A Timely Word

Witness Lee

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by Witness Lee

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PREFACE

This book contains messages given by Brother Witness Lee in Anaheim, California, at the conclusion of the summer training on Leviticus in 1988. Chapter 1 is a message given to the saints in the training on July 8, and chapters 2 and 3 consist of fellowship given to the elders on July 9. These two chapters are also included as chapters 4 and 5 in *Elders' Training, Book 9: The Eldership and the God-ordained Way (1).*

CHAPTER ONE

KEEPING ONENESS IN LOVE

Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:2-3; Rom. 14:1-3, 5-6; Phil. 2:2-3; 1 Cor. 11:27-29

This book of three chapters covers some vital matters related to the Lord's present recovery. In this first chapter we want to see the crucial matter of keeping oneness in love. In chapter 2 we want to study the Word concerning God's administration on this earth. Finally, in chapter 3 we will fellowship about our going on.

KEEPING THE ONENESS OF THE SPIRIT

The church life is a life in oneness in love. We are one in the Lord. Once a person believes in the Lord Jesus and gets regenerated and saved, he immediately begins to have a good feeling within him toward other Christians. He begins to love other Christians. When we were new in the Lord's salvation, we had a loving thought, a loving feeling, and a loving intention within us to love the other Christians. However, because of our human nature, troubles arise after we are in contact with one another for a longer period of time. If a married couple had never fallen in love, there would have been no possibility of divorce. How could love produce divorce? Love brings us together, and this togetherness is always the real source of trouble. If a husband and wife are away from one another for a period of time, they will miss each other. When they reunite, a problem may arise between them after a short time. Our contact with one another can create problems because of our fallen human nature.

Ephesians 4:2-3 says, "With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, bearing one another in love, being diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace." The word *all* governs both *lowliness* and *meekness*. We need all lowliness and meekness. We need long-suffering, and we need to bear one another in love. We have to pray ourselves into the reality of these verses. We need to pray so that our prayer can bring us into lowliness and meekness. To have this oneness among us is

not a small matter. It is very, very crucial. This oneness in the church life governs our daily life, our family life, and our church life.

This oneness cannot be prevailing unless it is in the Spirit. This is why it is called "the oneness of the Spirit." If we have a kind of oneness that is not in the Spirit, that oneness is not genuine and will not last long. The oneness of the Spirit is constituted with virtues such as lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, bearing one another in love, and diligence. We have to be diligent to keep the oneness in the uniting bond of peace. These are not natural virtues, but they are the divine attributes expressed in our humanity to be our human virtues. We should live a life full of the divine attributes expressed in our humanity to be our human virtues. In these virtues there is the keeping of the oneness of the Spirit.

In Philippians 2:2-3 Paul says, "Make my joy full, that you think the same thing, having the same love, joined in soul, thinking the one thing, doing nothing by way of selfish ambition nor by way of vainglory, but in lowliness of mind considering one another more excellent than yourselves." The apostle Paul's joy could be made full when the saints were thinking the same thing. Our unrenewed mind is like an unbridled, wild horse. It runs in many directions and is out of control. In addition to thinking the same thing, we need to have the same love for all the saints. If I love one brother more than another brother, this will create problems. If we live by our natural life, it is impossible for us to have all of the items in Philippians 2:2-3. These items can be realized only through the divine life expressed in our human life. In the divine life are the divine attributes. When these divine attributes are expressed in our human life, they become our human virtues. It is in these virtues that we have the oneness of the Spirit.

This oneness of the Spirit is altogether the basic element of our church life. If we are short of this, we "commit suicide" in the church life. Some of us may have experienced this kind of spiritual suicide already. Because the oneness is so crucial to our spiritual life, we have to go further to see what we have to be aware of in order to keep the oneness of the Spirit.

PRACTICING ROMANS 14
TO HAVE THE REALITY
OF THE BODY LIFE IN ROMANS 12

At the beginning of my ministry in the United States in 1962, I spoke frequently on Romans 12. Romans 12 is a chapter on how to have the Body life. First, you have to present your body to the Lord (v. 1), then your mind will be renewed (v. 2), and your spirit will be burning (v. 11). With our body presented, our mind renewed, and our spirit burning, we can know the will of God (v. 2), which is to live the Body life. If we only practice the truth in Romans 12, however, we cannot have the Body life. The Body life actually depends upon Romans 14. If we are going to have the proper Body life, the church life, we must learn how to embrace all the differences between Christians.

The differences between Christians are innumerable. In the local churches there are saints from many different countries and cultures, and this issues in many differences. Even within one country and one culture there are many differences. When I came to the United States, I traveled to many places to minister the word. I stayed in many American homes, and I was surprised at the different kinds of Americans. I discovered that the United States was a real melting pot of many different peoples, cultures, and races. I found out that different parts of the country had different foods and different accents. When I was invited to Tyler, Texas, I heard the word *y'all* for the first time, and I eventually realized that it was an abbreviated pronunciation of *you all*. It is a wonderful thing that the church life swallows up all the differences. In all the church meetings in Texas it is hard to hear the word *y'all*. Many of the brothers have learned to speak in a standard way of speaking English. Differences in the human race make it difficult to practice the church life in oneness. The Chinese saints who came to Taiwan from mainland China came from many different provinces. Although ninety-five percent of the saints were Chinese, they spoke Mandarin, a common Chinese dialect, with many different accents. Among the provinces in mainland China there were many differences. After almost forty years of practicing the church life in Taiwan, however, the differences have been nearly swallowed up.

On the one hand, the church life swallows up all the differences. On the other hand, it always creates problems. A new local church may not have many problems. But the older a church becomes, the more problems it may have. This is why we need the oneness. No other society in mankind requires the oneness as much as the church life does. In the church life we all have to receive mercy and grace to embrace all kinds of differences.

In Romans 14 Paul illustrates how we need to receive all believers regardless of our differences. Some of the saints at Paul's time were vegetarians, and others liked to eat meat (v. 2). Some of the saints in the church life wanted to keep certain days as holy days, and others did not (v. 5). Some probably liked to keep the Sabbath, and others felt that every day was the same. These different ways of living and worship came mostly from the Jewish people according to the Old Testament. Biblically speaking, it is all right to eat everything, and the practice of keeping the Sabbath was over, but Paul did not teach this in Romans 14. Paul did not justify anyone, and he did not condemn anyone. Instead, he tells us the way to keep the oneness.

Paul says, "One judges one day above another; another judges every day alike. Let each be fully persuaded in his own mind. He who regards that day, regards it to the Lord; and he who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who does not eat, does not eat to the Lord, and he gives thanks to God" (vv. 5-6). Paul's idea is that as long as the saints do something to the Lord, it should be all right with us. I do not think that Paul was too liberal. Actually, he was very generous, and he was not narrow. If we had been Paul, we might have given the saints in Rome three messages on the observing of days: one concerning the Sabbath day, one concerning the first day of the week, and one concerning the Lord's Day. These are important terms in the Bible. Perhaps we would have given the saints three messages to tell them what day is the right day. We might have said, "Don't keep the Sabbath day. That was of the Old Testament." But Paul did not do this, and he knew the Bible much better than any of us. He did not give the saints biblical teachings on these differences. He just indicated that those who keep a certain day keep it to the Lord; and those who do not keep a certain day do this to the Lord. They both did something to the Lord in a different way. Would we say that this is all right? This would be hard for many of us. We would like to say, "This is not scriptural."

Suppose that a Seventh-day Adventist came to take the Lord's table, and he sat next to you. Would you be at peace sitting next to a "Sabbath keeper"? Would you have the same feeling if another brother was sitting next to you? Probably all of us would feel uneasy. But our feeling and attitude are against Paul's teaching in Romans 14. In Romans 14 Paul tells us we have to receive the saints. Even if their faith is weak, we have to receive them because God has received them (vv. 1-3). Our receiving of the saints must be based upon God's receiving. Whomever God receives, we have to receive. Also, we have to

receive them in a willing way, and we have to love them with the same love with which we love others. We should not have different levels of love.

Let us suppose that we are meeting with ten saints and that two of them are Seventh-day Adventists, three of them are Pentecostal, and the others are somewhat general. We may feel good about the ones who are general but uneasy about the others. This shows that something sectarian exists within us. We should have mercy and receive grace and learn the lesson to embrace all the differences among the saints. Otherwise, sooner or later, we will have troubles, and we will miss the very unique and genuine oneness.

There may be talks among us that some are for this and others are for that. This is just like the Corinthians, who were saying, "I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ" (1 Cor. 1:12). Even the one who said that he was of Christ was divisive. He said this in the way of excluding other believers. In order to keep the proper oneness, we have to bury all these kinds of slogans. Some among us may have said, "He is for the new way," or "He is for the old way." These slogans *the new way* and *the old way* should be buried. We should not pick up these slogans. Let us bury and drop all these vain slogans. We have to embrace the differences, but we must try our best to avoid the differences.

All of us have certain peculiarities that make us different. But once we believe in Jesus and come into the church life, we come in as peculiar members. We may think that we are general and not peculiar, but actually, we all have our own peculiarity. We must be delivered from our peculiar traits for the sake of the church life. If we do not know our peculiarity, that may be excusable. But as long as we are aware of it, we should receive grace to deal with our peculiarity. This saves us from trouble in the church life and helps the building up of the proper oneness in the church life.

Romans 14 is a very crucial chapter for the church life. We must remember that Romans 12 and Romans 14 go together. When we experience the truth in these two chapters, we can have the church life in the proper way. If we had only Romans 12 without Romans 14, the church life would be annulled. If we had only Romans 14 without Romans 12, the church life would be a formal church without reality. The reality is in Romans 12, but the practice is in Romans 14. We must practice Romans 14, and then we can have the reality in Romans 12. According to this point, Romans 14 is very, very crucial.

When I was a young believer and I met other Christians, I would ask them whether they had been sprinkled or immersed in their baptism. If they answered that they had been sprinkled, it was difficult for me to embrace them. If a Christian had been immersed, I was happy to embrace him because he and I were the same. We may be the same as other believers in a matter such as baptism, but if we stay together with them for a long period of time, other differences will arise. We have to be aware of things like this so that we can avoid division in any form. I have been learning this lesson of keeping oneness in love for many years, and I am still learning.

During the ten-day trainings that we have in the United States, many of the saints open up their homes to receive other saints who are attending the training. Many of the hosts and guests must admit that ten days together is the limit of their endurance. During the first four days of the training, everything may be wonderful. But by the ninth day of the training, the "wonderful" might be gone. The longer we stay together, the more the problems rise up.

When we first began the church life in our locality, everything was wonderful, and it seemed easy to keep the oneness. But after remaining in this locality for a number of years, things can rise up within and among us to damage the oneness. What shall we do? We should not try to move out of our locality. Instead, we must move our peculiarity out. If our peculiarity is not moved out of us, our problems will be repeated when we move to another locality. If we insist on keeping our peculiarity, we might be able to function in the church life for eight years. But if we want to be a member in the church life for fifty years, we need to remove many things out of our being. Then we can enter into the experience of both Romans 12 and Romans 14.

CONCERNING THE LORD'S TABLE

Proving Ourselves to Partake of the Table

To partake of the Lord's table is a serious matter. First Corinthians 11:27-29 says, "So then whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord. But let a man prove himself, and in this way let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not discern the body." It is possible for us to eat the bread and drink the

cup in an unworthy manner. When we come to the Lord's table, we must be a person in a "worthy manner." Our living and our behaving must be worthy of the Lord's table, or we will be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord.

Paul goes on to say that each man should "prove himself." Every time you come to the Lord's table, you have to prove yourself. This means you have to examine yourself, put yourself to the test, and have yourself approved, meeting the prescribed specifications. You need to be approved by the "checking Spirit." Then you can go to the Lord's table and partake of the table with peace. If you sense that you are not approved, it is a problem for you to partake of the Lord's table. Then what shall you do?

The Bible tells us that it is simple for us to deal with this matter, if we are willing. If we sense that we are not approved, we can make a thorough confession of our sins, wrongdoings, shortcomings, and failures. Then the blood of the Lord Jesus will cleanse us immediately (1 John 1:9), and we can approve ourselves. All of us should practice this, especially when we come to the Lord's table. To partake of the Lord's table is a very serious matter.

If we eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, we eat and drink judgment to ourselves. When we partake of the Lord's table, we must discern the body. We have to consider what is being exhibited on the table. The bread on the table signifies not only the physical body of the Lord but also His mystical Body, the very unique Body of Christ as the expression of the Triune God. To partake of this bread is serious. We must discern the bread that we are going to break. It must be a figure of Christ's body broken on the cross for us, and it must be a figure of Christ's mystical Body, which is the very church as the expression of the Triune God. The mass of the Catholic Church and the so-called holy communion of the Protestant denominations do not point to the unique Body of Christ but to their division, their denomination. In discerning the Body of Christ, we should not partake of the bread in any division or with any divisive spirit.

Ministering Christ as the Sin-dealing Life

We may feel that we have been approved to partake of the table, but we are concerned about others who have been committing sins. We may know of some saints who have been committing sins and still come to the Lord's table. What shall we do? We must remember that Paul's word in 1 Corinthians 11

tells us to prove ourselves, to test ourselves for approval. It does not tell us that we have to prove or test others. We should leave others to the Lord and not be their judge. We should only judge ourselves and not judge others.

If you know that someone has committed some sins, you have to pray for him and learn to minister Christ as the sin-dealing life to him that he may deal with his sins. The life of Christ is a life that deals with sin, a sin-dealing life. First, you yourself must be dealt with by enjoying Christ's sin-dealing life. Then you must minister such a Christ as the sin-dealing life to others. The book of Leviticus tells us that the priests were to eat the sin offering in the holy place that they might "bear the iniquity of the assembly, to make expiation for them before Jehovah" (10:17). As you are enjoying Christ as the sin-dealing life, you must have the capacity to bear the iniquity of God's people. You must learn to minister Christ to the dear ones who are in sin.

To minister Christ as the sin-dealing life to someone is not to go to him to point out his fault and condemn him. This will only cause damage. You have to go first to soften his hardened heart. A person who sins usually has his heart hardened (Heb. 3:13). If you are going to minister Christ to him, you have to trust in the Lord that you may have the grace with the Spirit to soften his hardened heart. You have to soften his heart and warm up his heart. Then the very Christ as life will be actually, really, and richly ministered to him, and this life, which is the Spirit, will work within him. You do not need to mention his fault, because the life that gets into him as the life supply will do a lot. If a person has a certain physical sickness, you do not need to mention his disease. If you minister the proper medication to this sick man, he will get well. I have experienced this in caring for the saints. I did not talk with the saint about his weakness, fault, or sin, but he was healed. He did not get healed by my word but by the very Spirit, the life of Christ, ministered into him through me. This is what it means, according to Leviticus, to bear the iniquity of the people of God. This is the way to get rid of the sins among some saints.

The work to recover the sinful saints takes time. It cannot be quick. You have to be patient. Even if it took eight months or a year to get one or two sinful saints recovered, that would be a great thing. Galatians 6:1 says that when a brother is overtaken in some offense, those who are spiritual should restore him. We have to do our best to recover a fallen saint. Out of one hundred saints meeting together, maybe two or three are living in a sinful situation. Since you are enjoying Christ, you can pick up the burden to take

care of one of them. Another brother may have a burden for the same person. Then you and he can fellowship about this one saint and work together to help him. If you two can work together for half a year to get this sinful brother recovered, this is a great, great help to the church life. This kind of ministry is the element for us to maintain the oneness of the Spirit in the church life.

The oneness can be maintained only in love by the Spirit. Criticism only builds up division and destroys the oneness. We all have to avoid negative talk and learn to take Christ as the sin offering, the sin-dealing life, that we may have the measure and the capacity with a certain amount of Christ to minister to the sinful saints. Then these saints, sooner or later, will be recovered. If we recover one brother, we will reduce the problems in the church life related to the oneness. If you get yourself approved before the Lord, try to help another one who has a problem. After six months of your ministering Christ as the sin-dealing life to him, his problem may be gone. This is not only to bear the iniquity of the people of God but also to solve the problems of the people of God. Furthermore, this is a practical way to maintain the oneness of the Spirit among the saints.

Thus, related to the Lord's table, we should practice two things. First, we have to prove ourselves. Second, we should not talk about a sinful saint but pray for him and try to minister the very Christ whom we enjoy to him. Sooner or later, this ministry will be a real salvation to him. Then the church's problem will be solved through us, and we will have no problem in the oneness of the Spirit. By this way we also can have peace within us to take the Lord's table.

Let us all be diligent to keep the oneness and endeavor to live a life of love in the church life. Love builds up, but knowledge kills (1 Cor. 8:1; 2 Cor. 3:6). Always live a life in love. Whether or not you go to help a certain one is secondary. The primary thing is to love all the saints, whether they are good or bad, with the same love. We have a tendency to love the stronger saints but not the weaker ones. We must love all the saints with the same love. As long as someone is a saint, he is a member in the church, and we should love him with the same love that we love the other saints. This will kill the germs, destroy the problems, and build up a permanent, lasting oneness of the Spirit.

CHAPTER TWO

GOD'S ADMINISTRATION

Now that we have seen the crucial matter of keeping oneness in love, we want to study the Word concerning God's administration on this earth.

GOD'S ADMINISTRATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

God's administration on the earth is very much related to the church's administration. If we are going to see God's administration on the earth, we have to see the administration of the church. To study this matter, we must go back to the very beginning of God's move among man in the Old Testament.

A Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation

In the book of Genesis from the fall of Adam, God moved on the earth among His chosen people. Through His move in the book of Genesis, God gained some important persons, and eventually, He gained the house of Israel. The crucial persons whom He gained were Adam, Abel, Enosh, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with Joseph. Through Jacob with Joseph, God gained the house of Israel as a small group of people, but in that house we cannot see much of God's administration. We cannot see much of God's administration until we come to the time of Moses as recorded in Exodus.

In Exodus 19 at Mount Sinai the Lord told the children of Israel that He wanted them to be a "kingdom of priests" and a "holy nation" (v. 6). The nation of Israel had probably over two million people by that time. The children of Israel were not saved from Egypt individually. They were saved corporately as an entire race of people. They did not come out of Egypt one by one as individuals, but they came out as a corporate people, even as a nation and a kingdom. When they came to Sinai, God called them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. In this kingdom at Mount Sinai, God's administration among His people on this earth began.

God's Government by His Instant Speaking

plus His Constant, Written Word through Some Agents

God's administration was neither an autocracy by a dictator nor a democracy of the people. God's administration among the children of Israel was a theocracy, indicating that God Himself came to govern, to rule, to administrate, the people of God directly yet through some agents. Among the children of Israel these agents were the priests and the elders working together for God's theocracy. The priests were the ones who received God's word, God's speaking, God's instructions. God's speaking, His constant and instant speaking, was the living constitution of the children of Israel. Until the law was given, there was no constant speaking of God, but there was always His instant speaking. The law was the constant speaking of God. The law, like the United States Constitution, may be considered as the first written constitution of God's people written by God Himself. The Old Testament, however, shows us that the written constitution of God by itself was not adequate. There was still the need of God's instant constitution, His instant speaking. God's instant speaking always goes along with His written word. The theocracy among the nation of Israel was a government according to God's constant speaking as written in the law or God's instant speaking as revealed through the breastplate of the high priest by means of the Urim and the Thummim (Exo. 28:30; Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21; Deut. 33:8; 1 Sam. 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Neh. 7:65).

The very crucial part in God's government was God's instant speaking through the Urim and the Thummim on the breastplate of the high priest. Among the people of Israel there were the elders on the one hand and the priests on the other hand. Although the Scriptures do not clearly indicate how the elders were produced, they do tell us how the priests were produced. God chose the entire nation of Israel to be a kingdom of priests. He intended for every male Israelite to be a priest. But the children of Israel fell and failed to arrive at God's purpose. Thus, God turned His choosing of the entire nation of Israel as priests to a family, the house of Aaron. The house of Aaron became a house of priests to replace the nation of priests. Aaron as the father was appointed by God to be the high priest, and all his sons became the priests (Exo. 28:1). This was the way the priests were produced in the Old Testament.

Among the priests was the high priest with his priestly garments. The most important part of these garments was the breastplate on the ephod (vv. 15-30). On the breastplate were twelve precious stones engraved with the names of

the twelve tribes of Israel (vv. 17-21). I read an article years ago concerning the Urim and the Thummim written by a Hebrew scholar. According to this article, the twelve names of the twelve tribes of Israel were composed of eighteen of the twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet. The remaining four letters were put on a piece called the Thummim. The word *Thummim* indicates perfection or completion. Thus, on the breastplate with the additional piece called the Thummim, all twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet could be found.

Furthermore, according to this article, the Urim, which means "light," was an illuminator inserted into the breastplate underneath the twelve stones. Normally, the twelve stones of the breastplate were under the shining of the Urim. When the priest went into God's presence with the breastplate, suddenly a stone inscribed with a certain name became dark. This darkening of a particular stone was God's instant speaking. It was in this way that letter by letter the high priest was able to spell out a word, then a sentence, then a paragraph, until the full judgment of God was determined. It was necessary to have the complete Hebrew alphabet of twenty-two letters so that any word could be made.

The writer of this article said that it was through the Urim and the Thummim that the sin of Achan was discovered in Joshua 7. By the Urim and the Thummim the Israelites knew that the one who sinned belonged to the tribe of Judah. Eventually, the family and the person were found out (vv. 16-18). The breastplate of the high priest was called the breastplate of judgment in Exodus 28:30 because it spoke for God instantly. Whenever there was a problem that could not be decided or resolved by the written law, the high priest brought the breastplate into the presence of God to wait on God and to read the letters. Then he received the speaking of God. This was the way to receive God's instant revelation concerning His administration. Furthermore, this is why some scholars have called this divine administration in the Old Testament a theocracy.

After the high priest received the instant speaking from God, he did not directly execute or carry out what God spoke. Instead, he passed on the word he had received to the elders, and the elders became the direct administrators among God's people. Joshua could be considered as the leading elder among God's people at his time. The high priest accompanying Joshua was Eleazar, a descendant of Aaron. God asked Moses to tell Joshua that if he wanted to

know God's will or leading, he had to go to Eleazar the priest, who would "inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before Jehovah" (Num. 27:21). These two persons went on in God's move together. One bore the responsibility to go into God's presence to receive God's instant speaking, and the other received the divine speaking to administrate among God's people. In principle, the administration of God was always carried out by the elders according to the divine speaking received through the Urim and the Thummim. When the priests became weak, such as at the time of Eli (1 Sam. 1:12; 3:12-14), the prophets were raised up to strengthen God's speaking (vv. 20-21). God's instant speaking through the priests was by the Urim and the Thummim, but God's instant speaking through the prophets was by the Spirit of God coming upon certain persons to enable them to speak God's word.

Later in the Old Testament, the children of Israel followed the worldly way to have a king. That offended God (1 Sam. 8:4-7). Their desire for a king displeased God because they wanted a man to reign over them rather than God. God allowed them to have a king, but they suffered as a result (vv. 10-18). Following this king, Saul, God established a man as king who was according to His heart, a man named David (Acts 13:21-22). Even with David there was still the need of the ephod (1 Sam. 23:9-12; 30:7-8; 2 Sam. 6:14; 1 Chron. 15:27).

When the kingship became weak, the prophets were raised up. When David sinned, Nathan came to rebuke him and to help him in God's administration (2 Sam. 12:1-25). All the prophets from the time of David through the time of Malachi (Mal. 1:1) were people used by God to speak His instant word to His people in order to help the administrators, the kings, carry out God's administration among His people.

Whatever happened in the Old Testament is a type of the New Testament government. If we are going to understand God's administration in His move in the New Testament today, we have to go back to the Old Testament to receive the full understanding of the practice of God's administration. God's administration is a direct ruling and governing by God Himself. This direct divine ruling is a theocracy. We must see the principle of God's divine government among His people. His government is by His instant speaking plus the constant written Word. The instant speaking was either through the priests or the prophets, but neither the priests nor the prophets were the

direct administrators. The direct administrators were either the elders, the judges, or the kings.

GOD'S ADMINISTRATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Elders Appointed by the Apostles

Now we come to the New Testament. In the Old Testament we are not able to find out how the first group of elders was produced. There is also not a direct word in the New Testament to tell us how the first group of elders in the New Testament church was produced. Both Peter and John were elders in the church in Jerusalem (1 Pet. 5:1; 2 John 1; 3 John 1). James was also an elder there (Gal. 2:9; Acts 12:17; 15:2, 13; 21:18). He was a flesh brother of the Lord Jesus (Gal. 1:19; Matt. 13:55) and was not saved before the Lord's death (John 7:3, 5). Either through seeing the Lord's death or through the appearing of the Lord to him in His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7), James believed in the Lord. Thus, the time from his salvation to his becoming an elder was very short. Eventually, he became the leading elder in the church in Jerusalem. The church in Jerusalem is represented by the name James in Galatians 2:12, and in the book of Acts James is the prominent one among the elders in Jerusalem (12:17; 15:13; 21:18). How were James, Peter, and John produced as elders? The Bible does not directly tell us.

When the apostle Paul was raised up by the Lord and sent out by the Holy Spirit, the Lord used him to establish new churches. Acts 14:23 tells us that Paul returned to appoint elders in each of these new local churches probably within the same year. The appointment of the elders is recorded clearly in this verse. The elders were established among the saints by the apostles who had preached the gospel to them and had formed them into a local church. Titus 1:5 tells us that the apostles who established the churches had the position and the right to send a representative to appoint elders. This was the case with Titus. Titus was representing the apostle Paul to appoint elders in every city of the island of Crete. These verses show us that the elders were properly produced in the New Testament through appointment by those who preached the gospel to them, who taught them the truth, and who formed them with the saints into a local church. These apostles should be the ones who appoint the elders to carry out God's administration in every local church.

At the very beginning of the Lord's recovery in mainland China, we adopted at least eighty percent of the Brethren's practice. By 1935 we realized that we could not fully follow them because of their serious mistake in the matter of the church practice. The light that Brother Nee received during that time is in the book entitled *The Assembly Life*. Those messages were first given by him in 1934.

When Brother Nee began to see the light concerning the scriptural practice of the church life, he was still somewhat held by our humility. He said, "Today we are the unofficial apostles, yet the unofficial apostles still have the unofficial right to appoint the unofficial elders." We were very humble. We did not feel good about recognizing that we were the apostles at that time. But we did say, "If we are not the apostles today, at least we are the unofficial apostles. Otherwise, where did the churches come from?" No doubt, all the churches in China came out of Brother Nee's teaching. If he was not an apostle, at least he was an unofficial apostle.

After a short time another book was published in Chinese by Brother Nee entitled *The Normal Christian Church Life*. In this book Brother Nee became bold. He said that if those of us who preach the gospel, teach the truth, and establish and form churches are not apostles, then who are? He became very strong in this matter. He dropped the prefix *un* from the word *official* and said that we were official apostles and that the elders set up by us were official elders. Therefore, all of us meeting together here are not unofficial elders. We are official elders. I realize that some of us are still young, but compared with the elders appointed by Paul in Acts 14:23, you are not so young. Those elders were appointed by Paul within the same year that their churches were established.

The Teaching of the Apostles—
the Constitution of God's New Testament Kingdom

We have seen that in the Old Testament the law could be considered as the written constitution of God's people. In the New Testament, what replaced the law for God's administration among His people? We know that Christ replaced the law, but we are referring to the aspect and sense of replacing the law in God's administration. In the New Testament the teaching of the apostles replaced the law. Acts 2:42 says, "They continued steadfastly in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles." Immediately after the three

thousand were saved on the day of Pentecost, they began to continue steadfastly in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles. In the Old Testament kingdom of God the constitution was the law, and in the New Testament kingdom of God the constitution is the teaching of the apostles.

The teaching of the apostles is the complete New Testament. It comprises, first, the teaching of the Lord Jesus in the four Gospels. The first group of apostles were charged by the Lord Jesus to teach the new believers what the Lord had taught them. This is clearly recorded in Matthew 28:19-20. The teaching of the apostles also includes what is recorded in the Acts, the Epistles, and the book of Revelation. At the conclusion of the book of Revelation, John tells us that no one should add anything or take away anything from the divine revelation (22:18-19). This means that with the book of Revelation, the teaching of the apostles has been completed. From that time onward no one is allowed to add or deduct anything. If you add something, you will suffer the plagues, and if you deduct something, you will suffer the loss of the divine blessing. The entire New Testament, which is the complete teaching of the apostles, must be considered as the constitution of God's New Testament kingdom.

The Elders as Priests and Administrators

Paul, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, made this matter of God's administration in the New Testament very clear. He charged the brothers in Corinth to remove a certain sinful man from the fellowship of the church (5:13), which is also the fellowship of the apostles and of the saints. His desire was that this evil person would be removed from the church, but he would not do it by himself because he was not the direct administrator. Therefore, he charged the ones who were the direct administrators in the church. By the New Testament teaching and example we can realize that some elders had been established in the church in Corinth. Paul gave such a charge to the brothers, but he did not carry out the administration. The elders were the direct administrators of the church there. The written constitution of the New Testament kingdom of God is the teaching of the apostles, the complete New Testament, and the direct administrators in this kingdom are the elders.

Furthermore, in the New Testament age there is still some instant speaking. In the New Testament we have the reality of the high priest and the priests. In the Old Testament the priests are one group, and the elders are another group.

But in the New Testament these two groups are one. All the believers in Christ are priests to God (1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6), including the elders. All the elders are priests, and Christ is the High Priest (Heb. 3:1). Where is Christ? We know that He is seated at the right hand of God in the heavens (Rom. 8:34), but we must see that for God's movement among us on this earth, our High Priest, Christ, is in us (v. 10). All the elders need to declare that Christ, the High Priest, is in them. We have such a High Priest (Heb. 8:1). The elders, who are also the priests, should be the ones who administrate the church in God's government. If there is a problem in the church under the administration of the elders, how shall they solve it? In the Old Testament it was necessary to study the law to find out what to do to solve the problem. If there is a problem in the church, we have to study our New Testament constitution.

The United States is a good example of a country ruled by its Constitution. The highest power in the United States is neither the president nor the Congress. It is the Constitution. Because of the power of the United States Constitution, President Nixon was forced to resign from office. Eventually, the Constitution is more powerful than the president. We must admit that today the highest power in the church is the teaching of the apostles. If there is a problem in the church, we have to come to the New Testament to see what it says about this particular problem. We should not say that we are for or against something until we go to the New Testament constitution to see what it has to say. When any problem arises, we must learn to be silent and go to the written word of God, the New Testament constitution, without any opinion. We have a complete constitution with many more details than the United States Constitution.

If we cannot find anything in our written constitution directly concerning a certain problem or if we can find something and are not clear how to apply it, we need an instant speaking. The time and the way to carry out the written constitution still need the Lord's instant speaking. How can we have the Lord's instant speaking? We have to get into the presence of the Lord, stay in His presence, and wait on Him, asking Him to show us what to do. Then we have to read the breastplate with all its letters. The stones on the breastplate with the letters refer to the saints, God's people. We have to read the people of the church. By reading the people of the church in the presence of the Lord, with the Lord, and with His loving capacity, typified by the breast, we will receive some instruction as to when and how to carry out what is in the written constitution. This is to receive the instant speaking according to the

written teaching of the apostles. Of course, we should not do anything that is against the teaching of the apostles. In the Old Testament no one was to do anything against the law, but to carry out the law, there was also the need of the instant speaking of God Himself. When we have His instant speaking, we are not speaking our own word. What we speak is not something of democracy or of autocracy, but it is of theocracy since God Himself is speaking instantly according to His written constitution to govern and rule His people.

All the elders of the church need to realize that they are the real priests. They are the elders and the priests. As an elder, you have the High Priest within you, and you can share in His loving capacity as symbolized by His breast. You love the saints with Christ's love and go into His presence with such a loving capacity, waiting on Him and reading the letters on the stones of the breastplate, that is, reading all the members of the church. By reading the members of the church, taking the members as the letters of a divine typewriter, a word, a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph, and even a chapter will come to you, telling you what to do and how to do it.

We must also remember the principle of the eldership. The elders are always in plurality. Because the elders are in plurality, there is the need of much fellowship. The genuine fellowship must be in the presence of the Lord. If any fellowship among the elders is not in the presence of the Lord, that is not genuine fellowship. Thus, all the elders should exercise the practice of being in the presence of the Lord in the fellowship. In this kind of fellowship surely the "Urim" and the "Thummim" in Christ's loving capacity would speak. Then the elders would know what is on the heart of the Lord concerning His people and what He desires to administrate in their locality for the church there. The elders are both the priests to receive the instant word from God and the administrators to administrate what they have received from the Lord. The principle in the Old Testament regarding God's administration is the same in the New Testament.

The Prophets and Teachers

Besides the elders as the priests and as the administrators, there are the prophets and teachers, as illustrated in Acts 13:1-4. In Acts 13 in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers. These prophets and teachers are the ones who can help in the priesthood and in the eldership. They are like the

Old Testament prophets who helped the elders, the kings, and the priests. Today in God's administration on this earth, the principle is the same. Besides the ones who are priests to receive the revelation from the Lord directly and the administrators to carry out what God speaks, there are the prophets and the teachers to help the eldership and the priesthood.

The Apostles' Relationship with the Churches and the Elders after They Have Been Appointed

After the apostles appoint the elders and commit the church into the hands of the elders, what shall the apostles do in the future? Some say that the apostles have nothing to do with the church anymore. According to their feeling, the appointment of the elders by the apostles is the termination of the relationship of the apostles with the churches. They say this by using Brother Nee's fellowship in *The Normal Christian Church Life* as a basis. In chapter 3 of this book, Brother Nee says, "Once a church was established, all responsibility was handed over to the local elders, and from that day the apostles exercised no control whatever in its affairs." In this quotation from Brother Nee's book, we should notice the phrase *in its affairs*. Some quote Brother Nee's words without realizing the significance of this phrase. (Brother Nee in his book entitled *Church Affairs*, chapters 1 and 9, corrected this misuse of his word.) The apostles were to keep their hands off the administration of the local church in its business affairs, not in its need of the apostles' teaching, instruction, and charge.

We saw that Paul wrote a letter to the church in Corinth charging them to remove a certain sinful man from the fellowship of the church. The apostle commanded the church to do this: "Remove the evil man from among yourselves" (1 Cor. 5:13). Does this mean that the apostle took the church back under his administration? No, not at all. If this had been the case, he would not have needed to tell others to remove the sinful one. He would have done it directly by himself. In this sense Paul as an apostle kept his hands off of the church administration but not from teaching, instructing, and charging the church.

There is another aspect to the apostles' relationship with a local church, which Brother Nee talked to us about, in 1 Timothy 5. First Timothy 5:19-20

says, “Against an elder do not receive an accusation, except based upon two or three witnesses. The ones who sin reprove before all that the rest also may have fear.” Timothy was instructed by the apostle Paul on how to receive an accusation against an elder. This indicates that the apostles have authority to deal with the elders even after they have been appointed by the apostles to be elders. If there is a problem among the elders, this case should go to the apostles, and the apostles have to judge. The apostles have the authority to rebuke a sinful elder in front of others. The apostles’ hands should be off of the church in its administration, but this does not mean that the apostles have absolutely nothing to do with a local church after its elders have been established.

The wrong and sinful elders can be accused by the saints, and this accusation should go to the apostles. Eventually, the apostles become a small law court to judge the situation. According to 1 Corinthians 6, even the saints can form a small law court to judge cases among themselves (vv. 1-3). The apostles should make a judgment in cases regarding the alleged wrongdoing of certain elders. It is up to the apostles to justify or condemn them. According to 1 Timothy 5:20, if an elder is judged to be sinful, he can be reproved before the others. A sinning elder should receive public reproof because of his public position. Based upon Paul’s word to Timothy in this matter, how can we say that the apostles, who appointed the elders and handed over the church to them, have nothing to do with the church or the elders once they have been appointed?

The entire book of 1 Corinthians is a “bothering book.” The writing apostle bothered the church in Corinth. The entire book may be considered as a commandment to the local church. First Corinthians 11:34 says, “If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, that you may not come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.” Even after charging the church to take care of so many things, Paul says that he will set in order the rest when he comes. We need to come back to the Word. The Word is our highest authority, our constitution. This verse tells us that some things were not set in order by the apostle Paul. In his Epistle to the church in Corinth, many things were set in order by Paul’s charges, such as the matters of marriage, the eating of sacrifices to idols, head covering, the Lord’s table, etc. Paul charged the Corinthians to deal with at least eleven problems in his fellowship with them. He charged the church to do many things. As the apostle, he did not

have the position to administrate the church, but he did have the position, right, and responsibility to charge the elders to do it.

The Churches Being Local in Administration but Not Absolutely Independent

There is another important item from the Word that we have to realize. The churches are surely local in their administration, but they are not absolutely independent. In our history in the Lord's recovery we were warned by the Brethren practice of autonomy. All the states of the United States have their own administrations and governments, but they are not strictly independent. The states are separate to an extent, but this does not mean that they are absolutely independent. If the states were absolutely independent, the United States would not be one country. It would become fifty countries. The local churches are not absolutely independent. When the apostles kept their hands off of the affairs of the churches, this did not mean that each local church became one independent entity. Nor did it mean that since the churches were under the teaching of the apostles, the churches became a federation.

In 1 Corinthians 4:17 Paul says, "Because of this I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, even as I teach everywhere in every church." In all the churches the apostle Paul taught the same thing. His teaching was the same universally, not varying in any place. Concerning this matter, we need to look at the seven epistles to the seven local churches in Revelation 2 and 3. The word of the Lord to one church is the word spoken by the Spirit to all the churches (2:1, 7). At the beginning of each epistle, it is the Lord speaking to a specific church (vv. 1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14), but at the end of all the epistles the Word says, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). What was said by the Lord to the church in Ephesus was the word that all the churches should hear. Every epistle was a particular word to a certain church, yet this particular word should be heard and taken by all the churches.

On the one hand, the elders of the churches have the right and the position to carry out the local administration of the churches independently. On the other hand, all the churches should listen to the word that the apostles have received of God, which is the teaching of the New Testament. On the one hand, the churches are local separately. On the other hand, all the local churches are

still the one Body of Christ, which is an organism, not a federation, which is an organization. We need to meet as local churches separately according to what the New Testament says, but all the local churches are still the one Body of Christ.

By the way, I would add a little word. In our fellowship many of us are used to saying, "Brother Lee says..." I beg you, from now on, not to say, "Brother Lee says..." Instead, we should say, "First Timothy says..." or "First Corinthians says..." From the very beginning of the Lord's recovery in the United States, I have passed on the Lord's word to you. You may have received the Lord's word through my speaking, through my teaching, but what I spoke was His word. We all need to come back to the pure Word of God and discern accurately what His pure Word says.

The Teaching of the Apostles Being the Real Leadership

In 1986 we had an elders' training on the one accord (see *Elders' Training, Book 7: One Accord for the Lord's Move*). During that time I talked about the leading of the apostles and the leadership in the Lord's ministry, but I do not feel that what I said was accurately understood by some. Because of this misunderstanding, I gave the last two messages in the summer training of 1987 on this matter (see chs. 18 and 19 of *The God-ordained Way to Practice the New Testament Economy*). In those messages I pointed out that the leadership in the New Testament ministry in actuality is not the leadership of one controlling person. Instead, we have the leadership of one controlling revelation in the one ministry through those who bring in the revelation of the ministry. The New Testament leadership is in the teaching of the apostles.

In the four Gospels the leadership was with the Lord Jesus. That was the leadership in a person. The Lord Jesus was the Leader who had the leadership. In the four Gospels the Lord Jesus sent His disciples to certain places. His disciples were to obey whatever He said. In the Acts and the Epistles, Peter and Paul were supposed to be the leaders, but for the most part they did not send anyone anywhere to do the work. All the going-out workers were sent by the Holy Spirit. Acts 13 tells us that Barnabas and Saul were "sent out by the Holy Spirit" (v. 4) from Antioch to the Gentiles. Of course, Paul did charge some of the younger brothers who were closely related to him, such as Timothy and Titus, to go to certain places and to do certain things (1 Cor. 4:17;

Titus 1:5). He charged both Timothy and Titus to come to him, and they received these orders (2 Tim. 4:9; Titus 3:12). But there is at least one case referred to in 1 Corinthians 16:12 that we must see: "Concerning our brother Apollos, I urged him many times to come to you with the brothers; yet it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity." Paul was very burdened to help the Corinthians solve their problems, and their problems involved him and Apollos. This is why Paul expected that Apollos would go to see the Corinthians personally. Paul does not say that he charged Apollos. Paul says, "I urged him." To urge someone to do something is much different from charging him. Paul says, "I urged him many times...yet it was not at all his desire." Although Paul urged him, Apollos still had the liberty, the freedom, not to do it. And he did not do what Paul wanted. Apollos said that he would come when he had opportunity. This may seem like a small verse, but it is very important to the truth concerning the leadership. This verse is very strong to prove that Paul did not exercise any control over the work for the Lord.

Paul was not the leader in the New Testament move of God in the sense of commanding the co-workers to do things. Peter and Paul were not strict in this matter of the movement of the co-workers. If they urged a worker to do something and he felt not to do it, there was no problem. But all the apostles were very strict in the teaching of the apostles. In 1 Timothy 1:3-4 Paul exhorted Timothy to remain in Ephesus to charge certain ones not to teach different things from God's New Testament economy. The apostles would not tolerate any teaching that was different from God's New Testament economy. The aged apostle John, in his second Epistle, told the saints not to receive anyone who brings a teaching other than the teaching of Christ (vv. 9-10). John said that these ones went beyond the teaching of Christ. This means that they went beyond the teaching concerning Christ, which is the basic teaching of the New Testament, the teaching of the apostles. John was strict to the extent that he even charged the saints not to greet such ones. In the matter of the teaching of the apostles, the apostles were very strict. This proves that the teaching of the apostles is actually the real leadership in the New Testament.

CHAPTER THREE

FELLOWSHIP CONCERNING OUR GOING ON

Now that we have seen something concerning God's administration in chapter 2, I want to have more fellowship concerning our going on.

THE BURDEN FOR TRAININGS

Another thing that I want to make clear is our burden to have trainings to train the saints. Brother Nee conducted regular trainings for the saints in mainland China. I came out of mainland China to Taiwan in 1949. We started a formal training there for four months in 1953. From that year on, I set aside a few months nearly every year for the training of the saints.

We practice this matter of training to follow what the apostle Paul did, to follow in his footsteps. Acts 19:9-10 says, "When some were hardened and would not be persuaded, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, he withdrew from them and separated the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this took place for two years, so that all those dwelling in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." At that time Paul was in Ephesus, and there was already a church there. However, he did some work apart from the church there but related to and for the church. He did his preaching and teaching in a school, the school of Tyrannus. Tyrannus might have been a teacher, and Paul might have rented his school and used it as a meeting hall to preach and teach the word of the Lord. Paul's work was not within the church but was something apart from the church there yet still for the churches. Paul felt that there was a need to have such a work to preach to and teach many people. He carried out this work in the school of Tyrannus for two years, and the result was that all those dwelling in Asia heard the word of the Lord.

Acts 28:30-31 says, "He remained two whole years in his own rented dwelling and welcomed all those who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, unhindered." This tells us clearly that Paul rented a place to teach in Rome, and at that time there was a church in Rome. He did a work in his own rented dwelling to proclaim the kingdom of God and to teach the things

concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. No doubt, his proclaiming, his teaching, and his preaching went out to reach a good number of people.

We had our trainings mainly based upon Paul's example in the two passages in Acts that we quoted above. We have a burden to train some seeking saints and some young saints with the word of the Lord. We have seen much blessing upon this work of training. I began to have formal trainings in the United States in 1974. Through these semiannual trainings, I put out all the Life-studies on the entire New Testament. From 1974 to the present time, approximately three hundred churches, mostly in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Central America, and South America, were raised up through the Life-study publications. One brother who was sent by the Lord to Brazil used the one hundred twenty messages of the *Life-study of Genesis* to raise up close to one hundred churches there. Hundreds of churches were raised up and continually fed with these publications. If you ask me to stop the training work and stop the publications, I cannot do it. I must obey my Lord who sent me, who charged me, who gave me this commission to help His recovery, and who gave me this burden of the ministry of His word to release His word. At my age I could go to be with the Lord at any time. Therefore, I am very concerned before the Lord as to how I should use my time. I feel that the first place I should use my time is in doing everything I can to finish the Life-study of the Old Testament. Please bear the burden to pray about this.

When the Lord sent me to the United States, I endeavored to help the church in Los Angeles, but my primary burden was to release the truth to propagate and gain the increase for the church. In 1970 many saints migrated to spread the church life, and in 1974 I moved to Anaheim. At that juncture I was clear that I should put out the Lord's word. Brother Nee had many direct talks with me about this matter of teaching the Lord's word; he inherited a great amount of truth from all the teachings in the past centuries. I received much help from him because he told me many things. Brother Nee had so much of the truth deposited in him that was never put into print. Piles and piles of his manuscripts were destroyed by the Communists when they took over mainland China. I would say that less than one-third of what Brother Nee spoke was put into print. With so little of what Brother Nee saw and spoke in print, how could the church be built up? This is why by 1974 I was burdened to have the formal training in order to put out the proper understanding of the New Testament according to the top expositions of the top teachers throughout the past nineteen centuries. I still have the same

burden to put out the Life-study of the Old Testament. I have even received many letters from the saints encouraging and charging me to do this. This is my burden. I must finish my responsibility before the Lord to make the Lord's revelation in the holy Word as clear as I can to all of us. I must continue to present what the Lord has shown us from the beginning of the Lord's recovery in mainland China through Brother Nee until the present time.

I am also burdened to train some young saints, not with the expectation that they all will become lifelong full-timers to serve the Lord. But we do have an expectation that many of the young college graduates among us will spend either one or two years of time to learn something of the Lord, that is, to learn the Word and to learn the lessons in life. After such a training they may decide to go back to continue their schooling, or they may go back to get a job. Of course, by having such a training some will be tested out and approved to be lifelong full-time servants of the Lord. Without this kind of training, how could we have these persons tested out? We feel that the trainings are the best way to get these persons tested out. I also have a burden to see the completion of the evangelization of the island of Taiwan. I believe that this can be accomplished in about two years through 1990.

THE BURDEN TO STAY IN ONE PLACE TO DIRECTLY HELP BUILD UP A LOCAL CHURCH

I have a burden to stay in one place for at least nine months out of the year in order to directly help build up the local church there with some elders. In 1922 Brother Nee raised up a local church in his city. Sixty-six years have passed, and we have not seen a model of a local church built up entirely according to what we have seen from the Lord. Brother Nee did not have the time to do this. Until now I have not had the time to do this either. After leaving mainland China, I was in Taiwan for about ten years. But I spent most of my time to train the saints, and I spent more than one-third of my time in other countries. We trained many new believers who were saved through our preaching of the gospel when we came to Taiwan. Many brothers who were saved through our preaching became elders. We trained them and built them up. Then many of them became useful ones to bear responsibility in the church or in the work. Some brothers who are now elders in Taiwan are the sons of these useful ones who were raised up. Because I was so busy training

the saints, I did not have the opportunity to build up a local church according to what I teach and according to what I have seen of the Lord.

Many brothers came to me asking for certain ways to do things, but I did not give them a way. I told them to bring this matter to the Lord in prayer and seek the Lord's leading. I did this because I learned a lot in my earlier ministry. In my earlier ministry I could give people many instructions. Eventually, I discovered that very few of these instructions worked well. We can illustrate this by the teaching of driving a car. A driving teacher can impart the principles of driving to his students and even some details, but his teaching is not the application. When the driving teacher actually drives the car, his driving may be absolutely different from what he taught. He taught only some principles with some details. But quite often these principles do not fit in with the real situation of the road. When he taught driving, he did not realize there would be a big dip on a certain road. He did not anticipate that the roads would be flooded due to heavy rains. He never dreamed that two cars would crash right in front of his car. Some of the brothers may say, "I drive according to Brother Lee's teaching. Brother Lee told me this." But Brother Lee never spoke about "two cars crashing in front of you." My point is this: if the steering wheel of the church were in my hand, I might drive it in an absolutely different way from what I taught you. This driving would be according to the present situation and condition of the church in order to bring the church safely to its destination.

Thus far, according to my observation, many of the leading ones are still building up the local churches in a "probing way." They heard something and they received some teaching, but in their practice they are not so clear what to do or how to do it. This is why I have the burden to be involved in the direct building of a local church in a certain place if the Lord would give me time. I must be before the Lord as to whether or not I should do this and where I should do this. Please pray for me concerning this matter.

THE EXPERIMENT IN TAIPEI

About four years ago, in October of 1984, I went to Taipei to have some new things tested out as an experiment for our practice of the church life. Before I went, I told some of the brothers that I was going to Taipei to try to do something new. I also said that in those three to five years I would not be able to do much to help the churches in the United States. What I would do was to

come back two times a year for the trainings on the Life-study of the Bible. Then what I would do in Taipei would be tested out, and I would have a finished model to bring back to the United States. The churches in the United States would be able to follow this model and do something according to it. When I went to Taipei, I told the brothers there that I came back to have a new start and that I would call this a new way. But I did not have the assurance how much this way would succeed or work out. I told them that what I was going to do would be a trial, a test, an experiment. At that time close to eighty new elders were established. I told these elders that their being appointed as elders was not something permanent. Their appointment was also subject to experiment. Maybe after a short time some would find out that they were not suitable persons for the eldership, and they would feel to resign. Or maybe I would find out that some were not so fitting in this responsibility. I repeated this word again and again—we are conducting an experiment. I said that the training center in Taipei was a laboratory.

Regretfully, I was not strict in keeping my word to raise up a model in Taipei and then return to the United States with the finished product. When the saints in the United States heard about this, many of them wanted to go there to attend the training. I hesitated, but I gave in to their request. Now I regret this. At that time I should have kept my principle strictly to say no to the saints. I should have asked all the saints to please stay in the United States while I tested and experimented various things. Then I could have properly found out whether or not those things worked. I should have kept this principle, but I did not. That was my negligence, and I feel regretful for this.

Many saints from the United States went to the training in Taipei. In principle, the training should have fit the situation of the saints who came from the United States. But I did not have the time to oversee the training that much. I was occupied to the uttermost with the work on the Chinese Recovery Version. I could not even be involved that much with the training. If I had had the time, I would have considered the particular need of the saints from the United States. The training was planned and formed just to fit in with the need of the island of Taiwan. It was not designed to meet the need of saints coming from other countries. My negligence was in accepting these saints to be trained and not doing anything to prepare the training to fit in with their situation.

Within such a short time of training, we baptized over thirty thousand new believers. If I were able to repeat that time of training again, I would not have let the trainees baptize so many. We discovered that we could baptize many people, but then we realized that we did not have the manpower to take care of the new ones.

THE LIVING STREAM MINISTRY OFFICE

The Living Stream Ministry office is only a business office to serve my ministry for two things: to publish the messages in book form and to distribute these messages in both video and audio tapes. That is all the ministry office should do and nothing else. I did not have much time to check on everything related to the office in the past, but the ministry office has always had this specific function and no other function. This little office is a Levitical service, serving my ministry to put out the word of God in print and through video and audio tapes.

GOING ON UNDER THE TEACHING OF THE APOSTLES BY SPEAKING THE SAME THING AND BY KEEPING THE ONENESS OF THE LORD'S RECOVERY

Our going on should be according to what we have seen from the Word. There should not be any control, and the leadership is not in one controlling person. The teaching of the apostles must be the very leadership among us. We all must be under the teaching of the apostles. When I came to the United States, many brothers can testify that I never showed myself as a leader. The leading ones in the churches can testify that I never controlled any church or any saint. I never controlled anything, and I would never control anything. Rather, I would do as much as I can to withdraw from the so-called leadership. I do not mean that I am withdrawing from the Lord's recovery. I have a burden from the Lord, and I must be faithful to Him and to His commission, His charge. But be assured that I will try the best to stay away from the leadership.

We all need to endeavor to speak the same thing by the Lord's mercy and grace (1 Cor. 1:10). There is absolutely no heresy among us. We do not have

any basic problems among us, so it should be easy for us to avoid speaking different things and speak the same thing. Also, by His mercy we do not have any organization. No one can control the local churches. No one can control anything, because we do not have organization among us. I do not control, and the Living Stream Ministry office does not control. Mistakes may have been made in the past. But let us live in today and forget about yesterday. We do not even have tomorrow. We have only today in which to live. What happened yesterday is over. If anything was wrong in the past, we need the cleansing blood of Christ as the trespass offering. Past mistakes that have been confessed to the Lord are under the cleansing blood. We need to forget the past and go on. We should not even have any expectation about what will happen tomorrow. We do not need to worry about tomorrow. We live today. No one controls you. All the local churches have the full freedom to go on. As long as you do not do anything against our New Testament constitution, no one would bother you. Among us in the Lord's recovery there is nothing worth worrying about because basically we do not have any heresy or any kind of organizational control. Everyone in every church has the full freedom to go on. I hope that we would be so faithful and loyal to the Lord's recovery. We should mean business with the Lord that the Lord's recovery will be prevailing and even flourishing on the earth for the Lord's purpose.

Concerning practices among us such as head covering, baptism, or preaching the gospel, we should let these things be as they are among the saints. If some of the sisters want to wear a head covering, let them do it. If others do not, give them the liberty. We should have this attitude with all the practices in the church life that are outside our common faith. If some feel that they are burdened to visit people for the gospel, let them do it. Those saints who are burdened to visit people for the gospel should not insist on this practice. We should try to avoid different kinds of terms, slogans, and sayings and try our best to keep the oneness in the Lord's recovery. We must avoid anything that damages the freedom of the saints or the oneness of the Body of Christ.

It is altogether wise and profitable that we do not expect all the churches to be the same. This is impossible. Even twelve brothers within a local church cannot be the same in everything. If a local church has a burden to visit people in their homes for the preaching of the gospel, they should carry out this commission. They do not need to say that others do not preach the gospel in this way. If others do not feel to preach the gospel by visiting people in

their homes, that is not your business. Do not talk about who is for this or who is for that. We should not talk in this way. We should not label ourselves or label others. If we want to practice a certain thing, we can do it. If others do not want to practice it, they have the liberty not to practice it. We should not question who is for a certain thing and who is not for a certain thing. This does not help you or anyone else. We all must endeavor to keep the oneness of the Spirit so that the Body of Christ can build up itself in love (Eph. 4:3, 16).

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: Many times you reach a point in your experience where you have genuine concerns. How can you have fellowship about these genuine concerns without being considered by others as negative and thereby causing another problem? This is a concern to me, and this is related to the freedom of seeking the Lord and the truth.

Answer: First, let us try to avoid any kind of trouble. Second, we must try our best to make everything open. If I see something in you that would not be so good for the recovery, I must pray for you and seek the Lord's leading to go to you and open up the matters of concern. I should be able to do this without any kind of fear, because we are brothers in the recovery, and we can fellowship about these things. I believe that all things have a way to be resolved by thorough and frank fellowship. Please do not do things behind anyone. If I did anything behind you, that would mean that I am not faithful to you or to the recovery. Actually, if I am faithful to you, I am faithful to the recovery. I would never do anything behind you. If there is some problem, I need to go to you to have some open fellowship.

Today there are many people in the Lord's recovery. There are also a great number of co-workers and elders. We come from different countries with different backgrounds, and we have different kinds of understanding and thinking. To think that we would never have any trouble is a dream. Even between a husband and wife problems cannot be avoided. What is the way to solve the problems in a family of only two persons? There must be a proper way and a wise way that does not damage their marriage life or hurt their feelings. But we have to be open. I should not do something behind my wife, nor should she do something behind me. If we do not avoid this, we will kill the oneness.

If you feel or observe something concerning the Lord's recovery related to a certain person, you should pray for him. Do not come to him in a rushed way. He is still human, and you are still in the natural life. We should be afraid of ourselves more than anything else. We should be afraid that we would do something in a rush to damage someone's feeling and close the door for open fellowship. After praying for a period of time, we will feel led at the right time to go see this brother. Before we go to see him, we should not say anything to anyone, because this kind of "pre-talk" opens the door for the devil to come in. If I have seen something about you that is not so fitting in the Lord's recovery, I should not talk about this to anyone. I should pray to the Lord until He leads me to see you. Then we can open up to one another in love and in mutual understanding. We all have a heart for the Lord, and we all have the same goal to see that the Lord's recovery would be properly going on. Thus, we should have and can have the mutual confidence. I can come to you with the confidence that you would fellowship with me to find a way to get the trouble resolved. I believe that all the troubles can be taken care of by this kind of open, frank fellowship in love. If someone comes to me in this way, I am grateful for this kind of openness.

Even with three brothers taking the lead in a certain locality, there might be some troubles. How can these troubles be resolved? The only way is to have open, frank fellowship in love without fear. I do not feel that anyone is doing anything against me, and I am not against anyone, so we can have open, frank fellowship in love. Even though I was so busy in Taipei, I believe that if some of the brothers had come to me to let me know about some of their problems, I might have rendered some help to the situation. This may have required only two or three minutes. If you come to me, you should come without fear. I am not a tiger. I am just your brother. Some may feel that they are afraid of disturbing me and taking away my time. But when the troubles come as a result of not having the proper fellowship, my time is consumed with them. To deal with the troubles takes at least tenfold more of my time than if you would come to me. Your coming to me would save trouble, and to save trouble is to save time. When troubles like this arise, I receive many letters and phone calls. All the questions are concerning the past or the future. This is why I want to stress that the Christian life is not in yesterday or in tomorrow. The past is over, and we do not know what will happen in the future. The Christian life is today.

We should be frank and open, but we may feel in wisdom that we should not touch certain matters. If I need to say something, I say it openly to the person whom it concerns. If I realize that more troubles will result from my touching a certain matter, then I exercise my wisdom not to touch it. If I have the real concern, I will pray concerning it. I would not even tell my wife. I have always kept this principle. I exercised myself in this way with Brother Nee. I was with him for eighteen years. Everyone who knows about our relationship can testify that we did not have the slightest problem. Because I practiced this principle, I have avoided becoming involved in troubles throughout the years.

I hope that all of us would practice this principle. If we have a real concern about a certain matter involving a certain person, we should first pray. Then we may have some frank, open fellowship in love. If we realize that the by-product, the result, of our touching this matter will not be profitable, then we should exercise our wisdom not to touch it. We can leave this matter to the sovereignty of the Lord. If we have a burden, we can simply pray. Then we will never create any problems or any different speaking in the churches. I may have the best heart for the Lord's recovery, but I may come with the best heart to a brother and say something that can still be misunderstood by him. We all have to learn from now on to say things carefully and to do things carefully in every way.

Question: When the leading brothers come together to pray for the church, am I understanding correctly that you do not bring up any of the problems that you see in the saints?

Answer: Even with what we say to our wives, we must exercise our wisdom in order to have a marriage life with a peaceful and sweet feeling. We must exercise our wisdom concerning what to say and what not to say to our wives. We also have to be careful about how much we say. If we are a little careless in talking to our wives, we can create trouble. I know of some cases where a careless word from the husband to the wife resulted in a problem for their entire marriage life. We need to exercise our wisdom.

If there are three elders in a certain locality, these brothers also need to exercise their wisdom in what they say to one another. If you, as one of the three elders, see some problems with the saints, do not talk to the other two brothers right away. You have to bring this matter to the Lord and pray for it.

You can ask the Lord, “Lord, what I feel about this matter may be wrong. Show me the real situation.” In prayer you can follow the Lord step by step. Then you will have the leading of the Lord with some amount of assurance that the Lord is with you. In this kind of spirit and with this kind of atmosphere, you can go to the other two brothers. You also may ask the Lord, “Should I go to both brothers, or should I go to just one? Which one should I go to?” Maybe the Lord would tell you to go to a certain brother and not to the other one. Wait for a while. This is wisdom, this will help the situation, and this will never create any kind of trouble.

The elders should also be careful about letting their wives know the things concerning the church. This is risky and dangerous. Some saints told me things in confidence and charged me not to tell anyone. One dear saint opened up something to me and charged me not to let anyone know. He has gone to be with the Lord, but I have kept what he told me in confidence for over thirty years. I never made this matter known to my wife. Someday all of us will give an account to the Lord, so we must not be loose in what we say or tell others. Whatever we say and do really concerns the Lord’s recovery, the Lord’s interest, and it is not a small thing. If we would exercise this kind of wisdom, many troubles would be and could be avoided.

We must do our best to avoid trouble and do our best to say the same thing. All of us are assured that there is no heresy among us, and I do not believe that any one of us has a bad feeling toward another brother. We should not form parties among ourselves or join any parties. We should not have a different attitude toward some brothers. To one brother you may be nice, but to another brother you are a different person. This is not proper. We should be the same toward everyone. We are in the Lord’s recovery and in the church life. To have any preference for certain saints is wrong.

Question: Some of the saints may hear some rumors or some gossip. They may not become negative themselves or cause some trouble, but the symptom in many cases is that they become discouraged. They lose their heart for the church life. They lose their confidence in the Lord’s recovery. There are many cases where this causes them to question the leadership in their church or the ministry among us. This last training on Leviticus was a real medicine, a real balm, and a real help. But I am concerned that many of us may have certain cases in our church where brothers or sisters are not negative, but they heard some gossip or rumor, which may be totally unfounded. There may be some

element in what they heard that causes them to question. They themselves are not opposing, and they do not form a party. But they lose all their enjoyment, they lose all their heart, and they lose all their confidence. In many cases they do not even express what they heard, but there is a kind of withdrawing from the church life and a withdrawing from the service. This is a real weakening to these saints. How can we help this kind of brother or sister either in a public way or a personal way?

Answer: In 1942 there was a big turmoil in the church in Shanghai. That caused the church in Shanghai to close its doors and also caused Brother Nee to stop his ministry for six years. When that turmoil occurred, I was not in Shanghai. After the war in 1946, I went back to Shanghai, and the church there opened its doors. But there was a very small number of saints meeting together compared to their number before 1942. There were only about eighty or ninety saints at the Lord's table. Many saints were offended in this turmoil, and all the arrows were being shot at Brother Nee. He was the target of the attacks. Because I was not there and I am not a person who wants to hear negative things, I am still not fully clear concerning all the problems in the church in Shanghai at that time. When I returned to the church in Shanghai in 1946, I had just recovered from a very serious illness. During the two and a half years of my sickness and recovery, I learned a lot. Mainly, I learned about the two trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Some of the saints in Shanghai had been very dear to me in the Lord for years. They came to me and checked with me in this way: "Brother Lee, do you believe that Brother Watchman Nee has never made any mistake?" What should my answer have been? Yes or no?

I was not bothered about this question because I learned in my sickness some lessons concerning the two trees. I checked with the saints who came to me in this way: "Before you condemned Brother Nee as being wrong in certain things, how was your spiritual life?" They responded in a very positive way that their spiritual life was wonderful. They were living and absolutely for the church. Then I asked, "How about now?" Many times they would weep and tell me that they felt lost and that they had lost their heart. They said that the Lord was still with them but that they had lost interest. In other words, their experience after condemning Brother Nee was altogether negative. Then I responded, "Brother, if your saying that Brother Nee is wrong and your condemning of him are something proper, your spiritual life should be better than it was before. Why is it that after condemning him and saying negative

things about him, your spiritual life has become so poor?" This kind of fellowship was able to rescue a great number of saints in Shanghai. The saints there came to me one by one in this way. I simply checked with them how their spiritual life was before this negative speaking and how it was afterward. They all saw that there was a great difference, and they repented.

I think that we can help the saints in the same way. We can ask them if what they heard helped them in their spiritual life. If it helps them, they should take it. If it does not help them, it must be something of the enemy. Whether the thing you heard is true or not, as long as your hearing has a negative influence on your spiritual life, you should not take it. It was not the saints' business to judge whether Brother Nee was wrong or not wrong. Even if what they did was right, what was the result of their doing? The result was to deaden people. Even a little talk about something negative will deaden you. We must help the saints to go along with their inner life and to keep their spiritual life from becoming deadened, hurt, or poisoned by anything. We should help the saints to avoid anything that would deaden, hurt, or poison their spiritual life. This kind of fellowship that I had with the saints in Shanghai from 1946 to 1948 issued in the repentance of hundreds of saints. Hundreds repented and came back to the church life. Many went to Brother Nee and repented to him directly.