

LEADERSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT



Witness Lee

LIVING STREAM MINISTRY

LEADERSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

by Witness Lee

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FOREWORD

This small book is composed of selected material from four other books by Brother Witness Lee. Chapter one is from Truth Messages, pages 27-35; chapter two is from The God-ordained Way to Practice the New Testament Economy, pages 167-173; chapter three is from Elders' Training, Book 9: The Eldership and the God-ordained Way (1), pages 39-54; and chapter four is from The Apostles' Teaching and the New Testament Leadership, pages 17-30. (All works referenced in this book are published by the Living Stream Ministry.)

In this small book Brother Lee makes the following crucial statement:

> The leadership in the New Testament ministry in actuality is not the leadership of one controlling person. In the Lord's recovery we reject the notion of one person controlling persons and matters. We do have

> some leadership, but not the leadership of one controlling person. Instead, we have the leadership of one controlling revelation in the one ministry through those who bring in the revelation of the ministry. The revelation controls, and it controls through those who bring in the revelation. The revelation in the Lord's recovery controls us and restricts us. (p. 20)

The controlling and restricting revelation in the Lord's recovery is the revelation of God's New Testament economy. The teaching of the apostles is the teaching of God's New Testament economy to dispense the processed Triune God into His chosen and redeemed people to produce and build up the Body of Christ for His expression to consummate in His complete eternal expression in the New Jerusalem (Acts 2:42; 1 Tim. 1:3-4). Christ takes the lead among us as the unique Head of the Body through His slaves who take the lead to follow this unique teaching and to teach this one thing.

In Brother Lee's letter of fellowship to the churches in the Lord's recovery on March 24, 1997, he said:

The Lord has shown me that He has prepared many brothers who will serve as fellow slaves with me in a blended way. I feel that this is the Lord's sovereign provision for His Body, and the up-to-date way to fulfill His ministry.

May we serve with our brother as fellow slaves in a blended way to follow the revelation of God's New Testament economy to build up the Body of Christ and consummate the New Jerusalem until we meet the Lord.

The Editors

CHAPTER ONE

LEADERSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

THE LORD'S CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP

The meaning of leadership in the Bible is completely different from our natural concept. What the Lord said about leadership in Matthew 20:20-28 and 23:8, 10, and 11 shatters the human thought of leadership. According to the natural, human concept, a leader is higher than others. But in these chapters the Lord says that whoever desires to be great among His people must be a slave. Thus, the Lord's concept of leadership is the opposite of the natural concept. Yes, there is a need for leaders among the Lord's children today. These leaders, however, need to realize that, in God's New Testament economy, leadership means slavery. If you would be a leader among the Lord's children, you must be a slave.

If we are genuine and honest, we shall admit that we love leadership, but not slavery. Such is the human heart. Even the young sisters like to be leaders. If they cannot be number one, or at least be number two, they are disappointed. Do not bring the natural concept of leadership into your reading of the Bible. In the Bible, I repeat, leadership means slavery. If you are truly a slave among the Lord's people, you must be willing to clean the rest room, vacuum the floor, arrange the chairs, and serve as an usher. How different this is from the worldly view of leadership! In the Lord's recovery we should not ask for the janitor when we see the need for cleaning. Rather, we should all serve as janitors. Let us drop our natural concept of leadership and return to the pure Word.

CHRIST, THE ONE LEADER

According to God's economy, there is just one leader among His people—the Lord Jesus Christ: "And do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ" (Matt. 23:10, NASB). Anyone who considers me the leader in the Lord's recovery is not practicing the truth. If anyone asks you who the leader in the church is, you need to say that the leader is Christ. To

answer in this way indicates that we know the truth and practice the truth. If someone claims that Witness Lee is the leader, you need to tell him, "Witness Lee is our slave."

The Catholic Church claims that Peter was appointed by Christ to be the unique leader. The New Testament, however, reveals otherwise. Yes, in the Gospels and the first part of Acts Peter is first, and his name is mentioned first. But Galatians 2:9 says, "James and Cephas and John...were reputed to be pillars." Here Peter (Cephas) is mentioned not first but second. When Peter stood up with the eleven on the day of Pentecost, he was as strong as a lion. However, in Galatians 2 he was cowardly, for when the brothers came from James, Peter refused to eat with the Gentiles (v. 12). Prior to that time, he practiced the truth concerning eating with Gentile believers according to the vision he received in Acts 10. But when the brothers came from James, he no longer practiced the truth in this matter. When Paul saw that Peter and the others did not walk uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, he rebuked Peter before all (Gal. 2:14). Through his weakness, Peter was damaging the truth of the gospel, the truth that both Gentile believers and Jewish believers are the same. This indicates that in Galatians 2 Peter's spiritual capacity had diminished. Peter was not backslidden, but his spiritual capacity was less than that of James. For this reason, in Galatians 2:9 the name of James is mentioned before the name of Peter. Furthermore, the fact that brothers came "from James" indicates that James represented the church in Jerusalem.

Another indication that James, and not Peter, represented the church in Jerusalem is seen in Acts 21:17 and 18: "And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers welcomed us gladly. And on the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present." Here we are told that Paul and his co-workers went not to Peter but to James, for all the elders, including Peter, were in James's home. James was the one who represented the church in that city.

A further indication of this is seen in the conference held in Acts 15. In this conference of apostles and elders, Peter spoke first and then Paul. In a conference the leading one does not speak first, but last. The final word in this conference was given by James, as indicated by these words: "And when they finished speaking, James answered, saying, Men, brothers, listen to me" (Acts 15:13). Then in verse 19 James gave his decision: "Therefore I judge that we

do not harass those from the Gentiles who are turning to God." When we put all these verses together, we see that Peter was not the unique leader in the New Testament. When Catholics claim that Peter was such a leader, we need to know how to cut straight the Word regarding this so we can present a clear picture to them.

LEADERSHIP DEPENDING ON SPIRITUAL CAPACITY

In God's New Testament economy the leadership among His children is not official, permanent, or organizational. Rather, leadership depends upon spiritual capacity. The one with the greatest capacity is the leader. At one time that capacity may be with a certain brother, but at another time it may be with a different brother. On the day of Pentecost the greatest capacity was with Peter, but in Acts 15 it was with James.

The relationship between Barnabas and Paul further illustrates this principle. Acts 13:2 says, "As they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Here we see that Barnabas is named before Paul (Saul). But when they were on their mission, Paul spontaneously took the lead (Acts 13:9) because he had the greater spiritual capacity. It was Barnabas who brought Paul to Antioch, and as long as they were in Antioch, he took the lead. But Barnabas did not argue with Paul when Paul took the lead on the mission. Barnabas did not say, "Paul, stand back. Don't forget that my name was mentioned first when we were called. Why are you taking the lead?" Because Barnabas realized that Paul's capacity was greater than his, he did not argue with him over taking the lead.

All these cases prove that the leadership among God's children today should not be official, permanent, or organizational. On the contrary, it depends always upon spiritual capacity. God ordained it this way in order to set aside the human concept of leadership. In the Old Testament the kings succeeded one another. There were never three or four kings at the same time. But in the New Testament the Lord appointed not one apostle but twelve. Later, He added others, such as Paul, Barnabas, and Timothy. I believe that there were many apostles. If not, in 2 Corinthians 11:13 how could there be false apostles? Moreover, in every local church there are always a number of

elders. The plurality in the eldership indicates that actually there is no fixed leadership in the church.

PRACTICING THE TRUTH CONCERNING LEADERSHIP

The reason I mention this matter now is that during the past few years someone presumed to be the leader of the Lord's recovery not only in this country, but throughout the world. If the saints had been clear about the truth concerning leadership and had practiced the truth, no one would have accepted such a claim. If we are clear about the truth and practice the truth, from now on no one will dare say that he is the leader.

To consider me the leader in the Lord's recovery is to not be clear about the real situation; it is against the practice of the truth. During the years I have been with you, I have never assumed to be the leader. I have not given orders either to the churches or to the saints concerning what they should do. On the contrary, many times elders of various churches have begged me to tell them what to do. I always told them to go to the Lord in prayer and let Him lead them. There is no organized leadership in the Lord's recovery. When we left the denominations long ago, we mainly left the hierarchy, the organization. We all must hate hierarchy and never accept it in any form. Nevertheless, during the past few years a hierarchy began to creep in and assume leadership. Because so many were in darkness and did not practice the truth, this was tolerated. Now we must all know the truth regarding this matter. We must be under the shining of the light and full of truth.

Suppose someone claims to be appointed the leader in the recovery. We should not take his word; instead, we should go to the one who is said to have appointed him. If a janitor who works in the White House claims that the president has given him an order concerning you, do not take the janitor's word for it. Instead, contact the president and ask him about it. You should not follow the janitor's order simply because he comes in the name of the president. If you take the janitor's word blindly, you cannot help but be deceived, for you are in darkness and are short of the truth. You should never do anything or believe anything because the claim is made that a certain brother says so. What matters is what the Lord says and what the Bible teaches, not what a brother says. How we must learn the truth and practice the truth concerning this!

I was with Brother Nee for years. We never considered him the official leader, and he never regarded himself in this way. Whenever someone thought of Brother Nee as the leader and came to him for instructions, Brother Nee would never say a word. Only when a person came to him for fellowship would he open himself to share something. He never assumed that he was the official leader. Likewise, I do not regard myself as the official leader in the Lord's recovery today.

ONE HEAD

The New Testament reveals that all the children of God are one Body. Although there are many members, there is just one Head. However, according to our natural concept, there are many subheads. We regard the shoulders, the arms, the hands, and the fingers as subheads. Nevertheless, there is one Head who gives orders to all the members directly, not through subheads. In the Lord's recovery there is no organization; there is just one organism, the Body. Therefore, there are no subheads of any kind. Do not regard the arms or the shoulders as subheads. The Body has one unique head—Christ. If our vision concerning the leadership is clear, no one will be able to deceive us.

OBEYING THE LEADING ONES

We have seen one aspect of the truth concerning leadership, the aspect that in God's New Testament economy there is no official, permanent leadership. Now we need to consider another aspect. Hebrews 13:17 says, "Obey the ones leading you and submit to them, for they watch over your souls as those who will render an account, that they may do this with joy and not groaning; for this would be unprofitable to you." We all need to obey the leading ones. This does not mean that the elders exercise authority over us; it means that as those who are older and more experienced, they take the lead and we need to follow them. To obey means to follow.

Regarding elders, Peter says, "Nor as lording it over your allotments but by becoming patterns of the flock" (1 Pet. 5:3). The elders are to take the lead by becoming patterns, not by lording it over the saints. If the elders see that the floor has not been vacuumed, they should not sit on the throne and summon the servants to vacuum it for them. Instead, they should take the lead to vacuum the floor and thereby set an example for others to follow.

Although the elders should not lord it over God's flock, Peter does say, "Younger men, be subject to elders" (1 Pet. 5:5a). Moreover, there are times when the older ones need to submit to the younger ones. As Peter says, "And all of you gird yourselves with humility toward one another" (v. 5b). Thus, not only the young ones submit to the older ones, but all, including the older ones, submit to one another in humility. What a beautiful picture this is! It is absolutely different from the natural concept of leadership in the fallen mentality. The leadership in the church is not that of Nimrod, who built the city of Babel. Rather, it is a leadership that builds up the Body.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE APOSTLES

Finally, we need to say a word about apostles. Do apostles have authority? According to my knowledge of the New Testament, the apostles have no authority in themselves to control the churches. Only the word ministered by them has authority. If the churches and the saints go on according to the word, according to God's oracle, the apostles have no authority to touch the churches. But if a church goes astray or is misled, then the apostles have the obligation and responsibility to deal with the situation according to God's word, which has authority. Therefore Paul says, "What do you want? Should I come to you with a rod or in love and a spirit of meekness?" (1 Cor. 4:21). He also told them that he was present in spirit to deal with the sinful one among them and to cast him out (1 Cor. 5:3-5). The authority of apostles is spiritual and is in their ministry of the word. They have no authority in position to interfere with the church affairs.

Among the children of God in today's New Testament economy, there is actually no leadership in the natural sense. There is no official, permanent, organizational leader among the apostles. The same is true regarding the elders in a local church. Furthermore, all the churches are on the same level; there is no unifying organization. Likewise, all the regions, districts, and areas of the work are on the same level. Therefore, all the apostles, all the local churches, all the elders, and all the regions of the work are on the same level. There is no organization, no hierarchy, and no official, permanent leader. Rather, we all respect and honor the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we see this, we shall be cutting straight the word of the truth concerning leadership among God's people today.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LEADERSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT MINISTRY AND AMONG THE NEW TESTAMENT MINISTERS

Scripture Reading: Acts 1:17, 25; Eph. 4:3-6; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; 6:3-5; 2 John 9-11

ONE UNIQUE LEADERSHIP

In the New Testament there is only one ministry and only one leadership in the ministry. Although there is the truth of the leadership in the New Testament ministry, the Lord did not officially appoint someone to be the leader. The early part of Acts shows us that Peter was taking the lead among the apostles (cf. Acts 1:15; 2:14). However, the Lord Jesus did not appoint Peter to be an official leader. The leadership was something spontaneous according to life, according to the real need, and according to the situation. A leadership is shaped by the growth in life and is an issue of the need. If there is no need, no leadership can be manifested. The environment forms and constitutes the leadership.

There is one unique leadership since the ministry is one (Acts 1:17, 25). Because the ministry is one, there should never be more than one leadership. There is also one unique leadership since God, the Lord, and the Spirit are all one (Eph. 4:4-6). Since there are one God, one Lord, and one Spirit, how could there be more than one leadership? The one unique leadership is for keeping the oneness of the Spirit for the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:3). Today's Christianity is divided because there are too many leaderships. Every leader has a group which is the sphere of his leadership, and that sphere becomes a division. Thus, if the matter of leadership is not applied or viewed properly, it will create division.

THE LEADERSHIP IN THE APOSTLES' TEACHING

The leadership is produced, strengthened, and also limited, restricted, in the apostles' teaching. In 1 Timothy 1:3-4 Paul charged Timothy to remain in Ephesus to do one thing with a definite purpose. He was there to charge the dissenting ones not to teach the things different from the economy of God in faith. He had to charge these ones not to teach things that were different from the apostles' teaching, which is concerning God's New Testament economy to dispense the processed Triune God into His chosen and redeemed people that Christ might have a Body to express Himself and that the Triune God might have a complete, eternal expression in the New Jerusalem. Any minister who preaches or teaches should carry out such a ministry. Otherwise, this preacher or this minister should be limited. Paul had the authority to charge people not to teach differently from God's economy. Timothy was to tell these dissenting ones that their way of teaching had to be restricted and corrected. First Timothy shows us that there was some leadership that charged people to teach the right thing.

We can also see the leadership in the apostles' teaching in 2 John 9-11 where John charges the believers not to receive those who go beyond the teaching of Christ. To go beyond the teaching of Christ is to go beyond the teaching of the apostles. Second John 10-11 says, "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not say to him, Rejoice! For he who says to him, Rejoice, shares in his evil works." John's charge prohibits the believers from receiving these kinds of ministers. To say "Rejoice" to someone was used for greeting. The believers were not even to greet those who came to them and did not bring the teaching of Christ. Such a strong charge indicates the leadership in the New Testament ministry.

Paul, in his work in the New Testament ministry, exercised leadership to correct those who taught wrongly, and John exercised his leadership to charge the believers not to receive those who taught heresy, which was not according to the teaching of the apostles. The apostles who participated in the ministry of the New Testament economy did exercise some leadership.

NOT THE LEADERSHIP IN ORGANIZATION

Such a leadership as exercised by Paul and by John was not the leadership in organization. The first twelve apostles were appointed by the Lord Jesus, but they were not organized. The Lord Jesus' appointment was equal among

the twelve. In the New Testament we cannot see an organization with board members, a chairman, a secretary, or other officers. All the major denominations have board members and a chairman. The Catholic Church has the pope as the head of their hierarchical organization. But the leadership in the New Testament ministry is not the leadership in the worldly sense to control others. In the Lord's recovery we do not have board members with a chairman or president.

Furthermore, this leadership is not the leadership in the ministers' acts, but in their teaching, to restrict them from being divisive. Sometimes in the New Testament Paul told some of his co-workers to go to certain places (1 Cor. 4:17) or to remain in other places (Titus 1:5). But basically speaking, the leadership is not exercised over the ministers' acts. No one should exercise any control over the work for the Lord. If one has the burden to go to Alaska, he must be clear that this is of the Lord. No one controls his going or not going, but he needs to be clear that his decision is of the Lord through fellowship with the Lord and the Body. There is no restriction exercised in the movements of the workers, but if someone rises up to teach something beyond the teaching of the apostles, the leadership may rise up to tell this one not to teach differently. The leadership which is shown in the New Testament is mainly in the teachings of the ministers, not in the acts of co-workers.

As the Lord's recovery is spreading throughout the entire world, who can direct the acts of so many co-workers and serving ones? We do not have a board or a mission to direct the acts of the co-workers. No one is in a position to direct the ministers' acts. They must pray and seek the Lord's leading and fellowship with the dear saints who are so concerned for the Lord's move on this earth today. Through prayer and fellowship with the saints, they will be clear whether they should stay where they are or go to another place. They will be clear whether they should go by themselves or go with some others. What is taught or preached by the workers, however, should be restricted. The leadership is very much needed in this area.

In the recovery in God's ministry, there is no freedom to preach whatever we like to preach or to teach whatever we like to teach. Our preaching and our teaching have to be restricted under the leadership by the revelation of God's New Testament economy. If someone in the Lord's recovery began to teach, stress, or promote something contrary to or different from God's New Testament economy, there would be the need of some leadership to restrict

this. Then there would be no confusion. There would never be confusion in the Lord's recovery if all of us had a clear revelation of the ministry in God's New Testament economy.

In the past the Lord's recovery was disturbed by some who stressed the matter of tongue-speaking. The majority of Christians have still not accepted the matter of speaking in tongues, and in actuality this matter has done much damage to the Lord's move on this earth. With the matter of speaking in tongues, the debit is much bigger than the credit. In the early years of the Lord's recovery in mainland China, we suffered a great loss when we tried to practice speaking in tongues. Eventually the co-workers there spontaneously concluded that tongue-speaking was not a profit to the Lord's move on this earth.

A certain charismatic magazine printed an article in which the writer said that he had contacted two hundred people who claimed to speak in tongues. Without exception, all of these two hundred doubted that the tongue spoken was genuine. However, the writer encouraged them all to go on speaking in tongues regardless of their doubts about the genuineness of what they were uttering. We read this article publicly in the training in 1963. Then I asked the trainees if Peter and the others on the day of Pentecost had any doubt whether the tongues spoken by them were genuine. Certainly Peter and the others had no such doubts. However, these two hundred tongue-speakers had doubts because the tongues they spoke were not genuine.

Furthermore, in 1963 and 1964 there were newspaper reports about some Pentecostal prophecies that an earthquake would strike the city of Los Angeles and that the city would fall into the ocean. However, the date of the predicted earthquake passed, and nothing happened. Certainly this lack of fulfillment is sufficient to prove that this prophecy was a falsehood. For a number of years, we in the Lord's recovery in China were under the influence of the Pentecostal things. Through our experience we can testify that our involvement with Pentecostalism was more of a loss than a gain. The greatest damage of Pentecostalism is that it makes it difficult for believers to appreciate the inward, organic union with the Triune God. Many believers are interested in speaking in tongues, healing, and miracles, but not in the development and cultivation of the organic union with the Triune God.

From the very beginning of the Lord's recovery in the United States, I told the saints that I believed there was the matter of speaking in tongues in the Bible, but according to our observation and experience, the speaking in tongues in today's charismatic movement is not genuine, but is humanly manufactured. Some say that they can teach others to speak in tongues. They do this by encouraging others to speak in nonsense syllables. Obviously, this "speaking in tongues" is not a genuine dialect. To speak in tongues in this way does not minister life and does not build up the believers. When some were stressing speaking in tongues in the Lord's recovery, this created a problem. I did not give any orders to prohibit this, but I did my best to have a thorough fellowship with the saints to tell them that speaking in tongues does not minister life or help the Lord's recovery at all.

There is the danger of teachings coming in among us that stress things other than God's New Testament economy. We do not need to exercise too much leadership over these kinds of things, but we need to teach the saints in the Lord's recovery to learn the New Testament economy. By learning God's economy, the saints will have the ability to discern what is needed and what is not needed. The saints who have a vision of God's New Testament economy would not care for teachings that stress and emphasize other things. Because of the Lord's new way, the door is wide open for everyone to speak and to act. Therefore, we must be restricted by the heavenly vision, by the revelation of the New Testament economy.

THE LEADERSHIP IN ACTUALITY

The leadership in the New Testament ministry in actuality is not the leadership of one controlling person. In the Lord's recovery we reject the notion of one person controlling persons and matters. We do have some leadership, but not the leadership of one controlling person. Instead, we have the leadership of one controlling revelation in the one ministry through those who bring in the revelation of the ministry. The revelation controls, and it controls through those who bring in the revelation. The revelation in the Lord's recovery controls us and restricts us.

The ministry among us is not the ministry of a single person, but the unique New Testament ministry, the ministry of the Lord's move on this earth in the dispensation of the church. The Lord's move on this earth is through His unique ministry, and we are all participating in this unique ministry. Even our

going out to visit people by knocking on their doors is a part of this unique ministry. The leadership is not the leadership of any single person who is controlling people in the Lord's recovery. The leadership in the Lord's recovery is the leadership of the God-given revelation that restricts us, directs us, and controls us so that confusion and division can be avoided.

Thank the Lord for the unique ministry and for the unique leadership in this ministry. I am so happy that we all receive one revelation under one leadership, taking one way and reaching one goal. If all of the saints in the Lord's recovery would rise up to take the God-ordained way to practice the New Testament economy, what an impact we would have! In the Lord's new way, all the saints have many opportunities to serve the Lord by knocking on doors, baptizing people, setting up home meetings, teaching the truth, and helping people to grow in life. We must cooperate with the Lord to pick up the new way, the God-ordained way, to practice the New Testament economy. I do believe that this will bring back the Lord Jesus.

CHAPTER THREE

GOD'S ADMINISTRATION

GOD'S ADMINISTRATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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

A Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation

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

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

God's Government by His Instant Speaking plus His Constant, Written Word

through Some Agents

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

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

Among the priests was the high priest with his priestly garments. The most important part of these garments was the breastplate on the ephod (Exo.

28:15-30). On the breastplate were twelve precious stones engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (vv. 17-21). I read an article years ago concerning the Urim and the Thummim written by a Hebrew scholar. According to this article, the twelve names of the twelve tribes of Israel were composed of eighteen of the twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet. The remaining four letters were put on a piece called the Thummim. The word Thummim indicates perfection or completion. Thus, on the breastplate, with the additional piece called the Thummim, all twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet could be found.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GOD'S ADMINISTRATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Elders Appointed by the Apostles

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

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

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

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

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

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

We have seen that in the Old Testament the law could be considered the written constitution of God's people. In the New Testament what replaced the law for God's administration among His people? We know that Christ replaced the law, but we are referring to the aspect and sense of replacing the law in God's administration. In the New Testament the teaching of the

apostles replaced the law. Acts 2:42 says, "And they continued steadfastly in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles." Immediately after the three thousand were saved on the day of Pentecost, they began to continue steadfastly in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles. In the Old Testament kingdom of God, the constitution was the law, and in the New Testament kingdom of God, the constitution is the teaching of the apostles.

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

The Elders as Priests and Administrators

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

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

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

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

the church. By reading the people of the church in the presence of the Lord, with the Lord, and with His loving capacity typified by the breast, we will receive some instruction as to when and how to carry out what is in the written constitution. This is to receive the instant speaking according to the written teaching of the apostles. Of course, we should not do anything that is against the teaching of the apostles. In the Old Testament no one was to do anything against the law, but to carry out the law there was also the need of the instant speaking of God Himself. When we have His instant speaking, we are not speaking our own word. What we speak is not something of democracy or of autocracy, but it is of theocracy since God Himself is speaking instantly according to His written constitution to govern and rule His people.

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

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

The Prophets and Teachers

Besides the elders as the priests and as the administrators, there are the prophets and teachers as illustrated in Acts 13:1-4. In Acts 13 in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers. These prophets and teachers are the ones who can help in the priesthood and in the eldership. They are like the Old Testament prophets who helped the elders, the kings, and the priests. Today in God's administration on this earth, the principle is the same. Besides the ones who are the priests to receive the revelation from the Lord directly and the administrators to carry out what God spoke, there are the prophets and the teachers to help the eldership and the priesthood.

The Apostles' Relationship with the Churches and the Elders After They Have Been Established

After the apostles appoint the elders and commit the church into the hands of the elders, what shall the apostles do in the future? Some say that the apostles have nothing to do with the church anymore. According to their feeling, the appointment of the elders by the apostles was the termination of the relationship of the apostles with the churches. They say this by using Brother Nee's fellowship in The Normal Christian Church Life as a basis. On page 44 of this book, Brother Nee says, "Once a church was established, all responsibility was handed over to the local elders, and from that day the apostles exercised no control whatever in its affairs." In this quote from Brother Nee's book, we should notice the phrase in its affairs. Some quote Brother Nee's words without realizing the significance of this phrase. (Brother Nee in his book entitled Church Affairs, pp. 143, 8-14, corrected this misuse of his word.) The apostles were to keep their hands off of the administration of the local church in its business affairs, not in its need of the apostles' teaching, instruction, and charge.

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

of the church administration but not from teaching, instructing, and charging the church.

There is another aspect to the apostles' relationship with a local church, which Brother Nee talked to us about, in 1 Timothy 5. First Timothy 5:19-20 says, "Against an elder do not receive an accusation, except based upon the mouth of two or three witnesses. The ones who sin reprove before all that the rest also may have fear." Timothy was charged by the apostle Paul to receive an accusation against an elder. This indicates that the apostles have authority to deal with the elders even after they have been appointed by the apostles to be elders. If there is a problem among the elders, this case should go to the apostles, and the apostles have to judge. The apostles have the authority to rebuke a sinful elder in front of others. The apostles' hands should be off of the church in its administration, but this does not mean that the apostles have absolutely nothing to do with a local church after its elders have been established.

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

The entire book of 1 Corinthians is a "bothering book." The writing apostle bothered the church in Corinth. The entire book may be considered a commandment to the local church. First Corinthians 11:34 says, "If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, that you may not come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come." Even after charging the church to take care of so many things, Paul says that he will set in order the remaining matters when he comes. We need to come back to the Word. The Word is our highest authority, our constitution. This verse tells us that some things were not set in order by the apostle Paul. In his Epistle to the church in

Corinth, many things were set in order by Paul's charges, such as the matters of marriage, the eating of things sacrificed to idols, head covering, the Lord's supper, etc. Paul charged the Corinthians to deal with at least eleven problems in his fellowship with them. He charged the church to do many things. As the apostle he did not have the position to administrate the church, but he did have the position, right, and responsibility to charge the elders to do it.

The Churches Being Local in Administration but Not Absolutely Independent

There is another important item from the Word that we have to realize. The churches are surely local in their administration, but they are not absolutely independent. In our history in the Lord's recovery, we were warned by the Brethren practice of autonomy. All the states of the United States have their own administrations and governments, but they are not strictly independent. The states are separate to an extent, but this does not mean they are absolutely independent. If the states were absolutely independent, the United States would not be one country. It would become fifty countries. The local churches are not absolutely independent. When the apostles kept their hands off of the affairs of the churches, this did not mean that each local church became one independent entity. It also did not mean that since the churches were under the teaching of the apostles, they became a federation.

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

On the one hand, the elders of the churches have the right and the position to carry out the local administration of the churches independently. On the other hand, all the churches should listen to the word that the apostles have received of God, which is the teaching of the New Testament. On the one hand, the churches are local separately. On the other hand, all the local churches are still the one Body of Christ which is an organism, not a federation which is an organization. We need to meet as local churches separately according to what the New Testament says, but all the local churches are still the one Body of Christ.

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

The Teaching of the Apostles Being the Real Leadership

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

In the four Gospels the leadership was with the Lord Jesus. That was the leadership in a person. The Lord Jesus was the Leader who had the leadership. In the four Gospels the Lord Jesus sent His disciples to certain places. His disciples were to obey whatever He said. In Acts and the Epistles, Peter and

Paul were supposed to be the leaders, but for the most part, they did not send anyone anywhere to do the work. All of the going-out workers were sent by the Holy Spirit. Acts 13 tells us that Barnabas and Saul were "sent out by the Holy Spirit" (v. 4) from Antioch to the Gentiles. Of course, Paul did charge some of the younger brothers who were closely related to him, such as Timothy and Titus, to go to certain places and to do certain things (1 Cor. 4:17; Titus 1:5). He charged both Timothy and Titus to come to him, and they received these orders (2 Tim. 4:9; Titus 3:12). But there is at least one case referred to in 1 Corinthians 16:12 that we must see: "And concerning our brother Apollos, I urged him many times to come to you with the brothers; yet it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity." Paul was very burdened to help the Corinthians solve their problems, and their problems involved him and Apollos. This is why Paul expected that Apollos would go to see the Corinthians personally. Paul did not say that he charged Apollos. He said, "I urged him." To urge someone to do something is much different from charging him. Paul said, "I urged him many times...yet it was not at all his desire." Although Paul urged him, Apollos still had the liberty, the freedom, not to do it. And he did not do what Paul wanted. Apollos said that he would come when he had opportunity. This may seem like a small verse, but it is very important to the truth concerning the leadership. This verse is very strong to prove that Paul did not exercise any control over the work of the Lord.

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

the apostles, the apostles were very strict. This proves that the teaching of the apostles actually is the real leadership in the New Testament.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE NEW TESTAMENT LEADERSHIP

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:36; 5:31; Rev. 1:5; Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18; 1 Cor. 11:3; Heb. 13:24; Rom. 12:8; 1 Tim. 5:17; 3:2; 1 Pet. 5:2-3; 1 Thes. 5:12; Heb. 13:17; Gal. 2:7; Rom. 11:13; 1 Cor. 16:12; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; 2 John 9-11; 2 Cor. 13:10; 1 Cor. 4:17b-21; 7:17b; 16:1; 11:2; 2 Thes. 3:6, 9, 12, 14; 1 Cor. 1:10; 5:11-13; 11:34b; 2 Cor. 10:6; Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; 1 Tim. 5:19-20; Exo. 28:29-30; Num. 27:15-23; 1 Sam. 3:1, 19-21; Acts 15:6, 23, 28; 2:42; 13:1

OUTLINE

I. The headship of Christ:
   A. Christ having been made Lord and Christ by God—Acts 2:36.
   B. Christ having been exalted as the Leader over all the rulers—Acts 5:31.
   C. Christ having been made the Ruler of the kings of the earth—Rev. 1:5.
   D. Christ having been appointed to be the Head over all things to the church—Eph. 1:22.
   E. Christ being the Head of the church—Col. 1:18.
   F. Christ being the Head of every man under the headship of God—1 Cor. 11:3.

II. The leadership in the church life:
   A. The elders taking the lead diligently in the church life—Heb. 13:24; Rom. 12:8.
   B. The elders laboring in teaching the saints—1 Tim. 5:17b; 3:2.
   C. The elders shepherding the church as the flock of God, overseeing it according to God, and becoming patterns of the flock, not lording it over the flock—1 Pet. 5:2-3.
   D. To be regarded, obeyed, and honored by the saints—1 Thes. 5:12; Heb. 13:17; 1 Tim. 5:17a.

III. The leadership in the ministry:
   A. Peter taking the lead in the New Testament ministry among the Jews—Gal. 2:7b.
   B. Paul taking the lead in the New Testament ministry among the Gentiles—Gal. 2:7a; Rom. 11:13.

C. The leadership in the New Testament ministry being in the New Testament teaching more than in the leading ones of the New Testament ministry:
   1. The leading ones not being strict in directing the move of their co-workers—cf. 1 Cor. 16:12.
   2. The leading ones being strict in the teaching of the New Testament—cf. 1 Tim. 1:3-4; 2 John 9-11.

D. God's delegated authority in the leading ones:
   1. For building up and not for overthrowing—2 Cor. 13:10.
   2. In their teaching—1 Cor. 4:17b-21; 7:17b; 16:1; 11:2; 2 Thes. 3:6, 9, 12, 14.
   3. In their dealing with the problems and affairs of the churches—1 Cor. 1:10; 5:11-13; 11:34b.
   4. In their punishing of the saints' disobedience—2 Cor. 10:6.
   5. In their appointing of and dealing with the elders—Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; 1 Tim. 5:19-20.

IV. God's government in the administration of the churches:

A. Not autocracy nor democracy, but theocracy.

B. The theocratic government among the people of Israel in the Old Testament:
   1. Through the priesthood with the Urim and the Thummim—Exo. 28:29-30; Num. 27:15-23.
   2. Through the coordination of the prophets—1 Sam. 3:1, 19-21.

C. The theocratic government in the churches in the New Testament:
   1. Through the Spirit who dwells in the spirits of the apostles and the elders, both of whom are the New Testament priests, with the revelation of the New Testament teaching—Acts 15:6, 23, 28; 2:42; 1 Thes. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17.
   2. Through the coordination of the New Testament prophets—Acts 13:1.

In this chapter we will fellowship more concerning the New Testament leadership. The proper leadership is a great matter. In any human institution there is the need of a proper leadership. If a country has an excellent president, that country will be an excellent country. If, on the other hand, the leadership is poor, the people of that country will suffer. Even in a family, having the proper leadership helps everyone in the family. Without the proper

leadership, there is confusion and disorder. God is not a God of confusion, but of peace and order (1 Cor. 14:33, 40). Any situation of confusion is not of God; everything of God is always in order. The universe is so great, but all the billions of items in it are in a proper order. Because everything is in order in God's creation, the earth is in a peaceful, restful situation. A small change in this order, however, would make the earth unable to support us.

Because man was created by God, everything related to his physical body is in order. If even the smallest disorder occurs in our body, we become sick and suffer. In the same way that our physical body is in such a proper order, there is also an order in the church, which is the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1:22-23). Some have said that since the church is the church of the saints, the saints in the church are equal in every way, with no leadership or delegated authority among them. This is a wind of teaching (Eph. 4:14) which disrupts the church and brings disorder to it. The Bible does say that the church is the church of God (1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32), the church of Christ (Rom. 16:16), and the church of the saints (1 Cor. 14:33). There is no verse in the Bible that tells us that the church is the church of the apostles. The apostles never proclaimed themselves to be the owners of the church. Rather, they preached Christ Jesus as Lord and themselves as slaves to the churches (2 Cor. 4:5). However, this does not mean that every member in the Body is a head. For all the members to be the same with no leadership among them is not according to God's ordination.

When God's people in the Old Testament became a collective entity, there was a proper situation of order among them. Likewise, in the entire New Testament we can see that God is altogether against any kind of confusion. We have to see the truth of the New Testament leadership according to the pure Word of God. The Bible is our "constitution." In a democratic country such as America, the highest authority is not the president or the Congress. It is the constitution. To solve any matter, we must come back to our "constitution," the Bible.

THE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST

Concerning the New Testament leadership, the Bible firstly speaks of the headship of Christ. The unique Head of the entire universe is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ Having Been Made Lord and Christ by God

Christ was made Lord and Christ by God (Acts 2:36). As God, the Lord was the Lord all the time (Luke 1:43; John 11:21; 20:28). However, in His incarnation He became a man; the Creator became a creature. As man, He was made the Lord in His ascension after He brought His humanity into God in His resurrection. Moreover, as God's sent and anointed One, He was Christ from the time He was born (Luke 2:11; Matt. 1:16; John 1:41; Matt. 16:16), but as such a One, He was officially made the very Christ of God in His ascension.

God made the man Jesus the Lord to head up and own all things. None of the founders of any religion, such as Mohammed or Buddha, was called the Lord. Only Christ Jesus is the Lord. As Christians we have the deep realization that Jesus is our Lord. Especially during times of trouble or even at times when something good happens to us, the first thing we often say is, "O Lord!" How good it is to have Jesus as Lord! Jesus was made the Lord, as the Lord of all (Acts 10:36), to possess all. If one does not have Jesus, he does not have an owner. Jesus was also made the Christ in His resurrection and ascension to carry out God's commission, His plan and eternal economy. The Lord is the owner, and Christ is the doer. He is the One who owns all things, and He is the One who fulfills God's commission.

Christ Having Been Exalted as the Leader over All the Rulers

Christ was exalted as the Leader over all the rulers. Acts 5:31 says, "This One God has exalted to His right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." The way He saves us is by being the Leader. Because He controls all things, He has the power, authority, ability, and capacity to save us. Under His leadership we have been saved. He has the authority and power, if He should so desire, to remove a king in order to save even one of His people. The account of Pharaoh and the people of Israel in Exodus is a demonstration of the Lord's authority and power to save. In Egypt Pharaoh kept all the children of Israel in slavery, and God sent Moses to tell Pharaoh to let His people go (Exo. 5:1). When Pharaoh refused, the Lord brought the plagues upon him, and he asked Moses to entreat the Lord for him (8:8, 28; 9:27-28; 10:16-17). Eventually Pharaoh was subdued, and he released the people of Israel (11:1; 12:31). The Savior saved His people through His power and authority.

The Lord's authority and power as the Leader over all the rulers can be seen in His control over the world situation. My intention since the early 1940s was to evangelize the northwest portions of China and Mongolia. I never thought that I would eventually come to America. However, due to the Lord's sovereignty in the world situation, I am here today. The One who brought me to this country is the Leader over all the rulers.

Christ Having Been Made the Ruler of the Kings of the Earth

Christ has been made the Ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5). On the earth there have been many kings, queens, and presidents, but the Ruler of all these is Christ. God made Christ the Ruler and exalted Him as the Leader.

Christ Having Been Appointed to Be the Head over All Things to the Church and Being the Head of the Church

Moreover, God has appointed Christ to be the Head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22). Whatever Christ is, is to the church. Christ is the Head of the church (Col. 1:18). Whatever the Head is, is transmitted to the church by the circulation of life in the Body.

Christ Being the Head of Every Man under the Headship of God

Christ is also the Head of every man under the headship of God (1 Cor. 11:3). Christ is the Head of the church corporately and the Head of every man individually. Still He Himself is under the headship of God. What a marvelous order there is in the universe. God is over Christ, and Christ is over all things. As the Head of all things, He is the Head of the church and the Head of every man.

THE LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH LIFE

The New Testament leadership comprises the elders in the church and those who take the lead in the ministry. It is not right to say that there is no

leadership in the church. Even in the proper family life there is a leadership. When the parents are away from home, the oldest brother or sister is left as a leader for the other children. If both the parents and the older children are away, a baby-sitter is left with the remaining children to be a leader for them. In every situation there is the need for a leader. In the church life the elders take the lead diligently (Heb. 13:24; Rom. 12:8). All the elders are the leading ones in the church. Without leaders we could not have an orderly church life with so many arrangements. Rather, we would have confusion in the church life.

The leadership in the church life is carried out by the elders' laboring in teaching the saints (1 Tim. 5:17; 3:2) and their shepherding the church as the flock of God, overseeing it according to God, and becoming patterns of the flock, not lording it over the flock (1 Pet. 5:2-3). The leaders in the church must take the lead in all things. They must be the leading sheep, the head sheep, in the flock. When the sheep at the head of the flock move, the rest of the sheep follow. However, when the sheep in the front do nothing, the whole flock stops. If the rest rooms in the meeting hall need to be cleaned, the elders should take the lead to clean them. The elders should also be the first ones to go out to visit people for the gospel by knocking on their doors. If the elders go out to preach the gospel, many in the church will follow them. If, on the other hand, the elders do not take the lead to go out, but simply exhort the other saints to do it, not many of the saints will go. The way to be an elder is not to command others but to take the lead. If the elders labor in teaching and if they shepherd, oversee, and are patterns of the flock, all the saints will respect and obey them as leaders.

The elders should be regarded, obeyed, and honored by the saints (1 Thes. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:17; 1 Tim. 5:17). The honor given to the elders may include material supply. Some elders do not take a job for their living because they are too busy in the matters of the church. They do not have an income; they live by faith. The saints should honor them by giving them some material supply. This is the proper order with a proper, beautiful situation in the church life.

THE LEADERSHIP IN THE MINISTRY

Peter Taking the Lead in the New Testament Ministry among the Jews

and Paul Taking the Lead in the New Testament Ministry among the Gentiles

The New Testament leadership also comprises the leadership in the ministry. Peter took the lead in the New Testament ministry among the Jews (Gal. 2:7b). We can see Peter's lead in the ministry in the first twelve chapters of Acts. Paul took the lead in the New Testament ministry among the Gentiles (Gal. 2:7a; Rom. 11:13) in the last sixteen chapters of Acts.

The Leadership in the New Testament Ministry Being in the New Testament Teaching More Than in the Leading Ones of the New Testament Ministry

The leadership in the New Testament ministry is in the New Testament teaching more than in the leading ones of the New Testament ministry. In America the leadership of the country is in the constitution more than in the presidency. The critical factor in the government is the constitution. Likewise, the New Testament leadership was not in Peter or in Paul as much as it was in their teaching. If Peter or Paul would have turned from their teaching, the saints would not have followed them. The churches followed the apostles' teaching, and they followed the apostles because the apostles had the New Testament teaching. The apostles kept their teaching, they were in their teaching, and they were one with it.

In 1934 there was a turmoil in the church in Shanghai, mainly directed against Brother Nee. At that time I assured him that I completely followed him, not because of who he was, but because of the teaching and revelation he brought into the Lord's recovery. Brother Nee and I had not known each other formerly; we had no personal affection. He took the lead, and I followed him because he had the revelation in his teaching and he kept the revelation. I also told him that if one day he would deviate from the revelation he had passed on to us, I would still follow the revelation, but I would no longer follow him.

Today, because of the present rebellion in the Lord's recovery, some saints are trying to vindicate me. However, I do not care to be vindicated. Rather, it is the teaching in the Lord's recovery which should be vindicated. The churches in the Lord's recovery do not follow a man, but they follow the

teaching of this ministry. However, following the teaching and not the minister does not mean that we should reject the minister. Some have twisted my word concerning not following a man but following his teaching and claim to be following my teaching while rejecting me. Even the students in a school cannot receive teaching while rejecting the teacher. What the ministry in the Lord's recovery has brought to the churches is according to the New Testament teaching of the apostles. For this reason I am at peace. I do not care about the turmoils in the church. The turmoils cannot overthrow the New Testament ministry.

Some have wrongly taught that the local churches are autonomous, that once an apostle establishes a local church and appoints the elders, he is through with that church and should stay away. This is not according to the Bible. The apostle Paul established churches, and he appointed the elders in the churches (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). After this, however, he did not stay away from the churches. He visited the church in Ephesus after it was established and once stayed there for three years. Later, while he was returning to Jerusalem, he could not forget the church in Ephesus. Acts 20 tells us that from Miletus he sent word to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church (v. 17). They came to him, and he spoke a long word, warning, instructing, and even charging them. Acts 20:31 says, "Therefore watch, remembering that for three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears." Verse 20 says, "I did not withhold any of those things that are profitable by not declaring them to you and by not teaching you publicly and from house to house." No doubt he taught the saints in Ephesus concerning God's economy and concerning their daily life, declaring to them anything that was profitable. He told the elders in verses 29 and 30, "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among you yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after them." This shows how concerned Paul was for the future of the church in Ephesus. Paul also wrote an Epistle to the church there. This illustrates that the apostles never stayed away from the churches which they had established.

The leading ones in the ministry were not strict in directing the move of their co-workers. First Corinthians 16:12 says, "And concerning our brother Apollos, I urged him many times to come to you with the brothers; yet it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity." The leading ones were strict, however, in the teaching of the New Testament

(1 Tim. 1:3-4; 2 John 9-11). First Timothy 1:3 says, "Even as I exhorted you, when I was going into Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus in order that you might charge certain ones not to teach different things." Second John 9-10 says, "Everyone who goes beyond and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God...If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not say to him, Rejoice!" The apostles were not strict in directing a co-worker such as Apollos to go to a certain place. However, they were very strict concerning the New Testament teaching. This proves that the real leadership in the ministry is in the apostles' teaching.

God's Delegated Authority in the Leading Ones

The New Testament shows us God's delegated authority in the leading ones in the ministry. In a family there is delegated authority, and in human government there is also delegated authority. Without delegated authorities, the whole earth would be in anarchy and disorder and would be unsuitable to live in. Today a wind of teaching is blowing in the Lord's recovery saying that there is no delegated authority in the church. According to this teaching Brother Nee was wrong in his book Authority and Submission. If Brother Nee was wrong, the Bible is also wrong because the Bible strongly reveals God's delegated authority in the church life and in the ministry.

God's delegated authority in the leading ones in the ministry was for building up and not for overthrowing (2 Cor. 13:10). Paul had authority, not to destroy or overthrow, but for building up. God's delegated authority was in the teaching of the leading ones (1 Cor. 4:17b-21; 7:17b; 16:1; 11:2; 2 Thes. 3:6, 9, 12, 14). Paul exercised his authority in his teaching. He taught the same thing everywhere in every church (1 Cor. 4:17b), and the churches followed his speaking. This was the demonstration of Paul's delegated authority. Authority always follows the proper speaking. A teacher's speaking in a school is with authority. When the teacher speaks, all the students are under his authority.

The leadership in the ministry was in the leading ones' dealing with the problems and affairs of the churches (1 Cor. 1:10; 5:11-13; 11:34b). Paul was strong in dealing with the church in Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 4:21 he said, "What do you want? Should I come to you with a rod or in love and a spirit of meekness?" In 11:34 he said, "And the rest I will set in order when I come."

The leadership in the ministry was also in the leading ones' punishing of the saints' disobedience. In 2 Corinthians 10:6 Paul said, "We are ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled." Paul intended to punish all disobedience when the Corinthians themselves had learned obedience.

The leadership in the ministry was also in the appointing of and dealing with the elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; 1 Tim. 5:19-20). First Timothy 5:19-20 shows that not only did the apostles have the authority to appoint the elders, but they also had the authority to judge them, including the authority to remove them. This shows us that the apostles were the delegated authority of God.

GOD'S GOVERNMENT IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE CHURCHES

Even among the children of Israel in the Old Testament, God had a government for His administration to fulfill His purpose. God also has His government in the administration of the churches in the New Testament.

Not Autocracy nor Democracy, but Theocracy

God's government is neither autocracy nor democracy, but theocracy. Autocracy is dictatorship, and democracy is government by the people. Humanly speaking, democracy is wonderful, but to bring democracy into the church brings in the opinions of the people. This is like the church in Laodicea in Revelation 3. The word Laodicea in Greek means "the opinion of the people." In the United States government, congressmen and senators represent the states to express the people's opinion. God's government in the church is not like this. God's government in the church is theocratic.

The Theocratic Government among the People of Israel in the Old Testament

The theocratic government among the people of Israel in the Old Testament was through the priesthood with the Urim and the Thummim (Exo. 28:29-30; Num. 27:15-23). The priests in the priesthood were very close to God, even

one with God. God could open Himself to them, and they could open themselves to God so that there could be a mutual understanding between them and God. They had the ability, the capacity, to receive God's revelation, God's speaking, God's oracle.

The high priest wore a breastplate with twelve precious stones bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Two items were added to the breastplate called Urim and Thummim. Urim means light, and Thummim means perfection. The Urim was something that enlightened the stones on the breastplate. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel on the twelve stones contained only eighteen of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Therefore, there was a shortage of four Hebrew letters on the breastplate. The Thummim was something added to the breastplate that bore these four additional letters to make the Hebrew alphabet complete on the breastplate. This is perfection.

When the high priest came into the presence of God, he received the speaking of God by means of the shining of the Urim on the twelve stones of the breastplate with the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, including the Thummim. The breastplate was like a typewriter to form words, phrases, and sentences. Thus, God spoke to the children of Israel through the high priest with the Urim and Thummim. (For more details regarding the breastplate with the Urim and Thummim, see messages 123 through 129 of Life-study of Exodus, pp. 1381-1434.)

The theocratic government among the people of Israel in the Old Testament was also through the coordination of the prophets (1 Sam. 3:1, 19-21). The prophets were a strengthening to the priesthood when the priesthood was not strong. This is why there was the need of both priests and prophets.

The Theocratic Government in the Churches in the New Testament

The theocratic government in the churches in the New Testament is through the Spirit who dwells in the spirits of the apostles and the elders, both of whom are the New Testament priests, with the revelation of the New Testament teaching (Acts 15:6, 23, 28; 2:42; 1 Thes. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17). The Urim and Thummim on the breastplate of the high priest in the Old Testament typify the unveiling Spirit, the Holy Spirit, indwelling our receiving

spirit, our regenerated spirit. These two spirits mingled together are today's Urim and Thummim. Whenever the apostles and the elders as the New Testament priests come to the Lord and wait on Him for His administration in the church, they will surely receive some light and some word from the Lord. By this way we have God's speaking in the administration of the church to carry out His theocratic government.

This theocratic government is also through the coordination of the New Testament prophets (Acts 13:1). In a local church there should always be some prophets to strengthen our inner feeling. This is the New Testament theocratic government for God's administration in the church to carry out His New Testament economy.

Now we need to consider the practical application of this fellowship in a local church. Whenever the elders of a local church come to the Lord, they come as priests. Because they bear the responsibility of the eldership, they want to know how to take the lead, how to teach, how to shepherd, how to oversee, and how to be patterns. Therefore, they have to pray together, to wait on the Lord. As they pray and fellowship, the indwelling Spirit will speak and enlighten them inwardly. In their regenerated spirit, they will receive something of the Lord. Then they will realize how the Lord wants them to take the lead, to shepherd, to oversee, and to be patterns. Because this may not be so adequate or strong, there are the prophets in the churches. The prophets' speaking strengthens the elders' understanding of the will of God. The functioning of the elders and the prophets in this way constitutes a kind of government for the administration of God in His church to fulfill His eternal purpose.

God's theocratic government in the churches in the New Testament is according to the life-giving Spirit as the consummation of the Triune God indwelling the leading ones. When the leading ones go to the Lord to seek His leading, they receive some inner understanding. When the prophets prophesy, what they say strengthens the feeling of the leading ones. The result of this divine coordination of the New Testament priests and prophets in the Body of Christ is the God-commanded blessing (Psa. 133:3). I hope that all of us can now have a clear view concerning the New Testament leadership, including the headship of Christ, the leadership in the church life, the leadership in the ministry, and God's government in the administration of the churches.