was incarnated so that divinity could enter into humanity. Then through His death and resurrection He brought humanity into divinity. In His incarnation, prior to His resurrection, we could point to Him and say that there was a man on earth who had divinity within Him. After His resurrection and ascension into heaven, we can point to Him and say that there is One in heaven who has humanity within Him; that is, humanity has entered into God. Through His incarnation man on the earth could have divinity within him; through His death and resurrection God in heaven has humanity within Him. Through incarnation the Lord Jesus brought God to earth; through resurrection the Lord Jesus brought man to heaven.

Before the Lord Jesus was incarnated, God could not be found in man on earth. Before the Lord Jesus died and resurrected, man could not be found in God in heaven. But the Lord has been incarnated, and He has died and resurrected. His incarnation brought God to earth and into man. His death and resurrection brought man to heaven and into God. We can now say that man on earth has God within him and that God in heaven has man within Him. The Lord Jesus' incarnation brought God into man, causing God to be mingled with man; the Lord Jesus' resurrection from death brought man into God, causing man to be mingled with God. Here we see two basic principles: in order for God to enter into man, there is the need of incarnation, and in order for man to enter into God, there is the need of death and resurrection. These are two basic principles.

GOD'S BUILDING WORK BEING BASED UPON HIS TEARING DOWN

In order for God to enter into man, incarnation is required. In order for man to enter into God, the process of death and resurrection is required. This is the principle of God's building. In order for God to build the church, He must do a tearing-down work within us. This tearing down involves death. Abraham believed that God is the One who calls the things not being as being; he also believed that God is the One who gives life to the dead (Rom. 4:17). This is the God in whom Abraham believed. Calling the things not being as being is creation; giving life to the dead is redemption and building. God is a

creating God, the One who calls the things not being as being. He is also a redeeming and building God, the One who gives life to the dead.

GOD'S WORK OF CREATION BEING FOR THE WORK OF BUILDING

God's work in the universe has two steps, or we can say that God has two kinds of work. One kind of work is the work of creation, and the other is the work of redemption, which is also the work of building. In the universe God has only these two kinds of work—creation and building. The building work is commonly understood as the work of redemption. However, it is not accurate to speak of it merely as the work of redemption. We often consider God's building as a part of His redemption; hence, it is easy to emphasize only redemption and neglect building. However, even if man had not fallen, and there was no need for redemption, God would still have a work of building. God's creation was for building. Even if the man God created had not fallen and had no need for redemption, God would still need building.

The building of God is a very particular matter. God created Adam and built a woman, Eve. We can say that God created both male and female. However, not many of us can discern the difference between God's creation of Adam and God's creation of Eve. With Adam, God called the things not being as being, but with Eve, God gave life to the dead. Although God created both male and female, the creation of the male was His calling of things not being as being, and the creation of the female was His giving life to the dead. When God created the male, man did not exist, so God created by calling man into being. When God made the female, man already existed, so God put man into death and built a woman out of death and resurrection. Adam's sleep was his death. Moreover, his side was opened, and one of his ribs was taken out. All biologists acknowledge that when a part of the body is separated from the body, that part dies. The resurrection after death resulted in Eve.

Therefore, there is a difference between Eve being built and Adam being created. God's creation of Adam may be considered simply as a creation. However, God's building Eve was not simply a creation; rather, it was a building work using the material He had already created. Adam was the created material. With this material God took a further step to do a building work to build Eve. However, this was only a shadow of the building work.

When God created mankind, it was His work of creation. However, after redeeming us, all of God's work in us is related to building. After redeeming us, God continually works in us. This work is the work of building. What kind of work is God doing in this age? God is doing the work of building. In Genesis 2 God did the work of creation, which was preparing the material. In chapter 3 the material was corrupted. Starting from that point, God's work was related to redemption. When the Lord Jesus went to the cross and accomplished the work of redemption, God recovered the material. But God's work did not stop there. After accomplishing the work of redemption through the cross, God has been carrying out a work of building.

The building began in Matthew 16. Once the redemption of the cross was accomplished, the building work began. After the Lord's death and resurrection, God has been doing only a work of building. He is building the church, the Body, a dwelling place. The result of the building is the producing of a holy city, the New Jerusalem. Now we see that after creation there is redemption, and after redemption there is building. However, Christians always include building in redemption; thus, people pay attention only to redemption and neglect building.

Let us speak of redemption and building separately. We were all created by God, but we were also all lost and then redeemed by God. God's redemption recovers us, the lost materials. However, God's work did not stop with redemption. After redeeming man back to Himself, He began His building work in man. We should never suppose that God is building a heavenly mansion; there is no such thing. In John 14:2 the Lord said, "I go to prepare a place for you." What place did He prepare? Ever since the Brethren were raised up, all their teachings have been objective. People have been taught that the Lord Jesus went to prepare a heavenly mansion, to prepare many little rooms in the heavenly mansion, and that after the mansion is completed, He will come to take us to the mansion. It seems as if the reason for the Lord's second coming is to take us to the little rooms. Actually, we are the many rooms that the Lord is preparing; He does not need to come to take us to these rooms. If we have light and revelation, we will see that the thought in John 14 is that the Lord's going was the Lord's coming, that when He went, He was coming. The "place" in John 14:2, the "dwelling place" in Ephesians 2:22, the "spiritual house" in 1 Peter 2:5, the "city which has the foundations" in Hebrews 11:10, and the coming "New Jerusalem" in Revelation 21:2 all refer to the one building work of God.

God is not building a holy temple on earth and, at the same time, building a holy city in heaven. God never intended to build a church on earth and a mansion in heaven and then one day to relocate and move from earth to heaven. God has no such intention, and the Bible has no such thought. The building spoken of in these Scripture passages refers to the one building. The place that the Lord went to prepare in John 14 is the church today. The beginning of chapter 14 may give the impression that the Lord is preparing an abode in heaven, but by the middle and the end of the chapter it is clear that *abode* refers to a group of people being built by the Lord. The Lord said that He would come after He went. How does He come? He comes as the Holy Spirit and dwells in us. The Lord and the Father come to make an abode with us through the Holy Spirit, who works on us to make us the dwelling place of the Triune God.

In short, the Bible shows that God has one work in the universe. After creation He accomplished redemption; after redemption He is still carrying out one work, and this work is building. Matthew 16 speaks of this building, and John 14 also speaks of this building; however, this speaking was only in preparation for the building. The building was not present yet. In Hebrews 11 the preparation and the building are connected. Ephesians 2 and 4, 1 Peter 2, and 1 Corinthians 3 also speak concerning this building. When this building is fully accomplished, the New Jerusalem will appear, and it will be the full consummation of the building of God.

WITHOUT TEARING DOWN, THERE BEING NO BUILDING OF GOD

God does not have another building work, and He does not have another building. God's only building work is to build Himself into the believers and to build the believers into Himself; this is His building. In other words, the building work of God is to build God and man and man and God fully into one. We may never have had the thought that the only thing God desires to do in us after we are saved is to build. Some may have been saved for ten or twenty years, but they do not have this realization. They pursue spirituality and growth in life. They also learn to love the Lord and to consecrate themselves to the Lord, yet they have never had the realization that God desires to build in them. They understand all the verses concerning building in the Bible to mean individual edification. For example, after hearing a message on being

slow, someone with a quick temperament may be edified to slow down his quick temperament. Someone else who is lacking in love may hear a message concerning love. In this message, verses in the New Testament concerning loving one's neighbor as oneself may be quoted, and examples of such people in the world may be given. This may stir him up to repent in tears, asking the Lord to forgive him for not loving others and promising to learn to love his neighbor as himself. What is this? This is what individual edification involves.

Another brother who frequently quarrels with his wife may attend a meeting in which the relationship between husbands and wives in Ephesians 5 may be thoroughly presented. After hearing this message, he may sense that he has been edified. Such examples are beyond enumeration. There are also countless books promoting this kind of edification among Christians; almost everyone who reads them is touched and "edified." However, we need God to open our eyes and to show us that His work in us is not to edify us in this way but rather to build Himself into us and to build us into Him. Therefore, He must first tear us down. Our love for our wife, our slow temperament, or our loving our neighbor as ourselves must be torn down. Even if we are as perfect and as good as the incarnated Lord Jesus, we still need to be torn down. Anything that is of our natural being, whether good or bad, must be put to death, for without tearing down, there is no building of God.

This is a very serious matter. According to our human, religious concept, we think that after we are saved, we need to be edified so that those who are short of love will have love and those who are not meek will be meek. We believe that this is God's perfecting work, His edification work; little do we know that this is not God's work. God's work is to tear us down. He tears down not only our fretfulness but also our meekness, not only our quickness but also our slowness, and not only our jealousy but also our love. This is the difference between edification and building; building requires tearing down. Without tearing down, God cannot be built into us, and without tearing down, we cannot be built into God. The work of mixing concrete is to mix fine sand, cement, and gravel all together, to blend these individual elements together, so that the building can be completed. Although this is not a perfect example, it does give us a rough picture.

All messages that exhort people merely to love others, to be meek, to be spiritual, and to pursue the growth in life but do not show that after redeeming man, God is doing a work of building in which He tears man down

in order to build Himself into man and to build man into Him, are empty messages, which bear no weight. They are not the central revelation of the Bible. The Bible shows that after God saves us, He proceeds to do the work of tearing down. Whether we are good people or bad people, He must do a work of tearing down in us. God cannot build Himself into a person who is not torn down. God also cannot build into Himself a person who is not torn down. For this reason in His Word God repeatedly mentions the matter of building.

In every Scripture passage that speaks of building, we can see from the context or the text itself the matter of tearing down. In Matthew 16:18, when the Lord mentioned building for the first time, He said to Peter, "Upon this rock I will build My church." Then immediately, in verse 21, the Lord said that He needed to go to Jerusalem and be killed. Going to Jerusalem to be put to death is a matter of tearing down. Peter then rebuked Him, saying, "God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You!" (v. 22). But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan!" (v. 23). Whatever frustrates, rejects, and denies God's tearing down is the work of Satan. The Lord also said, "If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me" (v. 24). What is this? This is the tearing down. Denying the self and taking up the cross is the tearing down.

If we look up all the verses on building, we will discover that in each instance the Lord also speaks of tearing down. Suppose a brother is sick and needs to receive an injection. How can the medicine be injected into him? There must be a puncture in his body so that the needle can be inserted. If his body is not punctured, medicine cannot be injected into him. Another example is the vaccination of smallpox that requires at least two cuts. This illustrates that without tearing down, there is no building.

The cross is the needle, and Christ is the medicine in the needle. If we do not have the cross to tear us down, Christ as the medicine cannot be injected into us. The function of the ministry of the word is neither to convince a husband who does not love his wife to love his wife nor to convince someone who does not have love to love. The ministry of the word is a needle to give people a "shot," whether they love their wives, are meek, or are short-tempered. We are not interested in what people are; we care only to inject Christ into them. This is building. This is the work God is doing today. Whether we are in our family, our career, or our situations, God is working in

many ways, not to accommodate or to “edify” us but to break us so that He can build us up.

Many brothers and sisters hope that every situation would be proper, that their children would be proper, their family would be proper, their career would be proper, and that they themselves would be proper in speech and in their conduct. This is the reason they often pray and attend meetings, expecting to be edified unto perfection. They hope to quickly fill up what is lacking and to quickly make up what is missing. However, we must all admit that the more we try to perfect ourselves, the more imperfect we become, and the more we try to be proper, the more improper we become. Formerly, we seldom had an outburst of temper, but now it seems as if we lose our temper quite often. It is as if all the things that happen to us cause us to become improper. Inwardly, we desire to love the Lord, but we cannot; we desire to pursue diligently, but we cannot. Eventually, we are discouraged. We may be discouraged, but the Lord is not discouraged. He is never discouraged. In our “poor conduct” God has “punctured a hole” to give us a “shot.” This is the work of tearing down in God’s building. This is the work that God desires to do.

At the time of their salvation some brothers and sisters were fresh and were truly willing to consecrate themselves, but after three to five years they no longer seem to be fresh. They seem to be downcast and somewhat discouraged inwardly, even though they do not want to backslide. When we carefully investigate this situation, we will discover that, in spite of their effort, they were unable to be perfected after they were saved. After consecrating themselves, they were unable to do a good and decent work; instead, their work was a failure in which they were altogether ashamed of themselves. For this reason they are not as fresh and living as when they consecrated themselves after their salvation. However, we must bow our heads and worship God that these ones, who are not fresh and living, have a little more element of Christ within. Their being is more open, and they have elements of Christ within them. This is the story of many saints. Some of the saints have a messy situation in their family that causes them to be discouraged to the point that they feel they can no longer rise up. However, they have been opened, and the element of Christ within them has increased.

Our God is a God of creation and a God of tearing down, of destruction. He is a merciless God; He will shatter and break everything He has created.

Perhaps some would say that this is lamentable, but without this shattering, this tearing down, there is no building. Without the tearing down, God cannot be built into man, and without this tearing down, man cannot be built into God. Even after His incarnation the Son of God still had to pass through the destruction of death in order to enter into resurrection. What is in death is not glorious, but what is in resurrection is glorious. What is in death is something in man, but what is in resurrection is something that has entered into God. What is in death is limited, but what is in resurrection is unlimited.

After the tearing down, a marvelous building is produced. This building is of resurrection, and it is spiritual, heavenly, glorious, and eternal. In this building God has entered into man, and man has entered into God. Here we can see that God and man, man and God have truly been mingled and become one; God is in man, and man is in God. This is something mysterious in which we see both God and man—God is mingled with man, and man is mingled with God.

We have all met ones who love the Lord and have good wives or husbands that the Lord prepared for them. However, if we read church history and the biographies of many spiritual people, we will discover that the wives or husbands of many who were useful in the Lord's hand were a trouble to them and were a "syringe" in the Lord's hand. A brother may have a wife who is prepared by the Lord to give him a shot every day. Whether she gives him a large or a small dose, she always gives him a shot every day. She may give him a shot in the morning, another shot at noon, and administer one more shot at night. While he is experiencing this, he may feel that it is very uncomfortable and painful; the condition of his family is neither seemly nor proper. However, this is only a process. After a period of time a person whose being is opened has more of the element of God, and the element of Christ is increased within him. When we see him, we will sense that he has been torn down and has been given many shots. He will have the flavor of God, the fragrance of Christ, and the presence of Christ within him. When we contact him, we contact one who is broken, not whole; he is one in whom we can smell the fragrance of Christ. This is God's building. This is where we see the Body. Only in the Body is man no longer individualistic.

CHAPTER NINE

THE CONTENTS OF THE FULLNESS REVEALED IN THE WRITINGS OF JOHN— LIFE, RESURRECTION, LIGHT, AND THE WAY

Scripture Reading: John 1:16, 14; 11:25; 8:12; 14:6

THE CHURCH BEING THE EXPRESSION OF CHRIST

Ephesians 1:23 speaks of the church as the fullness of Christ, and Colossians 2:9 says, "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Everything of God is in Christ, and everything of Christ is in the church; therefore, the church is a great matter. Everything in the Godhead is expressed through Christ, and everything that is in Christ is expressed through the church. Just as everything of God is in Christ, everything of Christ is in the church. Just as Christ expresses God, the church expresses Christ. Whatever is not God is not Christ, and whatever is not Christ is not the church.

THE CHURCH BEING THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST

Who is Christ? Christ is God expressed in man. What is the church? The church is Christ expressed in man. God expressed from within man is Christ, and Christ expressed from within man is the church. The church is very special. However, this does not mean that Christianity is the church. In the eyes of God, the church is the fullness of Christ. The church is only the living out of Christ from within man. Anything that differs from this is not the church, even if there is only a slight difference. The church is the Body of Christ, the fullness of Christ.

GRACE AND REALITY BEING RELATED TO THE FULLNESS

What are the contents of the fullness? The Gospel of John is the first book in the Bible that speaks of the fullness. According to a basic principle in the Bible, the first mention of a matter establishes the definition and the principle of that matter. The first time the Bible speaks of the fullness in Christ is in

John 1:1-18, which is an introduction to John and ushers us into the entire book.

The Gospel of John begins with, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (1:1). This Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, and speaking of the Word becoming flesh, the Bible says that this Word was "full of grace and reality" (v. 14). This shows that grace and reality are the contents of the fullness. Verse 16 says, "Of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace." This shows that the fullness and grace are related. Verse 17 continues, "The law was given through Moses; grace and reality came through Jesus Christ." This again shows that grace and reality are related to the fullness. From this chapter we must acknowledge that the contents of the fullness are grace and reality.

What are grace and reality? Outwardly, grace and reality seem to be two different things. In John 14:6 the Lord Jesus said that He is "the way and the reality and the life"; He did not say that He is grace. We cannot find one place in the Bible that directly refers to the Lord Jesus as grace, but we can find portions that speak of Him as the reality. John 1 puts grace and reality together; hence, we can see that grace and reality are not two separate things but are actually one thing. Grace is God giving Himself to man as man's enjoyment. When God gives Himself to us, this is grace. Anything that God gives to us outside of Himself cannot be called grace; only when He gives Himself to us can that be called grace.

Whenever the Bible speaks of grace, it refers to God, the life of God, or matters related to life and redemption. *Grace* is a very specific term in the Bible, even though we use it too loosely. Some say that the birth of a child or purchasing a nice house is grace. That may be God's kindness toward us, but please remember that the Bible never uses the word *grace* when speaking of such things. The Bible refers to such things as blessings or benefits from God, but it never uses *grace* in reference to such blessings or benefits. It seems as if the Bible has purposely set apart the word *grace* to refer to God and the life of God. In particular, John 1 presents the coming of grace as God coming to be received by man (vv. 14, 17). In the beginning was the Word, the Word was God, the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, and through Him grace has come. We should realize that grace is God Himself to be received by man.

Grace is God Himself, and reality is also God Himself. Grace is God gained by us, whereas reality is God seen by us. Apart from God, everything we see and touch is vain, false, and unreal; only this One—God—is real. In other words, the Gospel of John reveals God to us, and this is reality; it also gives God to us, and this is grace. Chapters 1 through 21 in the Gospel of John speak of the aspects of God as reality and as grace. The incarnated One expressed God to man; this is reality. Through His death and resurrection He imparted God into man so that man can receive God; this is grace.

The Gospel of John also speaks of life. John 3:15 says, "Everyone who believes into Him may have eternal life." Verse 36 says, "He who believes into the Son has eternal life." Without God's light we will see very little. However, when the Holy Spirit enlightens us, we will see that the Gospel of John reveals that the Word, who became flesh, declared the invisible God; only He has declared God. God was expressed through the Lord Jesus, and this expressed God is called reality. When people touched this person, they touched reality.

Jesus Christ enabled people to see God by expressing God; even more, He enabled people to receive God. God expressed to us is reality, and God received by us is grace. This is the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John gives us life. This Gospel says that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God. This Word became flesh and expressed God to men; what He expressed is reality. He also enables us to receive the God whom we have seen; the expressed God desires to enter into us to become our possession. When He enters into us, He becomes grace within us.

Paul says that he labored more abundantly than all the other apostles by the grace of God which was with him (1 Cor. 15:10). This grace is not something dead; this grace is the living God. This living God is with us; He is within us. Thus, the greeting and blessing that the apostle wrote at the end of Philippians says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" (4:23). Since the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is in our spirit, grace is not something outward; grace must be something living within us, in our spirit. This grace is God received by us.

Grace is God, and reality is also God. The fullness of God or the fullness of Christ is God Himself. In other words, this fullness is grace and reality, and grace and reality are God Himself; therefore, this fullness is God Himself. The

fullness in the Lord Jesus is God Himself, and it is all the fullness of the Godhead as well. Everything of God is in Christ and is the fullness.

THE FIRST CONTENT OF THE FULLNESS—LIFE

What is the content of the fullness? In John 11:25 the Lord said very clearly that He is the life. This indicates that the first item of the fullness is life. If we touch the fullness, we will surely touch life. If we do not touch life, we have not touched the fullness. Perhaps someone would ask, What is life? Life is something living. The first expression of life is that it is living. Whatever has life must be living. This does not refer to something being lively; rather, it refers to something being living, being alive and full of vigor.

With some saints, their goodness is out of themselves, but with other saints, their goodness is of God. We can say that the goodness of some saints is merely behavior, but the goodness of other saints is life. The distinction is that the goodness of some people is without vigor; it is the same as something that is dead, without the breath of life. But the goodness of others is full of vigor, full of life. In other words, the goodness of some people is dead, but the goodness of other people is living. Often we contact a group of brothers and sisters who are good, yet their goodness can be compared to a piece of dead wood with no vigor. We touch their goodness, but we cannot touch vigor and life. However, in reading the Epistles of the New Testament, whenever we touch the goodness of the apostles, we touch life.

In the same way, in some Christians we touch goodness as well as life. Some have a meekness that can be compared to the meekness of a stone statue; they are truly meek, but there is no life in their meekness. Some have a meekness that has life within; when we touch that meekness, we touch life. How is it possible to distinguish whether a person's meekness and goodness is of the self or of Christ? That which is of the self has no life; that which is of Christ has life. That which is of the self is dead; that which is of Christ is living. If we understand this principle, we can easily distinguish between the two when we touch them. For example, how can we distinguish between a real flower and an artificial flower when the two are the same color and shape? This distinction lies in the fact that one has no life, but the other has life.

Sometimes we meet a saint who is full of love and diligence, yet all we sense is death; there is no supply of life and no anointing. The more we are loved by

him, the more uncomfortable we feel; the more courtesy he extends toward us, the more uneasy we feel; the more diligence and kindness he shows toward us, the more we feel dry within, lacking any anointing. This is because in his love, courtesy, and diligence there is no life; everything is out of himself and a part of his behavior. In another situation a person comes to rebuke us and speaks a very strong word. Although we may feel some pain, there is still the anointing within, and we can still touch God and be refreshed. At such a moment we should know that this rebuke is of life. Thus, the first content of the fullness is life.

We all know that the church is the fullness of Christ, but how do we know whether a particular church has the fullness? If we touch the anointing, freshness, and livingness in a locality, we should sense that the fullness, the church, is in that locality. However, we can contact a group of fervent saints in a locality and not sense the fullness or any overflow of life among them.

For example, in a Lord's table meeting two or three brothers pray so loudly that they can be heard by everyone, even without using a microphone; however, those with the sense of life will know that there is no life in their voice. Even though their voice echoes throughout the meeting, it does not touch man's spirit, and there is no anointing in man's spirit. Consequently, even though the voice is loud and clear, very few people follow with Amens, and some even cannot say Amen because the prayer has no life; it is short of something living and lacks the anointing.

All our activities, even our gospel preaching, should follow this principle. If what we do is out of ourselves, it is merely a behavior. We will not only feel dead within, but we will also not have the anointing. If our person has been broken and Christ has been built into us, then what we do is of Christ and is the fullness. The first content, the first sign, of the fullness is life. We know that wherever we touch livingness, freshness, and the anointing, there is life; to touch life is to touch the fullness.

The Gospel of John is a book on the fullness, and it presents life as the first content of the fullness. The Lord has come that man may have life (10:10), and He is the life (11:25). In the fullness there is something called life, and this life is in the Lord. Life is real. Even though man cannot touch life, he cannot deny it. If someone dies, everyone notices immediately, because that person no longer has life. Life is real. If life is present, it is present, and if it is

absent, it is absent. If it is, then it is, and if it is not, then it is not. When we put two flowers side by side, people can readily recognize which one is real and which one is artificial because life is very real.

In the church we should not look merely at the outward appearance; we need to touch the intrinsic content of the church. In other words, we need to touch the anointing and the life within; we need to touch the Lord's living presence. This is the key to all questions, and it enables us to know whether a locality is the church in experience and whether it is the fullness of Christ. If the fullness of Christ is present in a locality, life is also present. This is the first content of the fullness.

THE SECOND CONTENT OF THE FULLNESS—RESURRECTION

In the Gospel of John the Lord Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (v. 25). The Lord is not only life but also resurrection. Undoubtedly, resurrection and life are related; without life there is no resurrection. However, resurrection is one step further than life. Although life is life, it is merely life and has not passed through testing, smiting, or death. However, resurrection is life that has passed through testing, smiting, and death. So life progressing is resurrection.

Before life passes through death, life is merely life, but after life passes through death, it is resurrection. The life that is manifested after passing through death is called resurrection. Please remember that the life, which is the first content of the fullness, is a life that can withstand death, a life that can be manifested even after death.

For example, the prayer of a brother may cause us to touch life, to sense the anointing, and to touch the Lord. However, our sense is sometimes mistaken, but there is another indicator of whether this is of life. If his prayer is of life, prayer will still come forth when he is tested or smitten. Prayer that is of life never dies as a result of testing or smiting. Whatever dies after testing and smiting is definitely not of resurrection. Only what remains after testing and smiting is resurrection. A saint who serves in the church may be devoted and diligent. If we sense the anointing and the presence of the Lord when we are with him, we may conclude that this must be of life. However, he may be stumbled and stop coming to the meetings if he receives a particular dealing

from the elders. He may feel that the elders should not "deal with him" because he comes to serve the church; therefore, he withdraws. This indicates that his diligence and devotion are not something in the fullness; they are without resurrection. Whatever is of resurrection can withstand testing, smiting, and death.

Without passing through death, there is no strength, richness, and fullness; once something passes through death, it becomes strong, rich, and full. For two thousand years there has been a continual persecution and killing of Christians. Persecution and killing can destroy only that which is not of resurrection. Anything that is of resurrection is able to pass through persecution and death.

Some conditions appear for a while in the church and then disappear. This shows that these conditions are not related to the fullness. Only that which withstands trials and tests, endures dealings, becomes alive after death, and is manifested after breaking through the suppression of death is resurrection. In this situation of resurrection the fullness is here; resurrection is a sign of the fullness and a content of the fullness.

In the fullness there is not only life but also the life that has passed through death; this is resurrection. Anything that is able to stand is strengthened, made full, and enters into a higher level, even reaching a new realm after being tested, tried, suppressed, persecuted, and put to death. This is resurrection, the strongest sign of the fullness. The expression of a church should be resurrection. If the Lord would have mercy on us and put us in trials, we would see how much is left of us after the trial of death. Our bustling cannot withstand death, our excitement cannot withstand the smiting, and many of our virtues vanish completely once we pass through affliction. This proves that they are all out of ourselves and not of Christ. This also proves that there is no expression of the church and no expression of the fullness of Christ.

THE THIRD CONTENT OF THE FULLNESS—LIGHT

In John 8:12 the Lord said, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall by no means walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." The fullness has another content, which is light, and it has another sign, which is brightness. Whether a person is in the fullness can be determined by whether

he is full of light. Whether a local church is an expression of the Body can be determined by whether that locality is full of light. There is no darkness in the New Jerusalem. Everything is bright there. Not only so, everything in the New Jerusalem is also glorious—even the gold is transparent. Regrettably, the eyes of many in Christian groups are not bright. However, in the New Jerusalem even the gold will be transparent. Transparency is an expression of life and a sign of the fullness. This is a condition expressed through the Body.

Sometimes when we come to a local church, we may feel that it is like a bomb shelter that is dark and dismal inside. It seems that we have entered into a deep tunnel, surrounded by impenetrable walls of brass and iron. Once we walk into such a meeting, we feel as if we have entered into darkness, and everything is opaque. However, we can also be dismal and miserable within, but when we come to the Lord's table meeting, we begin to feel bright, transparent, and refreshed. This is the church, the Body of Christ, the fullness.

Sometimes when fellowshipping with some responsible brothers, we may inwardly become dark. Prior to our fellowship, we may have sensed a gleam of light as we prayed at home. However, the more we fellowship, the more we become confused and without light. At that point we should realize that the fullness, the Body, and the expression of the Body is lacking. We can also have an experience of feeling sorrowful, of groping in the dark, and of not knowing how to proceed. Even our prayer is unclear. However, after fellowshipping with the elders, our inner being is bright and full of light. Sometimes we do not even need to speak. As soon as we sit down to fellowship, our inner being is opened and bright. After we say a few words, we feel that we are transparent and that the church, the Body, and the fullness are present. If there is the Body, there is the fullness, and in this fullness there is light.

Some saints live in the Body. They are people in the fullness. When they stand up, their whole being is transparent. When they open their mouth, they cause people to become clear and bright inwardly. However, there are others who seem to have a particular ability to confuse people. After listening to them, we may lose what little light we have and not know what to do next. Do messages spoken by others cause us to touch God, or do they make us more confused? God is light. No message can cause us to touch God and yet be without light. For example, a message that causes us to feel that everything is acceptable—that entering the kingdom, for example, is about the same as

going to the lake of fire—does not come from the New Jerusalem but from the abyss. In the New Jerusalem everything is bright. Only in the abyss is there darkness over the surface of the deep and darkness everywhere.

What is the fullness? The fullness is brightness. Of Christ's fullness we have all received. The Lord said, "He who follows Me shall by no means walk in darkness" (v. 12). We all know that those who have received of His fullness are in the light. Their inner being is bright. We do not need to ask others whether we have touched the fullness and are in the fullness. Everything depends on whether our inner being is bright or dark, clear or confused. This is not profound doctrine or great wisdom; it can be touched by every believer. Christ is the fullness of God, and there is something in this fullness called light. Whenever we touch the fullness, we touch light, and we are inwardly bright.

Everyone who touches the fullness of Christ is a star, a lamp, or at least a candle. A lampstand is bright, and it also illuminates others. The church is a lampstand. May the Lord have mercy on us that we may see whether we are in darkness or in the light. This determines whether we are His Body in experience. Whenever a church denies the self and touches the fullness of Christ, the church is His fullness in experience. There may not be a great number in a locality, and there may not be many who are smart or capable, but upon entering their midst, people will sense that these believers are transparent and bright, and that there is light among them because they have touched the fullness.

THE FOURTH CONTENT OF THE FULLNESS—THE WAY

In John 14:5 Thomas said, "Lord, we do not know where You are going; how can we know the way?" Many misunderstand this as referring to the way to heaven. However, John 14 does not speak concerning the way to heaven but the way to God, the way into the Father. John 14 does not speak of how we can go to heaven but of how we can enter into the Father. Through the death and resurrection of Christ we have entered into God. Thomas inquired of the way, and the Lord Jesus answered, "I am the way" (v. 6). The Lord is the way. In this fullness there is not only life, resurrection, and light, but there is also the way.

Please remember that anyone who touches the fullness has the way. When a church touches the fullness, this church has the way. In the meetings of some localities it seems as if what was clear becomes unclear, and it is difficult to find the way. However, in the meetings of other localities we touch the way that enables us to touch the Lord. In such localities there is the fullness, and there is an element in the fullness called the way. Hence, when we have no way to go on, we need to touch a church, which is the fullness; here we will find the way. When we have no way to go on, we need to contact a brother who has touched the fullness. After fellowshipping with him, the way will be within us. I believe that we have all had these experiences with others, and others have had these experiences with us.

Proper elders are those who enable saints, who have no way, to find a way. Such elders are often those with whom brothers and sisters can freely discuss their problems. Perhaps a person cannot get through inwardly with a particular problem, but suddenly he thinks of going and fellowshipping with the elders. After he sits with them for half an hour or an hour, the frustration within him is released, and consequently, there is a way within him.

This is often the case in spiritual matters. Sometimes we cannot get through, and we do not have a way, regardless of how much we grope, pursue, and probe. But if we sit with a believer for a while, a way is often manifest within us even though we might not say anything. What is this? This is the fullness of Christ. In some saints a person can spontaneously touch the way when he comes to them because they live in the fullness. If the elders in the churches would all live in the fullness and have the way in the fullness, the church, being the fullness of Christ, will spontaneously have the way.

If we desire to know whether a locality is the Body of Christ and whether it is an expression of the Body, we need to see whether there is life, resurrection, light, and the way. These are strong proofs.

CHAPTER TEN

THE MATERIALS FOR THE BUILDING OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 3:9, 11-12; 7:25, 40

The church is the unique building of God in the universe. This building is not something apart from God, nor is it something apart from man. This building is in God and in man. If we have sufficient understanding of spiritual matters, we will know that God's building is to build Himself into man and to build man into Himself. Simply speaking, it is to fully mingle God with man and man with God. This word may seem simple, but it includes many things and a process that is not so simple.

GOD MINGLING WITH MAN THROUGH DEATH

The first step of God's building is to break us, to tear us down. The breaking and tearing down are for the purpose of building God into us. Therefore, even God passed through death. God cannot build Himself into us by being high in the heavens in an exceedingly transcendent position. In order to build Himself into us, God came down to earth and entered into humanity. Later, He passed through death. God came down to earth, entered into death, and passed through death. Only after passing through death in such a way could He build Himself into man.

In other words, it is through death that God can enter into man, and it is also through death that man can enter into God. God and man meet each other in death and mingle together in death. For a tree to be grafted into another tree, a branch must be cut off from one tree and the other tree must be cut open. Both trees must be cut, and only in this cutting can the joining take place. If one side remains intact, joining by grafting cannot be accomplished. For God to be joined to man, God must pass through death; for man to be joined to God, man must also pass through death. The union of God with man and man with God is in death.

THE PROCEDURE OF GOD'S BUILDING

BEING TEARING DOWN

From the time we were saved, God has been doing a building work in us. He desires to build Himself into us, and He desires to build us into Himself. This process requires a tearing down. Hence, the procedure of the building is the tearing down. God continually does the building work through tearing down and breaking. Without tearing down and breaking, there is no building of God.

The building material that God is using for the building is the fullness of Christ. The issue of God's building is also the fullness of the One who fills all in all, that is, the fullness of Christ. Hence, the material and the issue of God's building are the same. The procedure of God's building is breaking, and the material of God's building is the element of the fullness of Christ. God is continually doing the building work in us with the element of the fullness of Christ.

The element of the fullness of Christ is Christ Himself, which is just God Himself. Hence, the fullness of Christ cannot be separated from Christ and God. The fact that God builds His church with the element of the fullness of Christ means that God builds the church with Christ Himself and with God Himself. At the time of our salvation God gave Christ to us; that is, He gave Himself to us. Romans 8 shows that every believer has Christ within. Everyone who has Christ has God in him. First John repeatedly says that the anointing in us is God in us (2:20). When we were saved and the Holy Spirit entered into us, we did not receive merely the divine life. This life is God Himself. When this life entered into us, God Himself, that is, Christ Himself, entered into us.

Although God entered into us when we were saved, He has not yet been built into our constitution, into every part of our being. Every believer has God within him, but he may not have the building of God. A person may be saved, but he may not have God in his preferences, thoughts, and opinions. Although he is a saved person, God may not be in every part of his being. His thoughts are merely his thoughts, his preferences are his preferences, his opinions are his opinions, and his person is also his person. Even though God is in him, it seems as if God has nothing to do with his living. Although he has some fear before God and an outward appearance of godliness before men, God cannot be mingled with him in his living.

He is a man of God, and God is in him, but God has no place in his living, in his walk. He is still a person who lives by the self and in the self. He can declare that there is God, confess that he believes in God, and tell people that he fears God. He may give others the impression that he is quite godly and proper before God. However, God has no place in his living. It seems as if he does not make mistakes and is not contaminated by sin, but he is still himself; what he lives out is only himself. Although God is in his spirit and takes his spirit as His dwelling place, God has no place in his walk and living, in the way that he behaves and manages his affairs. What he lives out is merely a good man, a God-fearing man, and a man who is excellent in the sight of others but not a God-man and not a man who is mingled with God. The result is that there is a good man, but there is no church; there is a man who is perfect in the sight of others, but there is no Body of Christ.

We must know how to discern this. We should not suppose that a group of brothers and sisters living together in harmony and behaving properly is the Body of Christ. The Body is the fullness of Christ. The Body is God mingled with man and lived out from within man. It is true that without man there cannot be the Body of Christ; however, if God is not mingled with man, there still cannot be the Body of Christ. The church as the Body is very special; the Body is the mingling of divinity and humanity. To merely have God is not the Body, and to merely have man is also not the Body. The Body is the mingling together of God with man and man with God.

From the moment we were saved, the moment God entered into us, He has been working within us to tear us down so that He may build Himself into us. Many brothers and sisters have a difficult time understanding why everything was smooth and their health was good when they were not that clear in their pursuit of the Lord. This thought arises when problems abound, nothing goes smoothly, and their health deteriorates once they pursue the Lord, pray more, and are quite fearful before Him. It is a natural concept, to think that we only suffer when we are far away from God and do not fear Him, but if we fear and pursue Him, we will prosper in everything. However, this is often not the case. It seems that the more we pursue God, the more frustrations we have, the more difficulties arise, and the more our health fails. What is the cause of this? Whenever we seek God and put ourselves in His hand, we afford Him the opportunity to work in us. God is doing a work of building. Every building work requires the use of tools. If we build with rocks, they need to be hammered and beaten into shape; if we use a piece of wood, it needs to be

sawed and planed; if we use concrete, it needs to be stirred and mixed. Every building requires some procedures and the use of tools.

Our concept may be that we should live a God-fearing, peaceful, and secure life after we are saved. In this peaceful life we rise up early in the morning to have morning watch; our prayer is full of enjoyment, our Bible reading has much light, we have God's presence, and our living throughout the day is easy and smooth. In the evening after dinner, we go to a meeting. We put down our Bibles, close our eyes, and listen peacefully to a message. We feel very comfortable, and we are also "edified" and enlightened. After the meeting we have sweet prayer before going to bed, and we sleep soundly through the night. The next day we are full of vigor, our body is healthy, our wife is submissive, our children are well behaved, our business is prosperous, and everything is truly wonderful. Thus, everyone should want to believe in Jesus. If this was the true situation, God should go back to the heavens and sit on the throne to bless us continually and leave us to enjoy His blessings on earth. Many of us may have this concept. However, this is not God's work in the believers.

The universe can be compared to a factory where God is building and also to a kitchen where He is cooking. However, whether it is building or cooking, the process is quite troublesome and complicated. Everything is a great mess and very inconvenient when a building is being built. However, when the work is completed, a beautiful building appears. At a restaurant all kinds of attractive and delicious dishes may be set on a table. However, if we entered the kitchen, we would see that everything is a great mess and in utter chaos. In yet another example, everything that is displayed in the windows of shops on the streets is beautiful and attractive. However, if we went to a factory, we would see many messy and worthless half-finished products. All these products are in the process of being dealt with, and something still needs to be added to make them beautiful and valuable so that they can be displayed in the window for people to appreciate and purchase.

God's building is not yet at the stage of being displayed in a window. The appearance of the New Jerusalem will be the time when the building is displayed for all to see. Today we are in the kitchen and in the factory; God is in the process of doing a building work in us. We may never meet a pursuer of the Lord who has no problems in his body, in his home, in his career, or in his

environment. Actually, everyone has problems. This shows us that God is stirring and tearing down.

God is a God who creates and also a God who tears down (Eccl. 3:3). With one hand God created things out of nothing, and with His other hand He destroys the things He created. Why does God destroy what He has created? It is for His building. God cannot build up something new if the believers have merely been saved. He must do a work of destruction. He must break us through the people around us so that we are open and so that He can build Himself into us. This is the working together of all things for good to those who love God. In Romans 8:28 good is not related to physical matters. It refers to our being conformed to the image of the Son of God (v. 29). God uses all kinds of environments, persons, matters, and things as the procedure for our conformation.

Every one of our children has been given to us by God, and every one of our children is used by God to deal with us. Every child and every situation are tools used by God to deal with us. We should realize that from the time we are saved, God has no intention of doing anything other than building in us. He desires to build Himself into us by tearing down and breaking. When He tears down a little, He builds up a little. When He breaks a little, He builds up a little more. It is through this kind of tearing down that God does His building work.

A young brother may feel that an older brother is not as skillful as he is in giving a message on Genesis 1. He may also feel that the older brother is not as thorough as he is in giving a message on Revelation 21. Since he is not impressed, he stands up and gives a message whenever there is an opportunity. The message he gives, however, is merely a message. Although the older brother is not as eloquent and clear as the younger brother, those who listen realize that the older brother's speaking contains Christ and the element of God. His speaking moves and touches people inwardly, supplies life to people, and ministers Christ to people. Although the older brother cannot speak fluently, people touch life, gain Christ, and receive a spiritual supply after listening to him. The young brother is eloquent and clear, but after people listen to his speaking, they feel as if it is only sounding brass and a clanging cymbal. They receive nothing from this clanging. His speaking neither causes people to touch Christ nor gives them a supply of life.

We have all had experiences of being beaten or torn down by the Lord. In this tearing process, some gold has been beaten and added into us. We should never stress eloquence more than God's tearing down. A person may be well versed in the Scripture and eloquent from a young age, but if he does not have Christ and has not been built up within, these things do not have much value. In this matter we need to see the value of the older ones. We are not referring to their being older in terms of age but in terms of the increase of God's element within them, the increase of Christ's stature within them. They are "older" because they have been worked on by God and built by God. God's breaking, God's tearing down, is within them. Through a great deal of tearing down, the element of God has been added into them, and the element of Christ has increased within them. When they give messages, they quote the Scriptures with words that are not merely doctrine. There is something in their words that is God Himself, Christ Himself. Through these words something is able to touch people in their deepest parts that solves their problems, fills up their lack, and supplies their need. This something is Christ; it is God Himself.

We cannot obtain the portion of these saints by imitating them. Like them, we need to be torn down and built up in God's hand and be processed in God over a period of time. Regrettably, some people have been saved for ten or twenty years, but they have not been processed in God's hand, and their speaking remains the same year after year. There is no constitution of God or building of God within them. They do not have many scars and are not very open, because there are not many problems in their environment. Such a person is of little use in God's hand.

THE BUILDING MATERIALS BEING THE ELEMENT OF THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST

One who is truly in God's hand is one who has gone through hardships, sufferings, and has scars. We can say that this person is full of openings. In such a person God has been doing a tearing-down work. The result of the tearing down is building. The material that God uses for the building is God Himself, which is Christ Himself. A person in whom God has been building is full of life within and without. This is the first content of the fullness. When we touch this person, we receive life. His speaking is neither doctrine nor empty words but the supply of life. He needs to speak only a few words, and in

these words there is life and there is Christ. This is the coming out of the fullness, because he has passed through God's building. The element of the fullness of Christ as the material has been built into him and comes out from him. This is the expression of the fullness.

Anyone who has been built by God in this way supplies us with life whenever we touch him; however, the ability to supply life does not come out of his natural ability. Those who supply life to others have been built by God. The extent to which we allow God to build in us determines how much life we can supply to others. This cannot be learned through imitation. Even praying before God for three days and three nights will not avail.

Everyone who supplies life has been built by God, but God's building is through tearing down. The amount of tearing down that we allow God to do in us determines how much God is able to build in us; it also determines how much we can supply to people. Whether we are giving a message, giving a testimony, praying, conversing, or visiting people, life will flow out from us and supply people if we are built. This is a sign of the fullness, and this proves that the element of the fullness has been built into us.

In the last chapter we saw that the first content of the fullness is life. A person who has been built by God with the element of the fullness is able to give life to people at any time. The second content of the fullness is resurrection. This life has passed through death, is able to withstand death, and cannot be destroyed, hindered, held, or bound by death. Often, when we contact a saint, he supplies us not only with life but also with resurrection. We may be in a difficult situation, having been knocked down, or we may be in a situation of death to the extent that we despair even of living. At the point where we cannot get up and break through, we may meet a saint. As we contact and fellowship with him, we sense a power being transmitted into us, a supply entering into us that causes us to rise up to break through the realm of death. This is resurrection, the power of resurrection, and the supply of resurrection. The content of the fullness is in the One who supplies us. This fullness cannot be acquired through learning, study, or even prayer. The fullness can be acquired only by our allowing God to tear us down and build us up. If God is building the fullness into us, when people meet us, what they need will come out of us. If they need life, it will come out of us. If they need resurrection, it will come out of us.

The fullness also has a third content, which is light. Sometimes in contacting a brother, we sense that he is full of light, and even we ourselves are full of light when we are with him. It may also seem that when we leave him, we are in darkness, but as soon as we are with him, we are in the light. He can be compared to a shining lamp. When we are in his presence, we are in the light. When we leave him, we are in darkness. This person is full of light because in him there is the building of God. God has torn him down, and God has also built Himself into him. God is light, and Christ is also light (1 John 1:5; John 8:12), and the fullness is a great light. This light has been built into this person and has become the element within him. Therefore, God's light is in his thoughts, his emotions, and even in his preferences and opinions. This light is the content of the fullness.

This is not an empty doctrine. We are speaking in great detail so that everyone can see the Body of Christ and its condition. It is useless for us to merely shout, "The church is the Body of Christ!" The mere utterance of these words will not cause us to come out of darkness and be full of light. No, if we do not have light, when people contact us, we will still not have light; if we are not bright, when people contact us, we will still not be bright. This is because we have not been built by God, and the element of fullness has not been built into us. If God's tearing-down work is not in us, there is also no building of God, no fullness, and no light.

The fourth content of the fullness is the way. If there is the fullness, there is the way. If there is no way within us, we do not have the building. If we have the building, we will have the way. To have the building in us means that we have nothing except God Himself built into us. We need to know that it is one thing to be saved and have God in us, but it is another matter to be built by God and to have God built into every part of our being. We can sense God's presence in the thoughts of some older saints. We can sense that God is with them in their preferences, and even their opinions cause us to sense that God is with them. This is because for many years the fullness has been built into them. God has torn them down, dealt with them, broken them, and wrecked them. God has also gradually "beaten" Himself into them.

Those who have learned this lesson know that sometimes God will not let go of even a little thought or a slight preference of ours. In order to show mercy to a person and to establish him, God cannot let go of any of his preferences. God will be very strict with him. Only those whom God lets go of

are loose. Those who are truly in God's hand are restricted every day. We should prepare to be disciplined whenever we have a thought that does not have God in it. Whenever we have a preference in which the Lord has no ground, we should beware of encountering difficulties. When God's hand comes in, it strikes us, tears us down, and destroys us so that He can bring many natural elements within us into death. Then God will come in to build. God does not build with anything other than Himself, and He builds Himself into us little by little.

What is spiritual progress? Spiritual progress is the increase of the element of God within us. This increase is not simply growth; it is building. When we speak of growth, we are all happy. Growth is natural, and regardless of how much we grow, we grow unconsciously. However, we are aware of every step in the process of building because every step is painful. Spiritual progress is building, and without building there is no progress. With the Body of Christ, it is a matter of progress and growth; with the house of God, it is a matter of building. Actually, the two are one; the growth is the building. Without building, there is no growth. Every step of the building goes through fire and tearing down. In this way God is gradually wrought into us, and there is the fullness within us. The expression of the fullness is nothing other than God being built into us gradually.

The building of God takes Christ as the material so that man is inwardly filled with His element. At this point even if a man falls, the element within him will not be lost. A brother may say that two months ago he was doing very well. His prayer had the Lord's presence, his preaching was with power, and his fellowship with others was fresh and full of Christ. However, after being adjusted by an elder, he may be stumbled. As a result, he has a difficult time praying, and when he does pray, there seemingly is no power. He is also unable to give messages. This is because he was stumbled. If anything can be lost in this way, it is something that has not been built up. Whatever has been built up by God has been constituted into us and mingled with us. We cannot lose God's constitution. The more we fall, the more secure and full it becomes, because it is of resurrection and is able to withstand falling. However, anything that is outward will be lost as soon as we fall. Thus, if something cannot stand firm when it is touched, it has not been built up.

There was a certain brother who liked to imitate others in prayer. He imitated the accent, the wording, and even the lively tone. However, after

being adjusted by an elder, he sat at the back of the Lord's table meeting, and his voice could not be heard. When asked why he was no longer praying, he said that he was disheartened. He was disheartened because he had been dealt with by an elder. This shows that what was in him was not built by God. Whatever is built by God cannot be lost no matter how much it is touched; instead, the more it is touched, the more secure, fresh, living, and abundant it is, because it is of resurrection.

If a grain of wheat or a flower seed does not pass through death, it remains the same. Once it is put into death, it is given the opportunity to manifest the fullness within by growing more grain or pretty flowers. If we are untouched by the elders, we will remain the same. The more we are touched, the more abundant and full we become. The more difficulties we have, the stronger we become. The more we are dealt with, the more abundant we will be. This is the fullness. This is Christ being built into us. The element of the fullness that has been built into a person cannot be shaken by the environment.

INCARNATION BEING GOD ENTERING INTO MAN, AND DEATH AND RESURRECTION BEING MAN ENTERING INTO GOD

Incarnation is God entering into man, and death and resurrection are man entering into God. God's building work in us has two aspects: one aspect is to build Himself into us, and the other aspect is to build us into Himself. God has no intention to nullify our person. God's redemption does not nullify our humanity; it uplifts our humanity. In other words, before we were redeemed, our humanity was low. After we are redeemed, our humanity is uplifted, not nullified.

One who has not been dealt with by God may be weak in his will, but one who has been dealt with by God becomes firm in his will. One who has not been dealt with by God may be confused in his thoughts, but one in whom God is built is clear and enriched in his thoughts. One who has not been dealt with by God does not have many genuine emotions, and even if he has, they are not properly used. However, one who has been dealt with by God is rich in emotions, and his emotions are properly used; he is able to sympathize with others, love others, understand others, care for others, and support others. We need to know that God's building does not nullify us but develops and

uplifts our being and builds us into Him. Not only is He mingled with us, but we are also mingled with Him.

God's building work in us is the work of death and resurrection. The principle of the building of God is death and resurrection. He first tears down, and then He builds up. His tearing down is death, and His building up is resurrection. Whatever has passed through His tearing down and building up has died and resurrected. Death and resurrection bring man into God. God is in man through incarnation; man is in God through death and resurrection. Man entering into God is a glorious matter. Our Savior became flesh through incarnation; He also died and resurrected. He is God entering into man and also man entering into God. This is our Savior, and this is God's "prototype" for making more of the same product. God in man and man in God—this is God's ultimate goal.

The apostle Paul is an example. In 1 Corinthians 7 he says, "I have no commandment of the Lord" (v. 25), and then in verse 40 he goes on to say, "According to my opinion; but I think that I also have the Spirit of God." Since he said plainly that he had no commandment of the Lord, what he spoke was not the Lord's direct speaking. However, he also said that he had the Spirit of God, as if what he said was the Lord's speaking. Is this not a very precarious situation? Here was a person, an apostle, who said that what he spoke was not the commandment of God; it was not the Lord's charge but rather his own speaking. Nevertheless, such a word was recorded in the Bible. Although he had no commandment of the Lord, no charge of the Lord, and it was his own words, in the end he says, "I think that I also have the Spirit of God." How wonderful is such a word! It is our speaking, not the Lord's speaking; it is our word, not the Lord's word; it is our charge, not the Lord's charge; and it is our commandment, not the Lord's commandment. Yet we have the Spirit of God. This is God in man and man in God.

The apostle in 1 Corinthians 7 not only had God within him, but he was also in God. He was in God to the extent that he could say, "I think that I also have the Spirit of God," even though he did not have God's charge, the Lord's word, and it was altogether his own speaking. Here we see a man on the highest level. Even though he spoke, not having God's word or the Lord's commandment, he could still say, "I think that I also have the Spirit of God." This person entered into God and was mingled with God.

In His redemption God does not nullify our being; instead, He brings us into Himself and builds us into Himself. God is doing a work of breaking and tearing down within us for the purpose of building Himself into us and building us into Himself, to the extent that our proposals and speaking can be His proposals and speaking. In Paul we see a person who was in God and was one with God. He could say that even though he spoke without the Lord's charge, the Lord's commandment, he had the Spirit of God.

First Corinthians 7 is a chapter that is quite high. In 1 Corinthians 7 the apostle was on a very high level. Can we truly say that we have the Holy Spirit in our speaking, even though we have not received a direct word of the Lord? If we cannot say this, we have not fully entered into God, much of our element is still outside of God, and we have not been built into God. After much tearing down and building up, however, we will be built into God. Then even without the Lord's revelation, the Lord's word, or the Lord's commandment, we will be able to say that we have the Holy Spirit when we speak. At a minimum, we will be able to say, "I think that I also have the Spirit of God," because we are in resurrection and in God.

Through God's tearing down and building up, God builds Himself into us and builds us into Him. So even without His commandment or His word on a particular matter, we can have His Spirit and be in His Spirit when we speak. This is the Body of Christ. This is the fullness of Christ. To live in this way is to live in the Body.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE CONTENTS OF THE FULLNESS REVEALED IN THE WRITINGS OF JOHN— FOOD, SATISFACTION, FREEDOM, GLORY, AND LOVE

Scripture Reading: John 1:16; 6:48; 4:13-14; 8:36; 1:14; 1 John 4:8

What is the church? We need to look to God to open our eyes in order to see this spiritual fact and to know the Body of Christ. This is a great and profound matter. A person with no vision and no revelation is unable to understand this. Even if a person has light and revelation, he still needs to take heed before the Lord in order to have some understanding. If a person is negligent, the light he sees concerning such a mysterious thing as the Body will flash past him.

We may have an impression and comprehend many spiritual matters without being taught. But it is difficult for our natural man to comprehend the mystery of the church, the Body of Christ. If we are a little careless, the light will fade away. The problem with many Christians is not a shortage of light concerning the church, the Body of Christ; rather, the problem is that they disregard the light they have. We need to pray, asking the Lord to firmly fix the light within us, just as Joshua prayed for the sun not to set (Josh. 10:12-13). We need to ask the Lord to firmly fix and intensify this light.

Those with some spiritual experience know that spiritual light may flicker within us. For example, if we wake up at night and consider the Lord, we may receive light. However, if we are lazy and go back to sleep, not caring for the light, the light will fade away. When we receive light, we need to immediately pray, asking the Lord to retain the light and not let it fade away. After such prayer, we will sense that the light has been kept. The light will be shining in us when we rise in the morning, and it will stay within us the whole day. This light will also shine brighter and brighter in our spirit for many days. We will clearly see the fact shown to us by that light.

With some brothers and sisters, when the Lord's word is released in a meeting, light flashes in them like lightning in the sky. They feel quite good. However, they need to be careful lest the light gradually diminish and completely fade away by the time they leave the meeting. Therefore, when we listen to a message, we need to pray and ask the Lord not to allow the light to fade away but rather to retain the light within us so that the light can shine brighter and brighter until the full day.

We have all experienced the flashing of light within us during our private prayer or when taking a walk. If we are casual and negligent, the light will vanish in a moment. It is, therefore, best to carry a notepad. Even while sleeping at night, we should keep a notepad by the pillow. If light flashes in us when we wake up at night, we should immediately write down the inward feeling. For example, we may be riding in a car when the following words flash within us: "Of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace" (John 1:16). At that moment we should quickly pray, "O Lord, please retain this light for me. Lord, have mercy on my shortage in spiritual matters; do not let this light pass away." Then we need to write down the word *fullness* in our notepad. We may ask, "Lord, what is the fullness? O Lord, open my eyes to see the content of the fullness." In this way the Holy Spirit will unveil in us, scene by scene, that the contents of the fullness are life, resurrection, light, and the way. Under the shining of the Holy Spirit, the portions concerning the fullness in the Gospel of John 1 through 21 will vividly appear before our eyes.

What we read in the Bible may not seem useful at the time of our reading. But when we receive a vision, everything we have read will return; the pertinent words will shine forth. We can then worship the Lord and fellowship with Him. We can ponder on life as an element of the fullness and apply it to ourselves and to the church. Thus, we will be brought into a great enlivening vision. This vision will become a light that will illuminate those whom we contact and also will bring them into the light.

We should not consider the vision of the great mystery of the church to be a small matter. We need to seriously look to the Lord so that whenever we have a slight sense within, we would ask the Lord to retain that sense for us; whenever we have a slight comprehension and seeing, we would ask the Lord to retain and magnify the light. We need to tell the Lord, "Lord, this is the dawning light; this is the sun rising up in the morning. I do not want this sun to set; I want this light to shine brighter and brighter until the full day." If the

brothers and sisters are willing to do this, many of them will be enlightened, seeing and understanding what the Body of Christ is in this age.

THE CHURCH BEING THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST

Ephesians speaks of the church as the fullness of Christ (1:22-23). Everything related to the church must be the overflow of Christ; anything that is not of the fullness is not the church. What is the fullness of Christ? The fullness of Christ is the overflow of Christ. This can be compared to our being the fullness of Adam, the issue of Adam. Someone may ask, "Where is Adam?" Then we should respond with confidence, "Adam is here. I am Adam. Are you looking for Adam? Adam is right here; I am Adam's fullness." May we all be blessed by the Lord so that when people ask where Christ is, we can say, "Christ is here." The church is the Body of Christ, the fullness of Christ, the overflow of Christ.

The first time the Bible speaks of the fullness is in John 1. We have already seen some of the contents of the fullness from John's writings. The first item of the content of the fullness is life. When we visit a locality, we can sense and touch whether the church in this locality has life. The content of the fullness also includes resurrection, light, and the way. Whether a church has Christ's overflow depends on whether there is the life supply, the manifestation of resurrection, the shining, and the way in this church. All these items are tests.

THE CONTENT OF THE FULLNESS—FOOD

In this chapter we desire to see further from John's writings that the content of this fullness also includes food, satisfaction, freedom, glory, and love. The Lord said in John 6:48, "I am the bread of life." Hence, food is one of the contents of the fullness. The manifestation of the fullness of Christ depends on the presence of spiritual food in a locality. The food God gives to His people is Christ. In the Old Testament typology of the passover in Exodus, the Israelites were sustained by the flesh of the lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. In the wilderness they were sustained by manna. In Canaan they were sustained by the riches of the produce of the land of Canaan. The flesh of the lamb refers to Christ, the unleavened bread refers to Christ, the manna refers to Christ, and the produce of Canaan refers to Christ. Everything that is edible refers to Christ. Christ is the food for God's people.

If a local church walks on the way of God, there should be an unceasing, daily food supply. A local church that lives in Christ, is dealt with by God, and has the addition of Christ through the building work of God will have a daily supply of spiritual food.

People often ask whether they can go and meet in a certain place. It is difficult for us to say whether it is right to meet in a certain place; the crucial matter is whether one can receive a supply of life there. Some brothers often ask me whether it is all right to go listen to a message at a certain place. It is not a matter of right or wrong; the question is whether they will hear a message or receive some food. Will they receive merely a teaching, or will they receive a supply? God's children need to distinguish between teaching and food.

While sitting in a meeting, we should ask whether we are listening to a message to receive teachings or to receive food. While teachings make our thoughts clear and logical, food is altogether different; food nourishes our spirit. We may often forget a message that we have heard but feel that we have been fed inwardly. We may meet a brother, who can only say, "Today's meeting was so good!" If we ask him what was so good about it, he may only say, "I am so full; I am truly satisfied within." He may be unable to say anything other than that he is going back to be fed again. This is a good sign; this is the ministry meeting.

A ministry meeting should always cause people to be fed. The prayer meeting and the bread-breaking meeting should also cause people to be fed. We can be fed because Christ is released in the meeting. Christ is food; He is the One who satisfies people. He is the bread of life who came down out of heaven. John 1:16 says that of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. The expression and the proof of receiving is food that satisfies people. Whether a local church has Christ and is the expression of the Body depends upon whether there is food in that church; there is no way to fool people on this point.

If someone invites us for a meal, he cannot fool us concerning the number of dishes on the table. Three dishes are three dishes, and five dishes are five dishes; it is quite obvious. A person may prepare a banquet yet say politely, "This is just an ordinary, plain meal; please help yourself." Someone else may invite us over for a meal and put out only a small amount of ordinary food,

but he says, “Please eat as much as you can.” No matter what one says, if he puts out two dishes, there are two dishes; if he puts out ten dishes, there are ten dishes; if he puts out a plain and simple meal, it is a plain and simple meal; if he prepares a feast, it is a feast. Whatever one puts out, that is what there is; one can put out only what he has. There is no way to fool others.

People cannot be fooled in regard to how much a church has been dealt with and built up by God. How much a church has been built by God and how much Christ it has are not matters that can be faked. However, some places try to put up a façade. For example, when elders hear that some saints are coming to fellowship, they hurriedly put things in order. They try their best to make the elders look like “elders” and the deacons look like “deacons.” They may be elders and deacons, but they do not have much Christ. Our condition cannot be faked. It is impossible to pretend that God has worked in us more than He actually has. It is impossible to pretend that there is more building than there actually is. It is impossible to pretend that we have been broken by God more than we actually have. The measure that we have is the measure that we have. How much Christ has overflowed in the church is how much He has overflowed. It is not possible to pretend that we have more Christ than we actually have, nor is it possible to reduce the amount of Christ that we do have. Everything depends upon how much Christ has been built in us. Determining whether we have the reality of the church is greatly tested by whether people receive food when they come to meet with us. This is not a matter that can be proved with doctrine but rather with reality.

THE CONTENT OF THE FULLNESS—SATISFACTION

In the Gospel of John another item is satisfaction. In John 4 the Lord said to the Samaritan woman, “Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever” (vv. 13-14). This is satisfaction. On the last day of the feast, the Lord stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink” (7:37). To be thirsty is to have no satisfaction. To come and drink is to obtain satisfaction. The Lord said, “He who believes into Me...out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water” (v. 38). This is not only to be satisfied but also to be overflowing, that is, to be satisfied to the extent of flowing over. This satisfaction, this overflowing, is a content of Christ’s fullness.

The church as the fullness of Christ should have an effect, which is to give people inner satisfaction. There is a strong proof of whether a local church is an expression of the Body and whether it causes people to touch the Body: when people go there, are they satisfied? In the past people have asked, "Why do I feel the same both before and after a meeting? I was empty within before the meeting, and after the meeting I am still empty." This means that they were not satisfied in the meeting. But marvelously, it is also possible for us to be silent in a prayer meeting yet be inwardly satisfied after the meeting. We may feel as if something has entered into our being. If this happens, we should worship the Lord, saying, "O Lord, Your Body is here." This indicates that the fullness of Christ is being expressed and that there is a supply of Christ.

There can be no pretense in this matter. Loud prayers in a prayer meeting are not necessarily a source of satisfaction. Often there is only a trickle of rather quiet prayers in a prayer meeting instead of many loud prayers. However, the saints are refreshed. On the one hand, they listen to the prayers, and on the other hand, they follow and advance the prayers. They drink the living water and are inwardly infused. After the meeting they say, "I drank to the full; I am satisfied." I believe many saints among us have had this kind of experience.

If you ask me which meeting I like to attend the most, I would say that the first is the bread-breaking meeting and the second is the prayer meeting. This is because in the bread-breaking meeting and the prayer meeting, my spirit is always satisfied. I am watered, refreshed, and satisfied. However, I would say that while I enjoy the prayer meeting the most, I also dread it the most, because if the prayer meeting does not touch the Lord's presence, it is a real suffering to the saints. Without the Lord's presence they are at a loss as to what to do.

If the saints have a sense of frustration and thirst after a prayer meeting, that church has a problem before the Lord. Christ has "run into a blind alley"; He has come to a "dead end" there. He has no way to get through. If a prayer meeting lacks the flow of living water and is neither refreshing nor watering, the saints cannot be satisfied. This also applies to the bread-breaking meeting. May the Lord have mercy on us. Unless the Lord is in our meeting, the prayer meeting, the bread-breaking meeting, and every other meeting will cause the saints to be frustrated. However, when the responsible brothers and all the

saints live in the Lord, allowing Him to break them, build them up, and pass through them, anyone who comes into their midst will sense that the Lord is indeed among them. He will touch the Lord and be refreshed. He may not hear much doctrine or exhortation during the meeting, but after the meeting he is inwardly refreshed, enlivened, and truly satisfied.

Our gospel meetings should also be like this. It is not the message in a good gospel meeting that saves a person; rather, it is the fullness in the meeting that satisfies his empty human life. A gospel meeting depends neither on excitement nor the number of people; it depends entirely on the content. When the saints come together to preach the gospel as the church, the expression of the Body of Christ, there is a spontaneous flow of the fullness that touches the thirsty human life. As a result, people may not hear much doctrine or understand much concerning salvation, but they are satisfied within and can say, “Oh! I have touched satisfaction in the church!”

When I was in northern China, the local church there was truly blessed by the Lord. Although we had not learned many deep lessons, we genuinely enjoyed the Lord’s presence. Once, as a couple was entering the meeting hall for their wedding meeting, a thirty-year-old widow also walked by. Curious to see how the wedding would be conducted, she entered the hall. During the meeting some saints spoke a few words of exhortation, and she received the Lord.

She was a Gentile, who had never heard of the gospel. She and her family had never had any contact with Christianity, and according to the local custom, they would never accept a foreign religion. However, when she saw the wedding that day, she was touched, and she believed and received the Lord following just a few words of exhortation. As a result of receiving the Lord, her family gave her a difficult time. Nevertheless, she said, “I cannot help believing in Jesus. I have been unsatisfied my entire life, and I have never touched satisfaction in my human life. But on that day I went to see a wedding in that meeting hall, and even though I cannot explain it, I touched something, and I felt that I had found a resting place for my human life. I will believe in Jesus even if you threaten to kill me.” Her family said that in this case she would not receive a portion of the family inheritance. But her attitude was that if death would not cause her to stop believing, how could losing the inheritance? Although she did not hear much doctrine, she had

touched something in that wedding meeting. This is spiritual reality; this is the fullness of Christ expressed in His church.

The Lord does not desire to have a church that merely preaches the gospel for Him; rather, He desires to have a Body to be His fullness and expression. If He can gain a group of people on earth who live in Him and who allow Him to break and build them, this group of people will be the living Body of Christ. This Body is Christ's fullness, Christ's overflow. Whatever people need, they will find it in the Body, in the fullness. Those who need light will see light when they come to the Body. Those who need comfort will receive comfort when they come to the Body. Those who need a way will have a way set before them when they come to the Body. Those who are inwardly empty, unsatisfied, unhappy, and unable to find purpose in human life will become inwardly satisfied when they touch the Body, the church. They may not hear much doctrine, but inwardly they will touch something that gives them satisfaction, unites them with God, and attaches them to God.

If this is not our condition, we have a problem. If the meetings in a local church are unable to satisfy people, something is wrong. Such a locality has lost the Lord's presence and has not allowed the Lord's satisfaction to flow out of the saints.

THE CONTENT OF THE FULLNESS—FREEDOM

In John 8:36 Jesus said, "If therefore the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed." There is another element in the fullness of Christ, which is to set people free. I believe many of us have this kind of experience. When the condition of a local church is normal, when a local church is strong, the meetings will always give people the sense of freedom. We may be inwardly oppressed, bound, troubled, and unable to rise up. But often, our whole being is released, all bondages fall off, and we obtain real freedom even when there is not much speaking in a prayer or bread-breaking meeting.

There is an element in the meeting that causes us to touch freedom and that gives us freedom. This is not the case only for meetings. If the serving and responsible brothers and the saints live in the fullness of Christ and overflow Christ, people will sense freedom when they touch them. As people contact them and converse with them, those people are released inwardly. Some may say that this is merely a psychological effect; however, spiritual matters are

more real than anything else. If Christ has the ground in us and He can live out of us, we will know that there is a power in us that can release others. In other words, if we allow Christ to have the ground in us, we can release the spirit of others. On the contrary, if we ourselves are bound, we cannot cause others to be released.

Suppose the elders in a local church are bound, Christ is absent, and the devil has come in. Everyone in that locality will be bound. The elders, deacons, and saints will be bound. Even if they come to the meeting and sing, "Revive Thy work, O Lord" (*Hymns*, #797), they will not be released. Regardless of how much they sing, the church will not be revived, and there will not be freedom in the meeting. Everyone will feel restrained and bound. Before entering the meeting, a person may feel somewhat released, free, and at ease. But once he sits down and sings "Revive Thy work, O Lord" in such an atmosphere, his whole being will become bound; he will be unable to move. We have experienced such agony. While praying at home, our spirit is free. However, as soon as we enter the meeting, our whole being is bound, and the atmosphere in the meeting is suffocating. When this happens, we should realize that there is a problem in the meeting. The responsible brothers have a problem, and the saints have little or no dealings before the Lord. As a result, the fullness is diminished, and the meetings are bound and lacking in freedom.

Our being broken and living before the Lord, His being built within us, and the church being the expression of Christ's Body cannot be faked. People can sense this immediately when they meet with us. Similarly, the condition of our locality cannot be faked. It is cold or hot, poor or rich, in the flesh or in Christ. As soon as people touch us, they will touch the inward reality. Nothing is as real as spiritual matters; they cannot be faked at all.

Some people are in Christ, allowing Him to rule in them and to overflow out of them. They are persons who are broken, restricted, and ruled by the Holy Spirit. When we come into their midst, we are released and freed, regardless of how heavy a burden or how difficult a situation may be pressing upon us. As soon as we enter into a meeting with them, our entire being is released and freed. This is because there is freedom in the fullness of Christ. If the Son of God sets us free, we are free indeed. Of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. If we live in Him and allow His fullness to be expressed, there will be something in us that sets others free.

THE CONTENT OF THE FULLNESS—GLORY

Another element of the fullness is glory. The apostle John says, "We beheld His glory, glory as of the only Begotten from the Father" (John 1:14). This glory is the glory of the only Begotten from the Father. In 17:22 the Lord said, "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them." What is this glory? It is difficult to say. We may feel that everything in a meeting is without value and has no weight; everything seems light. Whether it is an announcement given by a responsible brother or an exhortation from another brother, the saints have a feeling of lightness. This is not glory.

In 1942 I was speaking a message in Nanking, fully under the Lord's authority, and the atmosphere of the meeting was very solemn. After I spoke, a responsible brother stood up and announced a wedding. The announcement was very light, and it did not give the saints a sense of glory. However, sometimes a responsible brother may stand up and give a short announcement that the saints feel is quite weighty and glorious. Once we heard some prayers in a bread-breaking meeting that caused us to sense a glorious atmosphere. It was exceedingly glorious. This glory caused us to sense the greatness of the meeting, and we touched the Lord Himself in that glory.

What is glory? Glory is God manifested before man. Whenever man touches God, he senses glory; whenever man is before the light of God's presence, he senses glory. Glory is God expressed before men. When God can pass through a church, tear it down, and build Himself into it, He can come out from within man. Then regardless of who comes in contact with the church, he will sense glory. Whenever God comes out, people sense glory.

We sense glory when a message given by a brother is the coming out of God. However, if a brother displays his flesh when giving a message, we inwardly sense that this is quite base. Although we may not say anything outwardly, we will lower our heads. This is in contrast to the coming out of God, which is glory. Whether a local church expresses the Body, whether it is the expression of Christ's fullness, is indicated by what people sense when they come into the midst of the saints. Do they sense something base and low? Or do they sense glory? When a person lives before God, even if he only stands up to introduce the brothers and sisters, the introduction will be glorious. We cannot gain this glory by imitation, nor can we fool others. We cannot pretend in any spiritual

matters, such as how much God has passed through us, how much we have allowed God to build, how much God is constituted into us, how much we have been broken and built up by God, how much God has been blended into us, and how much we have entered into God. When people touch our person, they will sense either the presence or the absence of glory.

THE CONTENT OF THE FULLNESS—LOVE

The content of this fullness has another element—love. The Gospel of John does not say that God is love, but this is spoken of in 1 John 4:8. Since the Lord is the incarnated God to express the fullness of God, love must be an element in His fullness. Generally speaking, in regard to love, man's love and God's love are two absolutely different things. The love that is in the fullness is not man's love; it is God's love. If our love originates only from ourselves, it will cause others to sense only us. If it originates from God, it will cause others to sense God. Love is an element of the fullness; this love does not refer to man's love but to God's love. If a local church lives in God, expressing the fullness, people will touch God's love among them. People will sense warmth, comfort, and sympathy. They will sense that they are at home.

If people come to us, even if it is only to cry, it is a good thing. If no one can cry before us, we should know that not enough God is coming out of us. If God is coming out of us, people will come to us. We should realize that it is not easy to shed tears. When others shed tears before us, this indicates that they are comforted by us, that is, they are cherished and warmed by us.

If a table meeting is full of the Lord's presence, full of the expression of the fullness, many people will shed tears in the meeting. This is because they touch love, warmth, and sympathy. However, if a table meeting does not have the Lord's presence and love, it does not have the fullness. While some of the saints are singing and praying, others may be indifferent, looking around and lowering their heads when they notice others looking at them. Does this depict our real condition? In our meetings do people hear singing and prayer but not touch warmth, comfort, and sympathy? Warmth, comfort, and sympathy are symbols of love. If a meeting is an expression of the fullness, there will be love in that fullness; people will receive warmth, comfort, and sympathy. When they touch these items, they will sense the reality of the church as the Body, the fullness.

CHAPTER TWELVE

FIVE ITEMS CONCERNING THE CHURCH AND THE ONENESS OF THE CHURCH

Scripture Reading: Eph. 2:15, 20-21

Ephesians presents several aspects of the church. Chapter 1 shows that the church is the Body of Christ (v. 23). Chapter 2 shows that the church is a dwelling place, a building (vv. 19-22). Chapter 5 shows that the church is a wife to match a husband (vv. 25-27). Chapter 6 shows that the church is a fighter, a warrior (vv. 10-18). Hence, Ephesians gives four different expressions concerning the church: the Body, the dwelling place, the wife, and the warrior.

The Body is also spoken of in Romans and 1 Corinthians. The dwelling place, the building, is seen in 1 Corinthians 3 and in 1 Peter 2 as well. Concerning the church, Revelation 12:1 speaks of "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon underneath her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars." This woman symbolizes the totality of God's people on earth, including the church in the New Testament age. Then in chapter 21, concerning the New Jerusalem, we see the bride of the Lamb. Therefore, in Revelation the church is both the wife of the Lamb and the city. Therefore, there are five items concerning the church: the Body, the dwelling place, the wife, the warrior, and the city. Although these five items are different, they have a common characteristic.

FIVE ITEMS CONCERNING THE CHURCH

The Body

We know that a body is for the expression of a head. The head is expressed through the body, and it also lives and moves through the body. If we do not have a body, we cannot express ourselves, nor can we live and move. Christ the Head can express Himself, live out Himself, and do what He desires in the universe only through the church as the Body. Therefore, we must remember three points when we speak of the Body: the Body is for expression, living, and moving. Our Lord has accomplished His redemptive work and is in the

heavens. However, He is still expressing Himself, living out Himself, and ushering in His move and work on earth through the church, His Body. Therefore, the church as the Body of Christ is the continuation of Christ in time and the spread of Christ in space (Eph. 1:23).

For two thousand years Christ has been visible on earth. However, this Christ is not the individual Christ but the universal Christ. This is because in His ascension He has obtained a universal Body that exists in time and space. Through such a universal Body, Christ expresses Himself, lives out Himself, and moves and works in this universe.

The Dwelling Place

A dwelling place is where a person resides and rests. God's dwelling place is where He resides and finds rest. If we understand the Bible and touch God's heart, we will sense that in Genesis God was searching for a dwelling place; He could be compared to a homeless person. In Genesis 1 and 2 God did not seem to have a resting place, a home where He could reside. If we touch God's feeling in the Scriptures, we will sympathize with God. Although God has the heavens as His dwelling place in the universe, this does not satisfy His heart's desire; He needs a dwelling place more suitable to His nature. In Exodus the thought of God's need for a dwelling place was revealed after He saved the Israelites out of Egypt. God commanded Moses to build a tabernacle for Him to dwell in (25:8-9); this tabernacle signifies man. When the condition of the Israelites was proper before God, He had a resting place among them.

According to the Scriptures, David was a man according to God's heart (Acts 13:22); he understood God's heart. David's desire to find a resting place for Jehovah was most pleasing to God (Psa. 132:5). In David's time the Ark, which represented God, was separated from the tabernacle (1 Sam. 4:22—5:1). The Ark was like a man wandering without a resting place. David eventually brought the Ark back (2 Sam. 6:12-15). When he was dwelling in a house of cedar, he remembered God. David was reminded that God did not have a dwelling place and desired to build a dwelling place for God because God did not have a dwelling place. This desire was pleasing to God (7:1-3). Now God desires to work in a group of people through grace to make them into a dwelling place (vv. 11-14). During David's time, God did not allow him to build His dwelling place by his own strength. Solomon, the son of David, built the temple for God (1 Kings 6—8). When the building of the temple was

completed, the glory of God filled the temple (8:10-11). At this time God was exceedingly joyful.

In the New Testament God has a spiritual dwelling place, which is the church (Eph. 2:22; 1 Pet. 2:5). Today God has a dwelling place on earth, a place where He can settle down. This place is the church, which is according to His heart. The New Jerusalem, the tabernacle of God among men, will be manifested in eternity. God will tabernacle with man eternally, settle down in man, and enjoy rest with man eternally (Rev. 21:3). Therefore, God's dwelling place is where God finds rest. The church is such a dwelling place to God. Where should people go to find God today? They should go to the church. We can find and meet God only when we come to the church, the house of God. The church is God's dwelling place, the place where God resides.

The Wife

The church is the wife of Christ, the counterpart of Christ. The church as the wife of Christ matches Christ. In Genesis 2:18 God said that it is not good for man to be alone; this word reveals God's heart. God felt that it was not good for Him to be alone; He needed a counterpart, the church. Christ needs the church to be His counterpart. When we see the husband of a couple, we are seeing only half of the couple; there is another half. Both a husband and a wife need to be together to be complete.

For example, if a gourd is cut into two, neither half is complete. Likewise, if a watermelon is cut into two, neither half is complete. It is not complete until both halves are together. In the same way, without man as His match, God is short of His counterpart. This means that without the church, Christ is short of His counterpart. God built the woman in Genesis 2 to match Adam. The church matches Christ as His counterpart. If there is no church, Christ is short of His counterpart. In the universe, God has been longing to find a counterpart for His Son, Christ; that counterpart is the church. The church is the bride of Christ to match Christ.

The Warrior

The church as a warrior is for fighting. The warrior in Ephesians 6 is not an individual saint but the corporate church. The armor in verses 10 through 20 is for the Body, not for an individual. No spiritual believer as an individual

can richly experience all the items of the armor. When John Bunyan wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the light concerning the church was not clear. Therefore, he likened the warrior in Ephesians 6 to an individual saint. The warrior in chapter 6 is the church, not an individual; the armor is also a corporate armor, not the armor for an individual saint. Only the church in oneness can experience all the riches of the whole armor of God. God has been hindered from carrying out His purpose by His enemy, Satan. Therefore, in order to accomplish His will, God needs to deal with His enemy through warfare. Ephesians shows how the church fights for God. God deals with His enemy through the church in order to accomplish His will. Therefore, the church is a spiritual warrior, fighting for God to accomplish His purpose.

The City

The city is the aggregate of the four previously mentioned items: the Body, the dwelling place, the wife, and the warrior. The city is the Body of Christ throughout eternity. Christ will be expressed through the city and live in the city. The city is an enlarged dwelling place. In this age the church is a dwelling place, a temple for God to dwell in; in eternity this dwelling place will be enlarged, becoming a city. The city is the bride of Christ; the bride and the city are actually one. The city is a warrior, but in eternity, when God's enemy is completely dealt with, there will be no darkness, no death, and no need for fighting. The city is an aggregate of the many statuses of the church.

In relation to authority, when the city is manifested, authority will be fully manifested. Authority can be seen in the Body, the dwelling place, the wife, and the warrior. Especially during warfare, anyone who cannot submit to authority has no place as a warrior; soldiers must submit absolutely to authority. In addition, a city implies ruling. In the holy city, New Jerusalem, God's authority is firmly established; the throne of God with His authority is in the city (Rev. 22:3). God reigns over the nations through this city, and this city is where God executes His authority. The Lord's reigning forever and ever is also a matter of authority. Therefore, the city denotes God's authority and ruling.

We need to see that the Body, the dwelling place, the bride, and the warrior are for the exercise of authority; these items have one goal, the establishment of God's authority so that God's glory can be expressed. In Revelation 21—22 God's authority is as secure as the city. This is accomplished through God's

building work throughout the generations. In this city there is the throne of God, signifying God's authority, and there is the life of God as its content. Everything of God is in this city; God can move and rule to express Himself in this city. Through this ruling, God's glory can shine forth, and God will bring the whole universe into harmonious order so that the whole universe can express God's glory in an orderly manner.

THE COMMON CHARACTERISTIC AMONG THESE FIVE ITEMS OF THE CHURCH— THE ONENESS OF THE CHURCH

The common characteristic of the Body, the dwelling place, the bride, the warrior, and the city is oneness. The Bible speaks of the church in at least five different ways. But regardless of how the church is presented, the characteristic of the church is oneness. The church as the Body of Christ must be one in order to express Christ and to allow Him to live and move. The church as God's dwelling place must also be one so that God can have rest. The church as the counterpart, the bride of Christ, must be one in order to match Christ. The church as the warrior must be one in order to fight. In the military oneness is critical; if an army is not in one accord, it will definitely lose the battle. In the New Jerusalem we also see oneness. Therefore, the basic requirement and characteristic concerning these five expressions of the church is oneness.

Our burden is that everyone would see that all the problems in the church are related to the lack of oneness. Everything in a local church will collapse and fall to pieces if it loses the oneness. The oneness of the church is not related to "unity." Anything that needs to be "united" lacks oneness. The church is one and does not need to be united. The church in a locality is one, and the churches in many different localities are also one. All the saints are one, and all the churches are also one. The church does not need to be united; the church has a problem if it needs to be united. Paul did not exhort us to be united as one in Ephesians 4:3; rather, he exhorted us to diligently keep the oneness of the Spirit. Because there is oneness in the church, the church does not need to be united; moreover, because the oneness of the church is spiritual and already exists, we only need to keep it. Our responsibility is not to be united; our responsibility is to keep the oneness that already exists in the church. We need to keep this oneness and not damage it.

God's oneness in the church is the oneness of the Holy Spirit, and this oneness is Christ. Some people say that the church cannot be united and that we should not expect the church to be united, because everyone has his own view. They say that although we have the same Bible, we have different viewpoints and interpretations of this same Bible. Consequently, they say that we should not even attempt to be united. Although this type of speaking may seem quite logical, we must see that the church is not a matter of being united. The church is one, and this oneness is simply God Himself, Christ Himself, and the Holy Spirit. If we do not have God's tearing down and breaking among us in the church and if we have not been built by God, constituted by the Spirit, and filled with the element of Christ, the church is not one in experience.

For example, in the church in Taipei there are people from over thirty different provinces in China. When they meet together, they speak with different accents. Even the ten or more elders in the elders' meeting represent several different provinces. Since their background, origin, education, and environment are all different, their concepts and views are also different. What should they do? How can they be one? It will not work for them to merely speak regarding a doctrine of "unity," telling the saints that the church must be united in order to bring in the Lord's blessing. The church is not a matter of unity; the church is one, and this oneness is Christ. Therefore, regardless of which province we are from, we need to be torn down; everyone needs to be torn down so that Christ can be built into all kinds of people to create the one new man.

Christ is one. In Him the one new man has been created, and we have been built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit (Eph. 2:14-15, 22). We can say that everyone has different characteristics, or we can say that everyone has different peculiarities and dispositions. However, these differences and distinctions are the reason that there is no oneness among mankind. Everyone has distinctions, regardless of whether they are old or young, male or female, high-school or college students. There are distinctions between students and teachers, and doctors and nurses. The differences between parents and children are even greater. Everyone is different due to the curse of Babel. However, at Pentecost people were saved and became one in Christ; they were created in Christ to be the one new man. In the new man Peter was torn down, John was torn down, James was torn down, and Paul was torn down. In Christ they became one, and they are one.

Our oneness is brought in through the cross of Christ. The cross of Christ works in us to break and destroy us. This produces an opening, a mark of the cross in us, so that Christ can be built into us. When Christ is built into us, we will have something beautiful among us, the oneness, which is Christ Himself, God Himself, and the Holy Spirit. When this oneness is expressed, the Body, the dwelling place, the bride, the warrior, and the city are manifested. Without this oneness we cannot express the Body, the dwelling place, the bride, the warrior, and the city; everything depends on this oneness. This oneness is the result of God's building. God desires to produce this oneness through His work in us. Colossians 3:10-11 says, "Have put on the new man, which is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all." The fact that the new man bears the image of the Lord means that the new man has grown to maturity. Therefore, in the new man there cannot be Greek and Jew, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free man, but Christ is all and in all. When Christ is all and in all, the oneness will be expressed.

KEEPING THE ONENESS

Let us apply these words to our situation. How do we keep and not damage the oneness? How do we allow God to build this oneness into us? Practically speaking, whenever we desire to take an action or express an opinion, we should ask ourselves, "Am I in Christ in taking this action or expressing this opinion? Am I walking with Christ?" If we would ask these questions, we will become clear, and there will be no need for others to teach us. God's building work is to build Himself into us and to build us into Him. If we allow Him to build Himself into us, He will be with us in our living, and in our every move He will walk with us. If we allow God to build us into Himself, all our conduct and living will have His presence. In other words, we and He, He and we, will become one. In all that we do, He will be in us, and we will be in Him.

Regrettably, our response to the Spirit's work within us is often: "Wait a minute; I want to say this first," or "Let me do this first." If we continue to walk carelessly after reading these messages, this shows that we are willing to push the Spirit aside and are unwilling to allow Him to interfere or intervene in our lives. Is this our condition? Even if we have some light and some feeling within, the oneness of the church will be damaged by our unwillingness to surrender ourselves. If this is our situation, we cannot

express Christ, live out Christ, be God's resting place, be Christ's counterpart, fight for God, or let God rule over us. Everything depends on oneness; this oneness is Christ Himself. If, through the cross, we allow Christ to have the ground in us to destroy all the differences in us, the oneness will be manifested. When this oneness is manifested, there will be one Body, one dwelling place, one bride, one warrior, and one city.

FELLOWSHIP CONCERNING OFFERINGS AND THE GOSPEL BOOK ROOM

Concerning financial support, according to the leading we have received from the Lord, any offering to an individual should be put in the offering box when an offerer has been led by the Lord to make an offering through the church. The church has no right to open such an envelope, just as we have no right to open other people's mail. Only when an offering needs to be sent to a distant place should the church open the envelope and remit the money through a bank. The church has no right to open envelopes containing offerings designated for individuals. Only the Lord and those who are receiving support should know how much support is received. This should be a secret before God, which shows that this matter is under the authority of the Spirit, not under human control. May we continue to receive mercy and keep this position by giving the Spirit the absolute position, lordship, and freedom. No one and nothing among us should replace the Spirit.

I would also like to fellowship concerning the matter of caring for the Lord's workers. This is a difficult point to fellowship because we do not want to neglect this responsibility or pass this responsibility on to others. It is not our intention to lighten our burden. May the Lord be gracious to us and enable us to bear our responsibility before Him. Please allow me to say that the saints in all the localities should faithfully care for the Lord's workers. I solemnly declare that by the Lord's grace I will do my best to care for the needs of my co-workers. However, this should not lessen your burden before the Lord. I am concerned that some may think that I am laying a heavy burden on you; actually, I only hope that you could receive grace. All the localities should follow the Lord's leading and care for those who serve the Lord. I can testify on their behalf that if they wanted to earn a living in the world, they could be much better off than they are today. For the Lord's sake they gave up their future and are willing to be in poverty. In addition, most of their service is

rendered to the churches. Therefore, the churches should take care of their needs before the Lord according to the grace they have received.

There is no person or organization among us that can replace the saints in this matter. The saints need to learn to bear the responsibility of these workers before the Lord. Please understand me; this is not an effort to increase your burden while decreasing mine. There is no person or organization that can force the saints to care for the Lord's workers. I beg you to understand my feeling. May the Lord grant us grace to see that everything we have is before the Lord. May we also learn to live before the Lord so that the churches in all the localities may be before the Lord. Please do not misunderstand my words.

The Taiwan Gospel Book Room does not belong to the churches or to the work. It is a burden I received from the Lord and is something of my ministry. According to my experience, I realize that the co-workers have many difficulties and needs. So I received a burden from the Lord to prepare a place for the co-workers and for those learning to serve the Lord. This place was not prepared by the churches; it was prepared by my ministry. Therefore, I do not discuss anything related to the Gospel Book Room and this place with the churches. They are not financially dependent on the churches. However, if the churches are willing and able, they should consider assisting in this burden. Many things done by the ministry are done in order to make up a lack from the churches. A basic principle in the Bible is that the ministry should transfer a burden to the churches when they are able to bear that burden. When the churches are short in a certain matter, the ministry needs to make up the shortage; if the ministry does not accept the leading from the Lord, that burden will not be carried out. This is a word of fellowship concerning the Gospel Book Room and the place for the co-workers. I believe the saints are clear. May the Lord grant us grace not to restrict the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

GOD'S TEARING DOWN AND BUILDING UP

Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:11-13, 15-16; Col. 3:10-11; Eph. 2:15b

THE CHURCH AS THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST

The church is the fullness of Christ, expressing Christ; wherever Christ is expressed, there is the reality of the church. However, Christ cannot be expressed through a group of believers who are merely saved. Paul's Epistles show that the church, as the fullness of Christ to express Christ, needs to pass through much building. Believers who have not been built by God are merely saved. Although they may be called the church in name and position, they are short of reality and expression. Believers who have not passed through a great deal of God's building work cannot be the fullness of Christ, and the expression of Christ will be limited among them. They may not express Christ in their meetings even if they are zealous and diligent.

NATURAL ELEMENTS NOT BEING OF CHRIST

In social organizations there are people who are enthusiastic for public welfare and who diligently render service to the public. Such merits, which come from man's natural being, do not have the element of Christ; instead, they have the element of Adam. Everything we have naturally is of Adam. Not only are the bad elements of Adam, but even the good elements are of Adam. We think that once we are saved, we should reject the bad elements that belong to Adam and keep the good elements, even bringing them into the church. We may be naturally gentle, sympathetic, magnanimous, charitable, diligent, and accommodating. We bring them into the church after we are saved because we think that these merits are pleasing to God. Nevertheless, these elements still belong to Adam. Others may praise us, and we may be thankful to God, thinking that these virtues are the result of God's moving within us. This is not correct. We should realize that the elements we possessed before our salvation are natural, not spiritual; they originate from the created Adam, not the resurrected Christ. Therefore, we should never consider our natural qualities as being of Christ.

The salvation of Christ can be seen to a certain degree in a newly saved brother; however, strictly speaking, it is difficult to detect the element of Christ within him. Although Christ is living in him and he has the life of Christ, we must admit that not much of Christ has been built into him and is being expressed through him. Although his salvation through repentance has delivered him from gross sins, he is still unable to express much of Christ's element. Although he is grateful to God, loves the church, and likes to associate with the saints, not much of the element of Christ is manifested in him. This is because he has not been built; there is not much building of Christ in him. He has repented and is a believer, but Christ has not yet been built in him and expressed through him.

On the one hand, we acknowledge the fact of his salvation and testify that it is the work of Christ within him by His grace. On the other hand, we must realize that there is not much Christ within him. His joy and exultation are the work of Christ, but he has only a small measure of Christ. Suppose a newly saved brother gives a testimony, full of rejoicing and exultation. But if someone says to him, "You have just been saved, and now you need to read the Bible more and pray more," his countenance may change, and he may become unhappy. This change in countenance is the expression of Adam. When he was testifying, we could see that Christ is in him, but when he becomes unhappy, we realize that he does not have much element of Christ.

A great deal of building is required for Christ to be manifested in a person. We cannot expect a person who is saved in the morning to manifest Christ by noontime. He may manifest Christ in the morning, manifest Adam in the afternoon, and manifest the flesh in the evening. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away; behold, they have become new." However, Colossians 3:10a says, "Have put on the new man, which is being renewed." A believer must pass through God's building. This can be compared to the new man, which has been put on but is still being renewed.

From God's point of view, everything is new, and the New Jerusalem is built; however, from man's point of view, the old man has not been completely stripped off but is still upon us. Therefore, we need to pass through a process. Although we are saved and have Christ within, outwardly we are still Adam. Adam can be compared to a thick layer of rubber wrapped around us. But there is a treasure hidden in us, which is Christ. It takes only a

moment for Christ to enter into us at our salvation, but it is not that simple for Christ to come out of us. This requires the stripping off of layer after layer of the old creation. Only then can Christ come out of us and be expressed through us.

CHRIST BEING BUILT IN US BY TEARING US DOWN

The building of Christ in us is a troublesome matter to God and a complicated matter to the church. In the Epistles building refers to Christ being worked into us and expressed through us. The Christ we have gained not only has the fullness in Him, but He Himself is the fullness. The fullness is now in us, but the question is whether the fullness can be expressed. The fullness cannot be expressed simply by our praying or uttering words of praise and thanks. For the fullness to be manifested through us, we must first be built. Without building, the fullness cannot be expressed.

The most important aspect of the building is the tearing down. Without any tearing down, Christ can never come out of us; without the tearing down, the fullness of Christ within us cannot be expressed; without the tearing down, Christ cannot be built up in us. Ephesians 4 shows that God gave the church different ones as gifts with ministries for the building up of the Body of Christ, for Christ to be built in us and expressed through us. He gave some as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers (v. 11). Their unique work in the church is to build up the Body of Christ.

Therefore, the building of God in us is carried out through these gifts. Many brothers and sisters serve the Lord excitedly and livingly after their salvation. They can testify of the Lord's presence and blessing. Even though they are excited and zealous, a person who knows the Lord can sense that not much of the fullness of Christ is manifested among them. This means that there is not much expression of the Body of Christ among them. If a person has a ministry, has been commissioned by God, and is experienced in the Lord, having been dealt with and broken by God so that God has been built in him, he can differentiate between excitement and Christ and between zeal and Christ. He can discern whether the human excitement is merely the fervency of one who loves the Lord or Christ Himself.

In northern China some young brothers who loved the Lord preached the gospel to maintain the Lord's testimony. They later decided to rent a meeting

hall so that they could serve the Lord together. However, they had problems because some insisted on renting a two-story building, and others insisted on a one-story building. Thus, there was a dispute among them as to whether they should rent a two-story or a one-story building. Both sides were so insistent that eventually they could no longer come together. They did not rent a building and even stopped meeting together. What is this? They were a group of zealous saints who loved the Lord and were eager to preach the gospel and testify for the Lord, yet they divided as a result of their difference in opinion. This shows that their zeal to preach the gospel was not Christ; it was not Christ built into them and expressed through them.

Please remember that our fervent love for the Lord and our diligent service are not necessarily out of Christ. If our actions are out of Christ, we can withstand any test, opposition, suppression, or dealing. If our actions are out of Christ, we will accommodate others. The more we are out of Christ, the more we are able to accommodate others; we can meet in a one-story building or in a two-story building—either situation is acceptable to us. We can be accommodating to the extent that we do not have our own opinion or our own feeling; we will not insist on anything.

Christ coming out of us is not part of our natural constitution, and it is not something we obtain at the moment of our salvation. The moment we are saved, we have joy and peace, and we also love the Lord. However, this may not be Christ coming out of us. We need to pass through building to have the element of Christ. A person who has been dealt with by the Lord can sense whether the excitement and the zeal of the brothers and sisters are like clouds that eventually disappear. When he speaks for the Lord, he relies on the grace of the Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit to tear down the excitement, the zeal, and the natural love toward the Lord. This kind of speaking produces two results. One result is that some saints receive mercy within and are enlightened by the Holy Spirit to realize that their excitement, zeal, diligence, and love are out of their natural being, not out of Christ. This enlightenment causes them to be broken and torn down; they condemn the zeal, excitement, and diligence. They see that these things are not Christ Himself but have instead replaced Christ, usurped Christ's position, and are even against Christ. The saints who receive mercy from the Lord are enlightened within to see what is out of man and what is out of Christ.

The second result is that other saints reject grace and disagree with the message. They may think, “What is wrong with loving the Lord? What is wrong with being excited? What is wrong with being zealous?” As soon as these saints encounter opposition, they cease to be excited and zealous; instead, they are deflated and simply withdraw. Therefore, after seeing the light, the natural man of some saints is deflated and falls apart. Others, however, rejecting the light, also become deflated and fall apart; thus, they can no longer be naturally excited.

A person who is gifted and has a ministry should do the work of tearing down and the work of building up. He should tear down the things that are out of man, and he should build up the things that are out of Christ. When a group of saints are passing through God’s tearing down, they may not be as lively, excited, and loving the Lord as before. However, after a period of time they will touch something of Christ, something solid within them. This is a portion of the element of the fullness of Christ being expressed through them.

When the saints gather together, they are often excited and active. This excitement and activity are very damaging to Christians. When a person does not love the Lord, he is indifferent toward everything, but once he is stirred up to love the Lord, the most damaging thing to him is to become excited and active. People often consider being excited and active as being spiritual, not realizing that God works on us to tear down all our excitement and activity. Christ is living, not busy; Christ is strong, not excited. A person may be full of Christ, be full of His vigor, yet not be busy and excited. If we understand spiritual matters, we can discern what is spiritual and what is excitement and what is of Christ Himself and what is of enthusiasm. That which has not been torn down is only excitement and business. Only that which has been torn down and built up is solid, spiritual, and out of Christ.

THE BUILDING WORK OF GOD

The work in the church of those who minister the word, who have the gift of ministry, is to tear down on the one hand and to build up on the other; their tearing down is their building up. A great part of their work is tearing down. It is to tear down everything that is natural, that is not of Christ, that does not have the constitution of the Holy Spirit, and that is not built by Christ into man. Their speaking is for tearing down; however, the result of this tearing down is building.

If we are blessed by the Lord, all our gatherings will have a tearing-down effect. They will tear down everything that is against Christ, replaces Christ, and usurps Christ's position. These things are natural; they are not of the Spirit and are not built up by Christ. God's Word reveals that the work of those who minister the word is to build up the Body of Christ; this building includes tearing down. These ones know Christ, have been dealt with, and have much experience. They know that God's work in the church is to build the element of Christ into the saints and that this building is entirely based upon the tearing down of everything natural. This is the building work of the ministry.

People may not see light immediately when they hear God's word and God's light shines on them. Some people need to pass through a long period of time before they are enlightened. When a person is enlightened, he will see his real condition; he will see the things in him that are not of Christ. He will see that he, rather than Christ, is bearing responsibility; that he, not Christ, is zealously helping the saints; and that he, not Christ, is diligently serving the church. When God's light shines forth, man sees his condition. He sees many things that he previously justified in himself or were commended by others to be altogether not Christ—these things do not have the tearing down and the building up. They are altogether of the self and natural; they are nothing more than what he had prior to his salvation. They do not come from the building of Christ or the work of the Holy Spirit.

When the light shines in a person, he needs to pass through a period of time to allow the light to work within him. During this period of time the light within him may point out many things to him every day. For example, he may realize that his speaking is natural and does not have the Spirit and that his conduct is natural and does not have the Spirit. When by grace a person remains under the shining, convicting, and accepting of light, there is the tearing down.

Man often needs the Spirit of God and the light of God to do a severe work within him that human hands cannot aid. Under this kind of condition a person may feel uncomfortable from morning to evening; it seems that he is doing everything. Whether he is standing or sitting, visiting or not visiting, reading the Bible or not reading the Bible, everything seems to be from himself. Such a condition seems wrong, but actually, it is a good sign. Anyone who desires to be built must pass through a process of allowing the light to

shine within him every day. This light will reveal his natural speaking and flesh and will enable him to see that everything is natural in himself. A person is truly blessed if he has this painful experience. This is a strong tearing down and a strong shining.

During this time there is an unconscious increase of Christ. Christ is built into and expressed through such a person; this is marvelous. When such a person speaks a message for the Lord, his speaking will be different. His speaking will no longer be an outward teaching to exhort or perfect people. His speaking will tear down and build up. When he speaks, Christ will come forth; there will be something solid that can touch people, not empty doctrine. When he speaks, he can touch man's heart, he knows man's natural difficulty, and he knows the activity of Christ's enemy. In this way he can do a good work for the Lord. When he visits the saints and fellowships with them, he can touch their difficulties and touch the enemy who frustrates Christ within them. He is a good worker in the hands of God, allowing God to build up the saints through him. This is the result of his being enlightened.

Our God always has a way. In addition to speaking to man through the word of the ministry and through the shining of light, He also uses the discipline of the Holy Spirit by arranging the environment to cause all things to work together for good to those who have received grace (Rom. 8:28). If God cares for us, He will definitely carry out a tearing-down work in us. God can raise up any environment; He can use heaven and earth and great and small things to perfect us. Everything we encounter involves the discipline of the Holy Spirit. In our environment God arranges persons, matters, and things; our spouse, children, relatives, and the brothers and sisters are all for our need. However, although God often speaks to us, we often ignore Him. We often kick against the goads, asking, "Why am I receiving these dealings? Why do I have this situation, this family, and this group of brothers and sisters?" We must be clear that all these things are to break us and build us up so that Christ can come out of us.

The elements of our natural being and our self are worthless in the eyes of God. However, we cannot be delivered from these until our eyes are opened. Whoever has not been delivered from the self and still remains in the natural being does not have the expression of the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ is the fullness of Christ, the Christ who has been built into us and is expressed through us. The self, our natural being, is the difficulty that Christ encounters

within us. Our God as the Lord has the authority and the way; He not only gives us the word and light, but He also arranges our environment. What we may consider to be a most troublesome marriage is often the most fitting in God's eyes; a seeming mistake is not a mistake in God's eyes. God has arranged every person, matter, and thing that we encounter. God our Father can never be wrong; He knows all our needs. Therefore, we should not murmur against Him and blame other people; a good environment may not be a blessing to us, and an adverse environment may not be a loss to us. God causes all things to work together for good to those whose hearts are toward Him. This "good" refers to God conforming us to the image of His Son (v. 29). This is also His tearing down so that His Son can be built into us.

If we experience the tearing down and building up, we will express the Body of Christ. Anyone who has not been torn down by God does not have the reality of the Body of Christ, nor does he have the fullness of Christ, the expression of Christ. He may express virtues or merits but not Christ or the Body. God must do the work of tearing down in us. He not only gives us His word and shines in us, but His hand is also upon us. His hand often accompanies His word and His shining. Besides these three things, God may also reprove us. The saints who are full of grace and experienced in the Lord know our condition and may often speak a frank word to us, pointing out what is not of Christ within us. This kind of reproof brings in light and salvation. Ephesians says, "All things which are reproved are made manifest...and Christ will shine on you" (5:13-14). If a person is willing to be reproved and receive light, Christ will shine on him. He will be resurrected from the dead and will rise within, leaving death and entering into resurrection.

There is also a silent reproof. In our experience we may sit with certain saints and be reproved within. Although nothing is said, we may feel that we are too natural, that our actions are of the flesh, that our intentions and motives are not pure, and that Christ does not have much ground in us. We are reproved within simply by sitting with these saints. This is marvelous. In the meetings we may be reproved within even though the brothers and sisters are not speaking specifically to us. This is the result of the manifestation of the fullness of Christ in a meeting. When the element of the fullness is manifested, we cannot help but be enlightened and reproved. Whoever experiences a silent reproof may feel that he cannot bear it, but the Lord's

sustaining grace causes him to ask for the Lord's mercy and salvation and to condemn everything the Lord condemns.

The building work of God is carried out through the ministry of the word, the shining of light within man, dealings in the environment, and the audible and silent reproof from those who are of the Lord and are doing the work of tearing down and building up. This building work will break down everything of man's natural being and build up Christ from within. There will be the reality of the Body of Christ only when Christ is built up from within those who receive grace.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

GOD'S THRONE AND AUTHORITY BEING THE KEY TO GOD'S MINGLING WITH MAN

Scripture Reading: Rev. 4:2-3; 22:1-2, 5; 21:11

God's work in the universe is to use the fullness expressed in His Son to build up the church as the Body of His Son, which is the fullness of Christ. The result of this work is the mingling of God with man through which God gains an expression. Therefore, the normal condition of a local church is that it mingles with God and expresses God. If we know the church, we will see that the church is the place where God is mingled with man and where man expresses God. A local church is not the church of God if it does not express God. The church of God is the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (Eph. 1:22-23). The church can express God only when it is filled with God.

THE NEW JERUSALEM BEING THE ULTIMATE EXPRESSION OF THE CHURCH AS THE FULLNESS OF GOD TO EXPRESS GOD'S GLORY

The New Jerusalem revealed in the book of Revelation is the ultimate expression of the church, the manifestation of the church at the fullness of the times. The New Jerusalem shows the proper condition of a local church. In Revelation 21 the universe is in a new condition. The New Jerusalem is the aggregate of all the believers throughout the generations, the corporate body of all the believers throughout the generations in the new universe. Everything of God is in this corporate body, and through this new corporate body God's splendor and glory are expressed. The content of the city is God Himself, the fullness of God; the expression of the city is also God Himself, the glory of God. Therefore, we can clearly see in the light of the Holy Spirit that the content of the New Jerusalem is the fullness of God and that the appearance of the New Jerusalem is the glory of God. Inwardly, the city is filled with God Himself, and outwardly, it expresses God Himself. This is a picture of what a local church should be.

In a normal situation a church will reach the state of being the fullness of the New Jerusalem. A local church should be as new as the New Jerusalem. The entire old creation will pass away and become new in God. Hence, there is the mingling of God with man, the mingling of the Creator with the creatures. The fullness of the Creator becomes the content of the creatures, and the glory of the Creator becomes the expression of the creatures. Whether we look at the church outwardly or touch it inwardly, what we see and touch is God Himself. This should be the condition of a church. Regardless of how we speak concerning the church, we must see that the church is the mingling of God with man.

From Genesis 1 until the end of Revelation, God has been working and revealing Himself continually, and what He desires to gain ultimately is the New Jerusalem. The church is a miniature of the New Jerusalem. In order to know the church, we need to know the meaning of the New Jerusalem. The church is altogether a new thing created in God. The content of the church is the fullness of God, and the expression of the church is the glory of God. In the New Jerusalem we see the mingling of man with God, and we see that God can express Himself from within man. This is marvelous. The Creator and the created—God and man—are inseparable in experience. In the New Jerusalem who can say what part is man and what part is God? This is because God and man are one: God is in man, and man is in God. God becomes man's content, and man becomes God's expression.

THE KEY TO GOD'S MINGLING WITH MAN—THE THRONE OF GOD

How can God be mingled with the church and expressed through the church? In order to clearly see the mingling of God with man, we must look at Revelation 22. Revelation 21 does not clearly show the mingling of God with man. In chapter 22 the throne of God is the center of the city, a river of water of life proceeds out of the throne, and on both sides of the river of water of life is the tree of life, producing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit each month (vv. 1-3). Hence, the throne is the factor of God's mingling with man. The main factor of God's mingling with man is God's authority; God's throne is His authority. Wherever God's throne is, there is God's authority. God can be mingled with man in the church because God's throne with His authority is in the church.

All the problems in the universe are due to opposition to God's authority. All of God's children should see that this is the basic problem in the universe. Satan rebelled to overthrow God's throne and authority. In his evil intention Satan led man to rebel against God and His authority. Mankind fell to the extent of collectively building the tower of Babel to make a name for themselves, openly and shamelessly pushing God aside to establish their own throne (Gen. 11:3-4). This was man's ultimate rebellion against God and man's negating of God's authority to the uttermost. Throughout human history man's denial of God's authority, his setting of God's authority aside, offends God to the uttermost. As a result of their rebellion, mankind entered into a long period of darkness and chaos, lost God's blessing, produced every form of corruption, and brought in suffering, death, and disaster.

The Lord Jesus came to the earth to accomplish the work of redemption. His life on earth was absolutely submissive to God's authority. Jesus the Nazarene lived and moved on earth fully under God's authority. His every word and action were under God's rule, and He fully recognized God's authority. He was a man with more than perfect behavior; He was a person completely under God's rule. In the Gospels we see His absolute submission to God's authority. Submitting to God's restriction and rule, He passed through death and resurrection to save a group of people who became the church. On the day of Pentecost He caused these ones to submit to God's authority, just as He had. This established God's throne among them. God's presence was fully in their midst as they acknowledged His throne.

At the tower of Babel mankind completely pushed God aside and negated God's authority. However, at Pentecost some received God into them and fully recognized God's authority. At Pentecost God's throne and authority were established in the church. When God's authority is in the church, the church is full of light, not darkness; full of life, not death; and full of God's blessing, not cursing.

A church should be the place where God rules among men so that His throne can be established. In 1 Corinthians 11 the apostle Paul showed that the meaning of the sisters' head covering in the church is to declare that God is the Head of the universe. God is the Head in the universe, and He has His authority in the universe. Verse 3 says, "Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ." Head covering is not an outward form; it is a real sign of our declaring that by God's

grace we recognize God's authority and submit to His authority and to the establishing of His throne among us. This is the reason that the church is blessed. The main reason that the church can be mingled with God and can express God is because the church allows God to sit on the throne and rule within the church. This is an unchangeable principle.

LEARNING TO SUBMIT TO GOD'S THRONE

If a local church does not have God's throne, His authority, we cannot see His fullness, His mingling, or His expression. Even if we see liveliness and excitement in a local church, God's authority will be absent. The young ones may not submit to the elderly ones, and the elderly ones have not learned to submit to God's authority. The result is that everyone serves in his excitement and fervency. Although we can touch liveliness and enthusiasm, we cannot touch Christ and God because they do not have God's throne and God's authority among them. Their love for one another is in the emotion, not in God's authority, and their fervent service is of the will, not of God's authority. However, there are some local churches that have truly been blessed. They have been dealt with by God; hence, they have God's leading, and they submit to God's authority. Their love for one another is under God's restriction, ruling, and authority. Even their enthusiasm and diligence are under God's authority, being restricted and ruled by God.

We often see brothers and sisters loving with a love that is fervent but wild. Their love is neither restricted nor controlled; instead of being under God's authority, it is like a wild horse. They fear nothing and care about nothing when they love others in this way. When we try to help them, they may respond, "What is wrong with loving the brothers and sisters?" Hence, we need to show them that their love is wild, that it does not have God's authority. In the same principle, we cannot conduct ourselves like unrestrained and unruly wild horses in our service, whether we are preaching the gospel, visiting people, or even cleaning the hall. The service we render by our natural man is the flesh. This service is of Ishmael—it is wild like an ass (Gen. 16:12); it is not of Isaac, not of grace. Although such service is eager, it does not have authority; it is unrestrained and unruly. In the matter of material offerings we should also submit ourselves to God's throne and authority.

Suppose there is an educated, wealthy sister, holding a high position, who employs servants at home. But when she hears the announcement about

cleaning the meeting hall, she comes to clean the hall because she loves the Lord very much. Although this is good, we need to see whether she has God's authority. If she is a person who is restricted by God and knows authority, she can accept any arrangement the responsible brother assigns to her when she comes to clean. If she is not like this, when the responsible brother for the cleaning tells her to wipe the windows a certain way, she will become upset and murmur within: "I came here to wipe the windows because I really love the Lord, and I want to show that I am quite good. Why are you criticizing the way I wipe the windows?" Maybe her inward reluctance is not expressed initially, but when the responsible brother points out her mistakes more sternly, she will be unable to take it and will not come back to serve.

On the one hand, all the elders and responsible brothers should allow the saints to serve the Lord freely; on the other hand, all the serving ones should realize that service is a matter of authority, not of right and wrong. It is an uncomely sight when a person fervently loves the Lord yet is unwilling to submit to God's authority. The most comely sight in the house of God is to see God's throne and God's rule. The sisters cleaning the windows should be under God's throne, and the elders taking the lead should also be under God's throne. A local church is not for elders to make decisions but for God to exercise His authority; it is not a matter of the elders' position but a matter of God's throne.

In all that we do and in all our service we should ask ourselves, "Is God's throne really in this? Do I recognize God's authority? Is this according to my opinion or according to God's authority? Am I enthroning God or myself?" The church is the fullness of Christ, having Christ as the content to express God. The central key to the church being the fullness of Christ is the presence of God's throne. Wherever there is God's throne, there is God's content and expression. Only God's throne and authority are eternal. Man's enthusiasm, excitement, piety, and diligence will pass away; ultimately, everything is vanity.

Certain brothers and sisters are seemingly of one mind, praying together and saying Amen to each other when they come together; they seem quite joyful. However, they are full of leaven or honey, as spoken of in the Old Testament; they do not have God's authority. Without God's authority, only human excitement and liveliness can be expressed. When one prays, sooner or later another will shake his head in disagreement, and when one sings in

praise to the Lord, sooner or later another will purse his lips in displeasure. Some "cultured" brothers and sisters neither shake their heads nor purse their lips; instead, they simply remain silent to show their inner displeasure. Thus, the initial atmosphere of one accord among them will disappear. Therefore, we need to know whether our being of the same mind and our having the same taste are according to God's throne. Whatever is not according to God's throne requires only time to be exposed.

Sometimes two sisters are especially close to each other, which causes another sister to become jealous. A fourth sister may sympathize with the jealous sister and take sides with her. This forms two parties that are against each other. This is an issue of enthusiasm and service without God's throne and authority. In preaching the gospel and in the meetings of the church, we must not merely have activity and discussion without God's throne and authority. The main factor that causes God's fullness to decrease among us is the absence of God's throne. If we desire to bring in the fullness of God, the unique key is the throne of God.

THE CENTER OF THE NEW JERUSALEM BEING GOD'S THRONE

Revelation 22 shows the throne of God as the center of the New Jerusalem. Out of this throne proceeds the river of water of life with the function of watering, refreshing, and thirst quenching. The river of water of life flowing out of the throne signifies the flow of life. This means that where God's throne is, there is the flow of life; where God's authority is, there is the flow of life. When the river of water of life flows, it issues in the watering, refreshing, and thirst quenching of life. "On this side and on that side of the river was the tree of life, producing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit each month" (v. 2).

From this we can see that every local church should be a place where people are fed, nourished, watered, and satisfied. However, this is not the situation in many local churches, because of the absence of God's throne in that locality. When God's throne is established in a church, life flows. As soon as life flows, there is watering, refreshing, and thirst quenching. When people touch such a church, they touch living water and life, and they are spontaneously satisfied.

The tree of life grows on both sides of the river of water of life, producing twelve fruits each year as its fullness and abundance. The fullness and

abundance in a church depend on God's throne and His authority. Only when God is enthroned and rules in a local church can the fullness of God be brought in; enthusiasm and diligence cannot bring in the fullness of God. God's authority brings in life, and life brings in the fullness. If God's throne is absent, the river of water of life will be absent as well. Without the river of water of life, the tree of life is absent, and the abundance of life is also absent. When a local church is full of the fruits of life, producing new fruit every month, the abundance of life will be fully manifested. The abundance of life flows out from the throne.

Furthermore, there is only one river and one street in the entire New Jerusalem; both *river* and *street* are singular. This unique street, this unique way, runs through the twelve gates, spiraling upward to reach the throne. This is a symbol of the oneness of the church. If there are twelve elders in a local church who do not have the throne of God in their elders' meeting, they will have twelve thrones, twelve opinions, and twelve ways. This will be very difficult for the church and will create confusion among the saints. Although there are twelve gates in the New Jerusalem, there is only one street because there is only one throne. The street not only reaches the throne, but it actually comes out from the throne.

Based on this principle, there should be only one throne in a church. All the elders should submit to God's throne and move as one man, one elder. There should not be any personal ideas, opinions, or views, and no one should care for his own idea. Rather, there should be only one way and one authority, God's authority. Such elders do not need to exercise tolerance or to swallow their pride and try to accommodate others, because they are under God's throne and authority, allowing the Holy Spirit to rule among them. These elders can say that all their decisions are made under the authority of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, everyone in that locality will have a clear way; no one will ever be lost and feel uncertain as to what he should do. There is no need to lead others on this street, because the street is the leading. As long as we are on this street, we are under God's throne.

The street and the river of water of life are blended as one. In the middle of the street is the river of water of life, and the tree of life is on both sides of the river (vv. 1-2). Here we have the way to walk, the river of water of life to drink, and the fruit of the tree of life to eat; these three are very rich. This should be the normal condition of a church. People who do not have a way to walk find

the way and the leading when they come into the church. People find living water on this street, richly enjoy the fruit of the tree of life, are refreshed and satisfied, and their thirst is quenched. Therefore, all of man's supply and living depend on God's throne.

For this reason we should ask ourselves, "Is God's throne among us and among the responsible brothers? Are we under God's authority? Is there a street with a river of life and a tree of life among God's people?" A local church that does not have this condition is not in the principle of the New Jerusalem. There is a throne in the New Jerusalem, and a street proceeds out of this throne; in the middle of the street is a river, and the tree of life grows on both sides of the river, producing twelve fruits. This is a beautiful picture. Therefore, the key to the church life depends entirely on God's throne, God's authority. Although there are many brothers and sisters serving among us, there is only one throne. It is not that you submit to my authority, or that I submit to your authority. It is not that I obey you or that you obey me; rather, the throne, the authority of God, is among us. If there is no throne among the brothers and sisters, it is the same as not having a center. Without a center everything loses its support and balance, and everything disintegrates and collapses.

The expression of the holy city depends on the throne, the street, the river, and the growth of the tree of life. The condition of the New Jerusalem depends on the throne. If the throne is lost, the entire New Jerusalem will be obliterated. The manifestation of the New Jerusalem has God's throne within and God's glory without. This means that God's authority and God's image are being expressed. In Revelation 4 we see God's throne and God's image; the One sitting on the throne is like a jasper stone in appearance (v. 3). Only when there is the throne can there be the image, and only then can God exercise His authority and be expressed. All blessings are with the throne.

Since the throne is in the New Jerusalem, there will be no more night, only brightness; there will be no more death, only life. The saints will reign in the city forever and ever. We should all realize that the normal condition of a church depends on God's authority. It does not depend on our methods or ideas nor on our enthusiasm or diligence; rather, it depends entirely on God's throne, His authority. May we have God's throne with God's authority among us.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE COORDINATION OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:15-16

Ephesians 4:15-16 says, "Holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ, out from whom 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." These two verses, which have a particular place in Ephesians, show the coordination of the Body of Christ, the growth of the Body, and the building up of the Body.

We have already seen that the church is the fullness of Christ and that the throne of God, the authority of God, is in the church. As a result, God can be enthroned in the church, and the church can be filled with God as the content. We can say these are the major points. Now we want to see some smaller yet more practical matters.

Ephesians 4:15-16 has a particular place because no other portion in the Bible speaks of coordination as thoroughly as these two verses. This passage plus Ephesians 2:21 and Colossians 2:19 speak of one thing—the coordination of the Body of Christ. The Body can grow because of this coordination, and the Body can build itself up because of this coordination. Therefore, these verses show how the church as the Body of Christ can be coordinated and how the Body itself grows and is built up through coordination.

Ephesians 4:15 says, "Holding to truth in love." Simply speaking, this is to love God. This word sounds very simple, but it is very particular to the apostle Paul. This word means that we need to love God and continually hold God in the love with which we love Him. Truth refers to God. Anything that is not God Himself is false; only God is truth. In the midst of today's confusion, every place is full of all kinds of teachings, interpretations, and instructions. What is the basis and standard for these teachings, interpretations, and instructions? Some people say that we should take the Bible as the basis. Regrettably, everyone's interpretation of the Bible is different. The same sentence in the Bible is interpreted and explained differently. Since Ephesians

4:15 says that we need to "grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ," what should be our basis and standard?

HOLDING TO TRUTH IN LOVE AND GROWING UP INTO THE HEAD, CHRIST, IN ALL THINGS

Any teaching or interpretation that does not cause us to touch God should be rejected, even if it is doctrinally correct. Every teaching and interpretation must also enable us to touch God and hold on to God. In the past few decades the sisters' head covering has become a popular topic of debate among the churches. The saints have had different interpretations, which all sound very logical. They have found portions from the Bible proving that sisters should either cover their heads or not cover their heads. However, does this teaching cause people to touch God more? Or does it cause people to be separated from God? This is a very strong test.

We may be right in our interpretation of doctrine, but we must not take mere doctrine as the standard. We should apply this test before God: if a message does not cause us to touch God, even if it is doctrinally correct, we need to put it aside. We should learn, because we love God, to hold to truth and never lose the fellowship with God in love. If one's speaking causes us to touch God, we should accept it. If their speaking causes us to be disconnected from Him, we should reject it, even if the speaking is doctrinally correct.

Holding to truth in love means that we have a heart of love toward God, and we hold the things that enable us to touch God in love. This results in our growing up into the Head, Christ, in all things. Here, *all things* does not refer to a few things or only to the big things; rather, it includes everything. We need to grow up into the Head, Christ, in all things. In Greek this clause means that we are not connected to Christ in matters that we should be; that is, we are not linked to Christ in some matters. Consequently, something needs to be added so that we can grow up into Christ.

In our experience it is not easy to grow up into the Head, Christ, in all things. The sisters have difficulty growing up into Christ in taking care of household chores and in how they dress. Nevertheless, we need to exercise to grow up into Christ. In the administration of the church the elders in particular must grow up into Christ; they should not rely on their natural being or depend on human wisdom, cleverness, or worldly methods. Elders

who do not grow up into Christ in administrating the church are holding on to things other than Christ instead of holding to truth in love. Elders who touch God's fellowship in love will be able to forsake the things of the world, of their natural being, and of their human wisdom, cleverness, and effort. Thus, the Lord will cause them to live before the Lord and administrate the church by touching His feeling and being mingled with Him.

Through much contact with the different localities I have become aware of our real condition. Just as businessmen in the world have their methods and schemes, sometimes those involved in spiritual matters also exhibit human methods, schemes, cleverness, and smartness. Under the Lord's precious blood, I can testify that I have never argued with anyone during the course of my service, but I have fought for one principle. I have often asked one question, "Is this our scheme or the Lord's will?" We must consider this. All who serve God must learn this deep lesson. We need to learn to touch the Lord's presence, to live in the Lord, to hold on to Christ the Head, and to hold to truth. We should not use our own skill and methods.

We must be clear that our being is not yet completely saved; we still do the Lord's work and administrate the church out of ourselves. We have not grown up into the Head, Christ, in administrating the church. There is one basic principle or primary requirement that will never change: if we desire a good coordination in the church, we must touch God's presence and grow up into the Head, Christ, in all things, holding to Him.

For example, when various halls send saints to pick up gospel invitations from the main service office, those who come first often pick up a large quantity and leave only a few for those who come later. As a further example, because the fund for supporting the full-timers is limited, one of the brothers from one of the halls may think of a way to be the first to fellowship about their need so that they can obtain more funds. These are all facts. There was a co-worker who was going to visit a certain church for three days and was passing by another church on the way. The brothers from that church came to talk to me. They gave a very good reason for needing the co-worker's help, saying that they had a group of young students with a good spiritual future. Because of this, they asked the co-worker to change his itinerary. Originally, he was going to be at the first church for three days, but after changing his plans, he could be there for only two days. This deprived the church of his full service. These examples are to help us see our problem. We have too many

human methods in our service. Although we accomplish some work, we do not touch the Lord, and we also lose the Lord's presence.

In our service, which is holy and good, we must learn an important lesson: we cannot forsake holding to truth in order to reach a goal. We must ask, "Lord, do I have Your presence in doing this?" We need to have the Lord's presence in everything, not only in our service. If this should be our attitude in things that are holy and good, how much more should it be in other things as well? Our household affairs, our occupation, our children, our family, our marriage, and our relationships with others must all be according to this principle. We should not merely care for benefit and success; we should care for whether we are holding to truth inwardly, holding the Head, and touching Christ. We may do something in a certain way and be successful, but will this cause us to be separated from Christ our Head? We do not need to wait for others to teach us; we know within.

It is possible for us to accomplish a task and gain some benefit yet lose the Lord's presence and the inward reality. We may justify ourselves, saying that our actions are not sinful but are instead for the church. We may even consider that there is a holy and righteous aspect to selfishness. However, within us we know that we have not learned the lesson and that we are detached from the Lord. We have lost God's presence because of our accomplishment. This is not an ordinary word; it is a warning. The brothers and sisters who care more for their benefit than for the presence of Christ cannot be fitly joined with others in the Body of Christ. They damage the coordination of the Body. These saints are neither fitly joined nor strongly knit together in the Body.

We need to have God's authority and touch the Lord's presence even in small matters, such as picking up gospel invitations. Whether we are early or late in picking up the invitations, we must touch the Lord's presence within. If the Lord gives us a feeling to pick up two thousand copies, but we instead pick up two thousand five hundred copies, we will feel neither at ease nor peaceful within. Spiritual lessons are fine and delicate. When we learn to touch God's presence within, we will pick up only two thousand invitations, even if twenty thousand are available. If we do not follow the Lord's presence, we will have a problem with the coordination of the Body.

Our service and coordination together will be beautiful and strong when we each hold to truth according to the inner feeling, do not lose the fellowship with the Lord, and learn the lesson of growing up into Christ. On the contrary, if we do not grow up into Christ in all things, there will be disharmony when we are together. Even if there are no outward arguments or quarrels, there will still be some hidden matters. Some of the saints are more cultured and have a greater capacity of tolerance. Although they are able to remain outwardly calm, they are in inward turmoil. This causes the Body to lose the flow of life. Thus, the Body is unable to supply itself, and it cannot grow because it lacks harmonious coordination. Hence, the coordination of the Body is essentially based upon the fact that the members grow up into the Head, Christ, in all things. The Body feels uncomfortable when any member in the Body acts contrary to this. Therefore, every member must be joined to the Head and grow up into the Head in all things.

SUBMITTING TO THE LORD'S HEADSHIP

Concerning the authority of the Head, we must see that Christ is the Head, that we need to give Him the position of the Head, and that we need to recognize His authority. We need to recognize Him as the Head in all things, whether big or small. We need to give all authority to Him, submitting ourselves to His authority. If all the brothers and sisters would do this, there would no longer be friction between the members or any discord in our coordination. Friction often occurs because we do not submit to the authority of the Head. We have many opinions, and we like to enthrone ourselves instead of yielding the position of the Head to Christ. We need to recognize Him as the Head even in small things, such as picking up gospel invitations. We need to grow up into Him in all things, that is, to submit to the authority of the Head in everything, to recognize Him as the Head with the authority in His hand, and to let Him rule. Then, spontaneously, the coordination among us will be harmonious, sweet, and beautiful.

Although these examples may seem trivial, we must pay attention to the basic principle. It should not be that we listen to the elders and that we listen to no one else when the elders are absent. If we listen only to the elders and certain designated ones, we are fundamentally wrong. Our submission to authority before the Lord is not submitting to the elders; it is our submitting to the authority of the Head. Our submission to the elders is the issue of our submission to the authority of the Head. We need to recognize that the

authority of the Head is manifested in every member. Therefore, we should submit to every brother and sister, not only to the elders, because the authority of the Head is manifested in every member. We should submit not to man but to the Head and to the Head's authority in every member.

A person who truly submits to the authority of the Head is one who grows up into the Head in all things. If this basic problem can be solved, all the difficulty in our coordination will be taken care of. Our flesh will lose its place, and we will be saved when we submit ourselves to the Head. Therefore, the basic requirement of the coordination of the Body is to submit ourselves to the Head and grow up into the Head in all things.

EVERY MEMBER FUNCTIONING

Ephesians 4:16 says, "Out from whom 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." *Through every joint of the rich supply* and *through the operation in the measure of each one part* both refer to each member having its own measure and functioning according to its measure. If one member does not function, it becomes a problem in the Body. For example, it may feel very natural to use our hands. But if our hand is injured and is unable to function, we will definitely feel that our hand has become a nuisance. In the same principle, if one member does not function, it will cause great trouble to the coordination of the Body.

The coordination of the Body is based on our relationship with the Head, our submission to the authority of the Head, and our growing up into the Head in all things. It also depends on our ability to function. We each have our own function, and our coordination depends on our functioning according to our measure. Our functioning depends on how much we have been dealt with, torn down, and how much Christ has been built up in us. According to Ephesians 4:16, every joint has its supply and function; the joints in the Body are for supply. Many in the churches have received grace to be the joints of the rich supply so that there can be a flowing out to supply other members.

Furthermore, we each have a particular function and usefulness in the Body. The fulfilling of our function depends on how much we have been torn down

by God and how much Christ has been built up within us. If we have not been torn down by God and built up by Christ, there can be no supply or usefulness; this causes the coordination in the Body to suffer loss. Our coordination is not merely to exhort and encourage one another with our words. When we all function according to our measure and release the rich supply from within us, a strong coordination of the Body will be manifested.

A brother may be a joint of supply in the Body. When he ministers the word, Christ the Head supplies the Body. However, there is only one way for him to minister the word to others: he must always allow God to tear him down and build Christ within him, submitting himself to the Head's authority and growing up into the Head in all things. He will then be able to minister the words that the Body needs at the proper time, releasing God's word, so that the Body can be joined and fit together unto the building up of itself. If the supply of the word is absent, the Body cannot be built up. The Body is supplied and joined through words of ministry. This is not merely a supply; it is a joining. If the Body lacks the supply, it is disconnected and cannot be built up.

The Body is disconnected when there is a lack of supply. Some local churches have lost the harmony and sweet coordination because they lack the supply of the word. Those who should minister the word do not fulfill their function. They do not allow God to tear them down or to build Christ into them; neither do they learn to grow up into Christ the Head in all things. As a result, they cannot richly supply others, and their function is not properly manifested. Hence, the Body spontaneously is scattered, and the Body's joining and knitting together is weakened. The coordination of the church will be solid and beautiful when the brothers who minister the word manifest their function before the Lord to supply the saints with God's word at any time.

FUNCTIONING ACCORDING TO THE MEASURE OF EACH MEMBER

The basic requirement for the coordination of the Body depends on our relationship with the Head and on the manifestation of supply and function. Although there are many people in the churches, they are weak because not much of their usefulness and function is manifested. According to Ephesians 4:16, the usefulness, the function, of every member is according to its

measure and can neither be too much nor too little. When the function expressed in some brothers exceeds their measure, it is abnormal. We must speak the truth in the Lord. In some local churches some brothers have stepped over their measure. They should leave certain things, which are outside their limit, for the other brothers, because God has not measured that much to them. We can use our physical body as an example. Our hands have a limit, and our feet also have a limit. Our hands step over this limit if they want to walk. God has not measured this function to our hands; the function and measure of the hands is to handle, to hold things. If the hands try to walk, replacing our feet, they will step over their measure. This will be very abnormal.

If we carefully observe the situation of the churches in Taiwan, we will discover that some brothers have truly gone beyond their limit because they are truly "hands" who insist on being "feet." Their going beyond their limit paralyzes the coordination of the Body and causes the coordination of the Body to be abnormal. In the coordination of the Body every member needs to stay within its measure and operate according to its measure. However, some brothers and sisters do not feel that it is safe to entrust things to others; they feel that they must do everything. Nevertheless, please remember that even the greatest member in the Body has its limit. We can neither replace the Body nor replace any of the members. We must take our hands off and allow others to function, even if they make mistakes. They will still learn after several mistakes. I hope the responsible brothers would see that the members cannot replace one another.

We can boldly say, "Brother Paul, you are a big member, and I am a small member, but you cannot replace me. You have your measure, and I have my measure. You have your portion, and I have my portion." If a local church is in such a condition, the coordination in the church will be altogether different. Some members think that they can do everything, and other members think that they can do nothing, as if their existence is of no consequence. This is the main reason that the coordination of the Body is paralyzed and not living. It is beautiful when the coordination of the Body is living; every member keeps its own limit and measure and operates according to its limit and measure. The word *operation* in Greek is in verbal form, indicating that the Body moves and works. Each member moves and works according to its limit and measure, not going beyond or falling short of its limit. In such a situation the Body has a strong, solid, and beautiful coordination.

The coordination of the Body depends on our relationship with the Head, our fulfilling our function as the members, and our operation within our measure, not stepping over or falling short of our limit. We should function according to the portion measured out to us by God. This will result in the solid coordination of the Body and cause the Body to grow and be built up. May the Lord have mercy on us that we may experience these truths in everything. May we hold to the Head in the smallest matter, supply the Body in the smallest matter without stepping over our boundary, and function according to the portion measured out to us by God. If we do this, the church in our locality will be living, beautiful, and strong and will experience daily increase and growth. This increase and growth is the building up of the Body of Christ.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE ORDER AND THE AUTHORITY IN THE BODY

Scripture Reading: Eph. 2:21; 4:16; Col. 2:19

We have already seen that in order to have the fullness of God, we need to have God's authority, and that in order to have the coordination of the Body, we need to hold to the Head. When we put these two together, we come to the following conclusion: there is order in the Body, and the coordination of the Body is mainly in this order.

GOD'S SOVEREIGN AUTHORITY

All of God's creation is an expression of His sovereign authority. In other words, we see God's sovereign authority in all His creation. For example, in astronomy the revolutions of the stars or the planets demonstrate the absolute authority of God. Hebrews 1:3 says that Christ upholds and bears "all things by the word of His power." In the universe we see God's sovereignty in great matters, such as astronomy, as well as in small matters, such as the growth of a blade of grass. Many laws and principles speak of God's sovereignty. Without His sovereignty there can be no laws or principles. The laws and principles of the universe depend on God's authority and are the expression of God's authority.

If everything in a place is in chaos, surely there is no authority, no sovereignty. However, when everything is neat and orderly, this is an indication that there is authority, there is sovereignty. Although the universe has been corrupted, it still maintains a certain degree of orderliness; everything is on track and in good order. This speaks of God's sovereign authority. Where there is order, there is authority. Likewise, the most crucial matter in the Body of Christ is to be in order. When there is order, there is coordination and no confusion. The matter of order is a matter of authority.

THE BODY NEEDING TO BE UPRIGHT

A body is no longer a body if there is no order; it will fall apart and will no longer be able to stand. A person is strongest when he is in an upright

position. He is most powerful when standing. Standing is an expression of being upright. When a person is sitting, he is not fully upright; when he lies down, he is even less so and is actually horizontal. When a human body falls apart, it is no longer upright but flat, and all the parts are useless. Hence, a body is in confusion and falls apart once it loses its order; it becomes flat and useless. A flat body is not only without power but also loses its functions. A strong body is upright. An upright body depends on order, and this order is authority.

Outwardly, it seems as if the human body is holding up the head; however, the body cannot stand if the head is removed. This is marvelous. Thus, it is hard for us to determine whether the body holds up the head or the head maintains the body. If we cut off an arm from the body, the body can still stand, but if the head is cut off, the body can no longer stand. Therefore, the body subsists in the head. If the head loses its position and order, there is no authority in the body; the body will be paralyzed and will collapse, becoming useless. This is true not only in the relationship between the body and the head; it is even more so in the relationship among all the members of a body. We cannot place the feet on top of the shoulders; neither can we place the shoulders under the feet. If someone tries to do this, his body will fall apart. Therefore, from the example of the human body we can clearly see that there is the matter of order in the Body of Christ.

SUBMITTING TO THE AUTHORITY OF THE HEAD

All believers must submit to the Head and be under the authority of the Head. Ephesians 4:15 and Colossians 2:19 say that we need to hold to the Head; this implies authority. Our holding to the Head and growing up into the Head in all things is our submission to the authority of the Head. If these two verses did not imply authority, there would be no need to speak of the Head; it would be sufficient to speak only of Christ. However, these two verses do not speak of Christ only in relation to life; they speak of the Head in relation to authority. Being the Head is a matter of authority. We need to grow up into Christ and also into the Head. Our growing up into the Head is our submission to the authority of the Head, allowing the Head to have authority in every matter.

Some saints may allow the Lord to have authority in their service to God and to the Lord but not in their finances and family life. They may allow the

Lord to have authority over one matter but not over another. Although we are merely human, to God we are troublesome and complicated; it is not easy for us to yield the authority to the Lord in every matter. We may allow the Lord to rule over our clothing but not over our shoes. As we advance in the Lord, we will grow up into the Head in all things and allow Him to have the authority. If we would know Him as the Head, we must know His authority. If there are any matters that are not under His authority, any matters where He is not the Head, this indicates that we are holding the authority in our own hands and that we have enthroned ourselves. We will have problems in the Body of Christ if we do not submit to the Head in all things. If we do not keep the proper order in our relationship with the Head, if the question of our position before the Head is not fully resolved, we will have problems in the Body.

Whether our coordination with other members in the Body is harmonious depends on our position before the Head. Do we submit ourselves to His authority, or do we stand on equal ground with Him? Do we completely or partially submit ourselves to Him? As soon as we have problems with the Head, we have problems in the Body. We should not expect to have a good relationship with the members when we do not have a good relationship with the Head. Only when our relationship with the Head is proper can our relationship with the other members also be proper. Ephesians 4:15 says that we "grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ." This implies authority. We need to know the Head, honor the Head, allow Him to be the Lord, and allow Him to have the authority and ground in us. If this is unresolved, we will have problems with the Body. Even if we are at peace with one another in the church, there will still be complaints and problems within us.

THE MEMBERS BEING FITLY JOINED TO ONE ANOTHER

We must not only submit ourselves to the authority of the Head; we must also maintain a proper relationship with all the members. Every member in the Body is under the control and authority of the Head. As such, no member should be isolated; rather, each member should be related to the other members. Ephesians 4:16 says, "Out from whom all the Body, being joined together." Let us consider how every part of the Body can be fitly joined together. From our own body we can see that all the members are perfectly joined together. For example, our face is truly God's masterpiece; a cow's head, a horse's head, and even a flower are not as beautiful as the human face.

It would be horrible to switch the position of the eyebrows with the position of the eyes and to switch the location of the ears with the mouth. This shows that the order and arrangement made by God cannot be altered by man. Any attempt to alter God's order is the flesh, the work of man, and is ugly.

Those who serve the Lord but strive with one another in a local church can be compared to a nose trying to be above the eyebrows or the eyes trying to be on top of the head. This is not beautiful. Under God's sovereign authority and arrangement some saints are above us, but envy and strife may cause us to try to be on top. This is ugly, and it proves that we have not seen the order in the Body and the beauty of this order. Nevertheless, we should never suppose that this order relates to being high or low, great or small, among the members of the Body. In the body there is no distinction between the eyes and the nose or the ears and the mouth; neither is there higher or lower nor greater or smaller. They all keep the position and order assigned by God under His arrangement.

COORDINATION DEPENDING ON ORDER

The most serious problem in the church is not knowing God's order and not knowing that coordination depends upon order. When the saints do not function, there is no coordination; when the saints function beyond their limit, there are problems in the coordination. Coordination depends on order. Without order the coordination will collapse; without order the Body will fall apart. The coordination in the Body depends entirely on order. This order is not man's work nor man's arrangement; order comes from being fitly joined and knit together (Eph. 4:16; 2:21; Col. 2:19). The saints who are too close and intimate need to maintain some distance from each other. Other brothers and sisters are too distant from others, too polite to others, and never able to connect with others. There is no possibility of coordination with these saints. They are afraid that too much contact with others will give rise to problems, not realizing that maintaining a distance from others does not make them "transcendent" Christians. As a result, they have problems in coordination and have caused the Body to be divided.

Some saints cannot coordinate with others even though they have been saved for many years; they are like outsiders and act as if they are guests in the church. Other saints serve in the church and gradually bear more burdens because they love and pursue the Lord. Although these saints are under the Lord's arrangement and commission, they still need to learn to coordinate

with others and be fitly joined together when all the saints come together to serve.

Our ability to be fitly joined with other members is a crucial matter; it is dependent on our submission to authority in others and their submission to authority in us. First of all, we must submit to the authority of the Head. Then we need to know whose authority we should submit to and who is in authority over us. Although we know that we should submit to the authority of the elders and the older saints, sometimes nothing can force us to submit to them. Our ability to submit to authority depends on the lessons we have learned from the Lord's hand by being torn down by the Lord. If we have not learned many lessons of being broken by the Lord, authority and order are out of the question, and coordination is basically nonexistent. Any "guests" in the church are not in the coordination of the Body. Although our salvation has placed us in the Body, according to our real situation, we live outside of the Body.

NEEDING TO BE DEALT WITH AND BUILT UP BY GOD

A believer who can coordinate with others in the church is one who has been dealt with by the Lord's hand and has learned many lessons before the Lord. If we desire to coordinate with others in the church and be fitly joined together with the saints in the Body, we need to be built up in the Lord's hand. Ephesians 2:21-22 says, "In whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit." These verses indicate that we are a building. All the building being fitted together is the coordination. Pieces of stone need to be hammered and dealt with before they can be joined properly; otherwise, they are merely a pile of stones.

In the local church, are the saints like a pile of stones without the building, or have they been dealt with by God to become stones that can be joined to one another? Without the dealing and the building, coordination is out of the question. If we cannot be fitly joined together, order and authority are out of the question. When a person has been built by God, having been dealt with and broken by God, he will be able to stand in a proper position in the order of the Body to be joined together with the other members. Therefore, genuine coordination is the result of building and breaking; it is the issue of being dealt with by the Lord's hand.

It is not possible to coordinate with the brothers and sisters in our natural being. Our coordination in the Body is not of ourselves but of God's hand and of His building. Our natural man is raw and wild; anyone who is raw and wild cannot coordinate with others. Those who can coordinate with others are those who have been tried, subdued, broken, and dealt with by God. They have at least been worked on by God's hand. Anyone who has not been worked on by God's hand cannot coordinate with others. It is not that we can fitly join ourselves together with others; rather, when we have been dealt with, broken, and built up by God's hand, we can be placed together in coordination. This is God's sovereign authority.

Everyone, even the elders and deacons, needs to be dealt with, torn down, and built up by God's hand. Only then can we coordinate before God. It seems that in God's arrangement, He rarely puts two persons with similar dispositions together. On the contrary, He often puts two incompatible people together, letting them rub against and perfect each other. A teacher who is unable to get along with other teachers can transfer to another school, but if we are unable to get along with the other believers, we cannot transfer to another locality. The church is a place where people are dealt with the most; because everything is from God's hand, we must accept everything whether we can bear it or not.

If we are a human, we must be a Christian, and if we are a Christian, we have no choice but to be in the church. Thus, being a Christian is not without its own difficulties. Consequently, we may desire to be comfortable and seek our own "freedom." If a local church does not fit our taste, we may think we should simply move to another place. However, even if we move to another locality, we will not feel peaceful in the long run. In the beginning we may feel that everything is fresh and suitable simply because we are in a new place. However, after two or three months we will be unable to endure it, because we have not passed through God's hand and have not been broken.

THE PROBLEM BEING WITH MAN HIMSELF

We should not expect the church to change; rather, there should be a change in us. Outward changes are useless; we need an inward change in our being. The Head needs to work in us; He desires to deal with us. Without being dealt with, we cannot coordinate with others. Many young saints, thinking that the church in their locality is not good, continually desire to

move to another locality. But when they move, they realize that their previous locality was better. The problem is not outside but inside, that is, in themselves.

Although we are saved, we are still intact, whole, and unbroken. If we are "round," we want our church to be "round" so that we can fit in perfectly; however, this is impossible. If we are "round," God would put us in a "square" church; if we are "square," the church will be a "round" church. This is God's work of breaking and dealing. Therefore, the co-workers and responsible brothers coordinating in a church must pass through the dealing of the cross.

The coordination in the church needs to go through breaking and dealing; only a person who has been broken and dealt with knows his place and order in the Body. He knows what God's arrangement is in the Body, and he knows that he is under the Head and also under certain members. A person who has learned this lesson is broken by God and knows his place and order in the Body. He would not dare to compete or even have the thought of competing. He would confess as sin any thought to surpass those who are placed before him. He has the Spirit and life, or we may say he has the ruling of authority in him that causes him to know his place and order in the Body. Under God's arrangement he submits to the members, as a hand submits to the shoulder and the arm.

SUBMITTING TO THE AUTHORITY OF THE MEMBERS

It is very simple to know which brother or sister is in authority; we do not need others to tell us. If, after arguing with a certain brother or sister, you immediately sense that the fellowship in you has stopped, the anointing is gone, and you are unsure of yourself, then that person is your authority. We should never take the authority in the church as something similar to the authority in the world. The authority in the church is spiritual and of life. Some people can criticize and slander the apostles freely and still be at peace and at ease, but those who have received grace, after speaking a few words of criticism or judgment, can no longer pray. Therefore, this is not a matter of man's work; it is entirely an inward matter. To determine whether a person is the authority placed by God over us, we merely need to disobey or oppose him a little, and we will know. If there is any restlessness and uneasiness in us that frustrates our prayer, we have touched authority—that person is our authority to whom we should submit. We do not submit simply because he is an elder, a

co-worker, or because he is older. Rather, our submission is altogether a matter of coordination and a matter of order.

If we can submit to an older saint, we should also be able to submit to the saints around us. God's arrangement often places us under the saints around us. We are all happy and willing to be in subjection to the Lord Jesus; however, it is not easy for us to be in subjection to the brothers and sisters around us. We may think that we would fully submit to the brother next to us if he were the apostle Paul, but since he is the same as we are, it is very difficult for us to submit to him. However, as soon as we refuse to submit, our prayer is not sweet, our fellowship is not clear, and everything within us is in a state of confusion. Hence, if we cannot submit to the member next to us, we cannot submit to the Head. Many times, the members placed next to us are the same as we are, yet they often are our authority. This is a real test to us.

Some people say, "It is too troublesome to be a Christian. When there are no Christians around us, we feel lonely, but when there are Christians around us, it is troublesome because they are a bondage to us." This is a wrong concept. The brothers and sisters do not bind us; neither are they a problem to us. Rather, our problems are because we do not want to be broken, and we are hardened toward the Lord, not submitting to His authority. If we do not submit to the authority of the brother placed next to us by God, we cannot get through with the Head and will be unable to pray. We must realize that if we offend the authority in the members, we offend the authority of the Head. Every member has the authority of the Head. We should realize that those who are more advanced and deeper in the Lord than we are have a measure of authority that is of the Head.

This is not a matter of teaching. As long as we live in the divine life, we will spontaneously have these experiences. Our coordination is not strong because we do not sufficiently know the authority of the Head. There are often difficulties in our coordination because we offend this authority. We may replace our submission to authority with our patience and tolerance, or our submission to authority may be full of a worldly flavor. This indicates that we are not submitting to the authority of the Head by accepting His breaking. We need to submit to the authority of the Head and also to the authority in the brothers and sisters. If we realize God's arrangement and the authority of the Head in the brothers and sisters, and if we would submit to the Head and to

the brothers and sisters, we will spontaneously be fitly joined and knit together with others to have a strong coordination.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE BODY

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 12:26-27; 2 Cor. 11:28-29

In the coordination of the Body there are four important points: we need to be joined to the Head, we need to carry out our function, we should not step beyond our limit, and we need to submit to authority. These four points are closely related to coordination. Whenever we speak concerning the coordination of the Body, we must pay attention to these four points. If we neglect any of these points, we will have a problem in coordination.

WHAT IS THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE BODY?

Let us now consider what is meant by the consciousness of the Body. Although we cannot find this exact expression in the Bible, according to the teaching of the Bible and our experience, there is something called the consciousness of the Body. First Corinthians 12:26-27 says, "Whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the Body of Christ, and members individually." In addition, 2 Corinthians 11:28-29 says, "Apart from the things which have not been mentioned, there is this: the crowd of cares pressing upon me daily, the anxious concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is stumbled, and I myself do not burn?" These two references cover a scope that is both great and small. The smaller scope is presented in 1 Corinthians 12, which speaks of all the members suffering with a member who is suffering and of all the members rejoicing with a member who is glorified (v. 26). This clearly refers to the sense in the Body. This is easy to understand if we consider our body. If someone hits us on our ear, our ear feels pain, and the other members of our body also feel pain. It is not possible for only the ear to feel pain while the other members have no feeling. This is very easy to understand.

The greater scope is presented in 2 Corinthians 11:28-29, in which the apostle Paul speaks of his anxious concern for all the churches. His anxiety and even his weakness were a matter of consciousness. When a church was weak, the apostle felt it; when a church had problems, the apostle became

anxious. The apostle felt this way concerning the churches and concerning the individual saints. He bore all the churches and had feelings for everything that happened to the churches.

The Epistles written by the apostle Paul, including Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and those addressed to individuals, show his keen sense toward the churches and the saints. Since he bore the churches and the saints, he could sense matters related to the churches and the saints. This is the consciousness of the Body. Second Corinthians 11 shows a great and broad consciousness; 1 Corinthians 12 shows a small and focused consciousness.

Concerning the consciousness of the Body, we need to begin with the sense of the spiritual life. We have spoken much concerning the sense of the spiritual life. We pointed out that the divine life within us has feelings, and our regenerated spirit also has feelings. This is based on Romans 8:6: "The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace." This verse clearly speaks of an inner sense. It is very simple to know whether a person's mind is set on the spirit; we simply need to ask him if he has peace within. This peace is a matter of sense. If a person sets his mind on the spirit, he will sense ease, comfort, and peace within.

The divine life is truly a matter of sense. A person who sets his mind on the spirit will sense satisfaction, strength, brightness, freshness, and liveliness. This means that his inward being touches life. Whenever we set our mind on the flesh, we become dry and darkened within; this is death. Therefore, this is truly a matter of sense.

The divine life and our regenerated spirit have consciousness. Every form of life has a consciousness; anything without consciousness is not a living organism and has no life. As long as it is a living organism, the life in it has consciousness. The higher the life, the keener is its sense. We, the regenerated ones, have received the life of God, which has the keenest and richest feelings. Moreover, our regenerated spirit is not only mingled with the life of God; it is also indwelt by the Spirit of God. Our regenerated spirit is the three-in-one spirit referred to in Romans 8—our spirit mingled with God's life and with God's Spirit. God's Spirit enters into our spirit with God's life and mingles with our spirit. Therefore, our spirit is not only a living spirit but also a strong and enriched spirit.

The sense of life in our spirit, or the spiritual sense, is keen and rich. This spiritual sense of life within us is often the standard for our spiritual actions and the test of our spiritual living. It tests whether we are living in the Lord or in ourselves and whether our mind is set on the spirit or on the flesh. There is no need for someone to tell us, because we have a sense within. We do not need others to tell us whether our speaking for the Lord is according to the spirit or according to the flesh; the sense in us will let us know. This sense can be compared to a thermometer. When we test ourselves with this thermometer, we will know where we are and our true condition.

Whenever we are calm and turn to our spirit to touch the sense within, allowing this inner feeling to touch our being, we will know where we are—whether we are according to the flesh or according to the spirit. This sense is crucial to our spiritual experience. Our spiritual progress depends on this spiritual sense. We cannot follow the Lord yet ignore this spiritual sense. This spiritual sense is different from the feelings in our soul. We should not take care of the human feelings in our soul; these feelings will confuse us. We need to take care of the sense of the divine life in our spirit rather than the human feelings in our soul.

We must care for the inner sense of life so that we can have peace within. If the inner sense of peace is absent, we have a problem. This is not something outward; it is inward. In everything we do, whether preaching the gospel, ministering the word, or doing good works, we should not be void of the inner sense of peace deep within us. Some saints have no peace; with their own effort they try to gain a sense of peace. Some people even try to fill themselves with different things in order to feel peaceful. However, all their efforts are vain and useless.

For example, a person with no peace may use excuses to make himself feel peaceful, even though he has a problem inwardly. This kind of effort is useless; it will not work, because the inner peace is something spontaneous. Anything that is of life does not require human effort, human help, or deliberate determination. We cannot produce peace; we should feel at peace naturally. This is the peace in Romans 8:6. The peace within some saints needs a helping hand. They are not at peace, but they use their reasons to try to give themselves peace. Their reasoning may work for two days or even two months, but it will not work forever. In the end there will be no peace. We have all had experiences related to this spiritual sense. We must take care of this sense.

CULTIVATING A CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE BODY

We need to cultivate a consciousness of the Body by fellowshipping more with the Lord. Our inner sense will spontaneously be developed as we fellowship more with the Lord. Furthermore, if we add obedience to this fellowship, our inner sense will become keener and richer. When a feeling comes, we should closely follow that feeling. If the inner sense desires us to stop, we should stop; if it desires us to go, we should go. In this way our inner sense will become keen and enriched. Our inner sense is developed through our fellowship with the Lord and our obedience to Him. Therefore, we should always exercise this sense. This means that we must always use this sense when we touch spiritual matters.

For example, when the church is going to preach the gospel, in addition to moving with the brothers and sisters, we should take a further step and check the matter of our participation in this gospel preaching with our inner sense. In fellowship with the Lord, we need to ask how much ground He has in us and how much spiritual element is in our preaching of the gospel. We need to touch the matter of preaching the gospel with the sense in our spirit. Likewise, when we meet a brother, we should not merely contact him outwardly; we need to touch him in our spirit. We need to see whether he is speaking to us according to his natural man, his mind, or his spirit. We need to exercise the sense in our spirit to gain a sense of whether this person is humble and pure before God and whether God's authority is in him. We need to touch these matters with our spirit. These are matters related to the exercise of our inner sense.

Regrettably, many brothers and sisters have never been trained to use their inner sense. For example, I may be a person who is interested in building houses. Even though I may have never studied civil engineering or contracted a project, I am interested in building houses. For this reason I am always interested in knowing how a building was constructed, paying special attention to the doors, the windows, the corners joining the walls, and the beams. I would also inquire if it was built with concrete and steel or wood and brick. Even though I do not have formal schooling in this field, my observation is quite accurate since I have been training my eyes in this matter. Similarly, this inner sense depends on our being trained.

As a further example, a person who is trained can give the accurate dimensions of a building simply by looking at it. He may say that the building is one hundred feet long and fifty feet wide. But an untrained sister might say that the same building could be as long as two hundred feet or as short as sixty feet. Sometimes we speak in this way; we either overestimate or underestimate because we have not been sufficiently trained.

Exercising our inner sense is like exercising our insight. Some people have keen insight; if we put gold in their hands, they can immediately say how much of it is pure gold. This is because they have been trained. Some businessmen are excellent in this matter. Suppose three items of the same product are placed in our hands: one is made in Hong Kong, one is made in America, and one is made in Japan as an imitation of the one made in America. They look the same to us. But those who are trained do not need to look; they can tell which one is made in Japan, which one is made in Hong Kong, and which one is made in America simply by touching the items. We cannot distinguish the difference, but they can distinguish clearly because they have been trained.

A brother has a son-in-law who is in the navy. Once he and his son-in-law were at the seashore watching for anything appearing on the horizon. Although the brother did not see anything, his son-in-law said that a naval ship was approaching. Since his son-in-law was trained in the navy, his sight was keen, and he could see what ordinary people could not see. After a while a naval ship appeared. This is a matter of exercise. Similarly, spiritual sense depends on exercise. Some brothers and sisters have never exercised their inner sense, never cared for it, and never cultivated it. Therefore, they are always confused regarding the Lord's work, others, and even themselves. They do not care whether a word should be spoken or whether there is inward peace; they simply speak as they please. Such people are very rough and never care for their inner sense. Those who ignore their inner sense have not been trained and have not been opened; moreover, they do not have enough heart for God. A person who loves God and cares for the things of God has a heart for God and is careful, always being conscious of the things in God's house as well as the situation of the brothers and sisters.

EXERCISING TO HAVE A KEEN SENSE

Everyone who serves God, everyone who serves sinners, and everyone who administrates the church must exercise to have a keen sense. If we do not exercise, we will not be of much spiritual use. We must admit that often the help we render to people is in faith; we do not need to be so clear. In fact, our being clear concerning the condition of people actually hinders us from helping them. At the same time, we cannot be foolish. When people come to us, we should be able to discern their condition in three to five sentences. Even if they describe a certain condition, our spirit should be able to sense their real situation. This kind of exercise is necessary. Although we are outwardly listening when we contact a brother or sister, inwardly we should be exercised to sense their true situation.

Several brothers and I were once fellowshipping with another brother who said that his wife was very good and that he was satisfied with their relationship. When we checked with each other later, two of us felt that this brother was happy and did not have any problems with his wife. However, my spirit sensed that there were problems. If you asked me how I knew, I would have been unable to answer. This can be compared with asking how we know that the food we are eating tastes good. This cannot be taught. We can only say that it tastes good.

Our inner sense is usually accurate. This is the reason some people say that you can fool a servant of the Lord in practical affairs, but you cannot fool him in spiritual matters. Spiritual matters are real; they cannot be faked, just as life cannot be faked. Everything else can be faked but not life; no one can pretend that he has a certain kind of life if he does not have that life. Life simply cannot be faked. A person's spiritual condition before God is what it is; he cannot pretend to have a different condition. A person with a trained, spiritual sense has a keen sense. When people speak a few sentences with him, he can immediately discern their inward condition. They may speak concerning the east, but he knows that they actually mean west. They may say there is no problem, but he knows there is a problem. He knows man's real condition, and no one can fool him; people can fool him in practical affairs but not in spiritual things. This is a matter of the inward sense. This sense originates from the Spirit of God and from God's life in our spirit. This sense is called the sense of life, and it is also the consciousness of the Body.

The overflow of the life of Christ is the expression of the Body of Christ. The consciousness of the Body is the sense of Christ's life within us. If we use this

sense often, it will cause us not only to sense our own condition before the Lord but cause us also to sense others' condition before the Lord and to be conscious of matters related to the Body. If we constantly exercise, cultivate, train, and use this sense, it will enable us to detect the problems in the Body.

In a newly saved believer this sense may enable him to sense only his condition and situation before God. If he pays attention to this sense, cultivating it by fellowshipping with God and obeying the inner sense, it will develop. He will be able to sense his spiritual condition and the spiritual condition of the brothers and sisters. This sense will gradually develop and increase to enable him to sense the condition of the meeting, the service in the church, and the Lord's work. This means that this sense has been enlarged, beginning with himself and then reaching to others, the church, and the church meetings.

If we would pay attention to spiritual things, pursuing and learning gradually, we will have feelings when we come to the meetings. We will have a sense of whether a brother is choosing a hymn according to himself and whether a brother or sister is praying according to the Spirit. We will have a sense of whether a meeting has started and is proceeding according to the Spirit and whether the progression of the meeting has been interrupted and is in need of being recovered. Our sense will also be enlarged to the point of sensing whether a work carried out by the Lord's workers is in the Spirit, that is, whether the Lord's presence is with them. Moreover, we will also be able to sense whether the situation in the church, the responsibility of the elders, and the service of the deacons is spiritual and in life. The sense that has been enlarged in us will enable us to properly touch all these matters. This sense is the sense of the Body.

If we use and exercise this sense often and if we love God and care for the church, this sense will become the sense of the Body. We will sense when our fellow members are in difficulty, when they are weak, happy, or victorious in the Lord, and we will share the same feelings with them. We sense their burden so that their burden becomes ours, we sense their experience so that their experience becomes ours, and we sense their difficulties so that their difficulties become ours. In this way we will be in one Body.

BEARING THE BURDEN TOGETHER IN THE BODY

When we exercise the consciousness of the Body, a good situation will develop. A member who is in a difficult situation will not bear his burden alone, but his fellow members will bear the burden with him. We will no longer pray for someone simply because he asks us; rather, we will pray out of the burden in the Body. Sometimes one person's prayer is not enough; there is truly the need for the prayer of the Body, but this prayer is still spontaneous. For example, a person who is Body conscious can sense that a certain brother has a difficulty and a certain sister has a heavy burden. The sense of the brother's difficulty is communicated into him, and the sense of the sister's being pressed is also added to his spirit. He shares the same feeling with the brother and sister. This feeling presses him and forces him to go before the Lord to pray for the brother and sister. This intercession is an intercession that comes from the sense of the Body. There is such a thing in the Body that proves whether we are weak or strong inwardly and also proves the extent of our concern for the children of God, the members of Christ.

If we look at ourselves from this perspective, we must admit that our service is weak because our sense of the Body is weak and poor. We may see a brother who is pressed, yet the others who live with him have no feeling of being pressed. A sister might not be able to get through a crisis, yet none of those who live with her have the same feeling. This means that we are not normal in the Body; we have not yet touched the reality of the Body. This shows that the element of the Body is not adequate among us, and we do not live in Christ enough when we are together. Therefore, although we may be living together, we may not be conscious of others' burdens. One may be fasting due to a spiritual crisis, yet others can be eating peacefully. This is an abnormal situation. This shows that there is a real problem, a great shortage, among us. We cannot match the sense of the Body; we lack the sense of the Body.

If our condition is proper, we should have a feeling of being troubled and pressed when a brother who serves with us is unable to get through a spiritual crisis or solve a spiritual problem. If a member is suffering, his fellow members should suffer with him. If he is suffering and we are not suffering, there is a problem with us. If our condition is normal, it should be that as he is suffering, we are also suffering; when he has a burden, we also have a burden; and when he is in a crisis, we are also in a crisis. When his crisis is over and his spirit is released, our spirit will be released; when he is happy, we will be happy. We will have the same feeling. This is the Body. It is not

possible for the foot to feel comfortable while the hand is suffering; this can never happen. When a member of the Body suffers, all the members feel uncomfortable. It should also be like this when we serve together. When a person has a difficulty, everyone else should feel the same way; when a person rejoices, everyone also rejoices together. This is the normal condition.

If someone hits my hand, all the other members of my body can sense it. If they cannot sense it, something is wrong with my body. Many times when something is wrong among us, we still care only about ourselves, loving our particular work, guarding our attachments to the world, and tolerating the sins within us. Because of our self-consideration, our inner sense is suppressed, and even if we had a sense, we would ignore it. We often ignore the sense of the Body when it comes to us and forcibly suppress it, because we are busy taking care of our own situations. This condition is altogether abnormal.

We should not consider that our condition is normal simply because we do not quarrel much. We can still be quite short and lacking on the positive side. Many saints among us are in the midst of tremendous hardships, yet those who serve with them have no feeling for them, and no one bears the burden with them. We do not pray too much for them, and when we do pray, our prayers are superficial. We do not touch the burden, and we do not have a feeling of pain within. We do not have a sense of being troubled and pressed. This shows that our sense of being in the Body is not adequate and that we still remain in ourselves.

THE SENSE OF THE BODY BEING UNIVERSAL

The sense of the Body is very mysterious. If we allow this sense to be enlarged, it will become a universal sense. Strictly speaking, this sense is already universal, but when it comes into us, we limit it. Christ's life is universal, and God's Spirit is also universal. Once this life and Spirit enter into us, we should have a universal sense. This sense is great and far-reaching, but when it enters into us, we limit it. At our salvation this sense caused us to realize our own condition. However, because we have not been broken very much, this sense cannot come out of us. Gradually, according to the lessons we learn, the more we are broken, the more this sense will increase so that we can begin to care for others, for the church, and for the Lord's work. The more we experience the Lord's breaking, learning the deeper lessons and being

delivered from ourselves, the more we will discover that this sense is universal.

A British brother once told a story of coming to America to preach the gospel. As he was preparing to preach the word, he felt very uneasy, but because he did not know why, he tried to suppress this feeling. He tried to resist it through prayer and by the Lord's blood, yet all his efforts failed. As he restlessly paced back and forth inside his hotel room, he suddenly had a sense and asked the Lord what it meant. He became clear within and prayed, "I will apply, by faith, the prayer of the brothers in London on my behalf." As soon as he drew on the efficacy of that prayer, the uneasiness in him vanished. When he returned, he related this incident to the brothers in London, and they asked him when this event happened. According to the five-hour time zone difference between the east coast of America and London, the brothers in London told him that they sensed that he was having difficulty at the same time that he was being pressed and troubled. So they prayed for him in London. Although he was on one side of the Atlantic Ocean and the brothers in London were on the other side, they were connected by an inner sense and were able to know what he was experiencing in a distant place. Although outwardly no one could clearly explain the situation, they all sensed the same thing in the spirit. How sweet this is!

In 1900, when the Boxer Rebellion took place, many Western missionaries were persecuted and martyred for the Lord. Transportation and communication were not as advanced as they are today. When the persecution took place in China, there was a group of people in London who lived before the Lord and prayed whenever they met together. At that particular point they felt oppressed in their spirit, and they sensed it was related to an unusual matter. This sense of oppression was not ordinary but extraordinary. Although they could not explain this according to their spiritual experience, they sensed that the Body of Christ, which is His church, was troubled on earth. So they prayed to release the burden within them before the Lord. After a period of time, when the news from China reached Europe, they became clear. They calculated the date and the time and discovered that the time when they began to sense the strong oppression in their spirit was exactly when the Chinese Boxers began massacring the Western missionaries. Although they were far away in another land, in their spirit they sensed the persecution faced by the believers in China. This is the sense of the Body; this is a universal matter. Therefore, we should never

despise the life that we have received. The sense in this life is a great matter. Regrettably, this sense has been restricted in us because of our own feelings and views. These have become a restriction within us.

For the time being, let us not even talk about the Eastern Hemisphere and the Western Hemisphere or even Europe and Asia. Let us merely take Taiwan as an example. The church in Tainan often has no feeling concerning what happens to the church in Taichung, and the church in Taipei has no feeling regarding what happens to the church in Tainan. When the church in Taichung receives a blessing, there is no rejoicing in the church in Tainan. When the church in Tainan has a revival, the church in Taipei is indifferent and is even a little jealous. Furthermore, the saints in Tainan may say, "Our revival this time is stronger than the revival in Taichung." Then the saints in Taichung become unhappy when they hear this, saying, "Wait and see. In half a year the church in Taichung will be stronger than the church in Tainan." Sometimes the saints may not say these words, but there are these feelings. Thus, there is no Body, and the sense of the Body is diminished.

Have we ever rejoiced for a local church other than our own? We are often shut up within ourselves, and when we see another local church being blessed, we do not rejoice with them. Even if we do rejoice, our rejoicing is stingy, not generous. After the saints in Keelung learn that Tamsui has a nice meeting hall, they may say, "Praise the Lord," but they are not that happy. Even though the church in Sanchung has built a nice meeting hall, the brothers in other places do not feel very happy. Such things happen among us. This shows that we are not in the Body, and we do not have a sense of the Body experientially.

If we have the sense of the Body, whenever any member in the Body of Christ is blessed, regardless of whether it is our locality, we will be very happy because another church has been blessed. Regardless of whether it is our local church, as long as the saints have hardships or have been blessed, we will identify with them and feel the same hardship or blessing. If we can reach this stage, the sense within us toward the Body will be rich. It will no longer be local but extra-local. The supply to the Body of Christ from this kind of sense is indescribable.

If we can bring the universal riches to the Body of Christ, our usefulness to the Body is universal. Thus, we may serve in one place, but the effect is

universal, not merely local. We are often shut up in ourselves. Even when we come out of ourselves, we remain in our locality and do not allow the Lord to enlarge us. The Body is universal, and the life within us is universal. The Spirit within us is universal, the sense within us is universal, and the supply is universal. It does not matter what locality is blessed. If the Body of Christ is blessed, we rejoice, and if the Body of Christ has a problem, we feel the pain. Like Paul, we should be able to say, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is stumbled, and I myself do not burn?" (2 Cor. 11:29). We feel this way because the anxious concern for all the churches is upon us. This is not merely a matter of an individual member; it is a matter of all the churches. This sense will save us and cause the Body to be supplied.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

TEARING DOWN PRODUCING FUNCTION IN THE BODY

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: How should a believer who has a harmonious marriage, obedient children, and an environment with no suffering or sickness pray if he wants to be broken?

Answer: We Christians should accept God's breaking when it comes, but we should not ask for the breaking. Those who are in the Lord's hand are not likely to have satisfactory circumstances. If one is satisfied with everything, he is probably an Esau, not a Jacob. If a brother's or sister's environment is very smooth, he or she should worship the Lord and be thankful. However, we should not trust that this smooth environment will last very long. Nonetheless, we do not need to ask for a terrible environment. The thought of asking for a terrible environment often comes from the devil, not from God. We should accept the environment measured to us by the Lord, but we should not ask for it. Similarly, we should accept His breaking but not ask for it.

Question: Some brothers and sisters are frequently sick, suffer persecution and affliction in their environment, and experience difficulties in their families. How should they respond?

Answer: Simply speaking, there are two sides. On the one hand, they need to submit under the mighty hand of God; on the other hand, they should ask the Lord to take the sufferings away if they are not of Him. Do not think that the Lord delights in making us suffer. We are willing to submit under the Lord's hand, but we do not need any suffering that is not of the Lord. Suffering does not necessarily equal being broken. We should seek the Lord when we are suffering and ask Him why this suffering has come upon us, or what particular point within us this suffering is touching. If we are clear concerning what needs to be dealt with within us, we will accept His dealing in that point. This, however, is still a doctrinal explanation.

In experience, many people are perplexed when they pass through affliction. If they were clear, the affliction would not be very useful. Most of the time, people do not realize the purpose of affliction until after the affliction; they are not clear while they are passing through affliction. It is quite normal for them to be unclear.

Question: Is someone who always condemns his thoughts, whether good or bad, accepting God's breaking?

Answer: This does not necessarily mean that he is accepting the breaking. If a person condemns himself because he feels to do so before the Lord, he should do so. However, this does not mean that he is being broken. Nevertheless, it is easier for such a one to be broken. Similarly, it is easier for a person who condemns himself, even though he does not have the feeling from the Lord to do so, to be broken. A person who often condemns himself, rather than justifying himself, often does not need to be broken through outward circumstances. A person needs to be broken through many outward environments because he does not condemn himself or because he overly justifies himself, overly depending on his skill and ability. A person who justifies himself and relies on his skill and ability forces God to use the environment to deal with him. If a person always condemns himself and rejects his skill and ability, he will spare himself from many troubles and many dealings in the outward environment.

Question: We know that in order to have good coordination, we need to be torn down and built up. However, if we have not been torn down or built up much, how can we have good coordination?

Answer: Tearing down and building up are daily and regular, not instantaneous, matters. If we have not been torn down and built up in a regular way, we cannot expect to have been torn down and built up when it is time to coordinate. If we have not been torn down and built up, how can we have good coordination? We cannot force ourselves. If there is coordination, there is; if there is not, there is not, even if we try to force ourselves. Coordination is a spontaneous matter of life; we cannot force ourselves to coordinate, nor can we pretend to coordinate. The degree of our coordination is determined by the degree of our being daily torn down and built up in God's hand. Without the tearing down and building up, there is no real coordination, even if we force ourselves to work something out. In response to

this, some have said, “If we do not have the regular tearing down and building up, we should not try to coordinate with one another.” However, even this “not trying” to coordinate with one another is unnatural. It is man’s work; therefore, it is wrong. The extent to which we have been torn down and built up is the extent to which we can coordinate. We should not purposely try to coordinate or purposely try to avoid coordination; rather, we should act according to what is spiritually spontaneous.

Question: Does a person need to have a special calling or confirmation to work for the Lord?

Answer: This is a practical and also important question. In principle, everyone who is led by the Lord to serve Him should be clear concerning his calling. However, we would need a considerable amount of time to explain how to be clear concerning the Lord’s calling. In the 1952 issue of *The Ministry of the Word* in Chinese, there is a message that specifically speaks of the matter of calling (vol. 1). That message is very thorough. Concerning this question, the brothers and sisters should look at that issue of *The Ministry of the Word*.

Question: How do we know God’s will concerning our marriage and our occupation?

Answer: This is also a difficult question. Knowing God’s will depends on the lessons that we have learned before the Lord, the degree of our consecration, and the condition of our consecration. For example, our understanding of different things is dependent on our level of life, our human maturity. It is difficult for a five-year-old child to understand the things of one who is fifteen years old, and it is also not easy for a twenty-year-old man to understand the things of someone who is sixty years old. Our understanding depends entirely on our level of life. Today you may not know the Lord’s will, but as you grow in the divine life, you will be able to know His will concerning certain things. However, you will not know His will concerning many other things until you have further growth.

Therefore, to know God’s will is not a matter of methods but of the level of life. Some methods may be very useful to certain ones but useless to you and me, because we are short in our level of life. A microscope is very useful in the hands of a thirty-year-old doctor, but it is useless in the hands of a three or

five-year-old child. A microscope is a good tool, but only someone who is trained and has a certain level of life knows how to use it. In the same way, only a person with some level of life is able to know God's will. If we are immature in life and have a low degree of spirituality, it is difficult for us to know God's will. Even if we know God's will, our knowledge will be limited. In order to know God's will, we need to consecrate ourselves to the Lord. We may be advanced in years, but if we are indifferent, having little understanding of spiritual matters and almost no heart for the service of the church, it will be difficult for us to know God's will. To know God's will requires us to turn our heart to God and stand on God's side. The extent of our consecration is the extent of our knowing God's will, and the condition of our consecration determines our ability to know God's will.

If a person desires to know God's will concerning his marriage, he needs to have an absolute consecration. If a young person is not consecrated absolutely in the matter of marriage, it will not be easy for him to know God's will. If his consecration is not thorough, his choosing will be according to his preference. Simply speaking, if we desire to know God's will, we must pursue the growth in life, and we need to have a thorough and renewed consecration at all times. We need to be able to say, "O Lord, I deny myself in this matter; I do not have my own preference." At this point we can practically know God's will. Otherwise, regardless of the method we may use, we will be unable to know God's will.

Question: Some brothers previously said that the believers will go to heaven, where God is. Now we hear that God dwells among us and that we will enter into God. If this is so, will we still go to God in heaven in the future? If you say that we will not, why does the Bible say that the Lord Jesus will return to take us?

Answer: Over the past one to two hundred years many seeking ones have been raised up among God's children. Among these people some were too objective, and some were too subjective. The objective ones emphasized doctrines and the objective prophecies, and the subjective ones stressed our experience of the Lord. Those who emphasized doctrines said that we have been saved, the Lord's blood has washed away all our sins, He has borne all our responsibilities, and when the fullness of the times comes, He will come from heaven to take us there. They say that the Lord is presently building a dwelling place for us in heaven, and as soon as He finishes building this

heavenly dwelling place, He will return to take us there. They use John 14 and 1 Thessalonians as the basis for this, saying that at the fullness of the times, we the saved ones will be taken to heaven. They say that our condition does not matter, because as long as we have believed in the Lord Jesus, received His salvation, and are under the sprinkling of His precious blood, we will be raptured when the time comes. This kind of speaking seems to be according to the Bible, yet it is too doctrinal and objective.

For this reason many people have been calculating the time and date of the return of the Lord Jesus. In particular, a group of believers of the Seventh-day Adventists said that the fullness of the times would transpire in a certain year, in a certain month, on a certain day, and at a certain time. For this reason they bathed themselves and put on white garments, and some of them went to the rooftops waiting for the Lord Jesus to return. Many people did this for several days, yet the Lord still did not return. However, they justified themselves by saying that their calculation was not wrong but that the Lord Jesus had merely stopped midway on His descent from heaven. They said that this could be compared to someone going from one city to another city but stopping in between. This was their explanation.

Others say, "Even though I am saved, I can live foolishly, because I know that the nation of Israel has not been restored, the holy temple has not been rebuilt, the image to the beast has not been erected (Rev. 13:14), Antichrist has not been manifested, and the last three and a half years of the seventh week have not come. Therefore, I can be foolish because the definite date of the Lord's second return has not been determined. When I see the manifestation of Antichrist, I will no longer love the world and will focus on the Lord's return." What kind of talk is this? This comes from having merely empty and dead doctrines. Many books in Christianity discuss the Lord's return, arguing whether the rapture is pretribulation or posttribulation and whether the tribulation is great or small. Each book has its own interpretation. They also pay attention to the restoration of the nation of Israel and the signs on earth, but few people pay attention to the maturity of life.

We solemnly ask all of God's children not to pay attention to these interpretations. The Scriptures show that God's work in us is subjective. About twenty years ago, as a young man, I met several fervent readers of the Bible who said that the Lord was coming at that time. They quoted the Lord Himself saying, "I come quickly" (Rev. 22:20). They asked me why I did not

believe that the Lord was coming back then. I told them that I believe that the Lord will come back, but not right now. They asked me why I believed this, so I replied briefly that the rapture of the believers spoken of in the Bible can be compared to the reaping of a harvest. A harvest is not reaped according to time or month but when it is ripe. Revelation 14 shows that a small group of people will be taken up to God before the great tribulation because they are mature; they are the firstfruits to God (v. 4). However, many saints will remain on earth because they are not yet mature. Then Revelation 14:15-16 says that the harvest is ripe and ready to be reaped. Let us open our eyes and look at Christianity; how many mature ones can we find there? The Lord is the Lord of the harvest, and He will come back to reap the harvest on earth. But the harvest is still green, not golden in color; it is not ripe. How can the Lord come back now to reap the harvest? This cannot happen.

Twenty years have now passed by, and we are still telling God's children that the church's rapture at the Lord's second coming is not a matter of time but a matter of the church being mature. If the church as the harvest is not mature, we cannot expect the Lord to come back at this time and rapture the church. We must see that the church's rapture is a matter of maturity, and this maturity is the Lord working Himself into us. The Lord works Himself into us until we are mature; that is the time when the Lord will come back, and we will be raptured.

Question: Where will we be raptured to when the Lord comes back? Today the Lord is in heaven; one day He will come down from heaven and take us up. In the end where will we be exactly?

Answer: The Bible says that the New Jerusalem is the place where God and the believers dwell. In the new heaven and the new earth, the New Jerusalem will descend from heaven to the new earth. Prior to the new heaven and the new earth, we do not see the New Jerusalem descending from heaven. From this, we can say that prior to the new heaven and the new earth, the New Jerusalem is still in heaven. Therefore, we should believe that when the Lord comes back, although He will leave heaven and take us up, we will still dwell together with Him in the place where He dwells. We cannot say that this place is a "heavenly mansion"; *heavenly mansion* is not a term in the Bible. The Chinese Union Version translates *heaven* as "heavenly mansion" in two places. According to the original text, *heavenly mansion* in the Chinese Union Version should be translated "heaven." The first place is Hebrews 9:24:

“Christ did not enter into a holy place made by hands...but into heaven itself, to appear now before the face of God for us.” The second place is 1 Peter 3:22: “Who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being subjected to Him.” Today our Lord dwells in heaven, and one day He will come to receive us into heaven. Then we will dwell together with Him in heaven. At the time of the new heaven and the new earth, the New Jerusalem will be manifested on the new earth.

However, we need to pay attention to this one thing. Although we are not in heaven today, the Lord’s work is to work Himself into us, that is, to work heaven into us. The more we grow, the more the element of heaven is in us; the more mature we become, the more the element of heaven is in us. According to the aspect of subjective experience, heaven and God cannot be separated. To be spiritual is to be heavenly, and to be of God is to be of heaven. The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 shows that to sin against heaven is to sin against God. Verse 18 says, “I have sinned against heaven and before you.” Therefore, it is hard to separate God and heaven. When God works Himself into us, He works heaven into us. Adam is earthy, and Christ is heavenly (1 Cor. 15:47-48). Christ’s working Himself into us is to make us heavenly. Thus, we should not speak of heaven as a doctrine or a place. We fully acknowledge that heaven is a place and that one day we as believers will go there. However, according to the light in the Bible, heaven is a reality in the believers.

While God is working Himself into us, He is working the element of heaven into us. Formerly, the elements in us were of the earth, earthy; however, from the time of our salvation, God has been working His element into us so that the elements in us become heavenly. When we are fully mature and are thoroughly worked on by God, the element in us will be heavenly. At that time we will be part of the New Jerusalem. This is a mystery that cannot be fully explained with human words and is difficult to understand, but it is our experience. Whenever the elements of Christ increase in us, we feel that we are more heavenly.

The place where we will be for eternity in the future, where we and God will be completely mingled, is the New Jerusalem. Therefore, we cannot say that the New Jerusalem is a place in heaven; the New Jerusalem is a constitution of the believers and the Triune God. At that time the element in all of us will be heavenly, without any earthy flavor. We cannot see earthy things in the

New Jerusalem. In the New Jerusalem there will be no brick, but everything will be pure gold, pearls, and precious stones. These items indicate that the earthy elements in us will be gone. Every part of Adam in the garden of Eden was of the earth, and to this day our body is still of the earth. However, we should believe that after the Lord has worked on us, when He comes again, we will be completely transformed; we will no longer have any earthy elements in us. The Bible says that at that time, our body will be redeemed and transfigured into a body of glory (Phil. 3:21). To be glorified is to be of God, and to be of God is to be of heaven. There will then be no element of the earth in us; rather, the element in us will be heavenly. Thus, strictly speaking, we should not be concerned with the matter of whether we will go to heaven but with the matter of whether heaven has been constituted into us.

Today in Christianity there is a deeply rooted concept of going to a heavenly mansion; however, there is no place in the Bible that says that the Lord's believers will go to a heavenly mansion. Going to a heavenly mansion is the thought in Buddhism and Catholicism; it is not a thought in the Bible. The thought in the Bible is that God will make all of us, who are earthy, into heavenly people. The Bible does not say that simply by being washed in the precious blood, men of clay will be able to go to a heavenly mansion without any change in their element. This is the Catholic thought, not the scriptural thought.

The thought in the Scriptures is that from the day a created, earthy person is saved, God not only cleanses him with the precious blood but also puts His life into him. This life is like pure gold, and it can produce pearls as well. God desires to transform earthy persons with the divine life so that all that they are naturally, including their earthy thoughts, earthy emotions, and earthy will, can become heavenly. This transforming life operates in man. The meaning of *transform* in the original Greek and in the English translation is "to change from one state to another"; that which is of clay becomes pure gold after transformation.

God's intention is not to transfer men of dust into heaven; that is not God's thought. Rather, God desires to work heaven into men of dust and transform them into gold, pearl, and precious stones. God indicated this desire in Genesis 2. He first created Adam with the dust of the ground, and then He placed Adam in front of the tree of life with the river of water of life flowing forth gold, bdellium, and precious stones. This is a very meaningful picture

that reveals God's intention. God desired that Adam, who was a man of dust, would eat the fruit of the tree of life to obtain life and would allow the water of life to flow in him. This causes men of dust to be transformed into gold, pearl, and precious stones. This picture reveals the record in the entire Bible.

We, as the descendants of Adam, are that earthy man. The tree of life is Christ and His cross, and the water of life is Christ's life and the Holy Spirit. When we, the earthy people, receive Christ and the cross and thus have His life and the Holy Spirit within us, we begin to experience transformation. We will be transformed to the extent that the New Jerusalem, a city of gold, pearls, and precious stones, will be manifested. Thus, the man of clay in the garden of Eden becomes the New Jerusalem, a city of gold. This is the divine concept.

We should never consider that as long as we are washed by the blood and regardless of our transformation, the Lord Jesus will transfer us to heaven when the fullness of the times comes. This will never happen. God's salvation is objective to us because our thoughts, our emotions, and our decisions are all still earthy, and we have not been transformed. The thought in the Scriptures focuses on what is subjective, that is, the gradual working of heaven into men. We may use Solomon's building of the temple as an illustration. Solomon's father, David, prepared stones in the mountains even before the building work began (1 Chron. 22:2, 14; 1 Kings 6:7). These prepared stones were not unrefined, useless stones; rather, they were stones that had been smitten, dealt with, and made useful. Then at a certain point in time, Solomon came, took the prepared materials, and used them to build the temple. The materials became the temple. We can say that Solomon moved the stones that were formerly in the mountains to the temple. However, to be more accurate, this is not merely a matter of moving stones; rather, it is a matter of making stones that are smitten and dealt with part of the temple.

Today our Lord, as David, is preparing us as the materials in this world, which is a wilderness. After He has prepared us individually, the harvest will be ripe, and heaven will have been wrought into us. That will be the time for Christ as Solomon to come forth. When the days of David are over and the age of Solomon arrives, the Lord will come and take us, the prepared materials, to build us up into a holy place, a holy temple. Although some people say that we will be moved from earth to heaven, we must pay attention to this basic matter—the earthy men cannot be moved to heaven objectively. Heaven must be worked into them even before there is any movement. This can be

compared to the fact that before the stones were moved to the temple, they were already transformed to become part of the temple.

Never understand the New Jerusalem in only an objective way. We need to know that we are a part of the New Jerusalem. We acknowledge that we will temporarily go to a place called heaven and that the New Jerusalem will ultimately come down out of heaven; however, it is not sufficient only to believe this. This is a subjective matter. The God in heaven desires to work the heavenly nature, heavenly reality, and heavenly content into us through the divine life and the divine Spirit. He does this so that every part of our being can be transformed, becoming heavenly, until one day we are completely ripe and ready for harvest. Before we go to heaven, heaven will have already been completely wrought into us.

We can say that before we go to heaven, we have already become heavenly. This is the thought of the Bible. Before the Lord takes us up into heaven, He has worked the heavenly nature and reality into us through His heavenly life and the Holy Spirit. We become completely heavenly, which is also to make us a part of heaven. When we arrive at this stage, the harvest will be ripe, and the heavenly Solomon, Christ, will come to consummate the spiritual building of His heavenly dwelling, the New Jerusalem, where God and we will be together eternally. Then we who have been saved and worked on by God will be a part of heaven. Therefore, heaven is not an objective matter but a subjective matter.

The thought of God working Himself into us is very deep and strong in the Bible. We know that one day God will take us up to heaven, but we should pay attention to this one thing—everyone who goes to heaven must become a part of heaven. If we have not become heavenly, and instead keep our earthy nature, we cannot enter into heaven. Heaven desires only men of gold, not men of clay. Heaven desires only heavenly things, such as gold, pearls, and precious stones; heaven does not want anything of earth. The things of earth must remain on earth; whatever is in heaven must have the heavenly nature. If we wish to go to heaven, we need to let God work heaven into us. This is a very important thought in the Bible.

We need to see this subjective matter and allow the Lord to daily work in us in order to daily transform us from earth into gold. He needs to transform us until we have His glorious image, until He is able to come back and transform

our earthy body into a glorious body like unto His own. We will then be with Him. Some people say that this is to enter into heaven, and we cannot say that this is wrong; nonetheless, we need to realize that heaven is already in us before that time arrives. Thus, subjectively speaking, entering into heaven does not contradict the mingling of God with man. It actually refers to the same thing.

Question: In the coordination of the Body, how can we know clearly what our portion is and carry it out properly?

Answer: Concerning the coordination of the Body, we need to stress that every brother and sister must carry out their function. However, while functioning, we should not trample others and step beyond our limit. If we do not function, the coordination of the Body will be lost, but if we step over our limit and trample others, the coordination of the Body will also suffer loss. How can we focus on functioning only according to our portion and not step over our limit? Many brothers and sisters do not know their portion. Whenever they serve, they all come. If it is for the preaching of the gospel, they all do it together. Whatever they do, they all do it together. Everyone is "a jack of all trades," and everyone wants to be able to do everything. Thus, no one is clear about what is their own portion. It is not easy for a person to know his portion, and those who claim that they know probably do not know.

In the past some brothers and sisters spoke clearly that they truly knew what their portion was before the Lord. After eight or ten years facts showed that they did not know what they thought they knew. We cannot be clear concerning our portion simply by analysis and observation. The function, or the portion, of a member in the Body cannot be discovered by one's analysis and observation. Our analysis and observation are often wrong because they are outward and therefore tend to be inaccurate. When we have been broken, torn down, and built up by the Lord, our portion is manifested spontaneously. How much our portion can be manifested depends on how much the Lord has been built in us. If we have not been sufficiently torn down by the Lord, the portion that we carry out will not be ours. If what we are carrying out has been torn down and built up by the Lord, then that is our function. When we allow the Lord to tear us down and build us up, the portion in us will be manifested.

Concerning knowing what our portion is, we do not need to know too much. We should be responsible for only one thing—if we sense we are doing something that is not the result of God's tearing down, it is better to avoid it; if we sense that we are trampling others and stepping over our limit, we should stop. We do not need to analyze too much about what the Lord desires us to do. The result of analyzing is often wrong. We should simply receive the Lord's breaking and tearing down and allow the Lord to build us up. Then our service will come out of what has been torn down. If we feel that what we are doing is trampling on others and replacing them, we should stop and deal with it. We should never look at whether the result will be good or bad. We often think that if we stop doing, we will be in a bad situation. Consequently, in order to maintain a good situation, we continue doing what we are able to do. Thus, in many respects it is easy to step over our limit. Instead, we may need to take our hands off and allow the situation to get worse. We need to take our hands off and allow the work to fall apart. If God desires the work to fall apart, that falling apart is much better than maintaining a "good" situation with our own hands.

Hence, the outward situation should not concern us. The important question should come from our inner sense: Are we doing the work in ourselves, or are we doing it after being torn down? Do we stay within our portion, or do we trample others? Although this is difficult for others to judge, we will have a sense within us. We do not need to ask what our portion is. We should only ask whether we have been torn down. This is the basic question. If we are willing to ask ourselves this question, we will discover that there are many things we should not have. We will also discover that many of our activities exceed our limit and that we are not functioning according to our actual portion.

We may be doing the portion of others, which we should not be doing. If we are doing something natural, which we are not supposed to do, we should not do it. The Head never wants any kind of replacement in the Body. Replacing other members is not only stepping beyond our limit; it is also fake and counterfeit. If we are willing to go to the Lord and consider everything we do from the viewpoint of tearing down, we will see that there are many things we need to drop. Then our portion will spontaneously come out from us.

Few people are clear outwardly concerning their portion; if a brother or sister is clear, then he or she must be quite mature in the Lord and must have

passed through a lengthy process in the Lord. Such a person can be clear concerning his portion, because it is the result of growth, not analysis. It is not the result of outward observation but of being built from within. Because he has passed through some dealings, tearing down, and building up by the Lord's hand and has quite a number of years in the Lord, spontaneously there is something in him that is a special portion, which is his ministry, his function. This portion in him was not produced in merely one or two years, and maybe not even in three or five years. Rather, this person has passed through quite a lengthy process in the Lord for his portion to be manifested. There are not many such people among God's children.

Most of us do not need to consider this matter because our function is not manifest. We simply need to focus on what has been torn down by the Lord and avoid what has not been torn down. Whenever we sense that we are trampling on others, regardless of how good and necessary that function may be, we should take our hands off and accept the restriction of the Holy Spirit. We should believe that the Holy Spirit and the Lord are responsible and not be overly concerned about the situation. We need to learn the lessons under the Lord's hand so that the Body can have a good coordination. The situation may be bad, but the coordination of the Body will gain the benefit. By our not restricting and trampling the brothers and sisters, others will be raised up in our locality, and the Body will spread. The Body will spread when we allow the Body to grow as it is supposed to grow.

May the Lord graciously enable us to not receive these words as doctrine. May we be humble inwardly to open and allow the light to shine. As soon as we are illuminated, we need to ask the Lord to be merciful to us so that instead of arguing, we would immediately receive and submit. This will enable us to receive stronger light and deliverance. In holding the Head, carrying out our function, not overstepping, living under authority, and being conscious of the Body, as soon as we receive light, the sense, we should humble ourselves immediately. In this way the light will shine brighter and brighter, and we will be delivered. The Body of Christ will spread and be built up among us. As long as we do not restrict Him, the Body of Christ will increase and build itself up.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

Acts 2:42 says, "They continued steadfastly in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles, in the breaking of bread and the prayers." This verse speaks of continuing in the fellowship. Ephesians 3:18-19 says, "May be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are and to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God." These verses speak of apprehending with all the saints. Colossians 2:19 says, "Holding the Head, out from whom all the Body, being richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews, grows with the growth of God." This verse shows that we grow gradually with the growth of God.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE BODY

We have seen the authority in the Body of Christ or the order in the Body. We have also seen the consciousness of the Body and the coordination of the Body. These are all related. The coordination of the Body, the order or authority in the Body, and the consciousness of the Body are closely related. Without the order and authority, there is no coordination; without the consciousness of the Body, the coordination is not practical. In addition, the fellowship of the Body is another great item experienced by those who live in the Body.

In the Body of Christ, fellowship is very practical; moreover, the Body of Christ cannot leave this fellowship even for one moment. If a believer desires to live in the Body, he must live in the fellowship of the Body. Once he loses the fellowship of the Body, he will definitely be disconnected from the Body. If one remains in the Body, he is in the fellowship of the Body. The fellowship of the Body is difficult to define. Portions from the Word of God, such as 1 John 1, show that this fellowship is related to God's eternal life: "The life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and report to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us" (v. 2).

God's eternal life has entered into us, and this life brings in fellowship. Fellowship in life means that this life is a fellowship. A person who does not

have the life of God often dislikes, even loathes, God's children when he sees them. But once he receives the Lord, the Lord's life enters him and causes him to desire to fellowship with God's children when he sees them. Prior to receiving God's life, he did not understand the story within the children of God; the spiritual things they spoke of sounded like a foreign language. However, after receiving God's life, he not only yearns to have fellowship with the children of God but also understands the story within them. He finds it enjoyable to fellowship with them, and he often feels fed, supplied, and inwardly satisfied. He also feels inwardly dry, as if something is missing, when he is unable to see the children of God for a period of time. This is a reflection of the condition in his spirit, showing that God's life has brought him into fellowship.

THE MEANING OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE BODY

Furthermore, Philippians and 2 Corinthians both show that this fellowship is in the Holy Spirit. "If there is therefore any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of spirit" (Phil. 2:1). "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14). Since the Spirit is the realization of Christ, when the Spirit is in us, Christ and God are in us. The Spirit in all of us is one and the same. The Spirit in you is the Spirit in me. There is one Spirit in all of us. This Spirit becomes our fellowship and also enables us to have fellowship with one another.

Many times when we meet another child of God, although we may not say much outwardly, there is a mutual flow, a communication, between us. This flow, this communication, is of the Spirit. The Spirit in us is the Spirit of fellowship, just as the life of God in us is the life of fellowship. Electricity in a light bulb can be used as an illustration. Although there may be many light bulbs in a room, there is only one electric current in all the bulbs. In an instant the electricity in one light bulb has flowed into another light bulb. The electric current in the light bulbs is the fellowship of the light bulbs; this is an illustration of the meaning of fellowship.

THE FUNCTION OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE BODY

Simply speaking, fellowship is the flow of life, the flow of the Holy Spirit, within the children of God. The fellowship of the Body is when the life of God flows among us, when the Holy Spirit flows within us. An illustration of this flow, this fellowship, is our own physical body. The Word says that the life of the flesh is in the blood (Lev. 17:11). Doctors tell us that the blood in our body is flowing very quickly; it flows very quickly and also through our body many times every minute. The blood in our hand flows rapidly to our feet; the blood in our entire body moves and flows continually.

In medical science this flow of blood is called circulation. This means that the circulation of blood is the flow of blood; the flow of blood is the fellowship of the body. We cannot say that the blood in our body is the blood of our hand or the blood of our feet. If the blood in a person's hand stops moving and remains in that particular place, the hand becomes dead. This indicates that his blood flow has a problem and that his body is in an abnormal situation. We need to be active, to exercise, so that we may accelerate and increase the blood circulation in our body. The faster the blood circulates in our body, the healthier our body becomes. Due to this circulation, all the improper things in our body are removed, and all the nutrients we need are supplied to us. Thus, the circulation of blood in our body has at least two functions: it supplies the nutrients that are needed, and it removes all the extra and improper things. This maintains the metabolism in the body so that the body can grow gradually. The blood circulation is the fellowship of the body.

There is also such a fellowship in the Body of Christ. The fellowship of the Body is the circulation of the life of Christ in us, which is also the circulation of the Spirit of life in us. The circulation of the Spirit of life within us has at least two functions: it brings in the spiritual supply we need, and it discharges all the improper, useless, and dead things from within us (Titus 3:5). Whenever there is a lack of fellowship among God's children, there is a lack of spiritual supply among them. Furthermore, there is the accumulation of many improper things within them, which creates problems; as a consequence, the Body of Christ becomes ill. We need to see that in order for the life of Christ to be continually living and strong, as the children of God, we need to have continual fellowship among us. Whenever this fellowship is stopped, the supply of life is stopped, and death is brought in; thus, the Body of Christ suffers loss related to spiritual death.

Experientially, many cases prove this. If I do not see the brothers and sisters and do not attend any meetings for one week, although I may pray and meditate, my spirit seems to become sick, lacking vitality. This is very strange. It seems that I lack something inwardly, and although I cannot explain it, I can sense it. I have a feeling within that is neither pleasant nor sweet; I feel like I am sick.

When I first had this kind of experience, I did not understand the source. I was reading the Bible faithfully every morning and praying often; there was no problem between the Lord and me. Although I had not done anything that the Lord condemned and did not sense any condemnation in my conscience, something was missing that caused me to feel despondent. I did not understand this condition until the Lord showed me that my lack was the fellowship of the Body. Although I had fellowship with the Lord and had no problem with Him, I was cut off from the fellowship of the Lord's Body, and therefore, I felt that something was missing in me.

After this, I had fellowship with a newly saved brother in the meeting hall. I asked him how he was saved, and he told me that he had been saved for a few days and had come to break bread. After speaking with him for a few minutes, I felt refreshed within; I was happy, revived, and bright. Although I could not explain what I had gained, I was definitely joyful and felt very good. I did not understand this in my first few experiences, but I slowly began to understand that this is the fellowship of the Body and that grace is brought in through fellowship. A brief time of fellowship with a brother, who was not more experienced than I and who did not have many spiritual riches, inwardly supplied me; I felt fresh, bright, and pleasant. This is truly wonderful.

We all like the prayer meeting and the bread-breaking meeting. Even though we sit for an hour in these meetings, not listening to messages or testimonies, there is a fellowship in the depth of our spirit. The prayers and praises of the saints flow into us. We may feel somewhat despondent before a meeting, but during the meeting we spontaneously feel a flow in our inner being. Once there is a flow, we are altogether enlivened and refreshed in our spirit. We have all had such an experience. We may not listen to many messages, yet we are enlivened simply by praising and praying together with all the saints. This is fellowship and the function of fellowship.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE BODY

SOLVING AND TAKING AWAY OUR DIFFICULTIES

A brother once testified that he had fasted and prayed related to a difficult situation and a burden within. However, even after two weeks the situation had not changed, and the burden was not relieved. He thought that it was only his problem and that he needed to spend more time to deal with it before the Lord. Another week or two passed, and still nothing changed. Then he went to a prayer meeting in which a brother called *Hymns*, #671, "Deep down into the depths of this Thy Name." This hymn had nothing to do with his situation, yet something marvelous happened. While everyone was singing, he suddenly became clear and enlightened; the difficulty ended, and the burden was relieved. If we were to ask this brother what happened, he would be perplexed, unable to explain; however, the difficulty in him was gone.

Another brother had a weakness, a sin, that he could not overcome. He tried to deal with it before the Lord repeatedly with fasting and prayer. Although he exerted much effort, nothing seemed to work. It even seemed that the more he tried to deal with it, the deeper the sin became; the more he tried to deal with it, the more he was bound and entangled. He later fellowshipped with some brothers, telling them that he had a weakness, a sin that entangled him and that he was unable to free himself. He then asked the brothers for help. While he was fellowshipping, something marvelous happened; the sin left. After those brothers listened to him and while they were still perplexed and did not know how to help him due to their lack of experience, this brother said, "Brothers, I am no longer in need of help. Let us give thanks and praise to the Lord because this difficulty is gone." This shows the life in the Body carrying away this brother's difficulty.

Although I am not a doctor and do not understand biology, physiology, or even bacteriology, I do have some understanding of blood circulation. The principle of Western medicine in treating an external ailment is mainly to remove by cutting and in treating an internal ailment is mainly to kill the germs. However, the Chinese medical doctors do not advocate cutting away or killing germs; rather, they help the blood in the human body to circulate. This is marvelous. When the circulation in the body is improved, all the ailments disappear. There is logic to this.

For example, sometimes gutters in the street are filled with mud, and water cannot flow freely. However, if a powerful and strong current swept through

the gutters, all “diseases” would be removed; that is, the mud and other things would be flushed away. Doctors who practice Chinese medicine often speak of the blockage of the passage of vital energy and blood. They use different treatments to clean blood vessels and clear the path for vital energy. When everything is cleared up, there is a free flow in the body. Consequently, there is a great circulation of blood that carries away and discharges everything that should not be in the body, with the result that all the ailments in the body are eliminated.

This is true also in our spiritual experience. When we encounter difficulties, we often ask the Lord to perform “surgery” in us and to kill all the “germs” in us, but this does not work. It is not until we have more fellowship with God’s children that the flow in us is increased, our difficulties are removed, and the “germs” eliminated. This is the fellowship of the Body, and this is the function of the fellowship of the Body.

THE MEMBERS IN THE BODY OF CHRIST NEEDING ONE ANOTHER

We often feel that we are unable to bear a particular burden. We may feel oppressed and troubled. Although we try to fight and overcome, we still have no way. A very simple and convenient way is to go to our brothers and sisters. Do not despise their youth, for there is something in them that can increase the flow in us. This is marvelous. We can tell them our difficulty and burden, and as we speak to them, the difficulty is removed. By the time we finish speaking, the heavy burden is removed. This is the flow of life in the Body carrying away difficulties and the fellowship of the Body solving our difficulties. Those who are experienced can all testify that once they stop seeing the brothers and sisters, they can no longer live. Similarly, if we are cut off from our Head, Christ, we will be unable to continue to live.

This shows two aspects of grace: one involves fellowship with the Head, and the other involves fellowship with the members. We cannot say which aspect is more important; both are equally important. When we touch the Head, we touch life; when we touch the members, we also touch life. The fellowship among the members often causes the supply to flow into us, and it discharges whatever should not be in us. For this reason a brother or sister who does not meet for a month will become weak and depressed inwardly.

We should never think that those standing on the podium are the only ones who can supply others and that they do not need the brothers and sisters. Actually, if the brothers and sisters are not there listening while they speak, they will probably finish speaking in only ten minutes. Hence, it is often not the speaker who is supplying the brothers and sisters but the brothers and sisters who are supplying the speaker. If there was no one listening, they would probably finish after ten sentences even if they wanted to speak over a hundred. However, if the brothers and sisters are gathered there, they may be unable to finish after a hundred sentences, even if they started with only ten. This is because the brothers and sisters are there. It is not that the more they speak, the more they are supplying the brothers and sisters; rather, the more they speak, the more they are being supplied by the brothers and sisters.

Some brothers come and thank me for giving good messages. I thank them, however, for giving me a supply. Without them I would have nothing. The brothers and sisters give me a good opportunity to release the Lord's word by supplying me with their spirit in the meeting. This is the happiest and most satisfying thing to me. When the word is released, I feel satisfied and fed inwardly. When I go home, I can sleep very well. This is grace, and this is also fellowship. There is a flow, and it is a great flow of life in the Body.

THE BENEFIT OF THE FELLOWSHIP IN THE BODY

This is a mystery that people in the world are unable to understand or comprehend. They marvel at Christians who attend meetings every day, spending three hours in a meeting even after working eight hours in the office. Christians attend meetings every day because they receive an inward supply and can touch life. Our inward needs are often met in the meetings. We may find ourselves in a situation that we are unable to handle, but once we present it to the brothers and sisters, for some unknown reason, a solution comes and the dilemma disappears. We can say that as long as the saints are willing to fellowship, no spiritual problem is unsolvable.

I am grateful to the two leading brothers here, and I always desire to see them before I give a message. When I see them, I am supplied. Although they say that they do not have an answer when I ask a question, the answer often comes to me even while they are saying this. This is truly wonderful. Therefore, I like to meet with them before the meeting and ask, "Brothers, how should I speak this message today?" The more they say that it is difficult

for them to give me an answer, the clearer I become, and I know what to speak. This is the supply of fellowship.

Whenever I have a heavy burden that I am unable to bear through prayer and by waiting on the Lord, I look for these two brothers. Often, after speaking with them for just ten minutes, my burden is discharged, and I am clear that I have found the Lord's way. When I am alone in my room, no matter how much I think, consider, pray, and seek, nothing seems to work, but as soon as I come to these two brothers, the problem is solved. We may talk for only ten minutes, and it seems that they cannot come up with any solution, yet a solution comes within me. The solution comes simply through this fellowship.

Afterward, the facts proved that the way was of the Lord, of the Spirit, of light, full of wisdom, and of benefit to the Body. There are numerous testimonies like this, and we can say that this is our testimony almost every day. Even today, I can say that not one point of service becomes clear to me through my personal prayer. I fellowship thoroughly with the brothers concerning every move in the service. We touch God's feeling in our fellowship; we touch the feeling of the Head through the members in fellowship. This is wonderful, yet it is also practical. The more we advance in spiritual matters, the more we see the practicality and necessity of this matter.

THE NEED FOR THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE BODY AMONG THE CHURCHES

The fellowship of the Body is not only needed by the brothers and sisters individually; it is also needed by a church or the work. There is something wrong with a local church that claims to live before the Lord and to receive grace directly from the Lord yet does not need to receive help from any other local church. Without help from the brothers and sisters, we will wither; without fellowship from other localities, a local church will be like a withered foot. If a church trusts only in direct fellowship with the Lord and despises the fellowship of the Body, that church will definitely wither.

Although we emphasize the giving of messages in every conference, we treasure much more the fellowship with all the saints. At least once or twice a year all the brothers and sisters from each locality in Taiwan who are seeking the Lord, working for Him, and serving in the churches gather together. We

are unable to count the blessings that we receive in these gatherings. Through the fellowship problems vanish, and much supply is received. Some saints can testify that during these conferences the help they receive from fellowshipping with the brothers and sisters is greater than the help they receive from hearing the messages. The fellowship solves more problems than the messages. This is truly a fact.

Let us consider our situation. The raising up, building up, and growth of meetings in various localities, bringing them to their present condition of service, is the result of fellowship. There are now thirty-five localities on the island that have established bread-breaking meetings, which means that they are local churches. In addition, there are close to another twenty places that have prayer meetings. Thus, there are meetings in about fifty places. The meetings in these places were not established by the workers; they were raised up through the fellowship of the brothers and sisters. This shows the importance of fellowship. These places have been raised up one by one, and they are growing. Moreover, the saints in these places are serving the Lord and bringing other places into the service as well. This is the issue of grace in fellowship.

The grace we receive in fellowship is very practical. Some localities began with one saint who, after attending a conference, returned to his locality and raised up a meeting. In other places there were two or three brothers and sisters who received the fellowship and supply within from a conference and began meeting in their locality. After two to three months they began breaking bread, and there are presently twenty to thirty saints in their locality. This is marvelous; this is fellowship, and this is the result of fellowship.

In order for the Body to grow, we must have the fellowship of the Body; the more we fellowship, the better. The churches abroad and the churches in Southeast Asia can also testify to this. The reason they suffered loss in the past is that they lacked fellowship. This is the reason we are paying special attention to fellowship at this time. Many brothers and sisters from abroad admit that through this fellowship, they have received many things that they did not receive in the past, many unsolvable problems have been solved, and a way through many difficulties has been found.

We need to see that the growth of the saints, the growth of the churches, the propagation of the work, and even the nurturing of the workers depend upon

the fellowship in the Body. For example, we feel satisfied when we eat enough food. During our exercise, however, when there is an increased circulation of the blood in our body, we may not have a full awareness of how much we are being supplied or how much is being discharged from us. However, the increased circulation through exercise is supplying us and discharging the negative things from our body. We may think that we receive much edification from hearing messages and obtain much help from reading the Bible, but we need to see that even more we are unconsciously supplied when we fellowship with others. The dissolving, the discharging, of our problems takes place unconsciously. The grace we receive is the grace of fellowship.

For example, if a person does not have light, he does not have the leading, and although he may seek light and the leading, he still cannot get them. However, he may attend a meeting, and marvelously, even before the meeting begins, light flashes within him. We often have this experience. When we come to a meeting, light comes. As we walk into the meeting, the light comes. Please remember that this light is in the Body; this light is in the sanctuary. When we remain in ourselves, we are in darkness; however, when we come into the fellowship of the Body, this fellowship brings in light, and this fellowship is the light. When we enter into this fellowship, we enter into light. We may be unsure of how to deal with an important matter, even though we may seek the Lord's leading. However, as soon as we fellowship with some brothers and sisters, we become clear concerning the matter and have the leading. This is what fellowship brings to us. I hope that from these points we can all see the importance of fellowship.

FIVE CRUCIAL POINTS CONCERNING THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE BODY

Not Making Distinctions in the Fellowship

Let us consider how to fellowship. First, we should be careful never to distinguish between who is experienced and who is young when we fellowship. If we fellowship only with those who are experienced and not with young ones, we will suffer much. Never despise the younger brothers and sisters. Although we may think that they are unable to supply us, they help our spiritual blood cells to circulate. They can be compared to a spiritual motivator; when we fellowship with them, our spiritual blood cells begin to "run" on a racetrack, and we receive a supply. We should never be so proud that we think that we

are experienced and that newly baptized ones cannot understand our needs, and we therefore do not need to fellowship with them. If we maintain this kind of attitude, we will be dead inwardly. When we fellowship with newly saved believers, who were recently baptized, we can receive a fresh supply and be refreshed. The marvelous thing is that we may think that we are helping others when we teach them, but actually we are being helped by them. Moreover, the help we receive from them is greater than the help they receive from us. Hence, the first point is that we should never make distinctions in fellowship.

Fellowship Being Dependent on the Level of Life

Second, although we should not make distinctions when fellowshipping, there is still a matter of the degree of fellowship. We can have fellowship and receive a supply from anyone, as long as he is a believer. However, we need to realize that in order for us to comprehend others, to understand their fellowship, and to know exactly what they are talking about, we need to have a certain measure of life. Some people are deep in the Lord, and others are shallow. Although it is possible for there to be mutual understanding in fellowship, it is also possible to have a lack. It is also possible for one person to understand the story, but the other does not. Although one may be able to stimulate the circulation of spiritual blood, he may not be able to specifically respond to the fellowship, because he is not at that level.

Therefore, when you fellowship with me, we may not be able to get through in certain areas, because I cannot understand you, especially if I do not have your experiences and my life has not reached your degree of life. You may be like a college professor speaking to a kindergartner about mathematics. We can understand one another when we speak of one plus one, but if the subject changes to algebra and geometry, I will not know how to respond. I may meet a brother who was baptized last week and say, “Praise the Lord, you are saved.” He can reply, “That is true, I am saved.” He can understand this. However, if I were to ask him a deeper question, such as how the Lord lives in him, he will be confused and puzzled.

This shows that fellowship can be limited. I have been saved for many years, but because this brother has been baptized for less than a month, he is not as advanced in the experience of life as I am. Although we can fellowship, our fellowship will be limited. Thus, anyone who seeks fellowship cannot ignore

the matter of growth in life. These two matters, fellowship and growth, have a cause-and-effect relationship. Because there is life, there is fellowship, and because there is fellowship, life can grow. The more life grows, the more fellowship there is; the more fellowship there is, the more life can grow. This is a cycle of life. Thus, we cannot say whether fellowship comes before or after growth. These two are interconnected.

If all the brothers and sisters in the church, as members of one another, grow in this way, our fellowship will be like water boiling in a pot. Whenever we gather together, whoever comes into our midst will be "boiled" and "burned." Consequently, everyone will experience the stripping off of at least a layer of skin. Since the meeting is "boiling," the water in this meeting is always "boiling," always fellowshipping, and always growing. When I fellowship with you, you understand; also, when you fellowship with me, I understand. This kind of spiritual activity causes us to grow in life. However, if you cannot understand when I fellowship with you, and I cannot understand when you fellowship with me, then we will be inactive, and eventually the Body will suffer loss. Therefore, we all need to be responsible to have more fellowship so that life can grow.

Not Criticizing and Not Condemning

Third, never criticize or condemn others while fellowshipping. After fellowshipping, we may realize that we were unable to understand each other because our spiritual levels are different. At this point some may abandon fellowship. However, even though we are unable to get through in our fellowship, we still need to fellowship. But our fellowship should go only to a certain extent, not beyond; otherwise, some will feel condemned. At the same time, we should never condemn others and think that their experience is too shallow and that we can fellowship only low and shallow things with them, not high things. We should not inwardly criticize a certain brother or a certain sister who has no apparent progress; if we criticize, the fellowship in us will stop. Fellowship is a matter in the spirit, which is the most tender and sensitive part of our being. If we are rough, unrefined, unreasonable, and impolite, this will hurt the feeling of the spirit, and consequently the fellowship in our spirit will be damaged. Therefore, we should never condemn and criticize others in the fellowship.

For this reason we should not only avoid distinctions when we fellowship, but we should also not condemn others and not criticize them. We need to keep ourselves soft and humble before the Lord at all times. We should fellowship with each other, and then we should continue in fellowship; however, if we have difficulty fellowshipping, we should fellowship only to the extent that is possible. In any case, we should always maintain the freshness and liveliness of the spirit.

Learning to Accommodate Others

Fourth, we should learn to accommodate others when we fellowship. This means that if our level of life is higher, we should not go too high in our fellowship. If we go too high, our fellowship will not benefit them but will rather push them to death; if this is the case, there will be a loss. We need to realize that the brothers and sisters around us are like the wives, children, and flocks led by Jacob (Gen. 33:13-14). When they hurried on in their journey, Jacob had no problem because he was strong and could walk fast, but his wives, children, and all the cattle were tender and frail and were not like Jacob. If Jacob hurried without caring for his wives, children, and the cattle, he would have pushed them to death. Jacob was unwilling to do this. Although he could walk very fast, he did not; rather, he accommodated his wives, children, and cattle.

Our spiritual understanding may be deeper and higher than the ones with whom we fellowship. If we always fellowship in a deep and high way, they will be unable to understand us. Thus, our fellowship will be killed. We should learn to accommodate them and learn to speak what they can understand. For example, our praising the Lord in a child-like manner during the bread-breaking meeting is to accommodate others. Our accommodation can help others advance. Fellowship is often lost in the Body because those who are deeper and higher do not want to accommodate those who are not as advanced. We should never despise any member in the Body.

Not Neglecting Our Personal Fellowship with the Lord

Fifth, although we have fellowship with the members, we should never neglect our personal fellowship with the Lord. Never think that the fellowship of the Body is all that is needed. Some people make this mistake; they taste

the fellowship of the Body and receive the blessing of the fellowship of the Body, but they neglect their personal fellowship with the Lord. After a period of time they develop a problem, because their situation is unbalanced. On the one hand, we need to fellowship with the Lord; on the other hand, we need to fellowship with the saints and the churches.

Lastly, I hope that we can all see that every blessing we have received has been given to us by the Head through the members. Out from the Head we are supplied by the joints and knit together by the sinews. Moreover, we apprehend the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ with all the saints. All these things are received in the fellowship of the Body.

CHAPTER TWENTY

SOLVING THE PROBLEMS OF THE CHURCHES (1)

As responsible brothers or as brothers and sisters who are co-workers, if we have any problems in life or in service, we should fellowship together and seek the Lord's leading. I hope that we can have more fellowship concerning the Body of Christ; this kind of fellowship is good and important.

Let us fellowship locality by locality concerning the problems in our localities or concerning the problems among the co-workers and responsible brothers. We can fellowship together and be enlightened together. We should not be afraid of feeling embarrassed or ashamed when speaking of our problems. We are all weak, and we all have problems.

FELLOWSHIP BY BROTHER CHANG YU-LAN

The church in Taipei has about seven thousand three hundred brothers and sisters and has seven districts. Apparently, this is a large number. We have two main problems. First, although we have records for seven thousand three hundred saints, we cannot locate over one thousand of them, and there are only one thousand seven hundred or one thousand eight hundred saints who attend the Lord's day meeting in the districts. This is our poor condition.

Second, in our service there is a great shortage in the coordination; this is shameful. Although we want the saints to rise up, we do not have a way. There are close to fifty co-workers, elders, and full-time serving brothers and sisters here, but the more people we have, the more problems we have in our coordination. Outwardly, everything seems calm and peaceful among the brothers and sisters. There are no troubles, arguments, or sinful and worldly things. However, although we serve together, we cannot pray together. Everyone seems to have some knowledge concerning the flesh, but whenever a situation arises, we all have our opinions. This makes it very difficult to coordinate with one another; therefore, our service is very weak. In addition, the full-time serving ones seldom bear responsibility in the meetings; they seem to have no desire to prepare themselves to be a mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit. Thus, when the Holy Spirit comes to them, they cannot be a

mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit. As a result, the meetings are very weak, lacking God's presence because God cannot find His mouthpiece.

First, we are ashamed that few are attending the meetings. Second, our meetings should be wonderful because we have so many full-time serving ones in the coordination in our service. However, this is not our situation because the serving ones are full of the flesh. Although they dare not contend or argue outwardly, they bear grudges inwardly; thus, they cannot be the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit in the meetings. If the inward problems are not removed, the Holy Spirit will be unable to rule in us or have a way to go on among us. As a result, we cannot see the authority of the Holy Spirit and the glory of God in the meetings.

FELLOWSHIP BY BROTHER CHANG WU-CHEN

The problem with the coordination in the church in Taipei is that, although we have many responsible brothers and full-time serving ones, we do not bear the responsibility together. Rather, we bear some responsibility or we serve only after it has been arranged. The result is that everyone serves only according to his arranged portion. Consequently, the brothers and sisters all feel that they do not receive real help. In other words, the co-workers hold on tightly to their own small portion of service, and they bear only their burden and responsibility. Thus, one bears his own small portion, I bear my own small portion, and everyone bears his or her own small burden. As a result, we are short in opening our problems to one another, short in praying together before the Lord, and short in bearing the burden together. Hence, some serving ones feel very lonely, because they feel that they are serving and bearing responsibilities by themselves. There is a great lack in rendering real help to one another and laboring with one another.

Second, some brothers and sisters feel that submission to authority is obeying only what has been assigned to them. Therefore, if they encounter something that is not their responsibility or something they have not been charged to do by the leading brothers, they are unwilling to do it. As a result, our situation can be compared to that of a government office in ancient China or to an organization. For example, one Friday night a brother from another locality arrived at the meeting hall. He placed his luggage on a bench and waited there. Although some brothers in the hall, including deacons and full-time serving ones, saw this brother, no one took care of him. It was not

their responsibility. Of course, someone in the church had been assigned to take care of hospitality, but because he was not present, no one took care of this brother or showed any concern. What kind of condition is this? We give people the impression that our coordination is not living. It seems that in the matter of service, we move only when we are pushed, and if we are not pushed, we would rather stand aside than be bold and move.

Therefore, it seems as if the result of learning to obey and submit to authority is that each one takes care of only his responsibility. Broken glass in the meeting hall or lights not being turned off at night are not our business; it is Brother So-and-so's responsibility. This is the situation we see in Taipei. On the other hand, some brothers think that they are overstepping their limit and going beyond the leading brothers' arrangement if they do what has not been assigned to them. They think that this is disobedience, not submitting to authority. It is common in many local churches for a serving one not to care about anything that has not been assigned to him, but he will hold on tightly and be very diligent with whatever has been assigned to him by the leading brothers. As a result, everyone feels lonely because there is not the real coordination. We cannot find those who bear problems and burdens together.

THE GOSPEL GOING OUT BY GROWTH, NOT BY PREACHING

Our lack of care is the reason for the low attendance in the meetings when there are so many brothers and sisters. If we consider this matter from the perspective of gospel preaching, our situation is because we pay attention only to saving sinners. We are not interested in how they meet and serve in the church after they are saved. However, the gospel is spread not merely by preaching but by the multiplication of life. The measure of life in a church determines how far the gospel can go. From a broader perspective, there are many people in Christianity who pay attention to preaching the gospel. They have a slogan that they want to evangelize the whole world, to spread the gospel over the entire earth. Some among them have even said, "We do not know anything else. We only know to preach the gospel, and our only desire is for the gospel to go out and save people." Apparently, this word sounds very touching and reasonable, but at the same time, it fits the taste of typically zealous Christians. Many Christians may not respond if we speak to them about other matters, but they will respond if we speak of being zealous to preach the gospel.

However, the facts prove that those who focus on the zealous preaching of the gospel do not have much result. This is because there is no container after the gospel is preached to hold and retain the result. Since there is no container to hold the result of the gospel, the advancement of the gospel is affected. Thus, even after many years the so-called gospel movement in Christianity has never succeeded. Strictly speaking, the gospel does not go out by preaching; the gospel goes out by growing. When the life of a church grows to a certain degree, the gospel spontaneously goes out. Therefore, we cannot pay attention only to the spreading of the gospel while ignoring the increase and growth of life. We will be unable to spread the gospel widely or promote any activities of the gospel if we focus merely on spreading the gospel, ignoring the increase and growth of life. This is true from both the spiritual perspective and from the perspective of facts and logic.

Many years ago we seriously warned the saints that we cannot focus only on preaching the gospel and ignore the increase and growth of life. If we do this, one day the gospel will be hindered, and we will be unable to move forward. For example, if a local church that is young and has only a limited measure of life focuses simply on preaching the gospel and helping people to be saved, they will only be able to beget children who are like them. Those who are young in life will only be able to bring in ones who are young in life. This is one aspect.

Those who are brought in through our zealous preaching will not receive much supply or be sustained by the fellowship in the meetings. They are just as newborn babes who will die without proper feeding or care. For this reason outside the church we do not bear much testimony before men, and inside the church the brothers and sisters are discouraged in the matter of preaching the gospel. This will continue until the preaching of the gospel comes to a standstill. Therefore, we have repeatedly cried out, saying, “If a church does not pay attention to preaching the gospel, let it be, but if a church focuses on preaching the gospel, we must begin with life, spreading outward from life.” This will keep us from repeating the mistake of Christianity—having activities of the gospel without the foundation of life and having the fruit of the gospel without the support of life.

Twenty years ago Dr. John Sung led thousands of people to repentance and belief in the Lord in China; however, not many of them remained. This is because there was not a strong church to hold them. This can be compared to

drawing water from a well; if we do not have a container large enough to hold the water, it will be poured on the ground and will gradually return to the earth. Gospel movements bring people to salvation through a kind of gospel revival, but if people have no place to go, and no one is responsible to feed and take care of them, they will be lost. This is a great problem.

We must have a place to store water after it is drawn up from a well. The condition of gospel preaching in Christianity is that there is no appropriate place to feed the saved ones. Sending new ones to some denominations can be compared to putting hot food into a refrigerator. If a newly saved and burning believer is sent to meet in a denomination, after a short time he will become cold and return to where he was before his salvation. This is because the meetings there can be compared to a refrigerator.

The low attendance in our meetings proves that our church is weak in life. Our life has not come up to the level of the move of the gospel, and our life cannot hold the result of the gospel. We have gained two hundred baptized ones, but we do not have the capacity that is needed to support two hundred people. This can be compared to parents who beget twelve children but do not have the ability to raise them. There is a begetting ability but not a nurturing ability. Since the parents have no consideration as to how to raise and educate their children, they can only stand by as their children grow and die on their own.

This is the reason that the attendance in our regular meetings drops after we hold a special conference. Our neglecting the growth of life while focusing on the spread of the gospel brings us to a dead end. Therefore, we need to catch up in the matter of life. I hope that all the churches would pay attention to the growth in life so that we can match the move of the gospel. We must see that only the increase of life can retain the result of the gospel.

According to church history, the growth in life in the church was the origin of the spread of the gospel to China by Western missionaries. The growth of life in the church in Western countries produced a group of Christians who were sent by the Lord to preach the gospel in China. These Western missionaries were the issue of the growth of life in the church in the West, and the issue of this growth in life brought the gospel to the coast of China. However, this gospel later stopped, and no matter how much people tried to push it forward, it could not go on. Thus, life needed to grow in China in order

for the gospel to continue. This can be compared to sowing a seed. People brought the seed here from America. We now need to sow the seed into the earth and let it grow so that it can fall into the earth again. The process of growing and falling, falling and growing, is the real spreading of the gospel.

Seemingly, the gospel goes out by preaching, but actually, the gospel goes out by growing. This is also true among us. After we came to Taiwan, we were very busy preaching the gospel the first few years, and the brothers and sisters had a strong desire and burden to preach the gospel. However, today gospel preaching is weakened because our life has not caught up—our life does not match the result of the gospel.

RECEIVING THE LORD'S MERCY TO ALLOW THE HOLY SPIRIT TO DO THE BREAKING WORK

Coordination in service is a matter of our need for the Lord's mercy; it is not a matter of doctrine. We need the Lord's mercy so that as serving ones we would be willing to receive the inward shining and breaking before the Lord. Any kind of method, instruction, organization, and even arrangement cannot cause us to have a good coordination. Only when we are willing to receive the breaking work of the Holy Spirit can we have real coordination. All the brothers and sisters are clear about this in theory, but I am afraid that we lack a heart of desiring mercy and receiving mercy. Thus, we miss the opportunity to experience coordination.

As long as we have a heart and are willing to receive mercy and the breaking and shining, our coordination will not be a difficult matter. Because the saints have all learned some lessons in the church life, they do not desire to contend and dare not contend. However, because there is not enough shining, although there is no outward contention or argument, they are unable to get through within. This is to be short of mercy. Any kind of speaking and exhortation is useless; we need God's mercy. Our responsibility is to allow the Lord to be merciful to us and to receive His shining in the meeting.

We often do not have a sense of spiritual responsibility in the meetings. There may be several reasons for this. Sometimes too many practical church matters occupy us. As much as possible, we should reduce our involvement in these matters so that we have time to prepare for spiritual matters. For

example, instead of putting their time and heart into spiritual matters, some full-time serving brothers and sisters are busy mostly with practical church matters. So when they come to a meeting, they are very low in their spirit and over time become indifferent. They would tell themselves, “I will let the Holy Spirit move others. I will let others bear the burden. I am too tired. This is my resting time.” The main reason for this is that they are busy with too many practical church matters.

Besides not allowing ourselves to be entangled by practical church matters, we also must be able to receive the Lord’s commission. This is a matter of receiving mercy. We must be willing to receive mercy in order to receive the Lord’s burden, the Lord’s commission. Take the church in Taipei as an example. Some brothers are indifferent in the meetings, not bearing any burden, and they merely sit and rest. However, when they are not in the meetings, they are busy, working unceasingly. It seems as if the meeting time is their Sabbath. During the other six days they are constantly busy, and on the seventh day they rest. Do not think that I am joking. This is a fact. However, if such a brother moves to a new place and becomes a responsible one, he will be unable to sleep at night because the burdens are too heavy. When he comes to the meetings, he will pray, select hymns, and exhort others. What is this? This shows that he has begun to have a sense of responsibility and to bear the burden of the meeting.

Consider the example of the brother who traveled from another locality and put his luggage in the courtyard of the meeting hall, while the full-time serving ones and deacons did nothing. If we send these full-time serving ones and deacons to a small locality as responsible ones, I believe that they would regard this visiting brother as an angel and would rejoice greatly. They would receive this brother warmly because they have a sense of responsibility.

Another reason can be that in such a big family as the church in Taipei, because there are many capable and experienced ones, we do not think that we need to be responsible. If we try to be responsible, we might cause trouble. If we do a good job, it is out of duty, but if we do a bad job, we will be rebuked. Therefore, it seems better to be wise and indifferent. In this way we think we are avoiding many problems and causing less trouble. However, if we go to a small locality, everyone must bear responsibility and make decisions. If we do a bad job, no one rebukes us, and if we do a good job, we receive all the credit. This is totally different from being in a big church, where if we do a good job,

all the credit seems to go to the responsible brothers, but if we do a bad job, we are rebuked. Although we may fall into this condition unconsciously, this is an abnormal situation.

Please keep in mind that if a serving one can bear responsibility only when he goes to a certain place, his responsibility is of the flesh. His bearing of responsibility only when he gets to a place where he can be "responsible" is of the flesh. Everyone who serves the Lord needs to learn a deep lesson before the Lord. We should learn not to hold on to any work that has been committed to us. At any time and at any place we must be able to receive the Lord's commission. Whether there is an arrangement or authority, our fellowship with the Lord, our concern for people, and our care for souls should be the same.

Suppose a brother arrives at the meeting hall and puts his luggage in the courtyard. If we are in fellowship with the Lord and care for people, we will go and serve him. This is not a matter of authority or responsibility. We should ask him kindly, "Where do you come from? May I help you put your luggage inside the hall?" This is a matter of spiritual life and not a matter of responsibility or authority. It is probably not life if we take care of things only because we are responsible. Not having the expression of life in one place but doing something out of responsibility in another place is not of life.

If we love the Lord and love people, we will definitely contact people before and after the meeting. Before a gospel preaching meeting we will go and find people. Before and after other meetings we will fellowship with the brothers and sisters. We should always receive a commission from the Lord when we contact people, either receiving help from others or rendering help to them. We should conduct ourselves the same way in a large locality as in a small locality. No matter where we are, we should be the same. In this way what we do will most likely be of life. These matters do not depend upon exhortation, arrangement, or encouragement; they depend upon our willingness to receive mercy and the Lord's shining.

There is often no outward contention among the churches in matters related to spiritual supply or practical help, but there is much inward contention. This shows that something is still hidden within us, and we have not been broken in our service. Our natural being remains, and the service entrusted to us is strongly attached to us. This problem does not exist only

among the churches; it exists even among different halls within the same church. For example, a certain co-worker who is capable of supplying the saints may be available one Lord's day to go to one of the halls and minister to the saints. When the responsible brothers of the various halls learn of this, they may begin to negotiate among themselves. The first hall may say that the second hall is strong and does not need any extra help; the second hall may say that the third hall has only a few saints and thus has no need for the co-worker to go there. After much negotiation each one retains his own understanding, and no one has been struck down in their inner being.

It is the same in matters related to help in practical affairs. Everyone may appear outwardly courteous, but inwardly everyone has his own opinion. This proves that we have not prostrated ourselves before the Lord. We should not be happy simply because the church in our locality is strong; we can have real joy only when the church of the Lord is strong. Although we have been entrusted with responsibility, we should not be attached to the responsibility. We should be faithful unto death, but we should not be attached to the service. We should not feel happy and satisfied because the hall where we are responsible is strong; rather, we should feel happy and satisfied because the Lord's church is strong.

We must see that man is selfish and that even in spiritual matters man can express the selfishness of the flesh. Sometimes, this selfishness is hidden; instead of contending for ourselves, we contend for the work for which we bear responsibility, and we even openly contend, thinking it is justifiable. We need to see that even in the responsibility that the Lord entrusted to us, we should not have any selfishness; we must prostrate ourselves before the Lord. There is no method that can solve this problem. This problem is dealt with only by receiving the Lord's mercy and allowing the Holy Spirit to do a breaking work in us.

FELLOWSHIP BY BROTHER CHU HSUN-MIN

The number of people in the church in Kaohsiung is much less than in the church in Taipei, but in principle, all the problems mentioned above are also in Kaohsiung, and there may be even more. Two years ago we reached one thousand four hundred saints, but today there are only a little over this number. There has been no increase in the number of saints during the last

two years. Although some have been saved, not many remain. This is our problem.

Concerning our coordination, there are problems in every place, and the most serious problem is the problem among the responsible ones. If the responsible ones did not have problems, there would be no problems in the church. All the problems are due to a few leading ones. Some of the leading ones are aware of the problem, but others are not conscious of it at all. Even though our present coordination does not result in many problems or arguments, it is not strong. Although we often fellowship and pray together, we are not very open in our fellowship. I hope that through Brother Lee's leading in this matter, we can have more openness in our coordination. Due to this lack of openness we have suffered a great loss. The lack of openness in the coordination of the different districts has resulted in barriers because the districts do not know what the other districts are doing. As a result, we are weak in our service. I hope that Brother Lee can give us some help on this point.

In addition, some saints with a heart to serve were brought in, but they have been unable to learn and become useful through our present arrangement. In other words, there are not many who can be group leaders. This lack of group leaders has caused many of those who were brought in to backslide. Our real lack is a failure of the responsible brothers of the church to perfect the group leaders. Furthermore, a great problem in our taking the lead in the church is that we are short of the supply of the word. There is a shortage of the supply of the word in the meetings, and there is also a shortage of the stirring-up word in the service; this is a great problem. This problem cannot go away in a day or two. This requires the Lord's special mercy.

Furthermore, in taking care of the young brothers and sisters, the greatest difficulty is the matter of marriage. On the one hand, we are short of people who have the burden to serve in this matter; on the other hand, it is not easy for the young people to receive guidance. How should we take care of this?

THE DEGREE OF OPENNESS BEING DEPENDENT UPON THE DEGREE OF BREAKING

The openness in coordination depends entirely upon breaking. If a person has not been broken, even his being open is natural. Some people open their door but do not know when to close it; their door is always open. This is something of their natural being and is useless; besides, it can bring in many troubles. Some people are born without a door and without windows; they are closed persons. Some people have a doorway and windows, but because they do not have a door or windowpanes, their doorway and windows are always open. All these situations are wrong. If there is a doorway, there also should be a door. When guests come, we should open the door, but when dogs and cats come, we should shut the door quickly. We should be able to open and close every door and window. However, some of us cannot open, and others cannot close. Both those who cannot open and those who cannot close need to be broken.

In the church life we often meet people who are open to everything, but there is no benefit in this. There are also people who can be compared to a steel wall—no one can touch what is within them because their whole being is closed. They are so closed that no one can tell if they are happy or sad. In discussing a certain matter with them, we cannot tell whether they agree or disagree. However, as far as loving the Lord is concerned, they truly love the Lord; as far as loving the brothers is concerned, they genuinely love the brothers; and as far as service is concerned, they are even very diligent. But regrettably they are closed. They will do everything we may ask them to do, but we cannot tell whether they do it willingly or unwillingly. We cannot touch what is within them. We may bear some responsibility for a meeting with them and even discuss a certain matter together, but when we speak to them, they do not even move their eyes. They simply listen quietly, and when we finish speaking, they get up and leave. If we were to ask them whether they agree or disagree, they would not express anything; to them, both are right and neither is right. There are such people among us. No matter how angry others are, they will not become angry, and no matter how hard people laugh, they remain unmoved. Such ones cannot open themselves properly until they have been broken in their natural life.

A person who has learned spiritual lessons and has been deeply broken before the Lord can be quite open, but his being open is very appropriate. This kind of person knows to what degree he should be open and to what degree he should be closed. He can open to others what needs to be opened and keep to himself what does not need to be opened. If we have learned the

spiritual lesson, we will know whether our opening to people is natural or spiritual. This is a matter of being shown mercy.

There was a brother who was "led" to fellowship with us. We did not know whether this "leading" was of the flesh and the natural being or of the Holy Spirit and revelation. He said, "Our problem is that we have too many complaints within us. We do not open to one another; instead, we hold the problems within. So let us learn to open ourselves to one another." We all felt the same way and said it would be good. However, when we opened up, we quarreled and rebuked one another. That was probably the most serious quarreling and criticizing in the history of the church in that locality. There was an opening, but the opening issued in rebuking. Some took credit for all the accomplishments, some complained that they were despised, and still others felt that they were misunderstood. What is this? This is absolutely the openness of the flesh. Thus, to be open is not necessarily good. Only when a person is broken can he have a real and proper openness.

Being open depends altogether upon whether we know the Body and whether we know the church. It is a matter of being shown mercy. The openness of a person who has been shown mercy is spiritual and fitting. His being closed is also spiritual, fitting, and proper. This is not a matter of being taught or learning a method; it is a matter of being shown mercy and of being broken before the Lord.

BEING ABLE TO LEAD OTHERS ONLY BY THE GROWTH IN LIFE

The matter of group leaders is the same in principle as leading new believers. The co-workers and responsible brothers are often limited in their capacity to lead people; a person may be able to lead fifty people but not sixty. This can be compared to schoolteachers. A teacher may be able to teach a class of fifty students yet unable to teach a class of eighty students. If he tries to teach the eighty students, thirty will definitely be neglected. Thus, anyone who desires to lead people must grow in life; only through the growth in life can our capacity to lead people be increased.

THOSE WHO LEAD NEEDING TO PERFECT OTHERS TO LEAD

The responsibility to lead people should be given to others. The responsible ones should not be the only ones who can lead people. We should always give others the responsibility to lead people so that they can learn to lead people as well. We all need to learn this spiritual lesson.

From the perspective of the work, the most useful worker or responsible brother is one who can work and bring others along to do the same work. In other words, we can lead others to be group leaders, and we can also teach others to lead people. In this way, if there are presently a few of us taking the lead and helping others, in a year there will be five or six people who can help others to be responsible ones. In order to do this, we need to learn some lessons and receive the Lord's breaking. A person who has been broken can work by himself and can also bring others along to work with him. One who has not been broken will always think that his work is the best. It is not easy for such a one to bring others along; he needs a deeper breaking.

CONCERNING THE SERVICE IN REGARD TO MARRIAGE

It is difficult to serve the saints in regard to marriage. We are caught between two difficulties. One is the matter of our Chinese culture, and the other is the matter of the church. Because of these two matters it is difficult to help the brothers and sisters concerning their marriage. In principle, we need to lead them in life and instruct them in truth. This requires us to have fellowship with them in order to lead them in their marriage. On the one hand, the age we are in poses many difficulties in regard to marriage; on the other hand, we need to pay attention to the spiritual aspect. We are situated between these two difficulties, and this is not easy. The older brothers and sisters in the church should bear some responsibility to help young people in the matter of marriage. In doing this, they should not put in their own feelings. People with too many feelings cannot touch the matter of marriage; everything will become a big mess, and there will be no ability to clear up the situation.

Second, we must have a genuine care for people. We should not serve in this matter simply because we love to do this kind of thing and have a feeling for this. Rather, it should be that we are concerned about this matter before the Lord. We care for the young people, and we desire to serve them in the matter of marriage according to our burden. We must have this kind of concern; otherwise, we cannot do this.

Third, we need to have patience. Some brothers and sisters expect an instant success when they introduce two young saints to each other. They are upset and discouraged when the introduction fails. However, we need to have patience; to be patient means not to be anxious. If we desire to serve the young people, we should help them in a good way. We should observe them, look at every aspect carefully, and help them little by little. This cannot be rushed. Therefore, we need to have patience.

Fourth, we must be honest yet wise. Honesty and wisdom are not the same. Some people become false in their attempt to be wise, and some people expose others through their honesty. A "wise" person may try to describe a brother as being perfect and a sister as being flawless, but after the two are married, they realize that this is not the case. An honest person may be honest to the point of having no discernment; he may disclose certain hidden matters related to both the brother and sister. This "honesty" negates the intention of introducing the brother and sister. This is truly difficult. Thus, we all need to learn some lessons; we need to be honest yet wise, and we need to be wise yet honest. Nevertheless, we should not say, "Since this is so hard, we should forget about it and not do it. We are not men of wood—how can we not have feelings? Besides, we also need to be patient and wise, yet because this is difficult, we cannot do it." If we say this, we will miss the opportunity to experience the Lord's grace.

Today we truly need a group of older saints who can rise up and care for this matter. They should do this properly, according to the manner of the saints, the teaching of the Bible, and the real spiritual condition of the brothers and sisters. This requires them to meet these four conditions. If we introduce the brothers and sisters in a careless way, there will not be much benefit; on the contrary, it may even cause them to suffer loss spiritually.

FELLOWSHIP CONCERNING PRAYER

Concerning the time for prayer, we should use it properly and be calm before the Lord. Excited prayer may not cause people to touch spiritual matters; however, this does not mean that we are against excited prayer. We all know from our experience that it is mainly when we are calm that we can touch spiritual reality and the things that are of God in our prayer. If we are in an excited and lively mood, we may suffer more loss than we gain. Therefore, when we pray together, we should try our best to be calm before the Lord and

seek the Lord with a calm spirit. Of course, sometimes the Holy Spirit may do something exceptional and stir us up to become excited, but generally speaking, we should not be overly excited when we are together.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

SOLVING THE PROBLEMS OF THE CHURCHES (2)

FELLOWSHIP BY BROTHER LIN FROM TAICHUNG

Concerning the matter of service, the church in Taichung has the same problems as Taipei and Kaohsiung. First, the attendance in the meetings is only about one-third of the entire church; most of the saints do not meet regularly. This is a problem. The brothers and sisters who serve in the districts and groups put more emphasis on practical affairs and are very weak on the spiritual side.

Second, there are several groups meeting in the areas around Taichung that depend on us. They truly need our help, but we feel that we are short of people and thus are unable to give them the proper help. If our service to them could be strengthened, we believe that the Lord's testimony could be quickly raised up in those places. This is also a great lack in our service.

Third, there is a place near Taichung where the saints have been meeting for close to one year. They have been blessed by the Lord and now have about thirty people in the morning and evening meetings on the Lord's Day. They should be established as a church and should no longer be attached to the church in Taichung, because they are outside the city boundary of Taichung. Nevertheless, the problem is that the brothers there are weak spiritually. Although two or three of them are more advanced, they do not desire to bear the responsibility of the local church before the Lord. This really troubles us. It is difficult for us to decide how to go on there.

THE NEED TO STRENGTHEN THE SPIRITUAL SIDE OF THE CHURCH SERVICE

As Brother Lin said, the church in Taichung has a great lack in spiritual service. Actually, this problem is not only in Taichung; this is the problem in many local churches in Taiwan. In the past we have said strongly that in leading the churches we should pay proper attention to the practical matters of the church. However, we also stressed that these practical matters are not the focus of our church service; they should be carried out in coordination

with the church service. The practical matters of the church should match the church service. For example, when there is a move for the gospel and we come to serve, if there is not a good coordination concerning the practical matters, there will be many shortages that may even affect the spiritual matters and cause there to be a loss.

We admit that the current situation related to our practical church matters shows that the church service has received a considerable amount of coordination and benefit. However, our condition also shows that we fall short on the spiritual side. Let us use an illustration. There may be exquisite plates, bowls, and chopsticks on a table, but there may not be much food. The plates, bowls, and chopsticks should function in coordination with the food. No matter how well they are arranged, there is not much food on the table. Thus, people appreciate the plates, bowls, and chopsticks, but we do not provide enough food to eat. I am not saying that we do not have spiritual things in the church; rather, I am saying that our spiritual content is not rich enough.

Simply speaking, the primary focus of a local church is to give the brothers and sisters a step-by-step leading in the spiritual life. The Body of Christ builds itself up in love and does not necessarily depend on those who are gifts (Eph. 4:11); rather, it depends on many brothers and sisters rendering help to all the saints in their spiritual life. This is a great lack in all the local churches.

For example, if we observe the situation in the large meeting halls of the church in Taipei, we will see that they care for practical church matters more than the spiritual matters. This does not mean that they are not taking proper care of practical matters, but comparatively speaking, their attention to the spiritual side is lacking. They are short in leading and supplying the saints. Hence, their meetings are very weak, and the attendance in their meetings is very low. This is because the supply on the spiritual side is weak, and thus, the sustaining power is insufficient.

Although we cannot say that every baptized one is genuinely saved, we can say that at least ninety-five percent of them are truly saved. Nonetheless, after they are baptized, they come to the meetings a few times and then stop. They stop coming because they are not receiving much supply in the meetings. Since we do not give them adequate spiritual food, they are not satisfied. We

are not only short of the supply in the meetings; we are also very short in visiting, fellowshipping, shepherding, and teaching outside the meetings.

Visiting, fellowshipping, shepherding, and teaching are responsibilities that rest on the shoulders of the saints. Regrettably, all the churches are very weak in these matters. According to our observation, our visiting and fellowshipping are mainly by arrangement and in a formal way. There is very little element of burden in the spirit, inner anointing, or the work of the Spirit's operation. Therefore, it is difficult for the saints to minister the things of life when they visit and fellowship with people. If our meetings cause people to sense and receive a spiritual supply, they will desire to come to the meetings. Rather than only feel that they should come to the meetings, they will come because they are hungry for the spiritual supply. May the Lord be merciful to all the churches and to the responsible brothers. We must deal with and resolve this matter before the Lord. However, this does not mean that we should despise practical church matters; rather, this means that we must strengthen the spiritual side of our service. From now on we should devote much time and attention to the spiritual side.

BEARING THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MEETINGS

We cannot make others spiritual, nor is there a method to make ourselves spiritual. Nevertheless, those who serve the Lord need to bear a certain amount of responsibility. The responsible brothers in each locality should have a thorough dealing with the Lord before every meeting. Many years ago when I was serving in a locality, I had to bear a great part of the responsibility in the meetings. Before every meeting I would go to the Lord. Even if a meeting was one and a half hours long, I would often spend two to three hours before the Lord. I did this because I desired to enter God's presence so that I could touch Him and receive a burden from Him, not because I needed to give a message. I opened myself to the Lord and said, "Lord, what is the responsibility that I should bear in this meeting? What is Your feeling for this meeting?" In this way I could often touch God's feeling in His presence. Then I could spontaneously become a mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit in the meeting. I could open my mouth either to pray or praise and thereby add some weight and content to the meeting.

However, in many places the saints have the impression that the meetings are not important. It seems as if everyone lets the meeting take its own course;

no one bears responsibility, and no one is a mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit. From beginning to end the entire meeting is empty and light and altogether meaningless. Such a condition spoils the appetite of the saints, and they no longer desire to come to the meetings. This can be compared to our eating. When we eat something that tastes bad, we do not want to eat it again, and if we do eat it again, we will loathe it. In the same principle, if the meetings are lacking in supply, the brothers and sisters will stop coming after two or three times. This is because their appetite for the meeting has been spoiled.

Some saints love the Lord, fear the Lord, and pursue the Lord; they feel that as Christians they should always meet together. However, when they meet together, they feel miserable, as if they are being punished. They are troubled because although they know that it is necessary to meet, they suffer much when they meet together. It is true that all the saints should participate in the meetings before the Lord, and we cannot put the responsibility for the meetings on any person or persons. However, the responsible brothers and the full-time serving ones in the church have no excuse; they should bear the responsibility. Despite the fact that we have no distinctions in order and rank in our service, according to spiritual condition, the elders, co-workers, and full-time serving ones should bear more responsibility than the rest of the brothers and sisters.

Regrettably, many responsible brothers and full-time serving ones are indifferent toward the meetings of the saints and do not have a sense of responsibility. They will bear the responsibility for giving a message only when there is a need for them to give a message. If they do not need to give a message, the meeting will often be affected by their indifference, because no one is responsible.

Although the responsible brothers sometimes pray together twenty minutes before meeting, this is not enough. Something that is carried out only according to one's convenience cannot be successful. Everything in the church must be carried out with a strong burden in order to become successful. To have a strong burden means that none of the responsible brothers and full-time serving ones lay aside their responsibility in any meeting; rather, they all bear responsibility. This is a very serious matter.

We need to spend more time to fellowship concerning this matter. The responsible ones and the serving ones are indebted to the church. The

full-time serving ones have given up their whole life to serve the Lord. They have forsaken their future and the world and set themselves apart solely to serve the Lord. According to the worldly term, they have become professionals; this is their occupation. Nevertheless, according to the condition of our meetings, it does not seem as if they work as professionals. Many of them do not care for the meetings and are indifferent before and after the meetings. Some saints, who are professionals, work during the day and must hurry in order to make it to the meetings, even forsaking their meal. However, the full-time serving ones, who have no excuse and who have the time to prepare and come to the meetings early, are barely able to make it to the meetings on time. In the meeting they sit indifferently with their Bible and hymnal. When the meeting is over, the working saints go home quickly, and most of the full-time serving ones also go home unconcerned.

In this kind of situation it is difficult to bring in the Lord's blessing. Every businessman knows that no one can succeed if he works merely eight hours a day in the office. Every good businessman works even in his dreams. When he is walking on the street or drinking coffee in a coffee shop, he is considering his business. This is the way his business can be successful. A businessman who works only eight hours in the office will never be successful. This is true in every occupation. Everyone who is successful in business puts his whole being into his business.

The workers may serve merely according to form and arrangement, arranging for when a brother should bear some responsibility in a place or when another brother should give a message. If this is the case, our work will not have the Lord's presence, and it will merely be a job. All our work should come out of a burden, just as a mother who cares for her children sets her heart on them day and night, hour by hour, and moment by moment. Only this kind of mother will be able to accomplish something in her children. Likewise, as serving ones, we should put our heart in our work, our service, day and night, hour by hour, and moment by moment. We should put our whole being into our service. Whenever we have an opportunity to meet someone, we should immediately give him "a shot" so that he can be supplied. We should always minister to people, whether it is an opportune time or not, or whether they feel happy or not. All the full-time serving ones should be like this. If all the full-time serving ones and the responsible brothers in a church are willing to do this, our degree of spirituality will increase tremendously.

God's grace always comes to people through man as a channel, a vessel. God's blessing and grace have their conditions. For example, if we do not preach the gospel, no one will be saved. This is a fixed principle. Genesis 2:5 clearly shows that in order for the plants of the field to grow, man must work the ground, and Jehovah must bring rain upon the earth. The person who digs the deepest channel in his field will receive the most water. If someone does not cooperate by working, when God abundantly pours out His blessing, it will not flow to that person. This is an outward test and an inward proof. If the Lord's servants are uninterested and unresponsive when they contact souls, they should not be in this line of work.

Businessmen know how to respond to business; no matter where they are, they will respond to their particular business. For example, a person who sells beverages will always respond to thirsty people and sell them a drink. We should be the same; whenever we meet people, we should respond with a burden. For example, when we meet a brother, we may realize that he has not consecrated himself, has not dealt with sin, or does not know how to pray. The response within us is our "business." This response causes us to do business. We should generate business as soon as we meet people; if we cannot generate business, we should go and pray to the Lord.

For example, although a certain brother has a heart, there may be a lack within him; he may need the Lord's enlightenment concerning a certain matter. If we are not clear, we should pray to the Lord, even spending a few days to pray and touch the Lord's leading. Then we should be able to help this brother touch the Lord's leading, and we can go contact this brother again. If we are interested in people before the Lord, responding as soon as we meet the brothers and sisters, we will be richer and more advanced than we are today. This is the need among the serving ones. This is a very important matter that is lacking among us.

It is very clear that our gospel preaching has become a formality; it is not spontaneous and in the spirit. Our gospel preaching has become a formal, practical church matter. For example, when we know that there will be a gospel meeting, we begin to do the work of evangelism as if we are working in an office. This is not healthy. The saints should regularly and spontaneously help people to be saved, not because of any encouragement, arrangement, or decision of the church. When there is a baptism in the meeting hall, the saints should be able to bring people to be baptized, not paying attention to outward

form. This problem cannot be solved simply by our fellowship. All those who serve the Lord need to deal with this problem before the Lord. We need to ask the Lord to give us a new start in this matter; otherwise, in the long run, we will suffer serious loss on the spiritual side.

PERFECTING OTHERS

TO BEAR THE RESPONSIBILITY TOGETHER

Concerning the brothers who are weak and not strong enough to bear responsibility in a locality, their being strong or weak is not an absolute matter. For example, is it impossible for Christians in Fengyuan to meet as the church if there is no church meeting in Taichung? Of course not. Simply speaking, being a responsible one in a locality is a relative matter, not an absolute one. A brother may not be qualified to take the lead in Taipei, but he may take the lead when he moves to Tamsui. This condition is relative and not absolute. Certain brothers may be elders in one local church, but when they move to another local church, they are no longer elders; this is a relative matter, not an absolute one.

In principle, when there are twenty to thirty people meeting in a locality, there should be a local church there. If we must wait until the saints are strong enough to establish the church, I am afraid that it will not be easy for them to become strong. Mothers always give their children the opportunity to walk after they are ten months old. Some mothers let their children learn to walk using a baby walker. It may seem as if the child is merely sitting there, yet this is not the case. Eventually, the child learns to walk. Strictly speaking, no matter how weak a group of brothers and sisters are in a locality, we should always give them the opportunity. Much of our strength is the result of falling down; a great percentage of our insight is developed through our constant mistakes. We should not be afraid to make mistakes; we should have faith just as God has faith. The garden of Eden did not have a wall, barbed wire, or an electric fence; the garden of Eden was open.

We often do not trust others and are afraid that if we commit things to them, they will make mistakes or that the result will be unsatisfactory. We seem to think that only the things that we do can be done correctly; thus, we do not easily let go of things. We each have this kind of disposition, more or less. Therefore, if the only place in the world with a meeting is in Fengyuan with its twenty weak brothers and sisters, Fengyuan can still be a local church.

The Lord would not say that they cannot be established as a local church because they are weak nor that they must wait until they are strong to be established. When the saints in a locality gather together in the Lord's name and exhibit Christ together, that is an expression of the church. This expression of the church should allow the brothers and sisters in that locality to have the freedom in the Holy Spirit. If they still desire to depend on us, we need to encourage them that they must bear this responsibility before the Lord. We should not give them the impression that the meeting in their locality is our responsibility.

The church in Taichung should not give the church in Fengyuan the impression that the meeting in Fengyuan is Taichung's responsibility, or that Taichung is in charge and bearing the burden. The responsible ones in Taichung should not think that they should determine when it is right for Fengyuan to meet on their own, nor should those in Taichung think that they will continue to bear the burden until they decide to hand over responsibility to the saints in Fengyuan. Instead, the church in Taichung should always give the saints in Fengyuan the impression that the meeting is the responsibility of Fengyuan. It is their responsibility to rise up, and the strength or weakness of the meeting is their responsibility. If the church in Taichung always conveys this impression, the church in Fengyuan will have more opportunity to contact the Lord and even will be forced to have more direct contact with Him. When they contact the Lord in this way, they will become strong spontaneously. When they contact the Lord with this burden, they will become strong and rise up. Actually, even if a place has only eight or ten saints, we should still encourage the saints to be strong and rise up to properly start a meeting in their locality and to bear the Lord's testimony.

The requirement for the responsible ones among them is comparative and relative. We should look for someone who is older and more experienced among them. This is similar to our family. Sometimes when the parents are absent, one of the children will rise up to take the lead. The oldest brother or sister may say, "You should listen to me." When the oldest brother or sister leaves, the second oldest brother or sister will rise up. Marvelously, even the youngest child knows this. For example, he may say, "Since my oldest sister is not home today, I will listen to my second oldest sister." But when the oldest sister returns, he will say, "My oldest sister is now here. I will listen to her now." It is not always the ones who are as old as a father who must bear responsibility in a family. When the father is not home, the one who bears

responsibility may be only seventeen years old. This is because the other brothers or sisters in the family may be only thirteen or fifteen years old; thus, the seventeen year old is the most senior and experienced among them. However, he would be considered one of the youngest if there were others in their twenties in the family. Responsibility is relative and determined by the natural order of the family. We who are sent by God simply appoint responsible ones according to their level of life. In this way the church will flourish, and the brothers will have the opportunity to contact God and receive grace from Him.

FELLOWSHIP BY BROTHER SHIUE FROM KEELONG

The problems in all our localities are about the same. These problems are mainly with the serving ones, not with the service itself. The problem in our service simply reflects what the serving ones have learned before the Lord. The more we serve, the more our shortages and problems are exposed. During the process of being exposed, we struggle within, and even though we know what we should do, we often do not manifest it. We should obey the Lord, yet we have many rebellious situations among us. We know what the Lord desires, but we cannot meet the demand or are unable to measure up to the standard of the Lord. Therefore, the major problem in our service is our person. We should learn quickly, advance, and be quite transformed, but even after many years these problems are still with us. Because our person still exists, either we cannot advance in our service or our progress is not obvious. The main reason for this problem is our disobedience to the Lord.

We cannot say that we have not seen the vision of the Lord's work, but we often fall short, are unable to supply others, and cannot meet the need. This is a great lack in our service. Sometimes we know that certain brothers should bear more responsibility before the Lord, but it seems that this is only a desire, without the ability. Thus, the condition in the meetings is always low, and there is a shortage in the ministry of the word. Another example is preaching the gospel. Although we do this several times a year, we frequently become lax and negligent in caring for and perfecting the brothers and sisters. Therefore, when a group of new ones is brought in, a group of old ones is lost. This problem has been troubling us. We must preach the gospel, but when we do, we drop the shepherding of the saints. This is a problem.

There is also a problem with newly saved brothers and sisters. After they are saved initially, we give them some basic perfecting and then bring them to the big meetings. However, because the general nature of the big meetings cannot give them a specific word, it seems that they are unable to receive the supply in the big meetings. Consequently, after a while they also fall away.

LEARNING THINGS BY DOING AND DOING THINGS BY LEARNING IN OUR SERVICE

No one who serves the Lord serves only after he has learned everything. In our service we should learn as we do, instead of doing after we have learned. Even though we do not know how to do things, we will learn as we do them. For example, the church in Taipei is a large church with a large number of saints, and there are about fifty full-time serving ones. However, according to our observation, the brothers and sisters are willing to do only what they can do, not what they cannot do. Very few are willing to aggressively study or research. The condition of our service is not ideal, and there is only limited improvement because there is not much study and research.

For example, some saints do not preach the gospel because they think that they do not know how to preach the gospel, some do not visit people because they think that they are not good at visiting people, and others do not shepherd people because they think that they are not good at shepherding. Almost everyone is willing to do only what he knows how to do. However, please remember that very few people in the church actually know how to do things. Thus, we should not have the concept that we will do only what we know how to do. Rather, we need to do things precisely because we do not know how to do them. Our doing is our learning; we need to learn as we do things, that is, to learn by doing. In learning to do something, we are forced to study it. We may not know how to take care of a certain person, but we still need to take care of him. We must do this even though we have tried every "possible" way and feel helpless. This will force us to pray to the Lord and ask Him how to take care of this person.

Acts and Paul's Epistles show that Paul was a person who put his whole being into the work. From God's point of view, he had a special vision, revelation, and commission. From man's point of view, he was skilled in his work, he was an "expert." He was not someone outside his line of work; in every one of his endeavors he became an expert. He was always talking about

his own work. Whether he talked about this or that, his whole being was centered on his work. Paul bore all the churches within him when he was working. He says, “The crowd of cares pressing upon me daily, the anxious concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is stumbled, and I myself do not burn?” (2 Cor. 11:28-29). He also says, “For three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears” (Acts 20:31). If each one of us would apply ourselves “night and day” and “with tears” on behalf of the brothers and sisters, there would definitely be a wonderful and great change in our locality.

Our shortage is that even though we do not know how to do things, we still sleep very well at night, we do not shed tears, and we do not study. We often put all the responsibility on God’s grace and mercy. There is no progress in our work, but we can still lie in bed and say that everything depends on God’s mercy and grace. We may say, “What can we do if God does not work? Everything depends on His grace and mercy.” Then we fall into a sound sleep. On the one hand, it is true that everything depends on God’s grace and mercy, but on the other hand, this grace and mercy do not simply come to us.

If a person says, “Lord, here is a family that I do not know how to enliven. What shall I do? Lord, I am going to wrestle with You and negotiate with You.” Some people may say that this person is Jacob; however, we must say that only a person who wrestles with God becomes Israel. Those who do not know how to wrestle with God will never become Israel. Many brothers and sisters often come to us and tell us that they do not know how to do something and that they are not good at something. At such a time we should encourage them to continue, precisely because they do not know how to do it. In any case, we must help the brothers and sisters to see that they need to do things because they do not know how to do them and because they are not good at doing them. In this way their usefulness will be manifested.

In the Lord’s work no one comes to work because he knows how to work; God does not desire this kind of person. Everyone who goes to work for God does not even know where he is going. When Abraham left Ur of the Chaldeans, he did not know where he was going. The real work is to work even when we do not know how to work and to lead even when we do not know how to lead. We may have failures in our work, but we must continue working; we may have failures in our leading, but we must continue leading. We do not give up and go home simply because we have some failures in our

leading others; rather, we should go to the Lord again and have more dealings.

Strictly speaking, nothing in the world demands more of a person than the Lord's work. No one, not even the apostle Paul, could dare say that he worked for the Lord because he knew how to work. The Lord's demand in the work is great. No one is qualified, and no one should dare to say that he knows everything. Rather, everyone must continue struggling, pressing forward, and working. We learn by doing, and we do things in the way of learning. We must have this kind of heart. If we do not have this kind of heart in our service, we will not be of much use in spiritual matters.

There was a young brother who was learning to work for the Lord. He did not know how to do a certain thing and was unwilling to do it properly. At the end of the day he went home peacefully as if the task was unrelated to him and not his responsibility. When we asked about the matter, he showed no concern. We should not say that this young brother is useless in everything, but in that particular matter he had become useless. If that matter had been put in his hand, it would definitely have resulted in nothing.

Let us use another example. A person may say that eighty or a hundred people need gospel visitations, even though only fifty-eight actually need to be visited. Although the actual number is fifty-eight, he speaks of eighty or a hundred. By this, we know that this person is not properly burdened; he has not put himself into the work. If he had received a burden and put his whole being into this burden, he would even have a list with the fifty-eight names, and he would have a map showing how to reach each of the fifty-eight people on the list. He would be very clear about the general situation of each of the fifty-eight people, including whether they are students or businessmen, young or old, uneducated or educated. Furthermore, even in his dreams he would be considering who would be the best persons to visit them, what is the best time, and how to lead them. This is what it means to receive a burden.

The apostle Paul says, "Apart from the things which have not been mentioned, there is this: the crowd of cares pressing upon me daily, the anxious concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is stumbled, and I myself do not burn?" (2 Cor. 11:28-29). Some may say that one who serves the Lord needs to pray and pursue. This is correct, but if one who works for the Lord and serves the Lord cannot receive a burden from

God and is not interested in man, he will not be very useful in the Lord's work.

A person who serves the Lord should be very responsive; he should be easily burdened. When he meets people, he should immediately have a response of loving them, caring for them, and being interested in them. This does not mean that he is interested in their affairs but rather that he is interested in them. A person who serves the Lord should easily receive burdens from God and easily be interested in and responsive to people. This kind of person will always put his whole being into his line of work and will always receive burdens and commissions from God. Everyone who serves the Lord should have this kind of character.

We have spoken concerning this point before, but our practice has been too poor, and we have not been well trained. The younger brothers and sisters have not experienced much mercy and grace from the Lord's hand through His dealings. According to the Lord's word, the more we use our gifts, the more we will have; "to everyone who has, more shall be given, but from him who does not have, even that which he has shall be taken away" (Luke 19:26). The gift of grace that we have originally is sufficient, but if we are unwilling to use it, it will be nullified in us and become nothing. If we are willing to use it and to continue to do business (v. 13), we will see the capital of grace in us increase more and more.

If we can care for others and bear their burdens every day, study their problems, and desire to receive grace for others every day, we will be the most blessed people among the brothers and sisters. We should not do things only after we think we have learned, are experienced, and know how to do everything. If we wait for that day, it will never come. We need to realize that we have nothing and that we can do nothing. However, we still need to do things, and we must work from nothing into something. This is a principle in material things; it is also the same in spiritual things. We move forward by faith, and we continue to work by faith.

For example, we may be asked to give a message in our locality. We may say, "Because I do not know how to speak, and I have not prepared anything, I cannot speak today." If we allow the brothers and sisters to sit there and we insist on not speaking, we are finished. On the contrary, if we are willing to be troubled and pressed before the Lord in order to receive a burden, to look to

the Lord in spirit with a strong will, and to stand up and say, “Brothers, I do not know what to say, but I have no choice, so I ask you to stand with me in spirit,” we will experience the word coming to us. Perhaps Genesis 1:2 will come to mind, and we may say, “‘The earth became waste and emptiness, and darkness was on the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was brooding upon the surface of the waters.’ This is our condition. If there is darkness within us, the word will come, and the Lord will come when we turn to our spirit. The Lord Jesus is the light, and when we touch Him, we have light.” This is a supplying message. After this speaking, everyone will feel satisfied, and we will be satisfied even more. In this way we will surely progress and become more experienced.

Do not think that this is merely an example. I have experienced this before. When I was twenty-eight years old, I was learning to speak for the Lord. I had to speak because there was a heavy burden within me, not because people invited me to speak in a formal way. I had never studied theology or received any formal training, and I had no idea what it meant to speak or release a message. Nevertheless, at that time a heavy burden weighed on me and forced me to speak. When I stood up to speak, my face was red, I was sweating, and I did not know what to say. However, I received grace because I did not know what to do. The Lord gave me a revelation. This happened time and time again; I received grace, and I gave others what I had received. Luke 6:38 says, “Give, and it will be given to you.” This can be compared to a water faucet: the amount of water that flows in depends on the amount of water that flows out. If water does not flow out, nothing will flow in.

We need to receive burdens from God all the time, and we always need to be interested in people. We cannot excuse ourselves and shirk our responsibility. If we do not bear responsibility, then who will? This is not to be proud. This is to be willing to learn to receive a burden. In this way we can become useful persons and channels of blessing in the Lord’s hand to bring in more blessing. This is needed among many brothers and sisters today, especially the young people.

FELLOWSHIP BY BROTHER HSU FROM TAINAN

The problem of the church in Tainan is exactly the same as other localities. Our supply to the brothers and sisters is very limited. In recent days we have begun to feel that our vessels are too small; if we take care of one item, we

cannot take care of another item. We do not visit those who have not come to the meetings for a long time, and our supply to those who come to the meetings regularly is very limited. In our daily church life, although we try our best to have good fellowship with the saints and give them a good leading, we are unable to supply them adequately. We feel that our vessel is too small, and we do not know what to do.

THE MORE WE EXPERIENCE THE BREAKING, THE MORE WE ARE ENLARGED

If we desire our small vessels to be enlarged, we need to pray. Man is limited, but the Lord is unlimited. The Lord can turn our limitedness into unlimitedness; this requires our prayer. Several have had this kind of experience; they had a great turn in this matter. For example, some people are not naturally eloquent, and they always stammer. However, after they pray before the Lord in tears, marvelously, they become very fluent when they stand up to speak for the Lord.

On the one hand, we should admit that we are limited and that our vessels are too poor; on the other hand, we should pray and look to the Lord that He would enlarge us. Everyone who has some real experiences in the Lord has experienced being enlarged. Our experience of the Lord involves enlarging; it does not cause us to become proud, but it causes us to be enlarged. The more a person has experience and learning in the Lord, the more he is enlarged. The basic principle of being enlarged is to be broken. The extent that a person is broken before the Lord determines the extent to which he has been enlarged. A person is narrow because he is not willing to be broken, and a person's unwillingness to be broken causes him to become narrow. The more intense the breaking, the more a person is enlarged. This is a fixed principle. Thus, we need to pray.

When we lead the brothers and sisters, we should give them the feeling that our service is like fire burning in the thornbush. This is the vision Moses saw: fire was burning in the thornbush, but the thornbush was not consumed (Exo. 3:2-3). The fire was burning in the thornbush, but the fire was not using the thornbush as fuel. The thornbush was Moses, who represents us, and the fire is God Himself. When God uses a person, it is God who is burning in the person. Nevertheless, he is not destroyed or consumed by fire. Hence, in our service we should not look at our condition. The more we look at our

condition, the more we will feel like a thornbush; that is, we will feel that we are no match for Egypt and that we cannot stand before Pharaoh.

We need to see that we are in God's hands, that it is He who is using us, and that it is His holy fire burning in us. It is His grace and His might; everything depends on Him. When Moses was called, the first vision he saw was the fire burning in the thornbush. Only then did he have the second vision in which he saw that he was fully leprous within (4:6-7). Anyone who has a desire to serve the Lord must have these two visions.

We need to see that we are a thornbush, which is useless, but this should not discourage us, because the fire can burn in the thornbush. This vision shows that no vessel is great enough to satisfy God's demand. Moses was a remarkable person, but in God's vision he was just a thornbush. The Israelites could be saved by the fire that was burning in the thornbush, not because of the thornbush itself. When Moses stood before Pharaoh, it was a scene of the fierce fire burning in a thornbush, and Pharaoh could not withstand it. This is something that all serving ones should have; we should not continually turn to look at ourselves. The first few chapters of Exodus show a beautiful scene of a person who is nothing, who is just a thornbush, but who could not be defeated by anything of Egypt because of the fire burning within him.