

# THE VISION, PRACTICE, AND BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

(Saturday—Evening Session)

Message Nine

## **The Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ**

**(3)**

### **The Organic Building by the Growth of Life and the Mingling of God and Man**

**and**

### **the Lord's Need of Overcomers to Care for the Body and Build Up the Body**

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:19; Eph. 3:17a; 4:4-6, 12-16; Rev. 12:11

- I. The organic building up of the church as the Body of Christ is by the growth of life, the increase of the Triune God within all the members, who grow up into the Head, Christ, in everything—Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:12-16:**
  - A. The Body of Christ, as the church of God, is an organism, not an organization of human beings—John 15:1-5:
    1. The Lord desires to build up the church organically, because the church is the organic Body of Christ—1 Cor. 1:2; 12:12-13; Eph. 1:22-23.
    2. The church as the Body of Christ is an organism, and the building up of the Body as an organism is its organic growth.
    3. The organic building up of the church as the Body of Christ is actually the growing up; the building up of the church is by the believers' growth in life—4:15-16; 1 Cor. 3:6-7, 9.
    4. How much organic building up we have experienced depends upon how much growth in life we have had—Eph. 4:16.
  - B. The growth of the Body depends on what comes out of Christ as the Head—vv. 15-16:
    1. When the Body is supplied by holding the Head, the Body grows with the growth of God—Col. 2:19.
    2. The Body grows out from the Head, for all the supply comes from the Head—Eph. 4:15.
  - C. The growth of the Body depends on the growth of God, the addition of God, the increase of God, within us—Col. 2:19:
    1. God gives the growth by giving Himself to us in a subjective way.
    2. The more God is added into us, the more growth He gives to us; this is the way God gives the growth—1 Cor. 3:6-7.
    3. Only God can give growth; only God can give us Himself, and without Him, we cannot have growth—vv. 6-7:
      - a. The addition of God into us is the growth He gives.
      - b. For God to give us growth actually means that He gives us Himself—Rom. 8:11.
  - D. Ephesians 4:16 reveals that all the Body causes the growth of the Body:

1. This means that the Body grows by itself; the Body makes the growth of the Body.
2. The Body of Christ causes the growth of itself by the supplying joints and the operating parts.
3. The growth of the Body of Christ is the increase of Christ in the church, which results in the building up of the Body by the Body itself.
4. The growth of the Body is “unto the building up of itself in love”—v. 16:
  - a. This is not our own love but the love of God in Christ, which becomes the love of Christ in us, by which we love Christ and the fellow members of His Body—1 John 4:7-8, 10-12, 16, 19.
  - b. Love is the inner substance of God; the goal of the book of Ephesians is to bring us into God’s inner substance that we may enjoy God and enjoy His presence in the sweetness of the divine love and thereby love others as Christ did—1:4; 2:4; 3:17b, 19a; 4:15-16; 5:1, 25; 6:24.

**II. The building up of the church as the Body of Christ is by the mingling of God and man—3:17a; 4:4-6, 12, 16:**

- A. The true meaning of building is that God is building Himself into man and building man into Himself; this is the mingling of God and man—2:21-22.
- B. The principle of God’s building is that God builds Himself into us and builds us into Himself—3:17a; 4:15-16.
- C. The mingling of God and man is an intrinsic union of the elements of divinity and humanity to form one organic entity, yet the elements remain distinct in the union—Luke 1:35, footnote 2.
- D. God’s purpose is to mingle Himself with us so that He becomes our life, our nature, and our content and so that we become His corporate expression—John 14:20; 15:4-5; Eph. 3:16-21; 4:4-6, 16:
  1. The will of God is the mingling of God with man, and the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose depends on the mingling of divinity and humanity—1:5, 9; 3:11.
  2. The Lord Jesus Christ is the mingling of God and man—Luke 1:31-35.
  3. The Christian life is the mingling of divinity and humanity; to be a Christian means to be mingled with God, to be a God-man—2 Tim. 3:17.
- E. The Body of Christ is the enlargement of Christ, the enlargement of the One who is the mingling of God and man—Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4-6, 16:
  1. The church is the enlargement of Christ, the God-man, the One who is God mingled with man—Luke 1:35; John 1:14; 12:24.
  2. The church is the enlargement of the principle of God being mingled with man and man being mingled with God; this enlargement results in the Body of Christ—Eph. 3:17a; 4:4-6.
  3. In the Gospels the mingling of God and man produced the Head; in Acts the enlargement of the mingling of God and man produced the Body of Christ—Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15-16.
- F. The Body of Christ is an organism composed of people who have the Triune God as the Spirit dwelling in their spirit; this indwelling of God as the Spirit

in our regenerated spirit is the mingling of God with us—2 Tim. 4:22; Rom. 8:16; 1 Cor. 6:17.

- G. The church as the Body of Christ is a group of people who allow God to be mingled with them and who are mingled with God—Eph. 3:16-21.

### **III. The Lord needs the overcomers to care for the Body and to carry out the economy of God to build up the church as the Body of Christ—1:10; 3:9; 4:12, 16; 1 Tim. 1:4; Rev. 12:11:**

- A. The overcomers are for the building up of the Body of Christ to consummate the New Jerusalem—Eph. 4:16; Rev. 2:7b; 3:12.
- B. Without the overcomers the Body of Christ cannot be built up, and unless the Body of Christ is built up Christ cannot come back for His bride—19:7-9.
- C. The building up of the Body of Christ is by the overcomers produced by Christ in His sevenfold intensified heavenly ministry—Heb. 8:1; Rev. 5:6.
- D. The overcomers overcome anything that is against Christ or that replaces Christ—1 John 2:18, 22; Phil. 3:7-11.
- E. The overcomers make a resolution to be vitalized ones—Judg. 5:15; Rev. 3:19b.
- F. The overcomers see the Body, know the Body, and care for the Body—Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12, 18, 24b-27; Eph. 2:16; 4:4, 16; Col. 2:19.
- G. The overcomers are those who care for God’s interests above everything, including their necessities—Matt. 6:33.
- H. The overcomers resolve to deny themselves and to pay the price required by the Lord to be the overcomers for the Lord, for the recovery, and for the Body—16:24; Rev. 3:18; 12:11; 14:1, 4.

#### **Excerpts from the Ministry:**

##### **THE LIFE ASPECT AND THE BUILDING ASPECT OF THE CHURCH**

##### **The Life Aspect Being the Mingling of God and Man**

By all of the above we can see clearly that in order to realize the church life, we first must know the real experience of Christ within us as our life. We need to experience Christ to such an extent that He is truly our life. This is a matter of the mingling of God and man. Some have criticized our use of the word *mingling*, asking, “How can God mingle with us?” These dear persons are too preoccupied by traditional theology. Whenever I hear others criticizing our messages, I am not subjective. I try to be objective to see their point of view and further consider what we are teaching. Many times I take the attitude that we could be wrong, and I check this teaching again. Even this morning I checked again whether or not something might be wrong with it. However, the Lord told me, “Look at John 6:57: ‘As the living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me.’” Can we eat something without it being mingled with us? If we eat a chicken, the chicken and we are joined together. Whatever we eat is digested and mingled with us. The Lord Jesus is the bread of life, and He said, “He who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me.”

The New Jerusalem has four sides, and on each side there are three gates (Rev. 21:13). This is not three plus four but three multiplied by four. The number three

signifies the Triune God, and the number four signifies man as the leading one of all the creatures (Matt. 28:19; Ezek. 1:5, 10). These figures signify that the Triune God mingles with man. The first time I gave a message about this picture was in 1941 in my hometown. Now, because I have been criticized for this teaching, I went back to check with the writings of Brother Watchman Nee. In *The Glorious Church* Brother Nee speaks about four women: Eve in Genesis 2, the wife (the church) in Ephesians 5, the universal woman in the vision of Revelation 12, and the New Jerusalem, the wife of the Lamb in Revelation 21 (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 34, pp. 99 ff.). Brother Nee pointed out that these four women are actually one woman, signifying God's redeemed people composed together. Concerning the last woman, Brother Nee said, "In the New Jerusalem, the union of God and man is no longer seven, but twelve. It is no longer three plus four, but three multiplied by four. Multiplication is a perfect union, something which can never be separated. When the Creator mingles with the creature, it is twelve, and twelve is the number of perfect union" (p. 132). When Brother Nee spoke this message in Chinese, he used the word *mingles*.

In order to have the church life, we must realize Christ as life to us, not merely in a general way but in the way of food to be digested by us. We must eat Christ and digest Him. "He who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me." This is the word of the Lord in John 6:57, which we must never forget. We need to experience the Lord as life in the way of food to be digested by us, thus becoming our very constituent. Then spontaneously we are in a proper order under His headship.

### **Life and Building Being Found throughout the Entire Scriptures**

The thought of life and building runs throughout the entire Scriptures. In Genesis 2 there is the tree of life, and there is also the building implied by the precious materials of gold, bdellium, and onyx stone (vv. 9, 11-12). At the end of the Bible, in Revelation 21 and 22, there is again the tree of life and the building with precious materials (22:2; 21:18-21). In the seven parables in Matthew 13 there is also the thought of life and building. In these parables the seed sown is the seed of life which grows to be wheat (vv. 3-8, 24). Even the mustard seed and the three measures of meal are related to life (vv. 31, 33). On the other hand, the treasure hidden in the earth and the pearl of great value are the precious materials for the building (vv. 44-46). Similarly, 1 Corinthians 3 tells us that, on the one hand, we are God's cultivated land, and on the other hand, we are the house of God (vv. 9-12, 16). As the cultivated land we need life to grow, and as the house we need to be built up. Throughout the entire Scriptures we have these two matters—life and building.

### **The Bridal Aspect and the Building Aspect of the Church**

In the Old Testament there are a number of types of the church. However, all the types are in two categories. The first category is the women. A number of women are types of the church. Eve is the first type of the church (Gen. 2:22; 3:20). Rebekah also is a type of the church (24:15, 64-67). Most of the positive women in the Old Testament are types of the church. The women are a matter of life. Eve came from Adam. She received her life from Adam, and Adam was life to her. This typifies that

the church receives life from Christ, and Christ is life to the church. The second category of the types of the church is the house of God, the tabernacle, the temple, and even the city. All these are a matter of building.

The book of Ephesians contains both of these aspects. On the one hand, Ephesians tells us that we are the house, the dwelling place, of God (2:20-22). On the other hand, it tells us that we are the wife, the counterpart, of Christ (5:25, 32). As the counterpart we need to grow, and as the house we need to be built up. A single verse, Colossians 2:7, mentions both aspects. This verse says, "Having been rooted and being built up in Him." To be rooted is a matter of life, and to be built up is a matter of building. Here again is life and building.

### **Growth in Life Being for the Building Up**

We need to grow, but merely to grow is not good enough. Growth is for the building. Although Christians today pay some amount of attention to the growth, they mostly neglect the matter of building. Ephesians 4:15 speaks of growth, and verse 16 speaks of building. These two verses say, "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." Similarly, 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." Ephesians 4:16 mentions the joints of the rich supply, and Colossians 2:19 speaks of the joints and sinews. Joints are for nourishment, the supply, and sinews are for knitting together.

We need to grow into Christ the Head in all things. If we do not grow into Christ, we cannot receive anything from Him, but the more we grow into Him, the more we receive something from Him to minister to others. In the Body the joints are the members of supply, the members of nourishment that supply nourishment to other members. In the Body some members are also the sinews to knit together. Without the sinews, all the members are scattered. It is by the sinews that all the members are joined.

### **THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH THROUGH THE FUNCTIONS OF ALL THE MEMBERS**

The verses mentioned above speak of four categories: the Head, the joints, the sinews, and all the other parts. First, we have Christ as the Head. We all have to grow into Him and receive something from Him as the Head, the source of supply. Second, there are the joints who receive the rich supply from the Head to minister to the other members. Third, there are the sinews, whose main ministry is not only to supply but to knit together. It is by them and through them that the many members are joined together. Fourth, Ephesians 4:16 says, "Through the operation in the measure of each one part." Besides the Head, the joints, and the sinews, there are the many parts, the many members who are neither the Head, the joints, nor the sinews. The eyes, ears, nose, and hands are not joints or sinews, but they are parts of the body that have their operation. With every member there is the

operation in its measure. We need to know the Head, Christ. We must learn to experience Him and grow into Him. Then we will receive something from Him. As we grow into Him and receive something from Him, we are in our function. It is by our function that the whole Body is built up. (*The Vision, Practice, and Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ*, pp. 50-53)

**SEEING THE BODY, KNOWING THE BODY,  
AND CARING FOR THE BODY**

When I was a young man, the Lord used me to raise up a church in my hometown of Chefoo. One evening the leaders of the denominations there invited me to have dinner with them. They complimented me for being zealous for the Lord's gospel and for bringing many people to the Lord. But they said that they could not agree with me setting up a church. Instead, they proposed that I go to their various denominations in the town to preach and to teach each Lord's Day.

I asked them if they believed that the divisions in Corinth were justified by Paul. Paul said, "Now I mean this, that each of you says, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided?...For when someone says, I am of Paul, and another, I of Apollos, are you not men of flesh?" (1 Cor. 1:12-13a; 3:4). All of these divisive ones were condemned by Paul. I then asked them, "What if Paul were here with us today? Would he justify your condition?" They said that he would not. Then I said that I could not maintain anything which God condemned. I asked them where I should put the new believers whom I gained as a result of my preaching of the gospel. I surely could not send them to their denominations, since they are condemned by God. This forced me to set up a meeting hall to take care of the new believers. Then I told them that if they took away all the signs which designated them as denominations, I would close the door to our meeting hall that night. They said that it was impossible for them to do this. I responded by saying, "Then you bear the responsibility for division, not I."

...All the problems are due to one thing—not knowing the Body. Some in the churches are self-appointed elders. They may say that the Holy Spirit appointed them, but the Bible does not say that the elders are appointed merely by the Holy Spirit. The Bible says that the apostles appointed the elders and that eventually the Spirit recognized that appointment (Acts 14:23; 20:28).

I want to say again that whenever we do something, we must have a proper consideration for the Body. We need to consider how the Body would feel about what we are doing. The biggest problem, the unique problem, is not knowing the Body and not caring for the Body. If we take care of the Body and are concerned for the Body, there will be no problems.

We are here for the Body. Without the backing of the Body, without the backing of the recovery, we have no way to practice the local churches. If we practice the local church life and neglect the view of the Body, our local church becomes a local sect.

The recovery is for the Body, not for any individual or merely for any individual local church. If we are going to do something, we have to consider how the Body, the recovery, will react. The problems are all due to the lack of seeing the Body and of

caring for the Body. We all need to come back to the truth, and to practice the truth is to take care of the Body. Sometimes the Body is strong, and sometimes the Body is weak, but it is still the Body. If we come back to the truth and take care of the proper order in the Body, the Body will immediately become stronger. All the problems are due to one thing: not seeing, not knowing, and not caring for the Body. We have to honor the Body.

**MAKING A RESOLUTION TO BE AN OVERCOMER, A VITAL PERSON,  
TO CARRY OUT THE GOD-ORDAINED WAY**

We must resolve to deny ourselves and be the overcomers for the Lord, for the recovery, and for the Body. We need such a resolution. We should pray, "Lord, I know You need the overcomers. Without the overcomers, You have no way to go on. Lord, I want to be one of these overcomers." The overcomers see the Body, know the Body, and care for the Body.

We have to make a strong resolution. In Judges 5 Deborah highly appraised some of those in the tribe of Reuben among the people of Israel. She said that they made a definite resolution to fight for the Lord's people (v. 15). Judges also tells us that God selected three hundred to be Gideon's army based upon how they drank water. The three hundred who lapped the water into their mouth with their hand did not care for their necessities, while the others who bowed down on their knees to drink the water did (7:4-7). The overcomers are those who care for God's interests above everything, including their necessities.

On the one hand, we have to make our standing clear that we do not agree with the divisions made by certain division-makers. This will help to calm down the situation among all the churches. On the other hand, we have to pick up a strong resolution by praying, "Lord, I'm going to mean business to live You for Your recovery, for the building up of Your Body. Lord, this is my job. This is my goal."

We must be vital persons. We must practice visiting people for the gospel once a week for two hours. Suppose that you pick up a resolution by praying, "Lord, I am on this earth for Your recovery, for Your Body. Your Body needs the human members for Your divine constitution. If I don't go out to get sinners saved to become Your members, then how could Your Body be built up? My going out is not for soul-winning. I am not for that. I am for Your Body. I have to go out to get members for Your Body." After making such a resolution before the Lord, you can begin to contact people for two hours every week. There are many ways to contact people and many places you can go. You may go out week after week and gain no one until the end of the year. At that time, you may meet a man while you are standing in line at the bank, and as a result you may gain him and his entire family. If you go out faithfully and consistently every week for two hours, you surely can gain one person as remaining fruit in a year.

Not all the saints are able to practice this consistent labor in the gospel because of various circumstances and weaknesses, but perhaps forty out of one hundred can. If thirty of these gain one a year, this will yield a thirty percent increase. In this way it would be easy for a local church to gain a thirty percent increase every year. The

Lord said that the seed sown on the good earth bears fruit and produces either a hundredfold, sixtyfold, or thirtyfold (Matt. 13:23).

A thirty percent yearly increase would be the highest in the history of Christianity. Do you believe that you can go out two hours each week, fifty-two times a year, and not gain one person? I believe that anyone who would do this would gain one person a year. To knock on doors means to contact people by any possible way.

We must be vital in order to gain sinners for the Lord. After we gain them, we need to feed them. To feed the new believers is even harder than gaining them. Then we have to perfect them by the mutual asking and answering of questions, the mutual teaching, in the group meetings. In order to do this effectively, we have to learn the truths. The recent life-study on Joshua, Judges, and Ruth did not come to me by accident. It came from over a half of a century of studying the Bible and accumulating the truth in the Bible. I am sharing this to impress us that we have to pay the price to learn the truths.

We need to gather the new ones together to form a little vital group, to mutually ask questions and mutually answer one another for the mutual teaching. The new ones cannot do this, so we have to set up a pattern for them by asking the proper questions. We may ask, "What is the first thing a believer should do after his baptism?" They will not know how to answer this, so we have to answer for them to set up a pattern. After we do this a number of times, they will learn how to ask and how to answer. This means that we need to pay the price to learn the truth and to learn how to speak. Then we need to help the new ones to practice the church meeting by prophesying to build up the Body. This is very high, but it is practical and workable. Whether or not we carry this out depends upon our willingness to pay the price to do it.

The Lord is a working God. He is still working today in His own way, and He needs people. We must enter into the intrinsic significance of the holy Scriptures to find out what the Lord says and what He wants. We have no right to invent anything. Rather, we discover things in the Bible. We should aspire to be patterns to the coming generation. Then the Lord will have a way. Otherwise He cannot have a way to build up His Body and to defeat His enemy, to destroy Satan. Satan is still working on this earth, walking about as a roaring lion and seeking someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8). He is also active in the heavens (Job 1:6). Revelation shows that God is waiting for the overcomers to defeat him (12:10-11). Christianity cannot fulfill this work for God. Even the church life in the recovery carried out in a routine way cannot accomplish God's desire. The Lord needs the overcomers. (*The Problems Causing the Turmoils in the Church Life*, pp. 34-38)