

TAKING THE LEAD AS ELDERS AND RESPONSIBLE ONES

(Lord's Day—First Morning Session)

Message Seven

Taking the Lead to Stand on the Unique Ground of the Church, to Be under the Limitation of the Body of Christ, and to Be Body-conscious in One Accord

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:2; Rev. 1:11; Rom. 12:3; 2 Cor. 10:13;
Eph. 4:16; 1 Cor. 12:12-27

I. We must take the lead to stand on the unique ground of the church, the genuine ground of oneness:

- A. First Corinthians 1:2 speaks of the church at Corinth—this shows the locality of Corinth for the existence, expression, and practice of the church; such a locality becomes the local ground of the local churches on which they are built respectively; thus, the church in Corinth was built on the ground of the city of Corinth.
- B. The practice of the church life in the early days was the practice of having one church for one city, one city with only one church; in no city was there more than one church—Acts 8:1; 13:1; Rev. 1:11:
 - 1. This is the local church with the city, not the street or area, as the unit.
 - 2. The jurisdiction of a local church should cover the whole city in which the church is located; it should not be greater or lesser than the boundary of the city.
 - 3. All the believers within that boundary should constitute the one unique local church within that city.
 - 4. There are four characteristics of our meeting on the genuine ground of oneness, the place that God has chosen—cf. Deut. 12:5:
 - a. First, the people of God should always be one; there should be no divisions among them—Psa. 133; John 17:11, 21-23; 1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:3-4a.
 - b. Second, the unique name into which God's people should gather is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the reality of which name is the Spirit; to be designated by any other name is to be denominated, divided; this is spiritual fornication—Matt. 18:20; 1 Cor. 1:12; 12:3b.
 - c. Third, in the New Testament God's habitation, His dwelling place, is particularly located in our spirit, that is, in our mingled spirit, our human spirit regenerated and indwelt by the divine Spirit; in our meeting for the worship of God, we must exercise our spirit and do everything in the spirit—John 3:6b; Rom. 8:16; 2 Tim. 4:22; Eph. 2:22; John 4:24; 1 Cor. 14:15.
 - d. Fourth, in our worship of God we must have a genuine application of the cross of Christ, signified by the altar (Deut. 12:5-6, 27), by rejecting the flesh, the self, and the natural life and by worshipping God with Christ and Christ alone (Matt. 16:24; Gal. 2:20).

II. As members of the Body of Christ standing on the genuine ground of oneness, we must take the lead to be limited by the other members, not going beyond our measure:

- A. God has placed all the members of the Body, even as He willed—1 Cor. 12:18:
 - 1. The Head sets us in our special place in the Body and points us to our special function—Rom. 12:4; 1 Cor. 12:15-17.
 - 2. Each one of us members has our own place in the Body of Christ; it is assigned by God and should be accepted by us.
 - 3. Since such an assignment is according to God's will, every member is necessary—vv. 19-22.
 - 4. Every member has a definite place, a definite assignment, and a particular portion with which he serves the Body of Christ.
 - 5. Each member has his own characteristics, and each has his own capability; these characteristics constitute the place, position, or ministry of each member—Rom. 12:4-8.
- B. A basic requirement for the growth and development of the Body is that we recognize our measure and do not go beyond it—Eph. 4:7, 16:
 - 1. We must be willing to be limited by our measure—Rom. 12:3, 6.
 - 2. As soon as we go beyond our measure, we go beyond the authority of the Head and move out from under the anointing.
 - 3. When we go beyond our measure, we interfere with the order of the Body.
 - 4. To think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think without a sober mind is to annul the proper order of the Body life—v. 3.
- C. Like Paul we should move and act according to how much God has measured to us, staying within the limits of God's ruling, God's measuring—2 Cor. 10:13:
 - 1. When we give a testimony about our work, experience, or enjoyment of the Lord, we must testify within measure, that is, within a certain limit.
 - 2. Although we expect the work to spread, we must learn how to be under God's restriction; we should not expect a spread that is without measure—vv. 13-15:
 - a. If we spread the work according to the Spirit, there will always be a certain limit—cf. 2:12-14.
 - b. Inwardly, we shall have the consciousness that the Lord intends to spread the work only to a certain extent; inwardly, we do not have the peace to spread the work beyond a certain point.
 - c. Outwardly, in the environment the Lord may cause certain matters to restrict the spread of the work; the environment does not allow us to go beyond a particular boundary line—cf. Rom. 15:24.
 - 3. In the church service, we need to realize that God has measured out only so much to us, and we should not overstretch ourselves—12:3-4, 6a.

III. For the Lord's move in His recovery both locally and universally, we must take the lead to be Body-conscious in one accord—Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 15:25; Rom. 15:6:

- A. We should always consider the Body, care for the Body, honor the Body, and do what is best for the Body—1 Cor. 12:12-27.

- B. "When Brother Nee taught about the Body he said that whatever we do, we have to consider how the churches would feel about it"—*The Problems Causing the Turmoils in the Church Life*, pp. 28-29.
- C. In the Body there can be no independence or individualism, for we are members, and members cannot live in detachment from the Body—1 Cor. 12:27; Rom. 12:5; Eph. 5:30:
 - 1. Those who see that they are members of the Body treasure the Body and honor the other members, each of whom is indispensable—1 Cor. 12:15, 21, 23-24; Rom. 12:3; Phil. 2:29; 1 Cor. 16:18; Judg. 9:9:
 - a. Since we are members of the Body of Christ, we should have a feeling for the Body, taking the feeling of the Head as our own feeling—Phil. 1:8; 1 Cor. 12:25b-26.
 - b. We need to be like-souled in the Body life, genuinely caring for the things of Christ Jesus, the things concerning the church with all the saints—Phil. 2:2, 20-21; 1:8.
 - 2. Wherever there is Body-revelation, there is Body-consciousness, and wherever there is Body-consciousness, individualistic thought and action are ruled out:
 - a. If we want to know the Body, we need deliverance not only from our sinful life and our natural life but also from our individualistic life.
 - b. Just as the Father is versus the world (1 John 2:15), the Spirit is versus the flesh (Gal. 5:17), and the Lord is versus the devil (1 John 3:8), so also the Body is versus the individual.
 - c. Just as we cannot be independent from the Head, we cannot be independent from the Body.
 - d. Individualism is hateful in the sight of God:
 - (1) The enemy of the Body is the self, the independent "I," the independent "me"; if we would be built up in the Body, the self must be condemned, denied, rejected, and renounced—Matt. 16:21-26.
 - (2) We should be dependent not only on God but also on the Body, on the brothers and sisters—Exo. 17:11-13; Acts 9:25; 2 Cor. 11:33.
 - e. What I do not know, another member of the Body will know; what I cannot see, another member of the Body will see; what I cannot do, another member of the Body will do—1 Cor. 12:17-22.
 - f. If we refuse the help of our fellow members, we are refusing the help of Christ; sooner or later all individualistic Christians will dry up—v. 12.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

NOT BOASTING WITHOUT MEASURE

Second Corinthians 10:13 says, "But we will not boast without measure, but according to the measure of the rule which the God of measure has apportioned to us, to reach even as far as you." The apostle is bold, but he is not bold without limit. This shows that he is under the restriction of the Lord. His boasting is according to the measure of the rule which the God of measure, the ruling God, has apportioned to him. Paul's ministry to the Gentile world, including Corinth, was according to the measure of God (Eph. 3:1-2, 8; Gal. 2:8). Hence, his

boast is also within this limit, not without measure, as that of the Judaistic teachers. The word rule in verse 13 literally means a measuring rod, as a rule used by a carpenter.

We should never boast without measure. In giving a testimony of what we have learned of the Lord, we should have a limit, a measure. The word measure in verse 13 indicates being ruled by God. God has allotted us just so much for our work and experience. Furthermore, He has given us just so much to enjoy. Therefore, when we give a testimony about our work, experience, or enjoyment of the Lord, we must testify within measure, that is, within a certain limit.

In giving a testimony or a report we should never exaggerate. However, the reports in certain Christian publications are exaggerations; those reports go beyond measure, beyond limit, without restriction. Thus, in testifying of our experience, we must stay within the measure God has given us. We should not boast without measure, beyond measure, but according to the rule which the God of measure has apportioned to us. There is One who is ruling and measuring. This One is the God of measure, the God who rules. Therefore, we must stay within the limits of God's ruling, of God's measuring. Paul's words "reach even as far as you" indicate that his coming to the Corinthians was under God's ruling and measuring.

Verse 14 continues, "For we do not, as not reaching to you, overstretch ourselves, for we were the first to come even as far as unto you in the gospel of Christ." In contrast to the Judaistic teachers, Paul and the other apostles did not overstretch themselves. They were the first to go to Europe, and hence to the Corinthians, with the gospel. If the Judaizers had gone there first, probably the apostles would not have gone, and that would have been the sign that Europe had not been measured to them under God's ruling. This is related to Paul's point in arguing with the Judaizers.

In verses 15 and 16 Paul says, "Not boasting without measure in others' labors, but having hope, your faith growing, to be magnified among you according to our rule unto abundance, to preach the gospel unto the parts beyond you, not to boast in another's rule in things made ready." Here we see that the apostles have hope that through the growth of the faith of the Corinthian believers, their ministry will be magnified (in the sense of praise), by being enlarged and increased abundantly, yet still according to the rule, the measure, that God has apportioned to them. Paul hoped to be magnified among the Corinthians according to the limit of God's measuring.

GOD'S RESTRICTION

From verses 13, 14, and 15 we see that although we expect the Lord's work to spread, we must learn how to be under God's restriction. Do not expect a spread that is without measure. That kind of spread would certainly not be within the limit of a walk according to Spirit. From experience we can testify that if we spread the work according to the Spirit, there will always be a certain limit. Inwardly we shall have the consciousness that the Lord intends to spread the work only to a certain extent. Furthermore, outwardly, in the environment, the Lord may cause matters to restrict the spread of the work. Therefore, inwardly we do not have the peace to spread the work beyond a certain point, and outwardly the environment does not allow us to go beyond a particular boundary line.

The young people are not yet very much into the Lord's work. Nevertheless, I would encourage them to keep this word within them, for one day they will experience it. We all need to learn that in serving the Lord and in working with God, there is always a limit. This is also true in the service of the church.

The Lord is especially interested in restricting the young people. If the young ones do not have a heart to serve the Lord, He will stir them up to serve Him. But once they have been

stirred up, He will limit them. Human nature does not like this kind of limitation. For example, both in our sleeping and in our activity we may not like limitations. When, spiritually speaking, we are asleep, God will stir us up. But when we become too active, He will restrict us. I know some young people who have been offended because God has done this to them. A young brother may want to be a leader among the young people. If he becomes a leader, he may then want to be a deacon or an elder in the church. In these matters he may expect to make swift progress. God's way, however, is first to speed us up and then to slow us down, first to raise us up and then to lower us down. When we are down, He will lift us up. But when we get too far up, He will lower us down. Hence, God's way of dealing with us is up and down, down and up. If we can take God's ups and downs, we shall eventually become useful in His work.

Many young people cannot tolerate God's ups and downs. After a few of these ups and downs, they want to quit. Their attitude may be, "If God wants me up, then let me go up to the heavens and stay there until the Lord Jesus comes back. But if God wants me down, let me stay down. But I don't like going up and down, down and up." This unhappiness with God's ups and downs is an expression of the disposition of many young people.

God does not want us to be always up or to be always down. Even in nature the alternating of day and night testifies of this. There is no such thing as an unending day or night. Rather, there is the alternating of day and night, night and day. God did not create us so that we would have a day or night that would last for many years. This may be according to our way, but it is not according to God's way.

LEARNING TO TAKE THE LORD'S RESTRICTION

God has many ways to bring us down. Some young people have been brought down by their married life. Before a particular brother was married, he may have been like an eagle soaring in the air. He could easily talk about the wonderful, glorious church life. But not long after his wedding, it seems that the church life is no longer glorious. God is using his marriage to calm down such an excited brother. In some cases, such a brother may stay down for a long period of time after his marriage. But eventually he is up again, although not in the same excited way as before. This is a sign of improvement.

Sometimes God may use one of the elders to bring you down. If such a thing happens to you, you should realize that God is the one who is putting you down, not the elder. He does it by means of the elder. Without having any intention, that elder may speak a certain word to you, and that word lowers you down. God deals with us in this way because He is a God of measure, apportioning to us a certain measure.

I realize that it is a serious matter to be down. Some brothers may be down for such a long time that it seems that they will never rise up again. But perhaps after another period of time, they will once again be up. None of us should presume to say what another brother's situation will be. It seems that this being up and down is beyond our control or management. Yes, we do not control this or manage it. Therefore, we all must realize that God is in control and that this is His way to keep us within our measure.

In this country the Lord's recovery has spread to a certain degree. Yet it seems that there has been a limit to this spread. However, this does not mean that the Lord will permanently stop the spread of the recovery. The point here is that, in our concept, once the Lord's recovery begins to spread, it should spread farther and farther without restriction. However, this is not God's concept.

We should not think that Paul was so spiritual that he was altogether different from us. Even he had to learn to take the Lord's restriction. For example, Paul wanted to go to Rome,

but he did not expect to go there in bonds. Furthermore, he told the believers at Rome that he expected to go to Spain by way of them (Rom. 15:24). Paul never went to Spain, and he arrived in Rome in bonds. Those bonds were the Lord's measure, His limitation. God did not measure out Rome to Paul in a free way. Instead, God led him there as a prisoner. Yes, Paul was in Rome, but he was there in prison. That imprisonment was a restriction. Rome was not Paul's territory in a way without restriction. God is sovereign, and whatever happened to Paul was under God's sovereignty. This means that Paul's bonds and imprisonment were God's sovereign restriction. Paul was willing to be subject to God's measuring. He neither transgressed this restriction nor rebelled against it. In this matter, he did not kick against the pricks.

ACTING WITHIN HIS JURISDICTION

Based on this principle of God's measuring, Paul told the Corinthians that whatever he did and spoke was not beyond his measure. Paul always acted and behaved within his measure. Using today's terminology, he acted within his jurisdiction. In contrast to the Judaizers, he never reached beyond his jurisdiction.

In 2 Corinthians 10:13 through 15 Paul seems to be saying, "Corinthians, as a church you have suffered a great deal because of the coming of the Judaistic preachers. These preachers, although Christians, are not willing to give up Judaism. On the one hand, they preach Christ; on the other hand, they still teach the Mosaic law. Therefore, they cause trouble and damage the church life. You Corinthians have been influenced by them. Therefore, you must realize that these Judaizers should never have come to Corinth. God did not measure the city of Corinth to them; Corinth is not in their jurisdiction. To be honest about it, Corinth is my jurisdiction, my territory." This is Paul's concept in these verses. However, it was difficult for him to speak about this in a direct, frank manner. But there is the implication here that Paul condemned the Judaizers for coming to Corinth. Thus, Paul seems to be saying, "We do not overreach ourselves, as the Judaizers do. We were the first to come to you with the gospel of Christ. That was a sign that Corinth has been measured to us. We came according to God's ruling. God has apportioned Corinth to us, not to the Judaizers. Actually, God has not apportioned anything to the Judaizers. They should not go anywhere. Their movements are altogether illegal before God and without the proper jurisdiction." This is the basic thought in these verses, and this was the feeling in Paul's spirit as he was writing.

The apostles always moved according to God's ruling. Whatever God measured out to them became their jurisdiction, and others should not interfere with it. If God had apportioned a certain territory to the Judaizers, the apostles would not have gone to that territory, for in so doing they would have overreached themselves. This is what Paul is saying here.

Today many preachers and teachers overreach themselves and interfere with the jurisdiction of others. This overreaching and interference always causes trouble.

STAYING WITHIN THE MEASURE APPORTIONED BY GOD

In the church service we need to realize that God has only measured out so much to us, and we should not overstretch ourselves. We need to know our limitation, our jurisdiction, and not go beyond it into others' territory. Like Paul, we should move and act according to our rule, that is, according to how much God has measured to us.

Paul knew from the Macedonian call he received that Corinth was under his rule, his measure. We know from Acts 16 that Paul became clear that God had called him to Europe. He came to Achaia with the gospel of Christ according to God's ruling. Both Macedonia and

Achaia were under Paul's rule. Thus, the Judaizers should not have come into this territory to cause trouble. This was the feeling deep within Paul as he was writing these verses.

In this section of 2 Corinthians Paul is vindicating his apostolic authority. This authority is related to jurisdiction. If Paul did not have any jurisdiction, what would be his authority? In his vindication of his apostolic authority, Paul conducted himself so as not to overstep the boundary of his measure. He is a good example of a person fully under God's restriction.

I encourage the young people especially to study this portion of the Word and learn from it how to conduct themselves in the church service and how to move in the Lord's recovery. Young people, you must know your rule, your limit. This means that you must know how much God has measured to you, how much He has apportioned to you. This restriction, this limitation, is a very practical dealing with our flesh. Our natural man wants to be without limitation. However, God knows our problem. Therefore, He sets up boundaries and restrictions so that we may stay within the measure He has apportioned to us. (*Life-study of 2 Corinthians*, pp. 447-453)