SERVICE
for the Building Up of the
CHURCH

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LIVING STREAM MINISTRY

SERVICE FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH

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PREFACE

This book is composed of messages given by Brother Witness Lee in Hong Kong on December 4 through 21, 1957. The messages were originally published in *The Ministry of the Word* in 1959 and 1960.

CHAPTER ONE

SERVING UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE HEAD IN LOVE

Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:15-16; Col. 2:19

In the following chapters we will consider the service for building up the church. Since this is a major topic, we can give only some brief principles.

HOLDING TO TRUTH IN LOVE

Ephesians 4:15 opens with *holding to truth in love*. It is very significant that truth and love are put together. If we can hold to truth in love, "we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ" (v. 15). We can grow up into the Head, Christ, when we have truth and love, that is, when we hold to truth in love.

Love and truth balance each other. Love makes people hot, whereas truth makes them cold. Love makes people foolish, whereas truth makes them clear. A person who merely has love may be hot yet foolish, and a person who merely has truth may be clear yet cold. We do not need to be cold or foolish; we need to be both burning and sober. Love can be compared to the fire in the boiler of a steam locomotive, which is the driving force of the train. Truth can be compared to the tracks by which the train is regulated. Combustion in the boiler generates the power that drives the train forward, and tracks keep the train safely on its path. This shows how Christians pursue the Lord and grow. When we have love within as our driving force and truth without as our regulating track, our pursuit of the Lord and our growth in life will be normal and free of problems.

At times fervent believers are not balanced by the truth; they go astray with their love and even run into trouble. This can be compared to starting the boiler in a train and setting the train in motion without laying the tracks. This train is bound to have an accident. Hence, we must have love, and we must have the truth; we must hold to truth in love if we are to continue growing in the Lord in order for our service to cause the genuine building up of the Body of Christ.

To hold to truth in love is to hold the truth, whether concerning God or man, with fervent love, not coldly. This is a great principle. Suppose a young brother wants to marry an unbelieving woman. As those who are learning to serve in the church, how should we help him? We cannot be cold and condemn him, saying, "Do not become dissimilarly yoked with an unbeliever; believers cannot marry unbelievers. If you do, you will violate the Scriptures and offend the Lord." If we merely measure and condemn him with the truth, using the truth to deal with him, we are not holding to truth in love. We might think that we are helping the brother with the truth, but because of our lack of love, we will not obtain good results; rather, we will stumble those whom we are trying to help.

If we want to help ourselves and others, we must have love every time we hold to truth. In order to help this young brother, we need not necessarily say, "Do not become dissimilarly yoked with an unbeliever," but we must have a fervent love for him. We must love this young brother and sense that the Lord has entrusted him into our care. Hence, we want him to be graced and to grow up into the Head, Christ, in this matter. Such a realization is necessary. Then we might not say much concerning how we feel, but we can lead him to pray and bring this matter to the Lord so that he can touch the Lord's will. Then he will see the truth and receive help. In doing this, we will not only hold to truth, but we will hold to truth in love.

Another group of believers may care only for love but neglect the truth. This is the case with many sisters, who are often more loving than brothers but do not stand as firmly in the truth. Take the matter of marriage as an example. An older sister may be concerned for the marriage of a young sister and want to introduce an unbelieving friend to her. The older sister may consider that the young unbeliever has a good temper, comes from a good family, has a good education, and hence, in every respect is better than the brothers. The older sister may say, "I have met a young man who is truly gentle and in every respect is better than the young brothers among us. Out of my concern and love for this young sister, I feel that I should introduce this young man to her." Although this older sister has a loving heart, she does not have the truth. The brothers often have the truth but are cold and lack a loving heart, but the sisters often are burning with love but unclear concerning the truth. The overemphasis of either truth or love will cause a loss to the Body of Christ.

Therefore, we must hold to truth in love. The brothers cannot have truth without love when they render help to others, and the sisters cannot have love without truth when they render help to others. We must always hold to truth in love. If we apply this principle to all things, we will daily grow in life, and those under our care will receive genuine help.

GROWING UP INTO THE HEAD IN ALL THINGS

Ephesians 4:15 says, "Holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ." This verse says that we grow up by holding to truth in love and that this growth takes the Head as its goal. In other words, our growth is to enter deeper into the Lord, that is, to be more subject to His authority. If we have truth and love and apply the truth by holding to it in love, we will grow up into the Head daily, and we will be increasingly subject to His authority.

Furthermore, the growth of a Christian is not for himself but for the other members. Because we grow, the brothers and sisters under our care will also grow. If we do not move forward, those who are with us will not move forward either. If we move forward, they will move with us. When we grow, those who are under our care will spontaneously grow.

THE GROWTH OF THE BODY UNTO THE BUILDING UP OF ITSELF IN LOVE

Verse 16 speaks of the growth of the Body: "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." The growth of the Body of Christ is through the many joints of supply. In addition to these joints of supply, there are many parts, and each part has its measure. The joints supply the Body, and each part operates and functions according to its measure. For example, my arm has many parts. I have fingers, a wrist, a forearm, and an upper arm, and each part has a different measure. The function of my arm is manifested when each part operates according to its measure, and it is not manifested if the parts do not operate according to their

measure. A doctor once told me that if a person covered his eyes and did not use them, in less than three years he would lose the ability to see. Hence, function comes from operation.

I have a little experience in this matter. When I was forty, I was restricted to complete bed rest due to an illness. For six months I did not get out of bed. When I became healthy and gained weight, I got out of bed and quickly discovered that my legs were too feeble to walk and that I could not even stand. My feet and my legs had been functioning for forty years; I had been able not only to walk but also to run and jump. I never would have thought that after six months of bed rest, my legs would not be able to function. I needed to lean on two people in order to begin to walk again. Initially, my legs would get tired after one minute, and I would need to sit down. After practicing for some time, I was able to walk for ten minutes. This experience shows that the ability of our legs, including their strength to walk, comes from their operation. Our legs lose their function if they do not operate for a long time. Therefore, although each part of the Body has a function, each part must operate according to its measure in order for that function to be manifested. Every brother and sister in the church is a member of the Body of Christ and has a measure. We do not manifest our function because we do not operate according to our measure.

If every joint of supply supplies the Body, and each part operates according to its measure to bring about its function, all the parts of the Body will be joined together and knit together. Then the various members will no longer be disjointed; rather, the Body will be joined and will be one. Some churches have an atmosphere in which the saints are not joined or knit together. This situation is caused by a lack of supply from the saints who are joints of supply and by a lack of functioning in the saints. If every joint of supply would receive something from the Head to supply the Body and if every believer would function according to the operation of his measure, the whole church would be joined and knit together. Then through every joint of supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, the Body will cause its own growth unto the building up of itself in love.

HOLDING THE HEAD
AND THE GROWTH OF THE BODY

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 and Ephesians 4:15-16 speak of the same matter.

Holding the Head means to be joined to the Head, that is, not leaving the Head but being subject to the authority of the Head and taking the Head as the source in all things. This includes growing up into the Head, Christ, in all things and also all the supply being from Him, as in Ephesians 4:15. Being supplied is a matter of the joints, and being knit is a matter of the sinews. This is the same as “being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply” in Ephesians 4:16. The growth of the Body in Colossians 2:19 is caused by the increase of God’s element in the believers. If in the church those who are joints and sinews grow up into the Head, are subject to the authority of the Head, and hold the Head in all things, the Body will be supplied by the joints and knit together through the sinews. As a result, God’s element will increase in the believers, and the Body will grow.

The growth of the Body in verse 19 refers to building up. As God’s dwelling place, the church must be built up, and as the Body of Christ, the church needs to grow. The dwelling place is the Body, and the Body is the dwelling place; therefore, building is growing. For us to build up the church is for us to cause the Body of Christ to grow.

For over two thousand years of church history, few believers have paid much attention to these two portions in the Bible. I believe that in these last days the Holy Spirit will show us the significance of these verses and reveal more light. Thus, we should memorize these two portions and keep them in our heart.

EVERY BELIEVER SERVING GOD

God wants every believer to serve Him. This is a basic matter in the Bible. Most believers have the erroneous concept that God wants man merely to be saved. However, the Bible reveals that God’s purpose in saving man is not merely for man to be saved but for man to serve Him. Every believer should serve God. Regardless of our profession, we should serve God. Our worldly professions are secondary; our primary profession is to serve God. First Peter 2:9 says that to be saved is to become a royal priesthood. We need to sense

within that we are priests of God. Whether businessmen, doctors, or teachers, regardless of our profession, we should have the sense that we are on the earth to be priests. A priest is a person who serves God exclusively. The title *priest* is not a designation for a minority. Catholics have the erroneous concept that only those who are ordained as priests can serve God. However, every Christian should be a priest.

CHRISTIAN SERVICE

BEING A SERVICE OF THE BODY

According to the New Testament, the believers are members one of another and are coordinated in one Body. A Christian is not a complete entity; he is merely a member of the Body, a part. Hence, when we serve the Lord, we should serve in the position of a member, in coordination with others. Just as a member cannot function apart from the other members in a body, so also we cannot have an individualistic service in the church.

We must be clear that our service in the church is the service of the Body. Once we are separated from the Body, there cannot be any service. Any service that is apart from the Body is abnormal. A nose is very becoming and useful on a person's face, but if it is cut off, it is frightful, unsightly, and useless. A hand is dexterous and becoming on a person's body, but a severed hand that is still moving would be a frightful sight. Such is any service that is apart from the Body.

Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 are two crucial chapters in the Bible concerning the service of the Body. In Romans we are being saved by the Lord for His service (12:1). In 1 Corinthians we are members of the Body of Christ; hence, we must not act or serve alone (12:14-22). If we see these two points, there will be fewer problems in our service for building up the church.

PRINCIPLES FOR OUR SERVICE

There are two crucial principles concerning our service for building up the church.

Serving under the Authority of the Head

When serving in the church, we must see authority. The matter of authority must be settled if we are to coordinate and serve with the saints in the church. Otherwise, our service will lack the element of building and will eventually cause problems in the church.

Authority in the church does not refer to the establishment of popes, as is practiced among Catholics. Authority concerns order in the Body. Every member in our body has its place. For example, I have shoulders, and my arms are attached to my shoulders, and my hands, including my fingers, are attached to my arms. Every member of my body has a certain position, and this position is its order. Similarly, there is order in our service in the church because it is the service of the Body. If we are subject to the authority of the Head, we will know our position and our order in the church. We will spontaneously know where we should be, whom we are in front of, and who is in front of us.

Some may think that it is difficult to know one's order in the church. They may ask, "What is my order, and whose authority should I be under? What should I do if I am in the wrong order or under the wrong authority?" Such questions are theoretical; they are not practical. We should question only whether we have seen the authority of the Head and whether we are subject to the arrangement of the Head. If we know the authority of the Head and are subject to His arrangement, we will spontaneously know our position and order in the church.

Those who have touched the authority of the Head and rest in their position in the Body will have spontaneous and harmonious coordination with others. Such ones will not despise their portion or shrink back, nor will they highly regard themselves or put themselves before others. Rather, they will fulfill their function in the church as becoming, beautiful members.

If all God's children knew the authority of the Head, that authority would become the power of the church. Once the authority of the Head is honored, the church will have the presence of the Head and the riches of the Head. The building up of the church depends on God's throne being in the church. For the genuine building up of the church, the first matter that every serving one should touch is the authority of the Head. Those who have touched the authority of the Head will never be disconnected from the church, nor will they serve God in an individualistic way. Under the authority of the Head,

there is no room for zealous or capable persons. If zealous and capable persons who do not know the throne serve in the church, they will trample and tear down others. Only those who know authority and are subject to the Head can supply the Body of Christ and build up the church of God.

Serving in Love

We must also serve in love. This love is important and significant. Ephesians 1:4 and 5 say that before the foundation of the world God predestinated us in love to be His sons. Hence, the divine love was in eternity past, before the foundation of the world. This love is God Himself (1 John 4:8), and it is His heart.

In order to participate in the service that builds up the church, we must first touch the authority of the Head, and then we must touch love. This love has also been poured out in the church through the Holy Spirit. In the Body of Christ there is the element of love. When we touch this love, we cannot but love God and the brothers and sisters, our fellow members. Furthermore, when we see the believers in pain or in weakness, we spontaneously feel their pain. Their pain becomes our pain, and their weakness becomes our weakness because we are related to them and cannot be separated (2 Cor. 11:29).

We may not be able to feel the various parts of our body loving one another, but they do. If my finger is cut by a knife, I would feel the pain immediately. If I bruise my foot, my whole body will suffer. Physiologically, you might say that this is a function of the nerves, but spiritually, this is a matter of love.

First Corinthians 12:26 says that in the church, the Body of Christ, when one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; and when one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it. This shows a relationship of love. We can have such intimate relationships in the church because we all have the divine love.

The service that builds up the Body comes out of our love of the Body. In order to help others in the church, we do not necessarily need to preach, nor do we need power, but we must have love. Some believers seek the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but the true experience of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is to be filled with love. The more we receive God's love, the more we will be

filled with the Holy Spirit. Love is the expression of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). The Holy Spirit in us is a matter of love.

The divine love motivates and empowers us for our service. We need such love in order to preach the gospel with power. We need to love the souls of sinners so that we would weep within when we see one who is not saved. Then our gospel preaching will be powerful. Similarly, we help the saints because we love them; we should feel sad when we do not pray for them and be bothered when we do not care for them. The care and service that issue from this love will be powerful, effective, and long lasting. The service of some of the believers in the church is not long lasting, because they lack the love of God.

We must not merely talk about serving in coordination. Without love, there is no service, and all our activities will be empty and rigid. True and living service comes out of love. The serving power, the helping power, and the edifying power are in this love. Thus, the Lord Jesus commanded His disciples to love one another (John 15:12). Without loving one another, we cannot bear fruit (v. 16). The Lord also said that by this love men will know that we are His disciples (13:34-35). If the saints would love one another, the world will believe that Christ was sent by God (17:21). Of the seven churches in Asia, only the church in Philadelphia was approved by the Lord (Rev. 3:7-13). The word *Philadelphia* is composed of two Greek words, one based on *phileo*, which means "love," and the other on *adelphos*, which means "brother." Therefore, *Philadelphia* means "brotherly love." The church in Philadelphia was full of brotherly love and was therefore approved by the Lord.

We need to see the authority of the Head, and we must have the love of the Body in order to build up the church. If we do not have the love of God, we will have problems. We often say that the Lord is taking the way of recovery in the church. However, if we do not have love among us, our work of recovery is empty and without spiritual value.

We should pray for the Lord to have mercy on us so that we would not only have the authority of the Head but also love the Body. Then we will hold to truth in love and grow up into Christ the Head in all things. This will cause the growth of the Lord's Body unto the building up of itself in love.

CHAPTER TWO

THE EXCELLENT WAY TO EXERCISE GIFTS

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 12:31; 13:1-8, 13; 14:1

First Corinthians 12:31 through 14:1 speaks of love. These chapters are closely related, because the Bible was not initially divided into chapters or verses. Chapter 12 speaks of various gifts and how to exercise them. Chapter 14 speaks of the most profitable gift for the church, which is to prophesy, to speak for the Lord. But in between these two chapters, chapter 13 speaks of the excellent way to exercise the gifts, that is, of the manner in which these gifts should be exercised.

In verse 31 of chapter 12 the apostle Paul says, "I show to you a most excellent way." The word *way* can also be rendered "manner." This word has two meanings in Greek: "path" and "method." Paul speaks of love in both chapters 13 and 14. Love is the way to exercise the gifts and to build up the church, and it is also the manner in which the gifts are exercised. "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but do not have love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries...but do not have love, I am nothing" (13:1-2). This means that if we do not have love, our gifts are useless. The gifts must be exercised in love in order for there to be true function. Love is the only way and the only manner in which to exercise the gifts.

After defining love in chapter 13, the apostle says, "Pursue love, and desire earnestly spiritual gifts" (14:1). *Love* in this verse is not something innate; it is something that needs to be pursued. We need to pursue love, and desire earnestly spiritual gifts. In other words, gifts function in coordination with love. Spiritual gifts are useless without love, and love by itself falls short. We must have spiritual gifts as well as love. Love is the most excellent way and the best manner in which to exercise the gifts. We need to hold to truth in love so that the Body may build itself up in love.

TOUCHING THE AUTHORITY

OF THE HEAD

In the previous chapter we said that in our service to build up the church, we must first touch the authority of the Head and then touch God's heart, that is, touch His love. Touching the authority of the Head will resolve most problems, because most of the problems in the church are the result of not touching the authority of the Head. For instance, spreading rumors is a particular problem in the church, and it unconsciously brings in death. Although the saints often receive a life supply in their fellowship with one another, our conversations are not free of the poison of death, which is spread through rumors. If we spread rumors loosely, we are not under the ruling of the Head and have not touched the authority of the Head. Thus, we can cause many problems in the church. Satan uses loose words to bring the poison of death into the church so that the church is not built up.

For example, brothers often say to me, "Brother Lee, I heard that Brother So-and-so is going to a certain place to work and is preparing to stay there for three months. Is this true?" When I ask where they heard this, they say, "Someone told me in a letter." I often reply, "If you ask Brother So-and-so, he will tell you that he does not know when he will be going or how long he will be there." Persons who are not under the divine ruling spread words loosely.

Rumors are often false, inaccurate, and unfounded. Even if the things being spoken of are accurate and true, can we say that we have the authority of the Head and the ruling of the Head to repeat such things in our speaking? If we are under the ruling of the Head, we will not speak without the permission or command of the Head. Whether or not our words are true or accurate, we would not dare to overstep the Head. Once we touch the Head, we will not have much to say. Once we touch the Head, our words will not be loose. Those who have touched the throne will not speak loosely. Not only will their words be true, correct, and accurate, but they will speak only what is permitted by the throne.

Many saints have a problem related to their speaking because they have never been dealt with by the Lord concerning their speaking. For instance, when a brother once told me, "So-and-so flew to Bangkok, and So-and-so took a boat to Singapore," I wanted to ask him why he was telling me these things, and how these things concerned me, but I did not. Many brothers and

sisters cannot keep anything to themselves; once they know something, they must tell someone.

We also encounter loose talking in the matter of visiting the saints. A brother once said to me, "I just went to visit a brother, and he was quarreling with his wife!" When I heard this, I thought, "If you, as a visiting one, are so loose with your words, the church should not assign you to visit others." If a brother is quarreling with his wife when we visit him, we should bring the matter to the Lord, and the Lord's throne would certainly not allow us to tell others. If we talk loosely instead of giving heed to the Lord's ruling, we will give Satan an opportunity to work, and there will be problems. For example, if the quarreling brother's wife hears of this "report," she will surely complain to her husband. As a result, the brother will no longer be open to the visitation of the saints. Furthermore, he will be unwilling to receive any help from us.

We need to be very careful concerning our speaking. If we touch the throne and are ruled by the Lord, we will not be able to tell others about a brother losing his temper, and we will not even tell our own wives. This is not a matter of regulation; it concerns the throne.

Loose speaking is often the cause of conflicts and problems in the church. We might not have an intention when we say things, but others may listen with an intention. A little word can poison a brother with death. If we are not under the ruling of the throne, we will have many problems. If we serve in the church for many years, we will contact one another frequently. In order to avoid problems among us, our speaking must be ruled. This is not a regulation. It would be useless to put up a sign that says, "Do not speak loosely." This is altogether a matter of accepting the ruling of the throne.

Ephesians 4:15 says, "Holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ." Some translations render this verse as a reference to speaking. For example, the Chinese Union Version says, "Speaking a truthful word with love." This translation makes some sense because the words *all things* in this verse certainly include the matter of speaking. In order to grow up into the Head, Christ, in all things, we should grow in our speaking. If we accept the ruling of the Head in other matters, we should accept it with regard to our speaking.

Hence, we must touch the throne for the service that builds up the church. The throne will rule over us and terminate the elements of the old creation in us. Stones must first be cleaned before they can be used in making reinforced concrete. If dirty stones are mixed into the cement, the reinforced concrete will not be firm or solid. In the church we are stones. Christ's life can be compared to cement, and the Holy Spirit can be compared to water. In order for us to be fitly joined together, the dirt and dust must first be washed off of us. This washing is not accomplished by the redemptive effect of the precious blood; it is related to the ruling of the throne. When we are ruled by the throne, we are purified experientially. There are certain things that I cannot do and certain things that I cannot say because of the throne. The throne also prohibits me from having certain attitudes and certain thoughts. If we live under the ruling of the throne, God will purify us in our experience.

The most important issue of touching the authority of the Head is that we know our place in the Body. This is important. If we touch the throne and live under the ruling of the throne, we will be fitly joined and firmly knit together, and the church will be built up.

TOUCHING THE LOVE OF GOD

In our service for building up the church, we also need to touch God's heart, which is love. On the one hand, we must be under the rule, the restriction, and the dealing of the throne; on the other hand, we must be full of love when interacting with others. When a person, who has been disciplined by the Lord, is harsh with himself, he may also be harsh with others. This is an unbalanced situation. We need to touch the throne, and we also need to touch love. We must touch the authority of Christ, and we must touch the love of God. Even if we are being severely disciplined by the Lord, we still need to be filled with the love of Christ. Only then will our service in the church be genuine. Our service for building up the church is not focused on how much we do but on how much we love.

Love is able to bear the faults of others. Those who like to focus on the shortcomings of others are short of love. Focusing on the shortcomings of others and not being able to bear their faults are indications of a shortage of love. The explanation of love in 1 Corinthians 13 is based on two points: not focusing on the faults of others and bearing the mistakes of others. The beginning of verse 4 says, "Love suffers long." This suffering is not suffering

related to afflictions but to suffering the mistakes of others. We do not need love when we suffer afflictions, but we need love when others mistreat us. This kind of love is long-suffering. To not focus on the faults of others is to "not take account of evil" (v. 5). It is not that we do not know of the faults of others but that we do not let their faults create problems within us.

Chapter 13 gives mainly a negative definition of love. "Love...is not jealous. Love does not brag and is not puffed up; it does not behave unbecomingly and does not seek its own things; it is not provoked and does not take account of evil; it does not rejoice because of unrighteousness" (vv. 4-6). Verse 7 says, "It covers all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." These verses contain words that speak of negative conditions, such as *covers*, which is related to shortcomings and faults, and *believes* and *endures*. Hence, love is contrary to many negative things.

Our greatest problem is a lack of love among the saints; hence, it is easy for us to notice the faults of others and to criticize one another. Without love we cannot help the saints. In our present condition we cannot tolerate those who offend us. This shows that we do not have love. If we are short of love, our service will not build up the church. The practical exercise of the gifts depends on love. Many saints are involved in the visitation service, but their service is useless without love. Our visitation will be ineffective, and we will not be able to build up the saints if we focus on their faults and cannot let go of their mistakes.

This applies not only to visitation but also to many other matters. In order for the gifts, the work, and our activities to manifest their function, they must be carried out in love. A brother may make a mistake or offend us, but we must still love him. Our functions will be manifested in the church when we have such a love.

PRACTICING LOVE

We will now consider the practice of love. Although the Bible does not say to practice love but to pursue love (14:1), practice is included in the pursuit of love. For example, in order to pursue an education, we must practice studying. Similarly, in order to pursue love, we must practice love. Without practice, it is futile to pursue love through prayer. If we want to have love, we must pursue love through prayer and also through practice.

I will use some examples to talk about the practice of love. I once stayed in a meeting hall for several weeks. Every Saturday at three o'clock I would hear saints singing and praying while they cleaned the meeting hall. Cleaning is a service, but this service is not merely to wipe the benches or to clean the hall. This service is for the building up of the Body of Christ. Hence, the brothers and sisters cannot be neglected; they must be helped. If we want to serve the Lord, we must bear responsibility for the saints; that is, we should find the saints whom we should care for and bear them, and then we should be responsible for them.

For example, my hand has five fingers, which are the responsibility of my hand. Those who are serving should ask themselves, "Which brothers or sisters am I caring for in my service?" If there are two thousand saints and three hundred responsible ones in a local church, then seventeen hundred saints need care. Who will bear these saints?

Many groups in organized Christianity have pastors and preachers. Most denominations have one or two pastors and sometimes several associate pastors, who are responsible for the care of their congregation. The largest denomination in China in the past century had less than five hundred believers. Most have only two to three hundred believers because the pastors and preachers can take care of only so many believers.

Our service must not be like the denominations. We must return to the Bible, and all the saints must practice serving in the church as revealed in the New Testament. We cannot rely on so-called pastors or preachers. We must give all the saints the responsibility and the opportunity to serve. Who should be responsible to care for the seventeen to eighteen hundred saints in a church that has only a few elders and a few full-time serving ones? There is a need for many serving ones to pick up this burden. In a normal situation every serving one should bear a group of believers. In order for their service to build up, the serving ones should be more experienced and should care for a few believers. I am afraid that the serving ones are short in their care for others. They may be able to say that they are serving and that they visit when there is a need, but this is not sufficient.

Every serving one needs to follow the Lord's leading according to His arrangement and find saints to serve. If saints are weak, sick, or do not come to the meetings, we should be responsible and know their situation. We

should be responsible for their spiritual problems and for the lessons that they need to learn before the Lord. In other words, the saints are our lambs, and we are their shepherds. If we practice according to this principle, each serving one will be caring for seven or eight saints. Responsibility for the saints is not too much when it is shared.

Sharing the responsibility is a practice of love. We cannot speak of love without speaking of practice, for love is not merely a matter of feelings. Every mother knows that she cannot love a child merely with her emotions. A child grows not by his mother's feelings but by her practical care. Whether or not a mother is happy, she must daily do many things for her child. She cannot say, "I will not give my child anything to eat today, because I am not happy. I will give him twice as much tomorrow when I feel better." This is not practical love. Genuine love is very practical. For example, if by the Lord's arrangement there are seven or eight brothers under my care, I should care for them whether or not I am happy at any given time. I must bear them constantly. When there is such practical care out of love, the saints will grow in the Lord.

It is possible for the church to arrange for certain ones to bear responsibility, but we all must follow the Lord's leading and bear a few saints. We often hear the saints sigh concerning the desolate and cold condition of the church. But sighing cannot do anything; we must have a practical love by following the Lord's leading to take up the burden of bearing other saints. If everyone would do this, the church will be in a normal condition. Such a condition does not come from excitement or exhortation; it is an issue of practical love filling the church and making the saints one.

In order to serve in the church, we must not only touch God's throne but also touch His heart. Once we touch His heart, we will love the saints by bearing them and caring for them, and we will know assuredly which saints are under our care. I am not teaching you a method. I am only pointing out a way. This does not mean that the elders should assign the saints to the serving ones. This would not be effective. The serving ones must first have a heart to serve the Lord and a heart of love. Then the responsibility that they bear out of such a love will be effective.

The greatest need of the church is to practice love. Many believers feel that the church needs to preach the gospel, but saving many people has not increased the number of believers in the church meetings. People are baptized,

but they leave soon afterward because we are not responsible for them. How can a large church receive thorough care from a few elders and full-time serving ones? The newly baptized believers are like newborn babes; they depend on the care of the older believers. Instead of caring for the new believers, we let them come to the meetings when they want to and fall when they stumble. Not many new believers are able to endure such neglect.

If the serving ones are willing to practice love and bear seven to eight new believers, sooner or later we will see significant results. As more people are saved over time, the new believers who have been under our care will spontaneously learn to care for others. This is the principle of bearing fruit after one's kind. If we bear our next generation in this way, it will not be difficult for new believers to be taken care of, and they will remain in the church. I hope that we will all exercise to practice love.

CARING FOR THE BELIEVERS

Let us have more specific fellowship concerning how to take care of the believers. First, we must pray for them. If we want to bring them to God, we must first go to God on their behalf. We should mention them by name to God; we should write their names in a booklet and pray for them often. Such prayer is necessary and should be specific. We should no longer have general prayers, saying, "Lord, revive Your church. Remember the brothers and sisters. Remember those who are weak, who have stumbled, or who are backsliding." It is not that general prayers are not effective but that the effectiveness of our prayers depends on how specific they are.

In the Gospel of Matthew two blind men heard that Jesus was passing by and cried out, saying, "Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!" (20:30). Jesus stopped, called them, and said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" (v. 32). They answered, "Lord, that our eyes may be opened" (v. 33). The Lord was moved with compassion and touched their eyes, and immediately they received their sight (v. 34). Hence, instead of general prayers, we need to bring the believers by name to the Lord and bear their specific burdens practically in prayer. If we love the believers, we need specific prayers for them.

After interceding, we need to contact the believers personally. We will know their true situation by contacting them. We will know their occupation, their

family, their financial situation, any marital problems, their children's education, and their spiritual condition. We can be clear concerning others only after we have personal contact with them. Such contact will guide our prayers and deepen our burden. Knowing the believers' actual situation is the base for intercession.

A brother may consecrate himself to the Lord but not know what he should do next. If we know his situation, we should pray specifically for him, asking the Lord to lead the brother in a definite way. Some may ask what the definite way should be. A consecrated person should know assuredly that he needs to forsake everything and that he has consecrated his strength, time, and energy to the Lord for His use. This is definite. Some believers make decisions concerning their finances immediately after their consecration. They say to the Lord, "From now on, I offer everything in my hand for Your use. Not only so, a portion of my income will be separated wholly unto You." This is a definite way. These believers did not say in a general way, "I am a consecrated person." Hence, if someone has consecrated himself but has not yet taken specific action, we need to pray for him and shepherd him in this regard.

A brother may have reached the point where he needs to know his flesh or his peculiar temperament. This requires that we pray for him and bring his situation to the Lord. These are examples. We need to contact the believers and also pray for them. The more contact we have, the more we will pray, and this prayer will cause us to have even more contact. Our contact with the believers should be spontaneous, not rigid. We can find opportunities to contact them before or after a meeting. This method is simple yet effective. The churches usually meet four times per week. If we can contact one person in every meeting, we can contact four people in a week and eight people in two weeks. If we are shepherding eight people, we can contact each person twice in a month. We should be able to have good contact with those whom we are shepherding without needing to visit them.

At times we might need to hold a love feast. If we cannot invite eight people at once, we can invite them in smaller groups. A married brother who has children can invite a couple over for mutual fellowship. Forgive me for saying this, but our love feasts seem to have departed from their original intention. We invite the believers whom we know, but the ones who are in need are seldom invited. This situation needs to be corrected.

If a serving one feels that he is limited and cannot supply the spiritual need, he can invite another brother to assist him. Such coordinated care for the saints will not be burdensome. It is best to keep the food simple for a love feast. Such simple love feasts save labor, money, and time. Then most of our time and strength can be spent on spiritual things, such as fellowship and prayer before or after the meal.

These methods are not unattainable ideals. This is the practice in some local churches. A local church baptized eighty people, and without any arrangements the brothers and sisters spontaneously began to care for two to three new believers. The newly baptized ones were borne by the brothers and sisters. For example, the new ones were baptized on Saturday and invited to love feasts on Tuesday. This is the way to sustain those who are newly baptized. In such a church most of the eighty new believers will still be remaining in half a year. This was not several elders or some so-called full-timers caring for the new believers; the local brothers and sisters bore the burden.

After three months some new believers are able to care for others. They spontaneously bear two or three believers. Therefore, this fire of love spreads quickly. This is the practice of love.

CARING FOR THE PHYSICAL NEEDS OF THE BELIEVERS

We should care for the spiritual condition of the believers and also for their various physical needs. We should pray for their material needs, and at the same time, we should do our best with what the Lord has given us to care for them in secret. We should never say, “Brother, since I am shepherding you, and you have a need, let me give you five dollars.” This would not be right. It is best to offer money in secret through the offering box. The brother should not even recognize our handwriting. He should know that it is the Lord’s care for him. This is according to the Lord’s word: “When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” (Matt. 6:3). The receiver should know that it is a gift only from the Lord. This is the genuine love of brothers loving one another.

We should pray for the brother and follow the Lord’s leading to help him in secret so that he will not depend on us or on the church but would learn to

depend on God and look to the Lord with a living faith. Suppose he needs twenty-five dollars, but we have the ability to give only one dollar. We need to have thorough prayer for him in secret. We might say, “Lord, I can offer only one dollar. You are responsible for the remaining twenty-four dollars.” The Lord often answers such prayers. We should never speak to others in a loose way concerning this need. There would be love in such a situation, but not a holding to truth.

We must hold to truth in love. We should not be like those in 1 John 3:17, who have the livelihood of the world and see that a brother has a need but then shut up their affections from him, or like those in James 2:15-16, who only say, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” to brothers or sisters in need of clothing and daily food. If we loosen our grip on our resources, open our purse, and do our best to care for the believers, the Lord will be responsible for supplying and filling up any shortage.

Furthermore, we must believe that God will not allow us to become poor as a result of following His leading to care for the poor and needy saints. In the past three decades I have not seen a serving one become poor because of his practical service of love.

If we can be led thus by the Lord to care for the needy saints without doing a work of charity, the church will be grounded in love. Such a love edifies people and does not corrupt them. A charitable love often corrupts people; it feeds people without leading them to know God. It causes people to rely on others and solicit help and thus lose their living faith. We should never consider that the believers whom we help are inferior. Rather, we should consider them to be more glorious than ourselves. We must help them to trust in God, to pray, and to see God’s outstretched hand having mercy on them. Then they will be supplied materially, and they will also trust in God and know that God answers them; they will not feel inferior. They will be glorious persons and will not beg for pity. If we pity the believers because of their material needs, we make them feel inferior; we make them persons who expect favors and help from others. This is to despise our brother. The lack of the believers is the way for them to receive more honor (1 Cor. 12:23). Even though we are the ones supplying the need, they receive more honor. There are no poor people in the church; there are only brothers and sisters. This is the church; this is genuine love.

We should care not only for the material needs of the saints; we should also care for other matters. Some young brothers and sisters may need guidance and leading concerning marriage. This requires practical love. We must not be careless or loose in making recommendations. We must help the young believers to fear God in the matter of marriage and to pray for His leading. We need to ask the Lord to enlighten them and to manifest His heart to them. Then they will receive help.

A church with such practical love will be solid, and it will be easy for the church to preach the gospel and to sustain the new believers. The service in such a church will be carried out by a practical love, not by impulsive emotions. Such service is ruled by the throne and touches God's heart. If we have such a practical love toward the believers, we will be able to supply them and help them every time we contact them. We must believe that if by the Lord's love we care for the spiritual condition and practical needs of the believers, the Holy Spirit will do a deep work in them.

We do not need doctrine or theory; we need to practice love. If we want the church to be built up, we must see the throne, know authority, and touch the Savior's heart. Then we will realize that His heart is love and that His heart cares for everyone who belongs to Him. If we touch His love, we will be considerate of His heart. If we do not have His love, we should say, "Lord, I am willing to be considerate of Your heart and to love those whom You love, but I have not yet touched the reality of this love. Pour out Your love into my heart. I am willing to give myself for the care of the saints." If every serving one would touch the Lord's heart, every believer in the churches would be taken care of, and the churches would be built up.

CHAPTER THREE

THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH NEEDING THE MANIFESTED FUNCTION OF EVERY MEMBER

Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:15-16; Col. 2:19

In the previous chapters we emphasized that in order for the church to be built up, we must know the authority of the Head, and we must know God's heart. One is a matter of authority, and the other is a matter of love. Authority eliminates problems, and love brings in the riches. In a normal and strong church all the serving ones manifest these two aspects. On the one hand, they know the throne and authority; therefore, problems, conflicts, and unnecessary situations are spontaneously eliminated. On the other hand, they touch God's heart and have the same love toward all the saints. Hence, their service is solid and full of the element of building.

THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH BEING THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL THE SAINTS

In this chapter we will focus on the building up of the church being not only a matter of authority and love but also of the manifested function of the members. Both Ephesians 4:15-16 and Colossians 2:19 show that in order for the Body, the church, to be built up, the function of the members must be manifested. The church is not built by external influences but by the Body itself. In order for the Body to be built, each one part must function according to the operation of its measure.

Some believers think that the building up of the church is the responsibility of the full-time workers. This is an inaccurate concept. Ephesians 4 shows that the church is not built up directly by the four kinds of gifts. Rather, these gifts perfect the saints unto the work of the ministry so that all the saints may manifest their function (vv. 11-12). It is through the manifested function of every saint that the church is built up. If we read chapter 4 carefully, we will

see that these gifts—the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers—build up the church only indirectly, not directly.

Bible translators have different views about verses 11 and 12. According to the Greek text, however, these two verses say, “He Himself gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as shepherds and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ.” This shows that the gifts perfect the saints so that the saints can participate in the building up of the Body of Christ. Without being perfected by the gifts, the saints will not be able to fulfill their responsibilities, but after being perfected by the gifts, the saints should manifest their function, which results in the building up of the Body of Christ. From this we see that the gifts do not build up the church directly; their work in building up the church is indirect.

Although some understand that the perfecting of the saints is the responsibility of the gifts, they mistakenly include the work of the ministry and the building up of the Body of Christ as part of this same responsibility; that is, they believe that all these three aspects of building up are done by the gifts directly. However, this understanding is not supported by the context of the chapter. Although verse 12 speaks of the building up of the Body as it relates to the gifts, verse 16 explicitly associates the building up of the Body in love with the operation in the measure of each one part. If we read only verse 12, we may think that only the gifts can build up the Body. However, verses 15 and 16 clearly show that the building up of the Body is an issue of the functioning of each one part. The building up of the Body is carried out by the gifts indirectly and by all the saints directly.

We need to consider this more deeply, because it is not merely a matter of translation or exposition but of practice. The general understanding in Christianity is that the building up of the church is the responsibility of the clergy, meaning that the church is built by pastors and preachers. Consequently, the saints are not considered as builders but as those who need to be built up. Thus, they have no responsibility for the building up. This understanding, however, is incompatible with the New Testament, which states that every believer is responsible for building up the church. The building up of the church is not the responsibility of a special minority of believers.

We must be very clear that the building up of the church is the responsibility of all the saints; the church cannot be built up merely through the efforts of a few members. If the local brothers and sisters expect a group of workers to build up the church and do not endeavor to build up the church themselves, the building up of the church will be frustrated. According to the light in Ephesians 4, the gifts merely perfect the saints, who are then directly responsible for the building up of the church.

The physical growth of a person follows this same principle. An infant may be only twelve inches long when he is born, but when he is an adult, he may be five or six feet tall. His growth and increase in stature, however, are not the issue of external influences; rather, his growth is the result of the operation in the measure of each one part of his body. Parents often consult a doctor when they see that their child is not growing, but the doctor cannot cause the child to grow. The most that a doctor can do is to help the parts of the child's body to function properly so that it is possible for the child to grow. For example, if the child has a problem with his stomach, the doctor can help his stomach function properly. If the child has a problem with his ears or nose, the doctor can treat his ears or nose so that the child's growth will not be hindered. Sometimes a child may not have any obvious problems, but he still does not grow. Then the doctor may prescribe some multivitamins to strengthen the functioning of the various organs of the child. This further shows that the doctor is not directly responsible for the physical growth of the child. At the most, a doctor can help to perfect the physical parts of the child's body. When each part of the body is properly functioning according to its measure, the properly functioning parts will be directly responsible for the growth of the child.

Similarly, in the Body of Christ the gifts are not directly responsible for the growth of the Body. This responsibility belongs to all the saints. The responsibility to perfect the saints belongs to the gifts. For example, a brother may be an "ear" in the Body of Christ; if he has a problem, he can be perfected by a gift who functions as a "spiritual ear doctor." When this member is "healed," that is, perfected, the growth of the Body will no longer be hindered. Other brothers and sisters may lack spiritual food and spiritual vitamins, but a minister of the word can supply them with the word of God as food. As a result, the brothers and sisters will receive spiritual nutrients and become strong to function. This shows that the gifts do not build up the church directly. The building up of the Body of Christ depends on the operation in the

measure of each one part of the Body, which brings out the function that is needed for growth. We should never expect a group of workers to build up the church in our locality; the workers can only perfect the saints. The church is built directly by the saints in the church, the members in the Body.

OPERATING ACCORDING TO MEASURE FOR FUNCTION

When a saint learns to be under the authority of the Head and to touch the love of God, spontaneously there will be an operation according to his measure. This operation will generate a function that enables him to minister in the church. The authority of the Head and the love of God cause an operation according to the measure in each saint, and in this operation there is a function that builds up the church.

The Greek word rendered "operation" in Ephesians 4:16 is also used in 3:7 and in Colossians 1:29. It relates to the exertion of a strong, driving power that energizes us; it is not a weak power. When a brother or a sister is under the authority of the Head and touches God's love, he or she experiences an exerting power, a driving, inward operation. While the operation in a large member may be large and the operation in a small member may be less, there is still a function that comes forth from these operations. For example, whenever I see the young people, I have a burden to speak to them. Hence, I have an operation that causes my mouth to function by speaking.

When people listen to messages, their ears operate to hear, their eyes operate to see, and their mind operates to comprehend and remember. In order to understand my messages, a person must watch while listening and remember while comprehending. This is all according to the operation in the measure of one's ears to listen, one's eyes to watch, and one's mind to comprehend and remember. In the same way, every member in the Body has a measure and an operation according to this measure. The result of this operation is a function that results in the building up of the Body.

This is the key. If we touch the authority of the Head as well as the love of God, we will surely experience an inward operation. Whether we are an "eye," an "ear," or something else in the Body, we will surely experience a continuous operation when we touch the authority of the Head and the love of God. This operation produces a function that builds up the Body of Christ.

The key to building up depends on the function that is according to the operation in the measure of each one part.

NEEDING TO HAVE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES FOR THE MANIFESTATION OF FUNCTION

A member must have spiritual experiences in order for his function to be manifested. Without spiritual experiences, there is no spiritual function. For instance, I may be someone who has touched God's love and who loves the brothers and sisters, but I may not have learned many lessons or have had many spiritual experiences. This will limit the operation of love within me and limit the manifestation of my function. Motivated by love, I may want to fellowship with a brother, but without spiritual experiences, I will not be able to help the brother. Without spiritual experiences, there will be no way to manifest my function according to the operation of love.

If a brother complains to me about another brother, I will not be able to help him without some spiritual experiences in this regard, and thus there will be no manifestation of function. The most I will be able to say is that the brother needs to forgive. If he responds that he cannot forgive the brother, I can exhort him to consider the other brother more excellent than himself. If he again responds that he cannot do this, I will only be able to give him another teaching, such as the need to be humble. But even this further exhortation will have no impact. Without learning lessons and having spiritual experiences related to such things, we can give others only doctrines and general exhortations. We may touch God's love and may fervently love the brother, but no function will be manifested without having genuine spiritual experiences before God. Consequently, we will be a loving brother who has no manifested function. We often visit people in the way of love, but there is no manifestation of function in our visiting. Sometimes, even though the brothers and sisters tell us their problems in tears, we have no way to help them, because we are lacking in spiritual experiences.

Twenty-two years ago I was quite young and limited in experience, and I had not been serving the Lord very long. One day a sister in her fifties came to see me. As soon as she began to speak, she had only critical words for her husband, saying, "Brother Lee, my husband is so mean to me. He never gives me a pleasant look. He is away from home all day long even when he is not at

work, and as soon as he gets home, he quarrels with me. I cannot bear this. Please pray that my husband would change."

As she continued to speak, I was unsure of how to help her at first. However, I did know that this kind of disharmony in a family cannot be attributed to just one person. If her husband needed to be dealt with before the Lord, she did as well. As she spoke, I began to realize that she also had many problems. For example, she was very proud in her husband's presence, and she was unwilling to bend or obey. If her husband was stubborn, she would be even more stubborn. If her husband was unhappy and had a long face, she would have an even longer face. When her husband came home late, she would wait to open the door and would greet him with an unpleasant expression on her face. In part, her reactions caused her husband to like her less and less and to want to be at home less and less.

After gaining a broader view of the problem, I said, "Sister, I will pray for your husband as you requested, but you must promise me that you will change your attitude toward him. As soon as he comes home in the evening and knocks on the door, you should open the door for him with a pleasant smile on your face. It would also be good if you could prepare a snack for him." Upon hearing this, the sister said, "I cannot do that." I responded, saying, "I know that we cannot do it in ourselves, but the Lord can. Is not the Lord in us as our life? Have a time of prayer with the Lord and ask the Lord to supply you in order to do this."

It is not easy for a person to yield to the Lord, and it is even more difficult to yield to man. Although the sister was very troubled, she had to yield to the Lord in order for there to be any hope that her husband would yield as well. When she went home, she knelt down and wept bitterly in her room, saying, "Lord, I cannot do this. I cannot do this." In her prayer, however, she was deeply touched by the Lord, and she yielded to Him. Then she inwardly yielded to her husband as well. That evening she dressed neatly, prepared some snacks, and waited for her husband to return. When her husband returned around twelve o'clock and knocked on the door, she immediately opened the door and had a much more agreeable attitude. This went on for several evenings, and soon there was a completely different situation in their house. After the sister yielded in this way, her husband began to yield as well.

In order to help people practically, it is not enough to have merely love; we must have spiritual experiences as well. Once there is experience, various functions will be manifested. We must learn the lessons of touching the authority of the Head, accepting the ruling of the Head, and letting the Lord subdue us in every matter. We can truly help others only in the matters in which we have been subdued. Function is based on experience.

This is even a principle in worldly matters. If we have not learned English, how can we teach others English? We may love a person and desire to help him learn English, but if we do not know any English, we cannot help him. This principle applies in spiritual matters. If we have not experienced consecration, we cannot help an unconsecrated person pass through the gateway of consecration. If we want to help others to not love the world, we must first deal with the world ourselves. Likewise, if we have not learned the lesson of the cross and our flesh has not been crucified, we cannot help others experience the cross.

Furthermore, if we try to render help without having learned a spiritual lesson, we can be negatively affected. For example, if we visit a brother who has not been meeting for a long time, he may say that he loves the Lord but that his problem is really related to a brother who is an elder in the church. Then he may begin to complain about how he was wronged and offended by this elder. If we have not learned the proper spiritual lessons, we can be influenced by the complaining brother. We may even become angry with the elder, causing us to eventually not want to meet as well.

Often a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law may not get along well, even though both are sisters in the Lord. If another sister in the Lord goes to visit them and only the mother-in-law is at home, the mother-in-law may say, “It is so good of you to come, sister. My daughter-in-law quarreled with me again this morning. Even though she is a believer in the Lord and a responsible one in the church, she is so disrespectful toward me.” Hearing such words may cause the visiting sister to become angry and echo the words of the mother-in-law. When this happens, the circle of the quarreling expands from two sisters to three sisters.

I am not speaking from my imagination. Such situations often occur in the church because the saints are full of love but have not learned the lessons of being under the authority of the Head or of letting the Spirit operate within

them. Hence, their function is not manifested. Spiritual experiences are our equipment. We must have the proper equipment in order to help others be built up.

Spiritual experiences not only enable us to help others; they also burden us to help others. Every burden to serve comes out of a spiritual experience. Our spiritual experiences determine the nature of our burden; without spiritual experiences, there is no burden.

For example, we care about the souls of sinners and are burdened to lead them to salvation because we ourselves have been saved. Our experience of salvation spontaneously causes us to care about those whom we encounter. This is a simple example. Furthermore, if we are consecrated persons who daily live in the experience of consecration, it is easy for us to tell whether or not a believer has passed through the gateway of consecration. When we encounter those who have not passed through this gateway, we are spontaneously burdened to help them pass through the gateway.

In order to manifest our function in the church and to build up the church, spiritual experience is the first requirement. Spiritual lessons and experiences are the equipment that enable us to build up others. We should place ourselves in the Lord's hands, accept His ruling, and obey the leading of the Spirit so that we may have spiritual experiences in many things.

NEEDING TO LIVE IN THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SPIRIT FOR THE MANIFESTATION OF FUNCTION

In order for our function to be manifested, we must live in the fellowship of the Spirit. Only by being in this fellowship can we have a living operation according to our measure, and only by being in this fellowship can we have a genuine burden and a living supply to minister to others. Service is not possible when we are not in this fellowship. We must be very clear concerning this principle.

NEEDING TO OBEY THE INNER LEADING FOR THE MANIFESTATION OF FUNCTION

In order for our function to be manifested, we must obey the inner leading. We must learn to obey the inner operation and leading in our visitations, in our helping of others, in our speaking, and in our activities in the meetings. Many saints think of service as being a matter of zealousness, but they are not sensitive to the inner operation, the inner leading of the Lord, within them. When a person is zealous, he may grab his Bible to visit this one and that one or to do this thing and that thing. Such visitation and service, however, have little spiritual value and will not yield much spiritual result.

The Bible says that the function of a member comes out of an inner operation that is according to the measure of each one part (Eph. 4:16). This operation involves leading. We should learn to know the inner leading so that we may know whom the Lord wants us to visit and what He wants us to say. We can serve well only when we function according to the leading.

We must know these three points in experience in order to serve in a way that builds up the church. It is not enough for just the full-time workers to learn these points; everyone in the church needs to learn them. I hope that we all can clearly see that the building up of the Body of Christ depends on every member functioning according to the operation of their measure. This involves more than touching the authority of the Head and the love of God. Genuine function issues from having spiritual experiences, being in the fellowship, and following the inward leading of the Lord. As those who are learning to serve the Lord, we must be subject to the authority of the Head and touch the love of God, and we must learn to follow the inner operation to manifest our function. This will build us up and enable us to build up others in the Body of Christ. May the Lord grace us!

CHAPTER FOUR

FUNCTION BEING MANIFESTED THROUGH THE SPIRIT'S OPERATION

Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:15-16; Col. 2:19

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." 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." Both of these portions are related to the building up of the church.

THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH DEPENDING ON THE GROWTH IN LIFE

Both of these portions speak of the growth of the Body in relation to the building up of the Body, which is the church (Eph. 1:22-23). This shows that the building up of the church is not the same as building a physical house. In order to build a physical house, one needs only to sort and organize wood and then frame and build the house. In order to build up the church, however, one cannot simply sort and organize the saints. Just as human limbs cannot be artificially joined and knit together into a living body, the saints cannot be built into the church through outward organization.

The building up of the church is altogether a matter of life. How much the church is built up depends on how much the saints in the church grow in life and in the stature of Christ. Spontaneously, as life grows, the saints are fitly joined and firmly knit together. Many responsible brothers and sisters have a heart to serve, and they long for the building up of the church, but the only way for the church to be built up is to lead the saints to grow in life. With the growth in life, there is building up; without the growth in life, there can never be building up.

I have met some workers of the Lord who are quite sociable and who can easily bond with people. Often they need only to speak a few words to a stranger in order for him to become very congenial toward them. They have a disposition that many persons find quite agreeable. We may think that these saints are quite capable of building up the church, of joining the brothers and sisters together. In experience, however, the churches in which these ones serve often have problems, and the brothers and sisters among them are often in discord. This is because the church cannot be built up by man's natural bonds or methods. The building up of the church is a matter of life. When we help the brothers and sisters to grow, to have the growth in life, they will be built up together. Man-made bonds do not last, and they often become a source of many problems. Only the growth in life brings in the building up of the church.

How can we grow in life? Simply speaking, growth in life is related to reducing the source of our problems, which is the element of our self, and to increasing the element of God in us. The story of God's life in us is one of reducing, negatively, the element of our self and of increasing, positively, the element of God. The more we experience life, the more the divine life grows. This reducing and increasing work is through the operation of the Spirit. The Spirit leads us in many things toward the goal of God's life growing in us and our being built up more with the brothers and sisters.

THE SPIRIT NEEDING OUR COOPERATION TO WORK OUT MAN'S GROWTH IN LIFE

The Spirit needs our cooperation. God works on the brothers and sisters through those who have received the benefit of the Spirit's operation. This does not mean that the Spirit cannot work on a Christian directly but that according to the spiritual principle, the Spirit works on some so that He can in turn work on others through them.

Some believers are full of the element of the self in everything they do. Although they are saved, they do not have much of the element of God, the element of building. In order for them to be truly built up in the church, there is a need for some who have been worked on by the Spirit and who have a certain measure of function. Through such ones, the Spirit has a way to build up the believers by reducing the element of their self and increasing the element of God. The Spirit works in the saints and arranges their

environments in order to work on them, but God must gain a group of people who will cooperate with Him and work with Him.

The cooperation that a believer gives to God related to the work of the Spirit is his function in the church. The service that counts, the work that builds up the brothers and sisters, comes into being through our cooperation with the Spirit. Only this service has spiritual value, and only this service can build up the church. If we have been worked on by the Spirit and if we work according to the move of the Spirit, the brothers and sisters whom we serve will spontaneously accept the operation of the Spirit. Thus, they will have less of their natural element and more of God's element, and they will grow in life, and the church will be built up.

Without the Spirit working in us, we will not be able to be subject to the authority of the Head, even if this is our earnest desire. Furthermore, our love for the brothers and sisters will contain mostly the element of our self, and even our zealous and diligent service will not manifest much function. Everything depends on how much we allow the Spirit to work in us. The more the Spirit can work in us, the less there will be of the element of our self and the more there will be of the element of God. Then as our life grows, the function of life will be manifested.

THREE OPERATIONS OF THE SPIRIT

In the previous chapter we saw that a believer must pay attention to three matters in order for his function as a member in the Body to be manifested. These include having spiritual experiences, receiving a burden in fellowship with the Spirit, and obeying the inner leading of the Spirit. These three matters are three operations of the Spirit within us. If we have these three operations, our cooperation with the Spirit will cause the church to be built up.

The First Operation

Being to Cause Us to Experience Life

The first operation of the Spirit is to cause us to learn lessons related to life and to have experiences of life. If we are under the authority of the Head and have touched the love of God, the Spirit will be able to operate in us so that we may be enlightened concerning our condition, be dealt with, and be broken.

This is the initial step of the Spirit's operation. If we allow the Spirit to operate in our inner being, we will have experiences of life and learn spiritual lessons. Then we will be able to help the brothers and sisters when they encounter similar problems.

For example, the Spirit may place a brother in a particular trial in order to reduce his natural element and to increase God's divine element. This is the Spirit's building work in him. But even though the brother is in the midst of a trial, he may have no realization of God's operation. In fact, he may even blame others and blame his circumstances to the point that he becomes quite resentful. Although God has a specific intention, he has no awareness of it. Without a proper realization of God's intention, his faith will waiver, and he will doubt God's love and faithfulness. At such a time, he needs someone to help him to be subdued and to accept God's dealing so that his natural element will decrease, and God's element will increase for the sake of his being built up.

However, it is not possible to help such a one unless we have had some learning and experience in this matter and know that this trial is related to God's will. Without this, the most we will be able to do is to sympathize with him and console him. We will not, however, be able to help him gain the element of God, because there has been no manifestation of function related to the Spirit's operation in us. We can never manifest a function apart from experience; that is, our function can never exceed the lessons that we have learned from our experiences.

Some brothers and sisters are rich, yet they do not know how to make use of their riches. Although they do not spend their money on sinful things, they spend it as they please on trivial things. These things may be good in the eyes of men, but their self has the full ground because they have never accepted God's dealing in the matter of spending. If we are to help them in this regard, we must be ones who have properly dealt with our finances.

Others cannot overcome poverty and lack. Although riches can corrupt a person, so also can poverty. There was a brother who was rich and proud, but when he became poor, he was not humbled. Instead, he used his skills to seek a way out of his poverty; he did not trust in God or look to God. If he had allowed the Spirit to operate in him and had been subdued, his natural element would have decreased, and God's element would have increased.

However, he could not stop himself; instead, he kept seeking for his own way out. His efforts even brought shame to God's name. In this situation he needed to learn the lessons that are brought about by poverty, and he should have experienced accepting God's hand in the midst of poverty so that he could be built up. There is a need for ones in the church who have experiences like Paul, who can say, "I know also how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in everything and in all things I have learned the secret both to be filled and to hunger, both to abound and to lack" (Phil. 4:12). We need the Spirit to operate in us and give us such rich experiences.

There are so many people in the church who need help in order to be built up. Every person has problems, and each one needs to be sustained and guided. However, only those with actual experiences of letting the Spirit operate in them can genuinely help, build up, and meet the needs of others.

I once met a brother who was in quite a difficult situation before he was saved. He had the burden of a large household as well as large debts. Later, he had a definite experience of salvation. He loved the Lord, feared the Lord in all things, and even brought his family to salvation. His business became increasingly prosperous, and he was able to repay all his debts. He was very happy and told everyone he encountered how God had blessed him and guided him to expand his business. At the beginning of one year, he told me excitedly, "The Lord truly blessed my business last year; my year-end accounts show that I made a very good profit. My family offered prayers of thanksgiving, and I even asked the Lord to guide me concerning what to do with the money. Soon the Lord gave me an excellent opportunity to buy a large piece of land and open a factory. The Lord is wonderful indeed; He does not abandon His children, but He leads and guides us in everything."

Although the brother spoke to me in grateful and sincere terms, I was quite grieved within because I knew that the church in his locality was needy financially and that no one was taking care of the co-workers there. I was grieved within when he told me that the Lord had guided him to buy land and open a factory. I do not believe that the Lord would guide him to buy land and open a factory but not move him to care for the needs of the co-workers in his local church. In the matter of spending money, he was altogether for himself and in himself. Although he became rich, there was no decrease in his natural element and no increase in God's element. Furthermore, he was not built up in the church. After a short period of time he became very proud and began to

despise everyone. He eventually became a great problem in the church. He did not let the Lord operate in him, and he did not learn any lessons. Although he became rich, he was not built up.

Another brother once held a thanksgiving meeting related to his new house, and everyone who came thanked God. When the brother insisted that I say something, I could only quote Haggai 1:4 with great grief, saying, "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled-up houses, while this house [God's house] lies waste?" I could not rejoice with them; I could only throw cold water on them.

Many Christians today do not know the true meaning of God's grace. They believe that grace is God giving them good clothes, good food, a good house, a good wife, a good husband, good children, or a prospering business. If we consider these things to be grace, then many unbelievers have been graced much more than we have been. In Philippians 3:8 Paul refers to such things as "refuse." How can God possibly give us refuse as grace?

The brothers and sisters truly need someone to lead and care for them. There is much difficulty, discord, and strife in the local churches today due to the lack of those who can help to build others up. This requires some of us to put ourselves in God's hand, to be dealt with, and to pass through spiritual experiences so that a proper function can be manifested for the sake of others.

The Second Operation
Being to Impart a Burden into Us

The second operation of the Spirit is to burden us in our fellowship with Him. Not only are spiritual experiences required to manifest a building up function in the church, but the Spirit must also be allowed to operate and impart a genuine burden into us. Some people are experienced in the Lord, but they can be slothful at times and unwilling to receive a burden from the Spirit. Thus, their function is limited in operation.

A responsible brother in a district used to exercise his spirit actively in the bread-breaking meeting; he was burdened to function at almost every meeting, but as soon as he was not bearing some responsibility, he no longer exercised his spirit so actively in the bread-breaking meeting. This diminished the manifestation of his function.

If all the brothers and sisters were burdened to serve actively before the Lord, the church would be much stronger than it is today. It is regrettable that some do not let the Spirit operate in situations where they can learn spiritual lessons, but even fewer allow the Spirit to impart a burden into them. Some people are so slothful in the exercise of their spirit that it seems as if they are always asking the Lord for a "leave of absence." Even though they know that this is wrong, they cannot respond. Instead, they ask the Lord only for forgiveness. Once a believer's spirit is in a slothful condition, the Spirit has no way to use him so that his function can be manifested.

When the Lord comes, He will rebuke some of His servants. The Lord speaks of these servants as being evil and slothful (Matt. 25:26). Although slothfulness can refer to many things, I believe that it primarily refers to slothfulness in the exercise of our spirit. If people are slothful in spirit, they will have no burden and will have even less manifestation of function. We must deal with this matter so that we can be burdened by the Spirit to help others to be built up.

The Third Operation
Being to Guide Us

The third operation of the Spirit is to guide us. After we have received a burden, we still cannot serve as we please. We should follow the guidance and the restriction of the Spirit in every matter. For example, whom we speak to, what we say, and when we stop speaking should all be according to the inner leading of the Spirit.

In order for the church to be built up, we must have a living service, a service of life. This requires that we have the living guidance of the Spirit when we serve others. We cannot help and lead others according to our feeling, simply speaking to them about our experiences and knowledge. This will inevitably become dead regulation and will not impart a living leading that causes the definite growth in life and the practical building up of the church. We must live in fellowship with the Spirit, accept the guidance of the Spirit at all times, and apply what we have experienced under the Spirit's direction to lift the burden in our spirit so that people may be truly built up.

We must experience these operations of the Spirit in order to participate in the service for the building up of the church. As mentioned in the previous

chapter, the word *operation* in Greek relates to the exertion of a strong, driving power that energizes us (Eph. 4:16; 3:7; Col. 1:29). The Spirit's operation in us energizes us to manifest our function. May we all manifest our function according to the operation of the Spirit so that the church may be built up.

CHAPTER FIVE

JOINED TOGETHER AND KNIT TOGETHER

Ephesians 4:15-16 is the most important reference in the Bible concerning the building up of the church. The building of God is a major topic in the Bible, and the building up of the church is spoken of in many verses in the New Testament. However, it is not easy to find verses that speak in more detail about how the church is built up than Ephesians 4:15-16.

The first mention of the building of the church in the New Testament is in Matthew 16:18, when the Lord said, "Upon this rock I will build My church." In His speaking the Lord spoke only of the church being built upon the foundation of Christ, the Son of God, and upon the revelation concerning Christ. He did not tell us how the church would be built. Romans 12:4-5 speaks of the coordination of the various members in the church, which is related to the building up of the church. Nevertheless, it does not speak of how such a coordinated building is produced.

First Corinthians 14:1-5 speaks of earnestly desiring spiritual gifts, especially that we may prophesy, in order to build up the church, but it does not say how these gifts build up the church. First Peter 2:4-5 speaks of the Lord being a living stone and of our coming to Him so that we, as living stones, may be built up as a spiritual house. However, these verses do not say how we are built up.

Ephesians is focused on the church. Of all the books in the Bible, only this book presents a thorough picture of how the church is built up. Although 2:11-22 shows that the church becomes the dwelling place of God by being built up, only chapter 4 provides the details of how this building up is carried out. Verses 11 and 12 speak of gifts—apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers—perfecting the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ. Verses 15 and 16 then speak in detail concerning how the church is built up. Although verses 15 and 16 are not very long, they contain every necessary detail concerning the building up

of the church. We need to see ten items in these verses in general and one item in greater detail.

THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH INVOLVING TEN ITEMS

The first item is love. Without love, the building up of the church is not possible. Verse 15 begins with *holding to truth in love,* and verse 16 ends with *the building up of itself in love.* Love is indispensable in the building up of the church.

The second item is truth. After love there is truth, or the holding to truth. When these two items—love and truth—are present, the church is balanced. Love balances truth, and truth balances love. The Bible is quite wonderful when it speaks of holding to truth in love. The building up of the church requires both love and truth.

The third item relates to the Head and how we practically experience the authority of the Head. The second half of verse 15 speaks of growing up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ. This shows that knowing the Lord as the Head is not a matter of knowledge or doctrine but of growing in life into the Head, Christ, in all the things in our daily life. Even though we are saved, there are many areas in our life in which we have not yet grown up into the Head. Many situations in our living expose the fact that we are still not joined to the Head. Hence, the fourth item speaks of our need to grow up into the Head, Christ, in all things. Growth is very important.

The fifth item relates to the joints of the rich supply. In order for the church to be built up, there must be some brothers and sisters who are joints of supply to the whole Body. The sixth item is the measure of each one part. Every member has a measure, and the operation in each member is according to this measure. The seventh item speaks of the operation in this measure. This is a great item involving practice. The eighth item is the Body being joined together and knit together. The ninth item relates to the Body causing the growth of the Body. Finally, the tenth item speaks of the Body building itself up in love.

These ten items are indispensable for the building up of the church. The building up of the church requires love as well as truth, the Head as well as

the growth of the saints, the joints of supply as well as the measure of each one part, and above all, the operation in the measure of each one part. The building up of the church requires the joining together and the knitting together of these parts through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part so that the church can cause itself to grow. This growth not only builds up the church but builds up the church in love.

THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH REQUIRING THE BELIEVERS TO BE JOINED TOGETHER AND KNIT TOGETHER

The building up of the church requires the believers to be joined together and knit together. If the believers have not been joined or knit together, the church cannot be coordinated and built up. When a house is built, the wood boards must be joined together and framed together. All the parts of our human body also are joined together and knit together. Whenever, for example, a part of our body is dislocated or suffering from a sprain, we are uneasy, uncomfortable, and troubled. This is a very good illustration of the need for the church to be fitly joined together. If there are brothers and sisters who cannot be joined with others in the church, the church will be troubled.

We need to ask ourselves whether we serve alone or whether we are joined with the saints in our service. This is a great matter. Even if we are joined with other saints, we still need to ask whether we are fitly joined. All the members of our body must be fitly joined with one another; that is, every member must be joined with other members according to their position in the body. Our eyes are not joined to our feet, nor are our feet joined to our arms. Similarly, every brother or sister should be fitly joined for the building up of the church. We should know our position, and we should know the function of the brothers and sisters to whom we are joined. This knowing is not according to human organization but according to the sovereign arrangement of the Holy Spirit. We have been joined to the brothers and sisters in life; we cannot be separate from them, just as they cannot be separate from us. Being fitly joined enables the church to be built up in coordination.

Ephesians speaks not only of being joined together but also of being knit together. Once we are joined together with the brothers and sisters, we are spontaneously knit together with them. When the saints are knit together, no external problems or internal factors can separate us. If this is our condition, the church will have a strong and powerful testimony in its locality.

Our physical strength depends on the knitting together of our body. When we run, every part of our body is intensely exercised, but no matter how much we exercise, our arms or feet will not fall off. The various parts of our body are always joined together and knit together; this is also the situation when the church is being built up.

INDIVIDUALISTIC ACTIONS NOT BEING IN THE CHURCH WHEN THE BELIEVERS ARE JOINED AND KNIT TOGETHER

When the brothers and sisters are joined together and knit together, there are no individualistic actions in the church, and there is not even a sense that we are individuals. There is only a sense of oneness based on the saints being joined together and knit together. This is an issue of the church being built up. In order to partake of the service that builds up the church, we cannot act individualistically or be separated from the saints. If we are separated, our work will tear down rather than build up the church.

A genuine and proper work joins and knits the saints together. An isolated and solitary work creates problems because there can be no building up without joining. There can be no building up without joining and knitting; there can only be tearing down.

In our history in the church life, we have clearly seen a few saints who seem to love the Lord very much and who seem to be very spiritual. However, such ones often become separated from the church and isolated from the saints. In a way they seem quite spiritual, but they are problematic because their spirituality lacks the element of joining and knitting. The more spiritual they become, the more they are separated from the church and the saints. In such a condition, these saints cannot be joined with the other brothers and sisters; they are like oil in water.

When a drop of water falls into a bucket of water, it immediately blends with the water and becomes indistinguishable from the other water. However, when a drop of oil falls into the bucket, the drop of oil remains on the surface, apart from the water. No matter how much the water is stirred, the drop of oil remains unblended. The drop may break apart into many drops, but it remains "alone" and "isolated" in the water; it is never blended with the water. Some saints are always isolated from the brothers and sisters, they are never blended with others, and they are always separate and solitary. This is quite dangerous.

A brother once stood up and said to the saints, "I do not want to meet here anymore. During the Lord's last days on the earth, He left Jerusalem to lodge in Bethany because Jerusalem completely rejected Him. The church here is like Jerusalem, where the Lord Jesus cannot dwell; therefore, I am leaving to go to Bethany." By "Bethany" he meant a group that he considered to be more spiritual. According to the Bible, the house in Bethany was associated with Lazarus, who died and rose, with Martha, who was drawn about with much serving, and with Mary, who sat quietly at the Lord Jesus' feet. Everyone in the house of Bethany loved the Lord, and these brothers viewed themselves as a similar group that loved the Lord. They said, "The brothers with us are like Lazarus, and the sisters are like Martha and Mary. Our small group in Bethany is in contrast to the meeting in Jerusalem." They believed that the Lord was not in the meeting in "Jerusalem" but only in their small group in "Bethany." Although this word sounds very spiritual and seems quite appealing, it is actually dangerous. Such a situation can easily result in the tearing down of the church rather than the building up of the church. In order for the church to be built up, the saints must be joined together and knit together. Building up does not involve tearing down. Everything that tears down is the result of individualistic actions.

THE BELIEVERS NEEDING TO BE JOINED TOGETHER AND KNIT TOGETHER ACCORDING TO THE GROUND OF ONENESS

I will insert a word here concerning the ground of the church. At a time of chaos in the church, we must judge whether a meeting represents the church by its ground, not by its condition. A family may be in a poor and

unsatisfactory condition, but this does not negate the standing of the family. A family may not be well off financially, but it still has the standing of a family. Even if another family is quite well off financially, we cannot take it as our family, because such a standing would be wrong. Family situations can change at any time, but its standing as a family never changes. Our family will always be our family. Being a family is based on standing, not on condition.

Similarly, the church is built on the ground of locality, which is expressed locally without any divisive element. Among the many so-called assemblies or gatherings in Christianity today, we must determine whether any represent the church by considering only their ground. If we make such a determination based also on spiritual condition, our determination will be based on relative conditions. For example, what is the basis for saying that a particular gathering is "good"? How do we measure "good"? Some meetings are in the "heavens," some are in the "air," and others are barely "off the ground." There is no standard for "good." In addition, that which is "good" often changes. Some meetings may have been very good several years ago but now are very bad. Furthermore, the meetings may be very good a year from now. The ground of locality, the ground of the church, however, is not at all affected by condition and can never be shaken. The local ground of oneness for the church is absolute. The condition of a local church may be completely different from one year to the next and from one month to the next. The condition of a church can rise and fall suddenly, but the ground does not change and cannot be lost.

Hence, we must pay attention to the matter of the ground. Our being joined together and knit together can occur only on the ground of oneness; we must avoid any "joining" that is based on something other than the ground of oneness. It is possible to be joined together and knit together only on the ground of oneness. We cannot destroy the ground of oneness merely for the sake of being "joined" with other brothers and sisters. When we find a meeting that is according to the ground of oneness, and we acknowledge that the meeting is on the ground of oneness, we should be joined together with these brothers and sisters. We cannot separate ourselves from them for any reason. As long as the ground is right, we must be willing to be built up with them no matter what their condition is.

Our being joined together and knit together with the saints must be based on the ground of oneness. Being properly joined together depends on the

proper ground. If the ground of a gathering is wrong, the "joining" that occurs will be wrong, and if the ground is right, there can be no basis for separation. The brothers and sisters may feel that this is too strict, but it is the only practice that matches the truth. There is too much confusion related to the church. If we do not pay attention to the ground, we will tear down the church rather than build it up.

Over a decade ago in a church in northern China, a few were focused on spiritual pursuit to the point that they felt the church was lacking in spirituality and was only according to the will of man and the flesh. Consequently, these "pursuers" stopped coming to the meetings. Instead, they began to meet in a home. They said that when they met in a home, everyone touched their spirit, and everyone said Amen to the prayers of those who were in their meetings. However, they said that when they met in the meeting hall, they felt oppressed and weighed down in their spirit as soon as they arrived and that they could not release their spirit in prayer. They left because they felt that the Lord was not present.

When I came to this locality, the "pursuing" brothers and sisters asked, "What do you think, Brother Lee? Can we meet like this?" I was very cautious and fearful lest I say too much and incite them even more toward a situation of division. I did not challenge them or rebuke them. I did, however, stand firm on one crucial point. I said, "Brothers, if you are only having some prayer and pursuit at home for mutual encouragement, there is no problem with this in principle. But you can never establish another church or another table to break bread. There can be only one church in one locality; there can be only one church here. I cannot say that the church here is spiritual or perfect according to its condition, but one thing is certain: there is only one ground for the church. Therefore, we must honor the principle that God has ordained regardless of the condition of the church. There can never be two churches in one locality." I did not say who was right or who was wrong; I answered their question only by standing on the ground of the church. I said firmly that we could not divide a local church into two because of differences in spiritual pursuit. We should never do anything that tears down the church.

THE BELIEVERS NEEDING TO FORBEAR ALL THINGS AND ACCEPT THE BREAKING

TO BE JOINED AND KNIT TOGETHER

In a local church there may be some who love the world and others who are spiritually weak, but there is no valid basis for any separation. In order for the church to be built up, we must learn to be joined together and knit together with others. Even if we feel that a certain brother is fleshly or that a certain sister has a strange temperament, we should still be willing to be joined together and knit together with them.

Is there any brother or sister who has no element of the flesh or no strangeness in temperament? We must admit that we are all the same. At the most there is a difference only in the degree of our blackness as "pots" and "kettles." Consider the different preferences that we have for food. Some like spicy food, and some like lightly seasoned food; some like soy sauce, and others like garlic. There are many different preferences for food; similarly, there are many different brothers and sisters in every local church.

There was a brother in Shanghai who would come to every meeting and pray without any inspiration of the Spirit. When the responsible brothers asked him not to pray, he did not get angry. Instead, he came to the next bread-breaking meeting and prayed, saying, "Lord, the responsible brothers asked me not to open my mouth, but no one is praying. Therefore, I must open my mouth." Then the responsible brothers again asked him to not pray, because his prayers were not edifying. Nevertheless, he continued to pray in the meetings. We should not think that this brother is strange, because everyone is strange in some way. Our strangeness varies only in terms of degree.

It is impossible for people to be joined together and knit together naturally. Man is by nature a loner. If we live by our natural man, sooner or later we will be separated from the brothers and sisters. In the building up of the church, being joined together and knit together are a great test. Even though there are many things that can stop us from being joined together and knit together with others, we need to be joined together and knit together with the brothers and sisters in the church. This joining and knitting involves two points that I will speak of briefly.

First, we need to forbear all things. The time that we need to fellowship with particular saints and to forbear them the most is when we feel that we

are not getting along with them. God often arranges for some particularly strange saints to be around us in the church so that we can learn the lesson of forbearance. In any case, we should make demands only on ourselves, not on those who are around us. We should not make demands on others, no matter what their condition is. On the one hand, we should be willing to ask ourselves whether we are the source of our inability to be joined with other brothers and sisters. On the other hand, we must forbear the genuine problems of others; we should make no demands on them. Their strangeness should not be a limitation on our forbearance. Without forbearance we cannot be joined together and knit together with others.

Second, we need to accept the Lord's breaking. Even if we have a meek and kind nature, we will eventually have problems with people. In our natural life we have no way to be joined with others. Ultimately, we must let the Lord break our natural life.

To speak of our natural life being broken may seem rather abstract. Let me explain with a practical example of serving in the church. Some people can serve only in a "new" way, in a way that completely disregards the ways of others. They feel that their way is the best and the most effective. If others do not take their way, they become unenthusiastic and cease to serve. Still others must do everything by themselves when they serve, and they trample upon others. Overthrowing others and trampling upon others are manifestations of the natural man. In the natural man there is no way to be joined with others; there is only isolated service that tears down rather than builds up. In order to be joined together with others, we must let the Lord break our individualistic, natural self. We should learn to respect others and enable others to serve. We should accommodate the views of others rather than disregard them. This is a great test; it requires us to consider others more excellent than ourselves, to trust others, to accommodate others, and to hand ourselves over to others.

This is the greatest key to the building up of the church. In order to be joined with others in the Lord, we must learn many lessons before God. If we are willing to accept the Lord's breaking, to allow Him to deal with our natural and individualistic elements, and to coordinate with others in one accord in every service, the church will have no problems, and the saints will be joined together and knit together and will be genuinely built up. Then the church will be immensely useful in the Lord's hand.

CHAPTER SIX

GROWTH AND BUILDING UP

Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:15-16; Col. 2:19

We will say more about Ephesians 4:15-16 and Colossians 2:19 in this chapter. Both portions refer to growth when speaking of the building up of the church. The building up of the church depends on the growth of the church. A physical house is not living, and it cannot grow, but the church is a living house built with living stones (1 Pet. 2:5). Hence, it must grow. The growth of the church is actually the building up of the church. If we do not have genuine growth, we cannot expect the church to be built up.

GROWING INTO THE HEAD, CHRIST, IN ALL THINGS

There are two references to growing in Ephesians 4:15-16 and two in Colossians 2:19. According to Ephesians 4:15, the believers need to "grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ." In other words, we must let the life of Christ gradually increase in us. When we let the life of Christ increase in us in a specific matter, we will grow up into the Head, Christ, in that matter.

When we received Christ as our Savior, He entered into us as the Spirit to be our life; this is a glorious fact. However, in our actual daily life we often are not joined to Christ practically, nor is there an element of Christ's life in our walk. For example, we may think that reading a book or a newspaper is a trivial thing, but if we are willing to learn lessons before the Lord, the Spirit within us will speak concerning this matter. He will ask, "Are you reading this book in Me?" When considering whether or not to read a book, most people would consider only the content of the book, that is, whether the content is good or bad. The Spirit's concern, however, is whether or not the element of Christ is in our reading. When the Spirit asks such a question, we are exposed as being wholly in ourselves, not in Christ. When such a light comes, we need to repent. Even if a book or newspaper is good, we still need to repent. We do not need to repent because the book or newspaper is bad, but because we did

not let the Lord into our reading and did not let the Lord add His element into us. Instead, we were wholly for ourselves and in ourselves.

When we repent in this way, we are repenting for the kingdom of the heavens, because we are acknowledging that we have not been under the ruling of the Lord, who is our Head. If we learn this lesson in such a seemingly trivial thing as reading a book or a newspaper, we will learn to deny ourselves and give the Lord the ground to mingle His element in us. Then we will experience a very practical union with Christ in the matter of reading a book or a newspaper.

In deciding whether or not to do something, people usually pay attention to whether it is good or bad. They believe that they can do anything as long as it is not bad. The Spirit, however, does not ask whether something is good or bad but whether there is an element of Christ in it. The Spirit asks, "How much of the element of Christ is in this? Are you doing this in Christ?" Once the Spirit asks such questions, we often become inwardly clear that there is not much of the element of Christ in it. Thus, we repent, saying, "Lord, even though this is a good thing, it does not have Your element in it." Through this we grow more into the Head, Christ. As a further example, in the matter of clothing, the Spirit often asks, "Are you wearing these clothes in Christ? Is the element of Christ in the choice of your clothing?"

In matters related to money, the Spirit often asks, "Are you spending this money in Christ? Is the element of Christ in your spending?" How money is spent is an important matter in a Christian's life. If we can properly handle the matter of spending money, our condition before the Lord will be quite good. If we need to grow up into the Head in what we read and what we wear, how much more we need to grow up into the Head in our spending of money. I know deep within that we often are unwilling to let the Lord "count" our money.

From my own experience, I know how difficult it is to let the Lord "count" our money, that is, to let the Lord have control over our money. Often when I considered the money that I had, a voice within would ask, "What would you do if the Lord wanted to count your money right now? Would you let Him count it with you?" Inwardly, I often would want the Lord to wait until I had "counted" it. Thus, in my considerations related to money, I did not have the element of Christ in me.

Let me say more about my experience of weakness related to money. Once, when I was "counting" my money, the Lord inwardly asked, "Do you intend to live off this money for the rest of your life, or will you depend on Me when this money runs out?" When this question came, I acknowledged the Lord and said, "Lord, at best I can live off this money for three months; in three months I will surely need to depend on You." Then the Lord said, "If you will depend on Me in three months, why do you not depend on Me today? The money you are counting will not last forever; it will soon run out. Then you will pray, but what will be your attitude in the prayer?" The Lord's speaking to me was so persistent that I eventually had to say, "Lord Jesus, come and count with me! Take as much as You want."

I was afraid of letting the Lord Jesus "count" the money that I had because I was afraid that the Lord would say, "Keep seven hundred but give away the rest." I was afraid of letting the Lord "count" my money because I did not want Him to control or direct my use of the money. I was wholly outside of Christ, not in Him, in the matter of money; I needed to grow. In the matter of spending money, we also need to experience growth and building up.

When I was serving the Lord in northern China almost twenty years ago, a brother came to me and said, "Brother Lee, an elder in a certain denomination is criticizing your speaking very strongly." I said, "I am familiar with this elder. Since he has never come to hear me, how can he be critical?" The brother responded, "His family and friends have heard you, and they told him about it. Then he began to criticize you." I replied to the brother, "Please convey in person to this elder what I am about to say. Tell him that if he allows the Lord Jesus to touch all his money, he will know whether or not I have spoken rightly." From that day forward, I have never heard of this elder speaking a critical word. That word sealed his mouth.

It is not easy to grow into the Head, Christ, in the matter of money. Although we are saved and Christ abides in us, we need great mercy from the Lord in order to grow up into the Head in our actual living and to let Christ have His way in everything. This is the point of Ephesians 4:15. This verse is more than just doctrine. If it is only doctrine to us, it is worthless. As God's children, we must see that everything related to the building up of the church depends on how much of the element of Christ is in us and how much Christ is in our actual living. This is the most basic point related to the building up of the church. If we do not grow up into Christ in our daily living, we cannot

expect the church to be built up. If we do not grow up into Christ in all things, at best we will be Christians who fear the Lord, pray regularly, attend meetings, and do not have any major faults in our living. However, in order to take part in the building up of the church, we must have some basic growth and learn to grow up into the Head in all things. *All things* in verse 15 means great things and small things. We must grow up into Christ in all things and let the element of Christ increase within us.

By the Lord's mercy, I learned some practical lessons in this regard at the end of 1933. Until then I had been merely zealous in my love for the Lord, but I had not learned many real lessons. In that year, however, the Lord started to touch many practical things in my living. For example, writing letters was an agony to me because the Lord would touch me concerning my words. Often I had to write a letter as many as eight times. Every time I finished writing, I would read the letter, and the Lord would touch me, as if to say, "Is this sentence of Me?" When I submitted to this sense from the Lord, I would have to tear up the letter and rewrite it. Therefore, I was quite intimidated concerning writing letters because there was always an inner speaking from the Lord.

We should never regard growing up into the Head in all things as a trivial point. If a brother is outside of Christ and sets Him aside in his writing of letters, or if he is outside of Christ and sets Him aside in the matter of his clothing, how can he be built up? If a sister speaks loosely and reads books and newspapers outside of Christ, how can she be expected to be built up in the church? This is not possible. In order for a believer to be built up in the church, he must learn spiritual lessons in every matter, deny himself in every matter, and let Christ participate in every matter. Then the element of God will increase within him. Only such a believer can be built up in the church.

MANIFESTING FUNCTION AND BEING JOINED TOGETHER AND KNIT TOGETHER WITH THE MEMBERS TO CAUSE THE GROWTH OF THE BODY

Growth is also spoken of at the end of Ephesians 4:16, which says, "Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together...through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the

growth of the Body." There is a distinction between *the growth of the Body* in this verse and *grow up into...Christ* in verse 15. Growing up into Christ in verse 15 is related to basic growth in our spiritual life, but the growth of the Body in verse 16 is a further step of growth because it is related to letting the Holy Spirit operate in us to bring forth a function that is manifested through our being joined together and knit together with the members of the Body for the growth of the Body. In other words, growth in verse 15 is related to giving Christ the ground in our life; growth in verse 16 is related to being full of Christ in our function. This second step of growth causes the service of the saints in the church to be full of the element of Christ.

Some brothers and sisters have some experience of being joined to Christ in their personal life, but they do not manifest much spiritual function in relation to the other members of the Body of Christ. They seem to have the element of Christ in matters related to their living, but when they come together with others, not much of Christ is manifested in their function in the church meetings or service.

I know a sister who was indeed a person living in the Lord. Yet remarkably, she would always fall asleep in the meetings. She loved the Lord and lived in the Lord, but she loved to sleep in the meetings. Furthermore, even though she knew that she would fall asleep, she would still sit close to the speaker. She did not like to sit in the back, so she would always sit in the second or third row. A young co-worker went to speak at this sister's locality around 1943. Since he had just started to serve the Lord, he was bold in himself but narrow in his capacity. As he spoke over a period of four days, the sister would fall asleep in front of him. Finally, when he could not stand this any longer, he spoke to the sister from the podium, saying, "If you continue to sleep, I will kick you out!" After the meeting I said to him, "Brother, you were too much. Do you not know that she loves the Lord?" Nevertheless, I still would like to ask, if brothers or sisters sleep in every meeting, what does this say about their service?

My burden is to show that it is possible for a Christian to grow up into Christ in many matters without manifesting Christ through functioning in the church. We may not fall asleep in the meetings, but if we have no burden for the service and cannot bear others, we are sleeping in our spirit. It is possible to have some personal growth but not contribute to the growth of the Body. After growing in Christ personally, we need to function for the sake of the

growth of the Body. We cannot neglect our personal relationship with the Lord, but it must be for the building up of others. We must hold to truth in love, gradually grow up into Christ in all things, and be joined together and knit together with others according to our operating function so that the Body may grow and build itself up in love.

NEEDING TO GROW WITH THE GROWTH OF GOD

Growth is also spoken of in Colossians 2:19, which 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." Since Ephesians and Colossians are sister books, Colossians 2 also speaks of growth in relation to the building up of the church. This shows that the growth of the church is based on the increase of the element of God. All growth in the church, whether individual or corporate, involves the increase of the element of God. The church is built up when God increases in us. The church is torn down when the element of God decreases. The increase in the element of God determines how much the church is built up.

The phrase *grows with the growth of God* is so concise and all-inclusive that it includes both steps of growth spoken of in Ephesians 4:15-16. Actually, the love, the truth, and the operation spoken of in these verses are God Himself; without God, they would not exist. In Genesis 11:1-9 God scattered the people from Babel over the surface of the earth because the people rebelled against God and rejected Him. When God forsook them, their language was confounded. However, when the Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost, the resulting oneness was signified through the communication of human language (Acts 2:1-11). As soon as the Spirit came, there was oneness. Thus, oneness is God Himself. If we learn to live before God, deny our self, and reject the flesh, our oneness in the church will be unbreakable; even the authority of Hades will cause no harm because our oneness will be God Himself.

We need to see exactly how much of the element of God is in us. If we have too much of the element of our self, we need to be shined upon and judged so that the element of our self may be killed and so that the element of God may increase. We must take care of this principle in all our service in the church. In our prayer with others, visitation of others, or fellowship with others after

the meeting, our natural element must gradually decrease so that the divine element of God may gradually increase. Without this, we will not have much growth or be built up.

All natural human elements divide and tear down the church; only the mingled element of God is the joining and building element of the church. If there is not the element of God in a prayer meeting, there is a problem with that meeting. If our ways of visitation are the same year after year, it indicates that we are not growing. Some people manifest only their natural human element in their visitation. Thus, instead of building up the church, they actually tear down the church. For example, before they visited the brothers and sisters, there was death, but it was not spreading quickly. However, as soon as they start to visit the brothers and sisters, this death spreads more quickly. In order to have service that builds up the church, we must learn to reject our natural element and let the element of God increase so that the divine life in us may grow. Only then can we manifest the function that joins us together and knits us together with others for the building up of the church.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH (1)

In this chapter we will continue to fellowship concerning service that builds up the church. If we would have a part in the service that builds up the church, we must clearly see Christ and the church, including the relationship between Christ and the church. A clear view concerning Christ and the church is a fundamental prerequisite for the building up of the church. If we do not have a thorough understanding of Christ and the church, our concept concerning the building up of the church will not be accurate, and our service, at the most, will consist of bringing people to salvation and leading them to pursue the Lord.

A person needs only to be saved in order to be in the church, the Body of Christ. If such a one pursues spirituality, it is even better. However, being built up is a further step. It is possible to be saved and to pursue the Lord without being built up in the church. This is also true with regard to service. We may be involved in much work related to the salvation of souls, but we may not be participating in any work related to the building up of the church. It is also possible to lead others to love the Lord, to pursue Him, and to live a sanctified life but still not take part in the work of the building up of the church. Although every believer is in the church and although those who pursue the Lord may be more attached to the church, this does not mean that they are being built up into the church. Being saved and pursuing the Lord are one thing, but being built up in the church is quite another thing. It is paramount that we see this distinction.

Under normal circumstances these two things should be one. When a person is saved, he should immediately begin to build up the church. It is not normal for a person who is saved to be unrelated to the church. Nevertheless, it is possible for someone who pursues the Lord personally, who loves the Lord very much, and who lives a sanctified life to have no regard for the church.

Many people know that a person who is saved is in Christ, but few know that a person who is saved is also in the church. Believers are not only in Christ but also in the church. Nevertheless, an abnormal situation exists among believers today; that is, many believers who are in Christ are not related to the church practically. I say this from practical experience. According to doctrine, every believer is in the church; however, according to the real situation of believers in general, some people are saved but do not live in the church and have no concept or consciousness of the church. The church has no place in their being, and it makes no difference to them whether or not they are in the church. This means that in actual experience, they are in Christ but not in the church; they have Christ, but they do not have the church.

This situation applies not only to those who are merely saved but also to many who pursue the Lord, love the Lord, and live a sanctified life. Even ones such as these do not have an understanding of the church, and the church is a matter of little consequence to them. This is a great problem. Although God's Word shows that a believer is in Christ, it also shows that the purpose of being in Christ is to be in the church. We are in Christ so that we may be in the church. A believer should endeavor to love the Lord and be sanctified so that he can live the church life. Our salvation and growth in life are for the church. Regrettably, the church does not have much ground in many believers. Many Christians do not even have a concept of the church. Even many who serve the Lord and work for Him have no consideration of the church. This lack of consideration is the result of having a limited understanding of the relationship between Christ and the church. Therefore, we need to speak concerning who Christ is, what the church is, and the relationship between Christ and the church.

CHRIST BEING A HYBRID OF GOD MINGLED WITH MAN

First, we must see who Christ is. Christ is God mingled with man. This is the simplest description of Christ. To speak of Christ as being only God is not accurate, and to speak of Him as being only man is also not accurate. Christ is God mingled with man and man mingled with God. This is a most practical and simple utterance.

In the universe there is God, and there is also man. Before Christ came, the two were separate and distinct. Although there was a Creator and creatures,

the two were not mingled as one. It is not until Christ came that God was mingled with man. Some people may ask, "Who exactly is Christ?" The simplest answer is to say that Christ is God mingled with man. Christ is neither just God nor just man; Christ is the mingling of God and man.

Many do not have an accurate understanding of this truth concerning Christ. This has been a great issue in theology. Nevertheless, we must put theology aside and not consider Christ merely from a doctrinal perspective. The facts concerning Christ are simple. Christ is God and man mingled as one. In the person of Christ, God entered into man, and man entered into God. In Christ, divinity has been mingled with humanity, and humanity has been mingled with divinity. Christ is the mingling of two natures—divinity and humanity—as one. In the past we used the term *hybrid*. A hybrid refers to things of different natures being mingled together to become one entity. Christ is a hybrid of God mingled with man, because Christ is not only God but also man. Christ is God mingled with man.

THE CHURCH BEING THE ENLARGEMENT OF GOD MINGLED WITH MAN

Next, we must see what the church is. The church is the enlargement of this hybrid, the enlargement of God mingled with man; this is the simplest description of the church. The church has been produced through the mingling of God and man. Christ is the hybrid of God mingled with man, and the church is the enlargement of this hybrid of God mingled with man.

The mingling of God and man occurred in the person of Jesus the Nazarene. He is the mingling of God and man. We need to ask how many such hybrids of God mingled with man are there in the universe today? Is there only one, or are there many? Is God mingling Himself with men, one by one, beginning with the Lord Jesus? Did God mingle Himself with Jesus the Nazarene and then with Peter, John, James, and Paul? Is He still being mingled with believers one after another? In other words, how many hybrids of God mingled with man are there in the universe? Is there only one, or are there many?

God has mingled Himself with man only once, not twice or even many times. In the universe there has been only one mingling of God and man. This principle can be seen in the redemption of Christ, which was accomplished

once for all (Heb. 7:27). Christ's one redemption means that there is no need for a second redemptive act. The Lord Jesus died for sinners once, and He accomplished redemption for our sins once for all. He did not accomplish redemption for Peter and then another redemption for Paul. Neither did He accomplish redemption once for you and then once again for me. In the entire universe there has been only one redemption for sins. Although sinners' experiences of the Lord's redemption take place at different times, the Lord's accomplishment of redemption on the cross occurred once for all. Hebrews 9:12 clearly says that Christ "through His own blood, entered once for all into the Holy of Holies, obtaining an eternal redemption." The Lord's redemption for our sins is once for all.

Even the pouring out of the Holy Spirit was accomplished only once. Although believers may experience the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at different times, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit occurred only once. In the same principle, the mingling of God and man occurred only once. God was mingled with only one man; God did not mingle Himself with one man and then another man. Since this is the case, when was God mingled with us?

According to our experience, we realized this mingling at the time of our salvation. According to the divine fact, however, our mingling with God occurred at the time of the Lord's incarnation. The Bible says that the Lord was born as a man and that the people would call His name Emmanuel (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23). This means that God entered into man to be with man. The man whom God entered was an inclusive man. This inclusive man includes Jesus, Peter, Paul, you, and me. Thus, the term *man* does not refer to many separate individuals but to one great corporate man. You are a part of this man and so am I; all the descendants of Adam are a part of this man.

When the Lord was incarnated, He was God entering into man, an inclusive, corporate man. From the time of the incarnation, God has been mingled with man. However, the incarnation was only the beginning; the enlargement and development of the incarnation in redeemed humanity is a further step. This can be likened to a doctor injecting a shot of medicine into the arm of a patient. In the beginning the medicine is present only in the arm, but after a period of time the medicine will spread throughout the patient's body. Hence, a doctor does not need to give a patient additional injections in other parts of his body. It is sufficient to give one injection in the arm. The incarnation was an "injection" of God, given by God, into man. God gave one injection of

Himself into man, and now this "injected" God is spreading into many believers and being enlarged gradually.

God did not mingle Himself with two men; He mingled Himself with only one man. The mingling of God with man occurred only once, not many times. In other words, there is only one hybrid of God mingled with man in the universe; there are no other hybrids. Christ is the Head of this hybrid, and the church is the Body, the enlargement, of this hybrid. In the universe this man is a great corporate man, whose Head is Christ and whose Body is the church.

I hope that the Lord will deeply impress us with this point. In order to be those who have a part in the service of the church, we must see this point. If we do not know Christ so accurately and do not know the church so thoroughly, sooner or later there will be a problem in our service for the building up of the church. How we build up the church depends entirely upon our knowledge of Christ and the church. Hence, we must see that God has mingled Himself with only one man, not two, and this mingling produced only one hybrid, not many hybrids. Christ is the Head of this hybrid, and the church is its Body.

CHRIST AND THE CHURCH BEING ONE AND INSEPARABLE

Finally, we must have a deep impression that Christ and the church are one; the only difference is that Christ is the Head, and the church is the Body. Nevertheless, the two are joined together as one. If we see this point, we will see the relationship between Christ and the church. We will see that these two are so intimately related that they are inseparable. The only way to distinguish between them is to speak of Christ as the Head and of the church as the Body.

When we say that Christ is the Head and the church is the Body, we do not mean that only the Head has the element of God and only the Body has the element of man. Instead, the element in the Head is the same element in the Body. Just as the Head is the mingling of God and man, the Body is constituted of the same mingling of God and man. The relationship between Christ and the church is so intimate that the two are completely one and can never be separated.

Based on the three points presented above, we can now speak of some basic principles regarding the building up of the church. In order to take part in the building up of the church, we must know these three principles and hold fast to them.

THE MINGLING OF GOD AND MAN BEING THE FIRST PRINCIPLE FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH

The church is not just divine, and neither is it merely human. If the church were merely divine or merely human, it would lose its true nature. The mingling of God and man manifests the true nature of the church.

When I was young, I had curious thoughts related to spiritual matters. On the one hand, I wanted God to speak to me directly. I felt that if God spoke to me personally, I would surely prostrate myself and worship Him. On the other hand, I was not particularly enthusiastic about listening to brothers who would speak to me. I did not even feel very uplifted when I listened to a brother giving a message. I wanted only God to speak to me directly from heaven.

However, God does not speak directly to us in the church; rather, He speaks through man and from within man. When someone is speaking in the church, God is speaking. A direct speaking from God is not in the principle of the church. We must grasp the principle of the church—the church is God mingled with man. When God speaks to people today, He does so by being mingled with man.

The entire New Testament was written based on this principle. Although we speak of Paul's Epistles as being God's word, these words were written by Paul, a man. He even said that what he wrote was only his opinion; nevertheless, he also said, "But I think that I also have the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 7:40). Paul's writing was according to the Lord, and his speaking was also the Lord's speaking. This is the principle of the church. The church is the mingling of God and man. When the church speaks on God's behalf, it means that some have allowed God to be mingled with them in their speaking. If only God is speaking, the church is not involved, and if only man is speaking, the church is not involved either because the Holy Spirit has no outlet, and God has no

ground. If man is independent from God and separated from God, speaking only from himself, then the church will not be manifested. God without man is not the church. God and man must be mingled in order for the church to be manifested. This is a great principle. God has no desire for our humanity to be annulled in order for us to be spiritual.

Man's Humanity Not Being Annulled in the Church

When I was young, I also had the strange thought that those who are spiritual would act more like a spirit than a man. However, even if this were possible, the church would not be manifested. According to the principle of the church, no matter how spiritual a person is, he is still a man. God's desire is for a spiritual man, not a spiritual spirit. God will never annul our humanity. If our humanity is annulled, the church will not be manifested. However, if only our humanity is manifested, this is not the church either. A church that completely annuls humanity is not the church, but a church that has only humanity is also not the church. Only the mingling of God and man, the mingling of humanity with divinity, results in the church.

Some teachings in the Bible seem to indicate that we should shun many things that are regarded as human. On the one hand, the Bible says that God's children should not love the world (1 John 2:15), should not love their parents, wife, or children above the Lord (Matt. 10:37; Luke 14:26), and should not love outward adornments (1 Tim. 2:9). These teachings are quite good, but on the other hand, this does not mean that God has no regard for our humanity. The Bible never speaks of dressing sloppily or of forgetting about our parents, wife, or children. God wants us to be human and even to uplift our humanity. It is not easy for us to be balanced; we tend to veer from one extreme to another.

Our thoughts are often bizarre and strange. A brother once asked, "Brother Lee, do you love your children?" I said, "How can I not love my children?" He responded, "I thought that people who are serving the Lord would be very cold and indifferent toward their children." Then I said to him, "If that were the case, I would not have a heart, and I would not be a human being." When another brother saw that I was dressed neatly, he said, "Brother Lee, I am rather amazed that you dress so neatly." I responded by asking, "Must I dress sloppily in order to be spiritual?" Another brother once sat next to me and

said, “Brother Lee, I am amazed that your shoes are always polished and shining.” I then asked him, “According to your thought, what should be the condition of my shoes?” He replied, “I thought that you would not have the time to polish your shoes since you are very busy working for the Lord.” Then I asked him, “If I only polished my shoes once a year, would I be a proper human being?”

There are two sides to every matter. Being fashionable and adorning ourselves are one thing, whereas conducting ourselves properly and dressing neatly are another thing. Loving our children above the Lord is one thing, whereas loving our children before God is another thing. God does not annul our humanity. A church should not be so spiritual that it forsakes what is properly human in order to be like angels. Such a church is not the church. A church should be filled with humanity as well as divinity. The church is both divine and human, human and divine. If we do not grasp this basic principle, there will be problems in the building up of the church.

Negligence in the Principle of God Being Mingled with Man Leading to Problems in the Building Up of the Church

Some may ask why we are speaking of the principle of God being mingled with man in relation to the church. The main reason is that this principle eliminates many problems. I know of a group of brothers who pursued spirituality to such an extent that they acted as if their humanity was annulled. They were very earnest in seeking the Lord, and they loved the Lord very much. However, they encouraged people to be spiritual to the extent that they despised what was human. If they saw someone behaving as a normal human being, they would despise him and speak of him as being in the flesh or even devilish. I must admit that their love for the Lord was genuine and that they pursued the Lord, but their idea of spirituality resulted in a grave mistake of neglecting the principle of the building up, which is the principle of God being mingled with man.

We should never think that annulling our humanity is the way to be spiritual or to be the church. The mingling of God with man does not make us spiritual by annulling our humanity. I hope that all of God’s children will see

this basic principle: the church is the enlargement of this hybrid of God mingled with man. Without divinity there is no church, but without humanity there also is no church.

The problem with the group of brothers who pursued so-called spirituality is that they tried to completely annul their humanity. When they spoke of having no use for humanity and of humanity having no ground before God, I thought, "This speaking does not make sense. If there is no use for our humanity and no ground for our humanity before God, why are you speaking? You should let God do the speaking. How can you explain the Bible if you have not been educated? You can explain the Bible because you have gone to school and received a human education. How can you say that there is no use for humanity and no ground for humanity?" The church does not annul our humanity.

In contrast to these brothers, there are also groups who pay attention only to human factors. Such ones say that everything is up to man and depends on man; as a result, they put God aside. Although they acknowledge God and worship God, they limit God to the heavens. They say that God remains in heaven and does not involve Himself with human affairs. They also think that in order to live in the twentieth century, we must be modern and up to date with the trends of this age. This poses a problem in the building up of the church.

THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH BEING TO BRING GOD INTO MAN AND MAN INTO GOD

If we want to build up the church, we must see this principle: the church is the enlargement of this hybrid produced through the mingling of God and man, man and God. The basic work of the church is to open a way for God to enter into man. It also brings man into God in all things so that man can grow up into the Head, Christ, in all things. The more our service causes the mingled element of God and man to increase, the more the church will be built up. If our service results in people focusing on annulling their humanity in order to be spiritual, we will tear down the church instead of building it up. However, if we lead people to focus on humanity and put God's divinity aside, separating the two elements, we will also tear down the church instead of

building it up. The basic principle in the building up of the church is to bring God into man and to bring man into God.

Whether we are giving a message, administrating in the church, visiting people, fellowshipping with others, or functioning in the meetings, we must grasp this principle. When we are about to pray, we should check with ourselves to see whether our prayers are coming out of God being mingled with us. This is a big matter. Although we want to render help to the saints with families, how do we teach them? If we tell them to pay attention to being spiritual while annulling their humanity, there will be problems in their family life. However, if we put aside the divine life and teach them only about being a husband and a wife, there will also be problems. Hence, in everything, whether in the church, in our homes, or in our personal life, we must grasp the principle of God being mingled with man so that God can have a way to enter into man and so that man can be brought into God.

The main reason there are so many divisions in the church today is that the principle of God being mingled with man has been lost. If God's children would keep this principle, I believe that there would be oneness in the church. When we ignore this principle, we tear down the church and damage the church, and the church becomes divided. The only way to build up the church today is to build according to the principle of God being mingled with man. In everything we must give God the way to enter into us and to bring us into God. I hope that we are all deeply impressed with this principle and will apply it in our service practically.

CHAPTER EIGHT

IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH (2)

Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:12-14

In the previous chapter we spoke of the principle of the mingling of God and man and man and God. In this chapter we will speak of some additional principles related to the building up of the church.

THE ELEMENT OF CHRIST INCREASING IN THE SAINTS BEING THE SECOND PRINCIPLE FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH

The second principle for the building up of the church is that the building up work in the church must cause the element of Christ to increase in the saints. Ephesians 4:12 speaks of "the building up of the Body of Christ," and then verse 13 says, "Until we all arrive...at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Hence, to build up the church is to cause the element of Christ to increase in the saints. We must pay special attention to the two references to Christ in these verses: "the building up of the Body of Christ" and "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The fullness of Christ is Christ Himself. The fullness of Christ has a stature, and with this stature, there is a certain measure. If a brother is tall and robust, his tall and robust stature is his measure.

The building up of the church involves the fullness of Christ increasing in the church. Increasing the fullness of Christ does not mean that Christ needs to increase; it means that the fullness of Christ needs to increase in the church. In some churches there is only a small measure of the fullness of Christ, and in other churches there is more of a measure of the fullness of Christ. In still other churches we can sense a much larger measure of the fullness of Christ. In every church, however, the measure of the fullness of Christ is still far short

of the full measure of Christ in Himself. Hence, there is a need for Christ's fullness to increase continually in the church. The increase of Christ is the building up of the church. The degree to which a local church has the fullness of Christ is the degree to which the church has been built up. This is a strong and accurate gauge of the amount of building up that is present in a church.

Sometimes when we visit a local church, we see brothers and sisters who are good-natured, patient, and humble and who love the Lord. However, we cannot see much Christ in them. While we are with them, we touch the saints, but we do not touch much of Christ. Furthermore, we do not touch much of the element of Christ in the workers serving in the church, including the elders and deacons. When one who lives in the Lord comes into contact with such a church, he will be sorrowful for the lack of the building element. In short, the more a church is built up, the more it will have the element of Christ.

We must ask ourselves: How much ground does Christ have in us? How much of the element of Christ Himself, the fullness of Christ, do we have? These are important but basic questions. In order for the element of Christ to increase in us, we need to accept the breaking of the cross. The more we accept the breaking of the cross, the more the element of Christ will increase in us. The work of the cross deals not only with evil things; it deals also with good things. The evil things in our natural being need to be broken by the cross, but even our natural goodness needs to be broken by the cross. God has no desire that we would be constituted with evil things, but He also has no desire that we would be constituted with good things. His only desire is that Christ would be constituted into us. However, in order for Christ to be constituted into our being, God needs to break us.

Being broken is not a doctrine but a reality. All matters related to our living must pass through the breaking of the cross. Husbands are broken through their wife, and wives are broken through their husband. A husband who is naturally good may not have much of the element of Christ in him. Likewise, a wife who is naturally good may not have much of the element of Christ in her. Both the husband and the wife must pass through the cross and be broken in order for the element of Christ to increase in them. This principle also applies to parents as well as to children. In both big things and small things, we must learn the lesson of being broken. We must accept the dealing and breaking of

the cross in every circumstance. This is the only way for Christ to gain ground in our being so that His element can increase in us.

If we are willing to accept the breaking of the cross and allow Christ to have ground in us, we will spontaneously lead others to accept the breaking of the cross. This will impart the element of Christ into them, and our work will have real spiritual value. This is the only way for the church to be built up. If our work does not cause the element of Christ to increase in the saints, our work will not build up the church. The church is constituted only with the mingled nature of Christ. Hence, we must work to increase the element of Christ in the brothers and sisters in order to build up the church.

For example, when we visit the saints, we may meet a sister who has a problem of not submitting to her husband. When we meet her, it is very easy to turn to Ephesians 5:22 and exhort her, saying, "Sister, the Bible clearly says that a wife should be subject to her husband because he is the head; we must stand in a covered position." Although such an exhortation is based on a biblical truth, it may not cause the element of Christ to increase in her. Instead, our speaking may only cause her own element to increase, especially if she agrees with us. She may say to herself, "Yes, I am the wife, but I do not submit to my husband. As a child of God, I should follow the Bible." Thus, she will receive our exhortation, pray with us, and resolve to submit to her husband. Since she is also afraid that she will not be able to submit, she will pray to the Lord, asking Him to give her the strength to submit to her husband. Although this prayer seems quite good, there is a hidden thought in this prayer that her element must be strengthened.

There are two possible outcomes to her resolution to submit to her husband. The first outcome is relatively rare: She will grit her teeth and submit in her natural strength until she thinks that she has succeeded. Then she will say, "Praise the Lord! He has really heard our prayer. I can submit now. I acknowledge my husband as the head, and I am willing to stand in a covered position." When she meets another sister who cannot submit to her husband, she will even testify of how she accepted the Lord's lesson and followed His word to receive her husband as her head and submit to him. Even if this is the outcome, it will have no spiritual value, because her submission is entirely based on her own effort; it is altogether man-made. Although she submits to her husband, there will be no element of Christ in her submission.

The second possible outcome is more common: She resolves to submit but is unable to do it. In fact, the more she tries to submit, the less she is able and the more she will fail. Eventually, in complete despair she will say, "I know that I should submit, but I cannot. I also know that the Bible tells me to submit, but I simply cannot. Therefore, I have no choice but to quit trying to submit."

It is hard to know which outcome is worse. As far as good behavior is concerned, I would choose the first outcome, because there is more harmony in a family when a wife submits to her husband. Nevertheless, I would rather choose the second outcome so that the wife would gain Christ. Both outcomes are initially void of Christ. A sister who can submit based on her own strength is void of Christ, and if she cannot submit, she is still void of Christ. Neither her success nor her failure has an element of Christ. However, her inability to submit will be better for her in terms of her being broken.

If we visit such a sister, the help that we can render depends on the lessons we have learned. If we have learned the lesson of being broken by the cross, we will know that God has no intention to build up the natural element, and we will know that God desires to build up Christ in us. If we have allowed God to do a building work in us, we will be able to help the sister, leading her to see that God has a good intention despite her inability to submit. We can help her to accept the cross and to learn to condemn herself and put herself aside by the cross so that the element of Christ can increase in her. Then she will begin to turn to the Lord and say, "Lord, it is impossible for me to submit, but it is possible with You. I have no way to submit to my husband; I am not able. Only You are able. I cannot submit in myself. I want to be in You." In this way she will become more than just a sister who submits; she will become a sister who is full of Christ. She will be constituted not merely with submission but with Christ's element. Her constitution will be Christ.

If we do not lead the saints in this way, I am concerned that the more we lead, the greater the saints' problems will become. If we can only advise a sister to submit to her husband, the result will not be good if she listens to us. If she submits in herself, Christ will not have much ground in her being, and in the future we will be able to help her even less because we have only strengthened her self, which cannot be built up. Although she has the natural strength to submit, Christ will not increase in her. After being "edified" by us, it will be more difficult for her to be broken. She will become like a block of

concrete. She will pray, “O Lord, thank You. You are helping me to submit to my husband,” and she will stand up and testify, “This is the Lord’s work. Formerly, I could not submit to my husband. However, I was taught how to submit.” At this point she will become almost unbreakable, and she will have no understanding of her need to be broken and subdued by God. Instead, she will only boast of her strong resolve and success.

As far as human conduct is concerned, the family atmosphere of this sister will become more harmonious if she submits, but as far as the building up of the church is concerned, there will be big problems and great difficulties in the future because the element of Christ has not increased in her. She will become a person who is strong in her will but completely void of Christ. It will be very difficult for her to be built up in the church. She will be self-confident, self-assured, and full of hidden pride. She will not be able to get along with others or be considerate and sympathetic toward others, because she has not been broken.

Such a self-righteous and self-confident sister cannot easily be joined, coordinated, or built up with others. Instead, she will cause problems in the church. Outwardly, she may behave very well and seem like a brand-new tire that has no wear and tear. However, when a small incident touches or offends her, she will explode like a tire that is filled with too much air. When she becomes angry, she will not only defy her husband but also cause problems in the church.

Brothers and sisters who have wrestled with God and who have been broken by God cannot be “pumped up” very easily. When they encounter people and circumstances that previously “pumped them up,” the air “deflates” from their being. No matter how much difficulty they encounter, it is not easy for them to become agitated. These saints are humble, but their humility is spontaneous; it is not forced. Although they live in Christ, they can sympathize with others and do not belittle those who do not live in Christ. Although they live an overcoming life, they can be considerate of the weaknesses of those who fail and sympathize with them. Hence, they can easily be built up in the church.

If we want to build up the saints, we must grasp this principle: we must follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and help others to learn to live in Christ according to the work that the Holy Spirit is doing in them. This will enable

Christ to have more ground in them so that the element of Christ will increase in them. This is to build Christ into the saints; it is also to arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

I hope that we can grasp this principle. The goal of our help and leading must be to build Christ into the saints. Without this focus, we will not be able to build up the church. The saints can be delivered from being individualistic, secluded, and scattered only when Christ is built into them, and then they will become one in Christ. This is the second principle related to the building up of the church.

NOT BEING INDIVIDUALISTIC BEING THE THIRD PRINCIPLE FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH

The third principle for the building up of the church is that we cannot be individualistic in the Body of Christ. The church is the Body of Christ, and in the Body a member can never be individualistic. If we work individualistically, our work will tear down the church, not build it up. Furthermore, if our work causes others to be individualistic, our work will tear down the church, not build it up.

A believer should become more distinct when he lives in the Lord, is delivered from the self, and allows Christ to increase in him. However, being distinct from others is one thing, but being separate from others is another thing. As the element of Christ increases in us, we will become more distinct but not more separate from others. Instead, we will become more considerate of others, more accommodating of others, and more attached to others. I hope that we can discern the difference between these two conditions. It is normal to become more distinct because of the increase in the element of Christ in us. However, it is not normal to become more isolated and separate from others.

For example, when the Lord deals with a brother who is very talkative, the element of Christ will increase in him. Often such a brother will become restricted in his speech and not speak as carelessly as he spoke in the past. In all things he will accept the discipline of the Spirit, speaking only when the indwelling Spirit leads him to speak. Based on the lessons that he has learned,

Christ will rule in him in regard to his speaking. Thus, in his speaking he will grow into Christ, and this growth will make him distinct from others.

This brother, however, may serve with a number of other saints who have not been broken in the matter of their speaking. When they come together, they will speak to one another carelessly, because they do not have much of the element of Christ in their speaking. When this brother is with these saints, there will be an obvious distinction between them. In spite of this distinction, however, the broken brother will not despise or condemn the saints, much less separate himself from them. The fact that his companions are talking nonsense will not affect him, and although he is distinct, he will not separate himself from them. In fact, he will attach himself even more to them because of the increased element of Christ in him. We must see that the church is the Body and that the Body cannot be divided. We cannot be divided from brothers who are weak. The weaker the brothers are, the more we should bear them up. We should not be isolated from others, and we should not do a work that is isolated from others.

If a brother has really learned the lesson of being dealt with in his speaking, he can serve and work with brothers who are quite talkative. However, as he helps the brothers, he should not work in a way that isolates them as a group from the saints. If he helps the other brothers to learn the lesson of receiving the Lord's dealing, he should be careful not to let a separate group be formed in a local church; this would be a work of separation. We should not be secluded from others, and our work should not foster seclusion. We should help others to learn to live in the Lord so that the element of Christ can increase in them. An increase in the element of Christ will result in a person manifesting distinctions in his expression of Christ, but it will also make him more accommodating, more considerate, and more attached to others.

Let me repeat, we should not do a work that causes the saints to be separate from others. We should never say, "A small number of us have received the Lord's dealing in our speaking, and we love to be together in the prayer meeting and the bread-breaking meeting. Those who speak carelessly can meet somewhere else; we do not want to meet with them." If we say this, we will tear down the church. You must learn to be patient, considerate of others, and accommodating, because the principle of the church, the principle of the Body, is oneness. This is the reason Paul asks, "Is Christ divided?" (1 Cor. 1:13). The Word never charges those who are stronger in the church to

separate themselves from those who are weaker. In fact, Romans 14:1 says, "Him who is weak in faith receive." No matter how much we have been dealt with and no matter how much our fellow serving ones lack the Lord's dealing, we must still sit together with them and pray with them.

What should we do if the brothers sitting around us are talking to each other when the bread-breaking meeting begins? Would we be able to participate in the bread-breaking meeting? Some brothers would not be able to, and instead, they would frown at the saints and move to a different chair. Although they do not leave the meeting, they would change their seat. If this is our reaction, it will not be possible for us to build up the church. If we have been dealt with by the Lord, we will be able to pray, "Lord, praise You for giving me so many brothers." Rather than despising them, we will be considerate of them, knowing that we were once just as talkative. We will also have a deep realization that their lack of restraint is related only to their shortage of the element of Christ, and we will be full of compassion and mercy toward them. Furthermore, we will not feel that we are rich and others are poor, or that we are full of Christ and others are short of Christ. This kind of attitude is also not right.

No matter how many lessons we have learned and no matter how much Christ we have, we cannot disregard our brothers and sisters. No matter how much they care for themselves, how carelessly they speak, or how lacking they are of Christ, they are still our brothers and sisters. Since the Lord has received them, we must receive them and receive them from our heart. We must feel from our heart that we cannot be separated from our brothers and sisters, because we are in the church, the Body of Christ. No matter how much of Christ we have and how little of Christ they have, we have no reason to be separated from them.

We must learn this lesson. In the church we cannot be individualistic or isolated; neither can we do an individualistic work nor a work in isolation. A sister once said to me, "Brother Lee, I cannot visit people with a certain sister, because whenever we go, she always speaks first. As soon as she opens her mouth, she cannot stop speaking. I never have an opportunity to speak. I cannot visit people with her." Then I asked, "What do you think should be done?" She responded, "It is best that she visits whomever she wants to visit and that I visit others. Since she likes to talk, she can go wherever she wants by herself." We should consider whether this sister's words are right and

whether these sisters should continue to visit saints with each other; however, I think it would be better if they would visit the saints together.

A sister who has learned the lesson of being broken can coordinate with a sister who always rushes in and speaks first. When two sisters visit someone, for example, and one sister seems to cover everything in her speaking, the other sister will have no reason to be concerned if she has learned lessons before the Lord. A person's weightiness before the Lord cannot be hidden or suppressed. If she has something of the Lord, she has it, and if she does not have something of the Lord, she does not have it. Others will always sense what we have of the Lord; we do not have to say anything. A weighty sister can sit quietly without any anxiety and let the other sister speak freely. At the end she can spontaneously offer a little prayer. In effect, the endless talking of one sister only provides a blackboard for the other sister to write upon with her prayer. Thus, it is the quiet sister who is edifying the others. Even though she says hardly anything, her silence is more powerful than the other sister's speaking. Furthermore, the sister who is being visited will witness a weighty person who is able to sit without saying anything, who is without any anxiety, and who does not even change her countenance. Her calm and steady demeanor will edify the one who is being visited. We should never think that a talkative sister will ruin a visitation, and we should not think that only speaking could edify others.

If a sister thinks that she has learned the lesson of being broken and decides to visit by herself because the one with whom she is serving has not learned the same lessons, she will have problems. As soon as she arrives, she will be asked, "Where is sister So-and-so? Did you not come together last time?" Answering these questions will be difficult. The visiting sister cannot lie and say that the other sister is sick, and she also cannot say that she did not want the other sister to come because she talks too much. The expression on the visiting sister's face will expose the fact that the two sisters cannot coordinate with each other. The sister who is being visited may not know the details related to their inability to coordinate, but unconsciously she will be damaged. She will think, "How can you come to visit me when you cannot coordinate with the other sister?" This will leave a very poor impression in her.

Genuine work does not depend on how much we have said or how much we have done. All genuine work depends on what we are in our being, how much

we have been broken in the Lord's hand, and how much we know concerning the church and the Body. Whether or not we are talkative does not matter. The only things that matter are the lessons we have learned, the attitude we have, the spirit we have, and the kind of person we are. If our situation is proper, we will be able to serve together and visit others with brothers and sisters who are talkative. Their talkativeness can even be a blackboard upon which we can convey the spiritual lessons we have learned. Hence, there is no need to be individualistic or to do an individualistic work.

An individualistic work is based on a demand that others be the same as we are; however, everyone is different. Whether in disposition, temperament, viewpoint, or opinion, no one can be exactly the same as we are. We become individualistic whenever we are unwilling to coordinate with others or be attached to others. We also produce individualistic members when we work to make others the same as we are. If our work is individualistic, our work will produce individualistic members who are separate from others. On the surface, it may seem as if we have edified others, but actually, we have torn down the church.

We should never have a goal to make others the same as we are. Our work is not to build up ourselves, nor to build up a group of people who are the same as we are. Our work is to build up the church, the Body of Christ. This is a crucial principle.

The best proof of whether or not a person or a work is individualistic is time. An individualistic worker or an individualistic work cannot stand the test of time. If we are individualistic and demand that others be the same as we are, those who are the same as we are will become different from the other saints over time. Requiring others to be the same as we are does not produce lasting results. We need to have the same mind, but such a mind is not maintained by requiring others to be the same as we are. Being of the same mind comes from being in the church, not from having the same personal characteristics. I may have learned some lessons and by the Lord's grace can render some supply to others, but I should never ask others to adopt my personal characteristics. I should never use my personal characteristics as the center of our one accord. Our one accord rests in the church itself. Since all the brothers and sisters around me are in the church, I should be in one accord with them, blend with them, and serve with them, no matter how fleshly, weak, and short of Christ they seemingly are. Even though there may be a difference in the amount of

our spiritual growth, this cannot be a reason for separating ourselves from them. If we see and keep this principle related to the building up of the church, our one accord and our work will bear the test of time.

NEVER BEING DIVIDED
BEING THE FOURTH PRINCIPLE
FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH

The fourth principle for the building up of the church is that we must see that there is only one church, not two. Just as there is only one Christ, so also there is only one church. In the previous chapter we spoke of one hybrid produced through the mingling of God and man; there are not two hybrids. The nature of the church is one, and the principle of the church is oneness. Whenever the church is no longer one, she loses her nature and her principle. If we want to build up the church, we should not allow any division in the church. I hope that God's children can understand the Lord's heart and realize that anything that causes the church to be divided, no matter how justified, is wrong.

The outward situation of today's church is entirely divided. It grieves us to realize that people regard the division of the church as something ordinary and even acceptable. It is so easy for believers to establish a congregation according to their own ideas. Whenever there is a difference of opinion, believers separate themselves and form another congregation. Throughout the world we can see various small meetings under different names in the same locality. None of these build up the church; rather, they divide and tear down the church.

We all must know the unique nature, the unique principle, and the unique ground of the church, and we must keep it diligently. The church has the ground of oneness, the principle of oneness, and the nature of oneness. We should keep this oneness carefully and not give any ground for divisions. We must see that God is building one unique church in the universe and that there is only one church in a locality. We cannot divide the church of God, and there is no basis for dividing the church of God.

Not Being Carried About
by Every Wind of Teaching

Ephesians 4:13 says, “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.” This indicates that building up the church is related to building Christ into the saints. In other words, to build up the Body of Christ is to cause the measure of the stature of Christ to grow into its fullness. Hence, we should never have anything other than Christ as the center, the goal, of the building up of the church. Verse 14 continues, saying, “That we may be no longer little children...carried about by every wind of teaching.” Christians often are carried away by every wind of teaching, even the teachings in Christianity. For the building up of the church, we cannot afford to pay attention to teachings that carry us away from Christ Himself.

In 1952 a wind of teaching related to divine healing was blowing in Hong Kong, and brothers and sisters in Hong Kong were carried about by this wind. At that time we were speaking concerning the cross, the breaking of the natural man, and Christ, but the saints could not hear or receive it. However, as soon as some incidents of divine healing were reported, it became sensational news among the saints. For example, after someone received the laying on of hands, his fever receded, and his sickness was healed. Even if the healing was genuine and even if the doctrine related to divine healing was correct, this teaching became a wind that carried the saints away from Christ.

It is easy to test whether a teaching such as divine healing is a wind of teaching. Whether or not the teaching corresponds to the truth in the Bible is not enough; we also need to see whether the incidents of healing cause the element of Christ to increase or to decrease within the saints. We must take Christ as the base of testing in every situation in the church. Without this, even messages on healing can carry the saints away from Christ. The “wind of teaching” in Ephesians 4:14 refers to teachings that are like the wind. Such a teaching may not be wrong as far as the truth is concerned; however, such a teaching can separate the saints from Christ and cause them to deviate from the central goal, Christ.

I know of some saints who have been carried away by the teaching of foot-washing; they even do not come to break bread. When we ask them why they do not come to the meetings, they reply, “You do not have love, because you do not practice foot-washing. If you washed one another’s feet, I would come back to the meeting.” Even though the teaching of foot-washing corresponds to the Bible, this kind of teaching can draw us away from the

center, Christ, and thereby become a wind, which carries the saints away from Christ. In addition, there are also brothers who emphasize holy kissing, and there are indeed verses in the Bible that speak of greeting one another with a holy kiss (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12). Thus, we cannot say that such a teaching does not correspond to the Bible. Nevertheless, this teaching can become a wind that carries us away from Christ.

When people are carried about by the wind of teaching, the result is division and sectarianism. The teaching of foot-washing can carry people into a practice of washing one another's feet, and the teaching of holy kissing can carry people into a practice of kissing one another. Both practices can cause the saints to be separated from Christ and to be divided because of differences in practice. There are so many divisions in Christianity today due to the wind of teaching. People are carried about by the wind of teaching because they do not hold fast to Christ and take Christ as their center. Ephesians 4:13-14 says, "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, that we may be no longer little children...carried about by every wind of teaching." The saints can be kept from being carried about by the wind of teaching only by growing in life according to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Even though foot-washing corresponds to the Bible, we do not have to practice it if the environment is not appropriate and if there is no need. In this way we will never be carried about by the wind of foot-washing. Even though there is nothing wrong with greeting each other with a holy kiss, we do not have to practice it if the environment is not appropriate. The same principle can be applied to practices related to baptism. In any case, we should not be carried about by the wind of teaching.

In short, everything should be centered on Christ. We are not here to build with anything other than Christ. This building is not individualistic, much less divisive. We cannot allow the wind of teaching to carry the saints about to the point of becoming sectarian and producing divisions. What we do and what we are must be for the building up of the church.

May the Lord open our eyes, and may we see that the church is the enlargement of the hybrid of God mingled with man, that the Body comes out of the fullness of Christ, and that we should not be individualistic or divisive. If we see these principles related to the building up of the church and learn to serve according to these principles, we can build up the church. These

principles are related not just to doctrines, but to our practical service. May the Lord have mercy on us.