

TAKING THE LEAD AS ELDERS AND RESPONSIBLE ONES

(Lord's Day—Second Morning Session)

Message Eight

Taking the Lead to Work with the Lord for the Body

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:12, 16; S. S. 6:13; 7:1-13

- I. If we would work with the Lord for the Body, we need to realize that in the Lord's recovery there is only one work—the work of the Body; what we are doing today is not our personal work but the work of the economy of God—the building up of the Body of Christ—1 Cor. 15:58; 16:10; Eph. 4:12.**
- II. If we would work with the Lord for the Body, we must know the central work of God—3:17a; Phil. 2:13:**
 - A. God's central work, His unique work, is to work Himself in Christ into His chosen people, making Himself one with them for the Body of Christ—Gal. 4:19; Eph. 3:17a; 4:16.
 - B. The principle in God's work is to gain persons and by gaining them to have a way to go on for the carrying out of His economy—Acts 9:15; 13:1-2:
 1. The right priority is not for us to work for God but for God to work Himself into us—Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:13.
 2. It is not that we work for the Lord but that He works on us; therefore, we should not be merely the Lord's workers but the Lord's work—Eph. 2:10.
 - C. The kind of person we are determines the kind of fruit we produce; if our person is wrong, we may build up something by what we do but tear down more by what we are—Matt. 7:17-18.
- III. If we would work with the Lord for the Body, we need to realize that God's work has certain essential features:**
 - A. The initiation of God's work must be according to His will—15:13; 1 Cor. 8:6.
 - B. The advance of God's work is according to His power—2 Cor. 3:5; Phil. 3:10.
 - C. The result of God's work must be for His glory—John 7:17-18; Eph. 3:21.
 - D. No work should be initiated by ourselves, no work should be carried out by our own power, and no work should result in our own glory.
- IV. If we would work with the Lord for the Body, there should be no difference between life, work, and move—Mark 1:14-45:**
 - A. With the Lord Jesus there was no difference between life, work, and move:
 1. The Lord worked everywhere and all the time because His life, His work, and His move were all the same; He lived His work, His ministry.
 2. With the Lord Jesus every aspect of His life was the same; there was no distinction between life and work.
 - B. Just as the Lord's life was His work, so our living should be our working—Phil. 1:20-21a.
- V. If we would work with the Lord for the Body, we need to work by a life that is all-sufficient and all-mature, able to fit all situations, that is, able**

to endure any kind of treatment, to accept any kind of environment, to work in any kind of condition, and to take any kind of opportunity, for the carrying out of the ministry—John 14:6a; Acts 27:22-25; 2 Cor. 6:1-13.

VI. If we would work with the Lord for the Body, we must be willing to make up what is lacking of the afflictions of Christ for His Body, the church—Col. 1:24.

VII. If we would work with the Lord for the Body, we need to become the Shulammitte, one who is qualified to work with the Beloved—S. S. 6:13; 7:1-13:

- A. In Song of Songs 6:13 the lover, having passed through various stages of transformation, has become the Shulammitte, Solomon's duplication:
 - 1. She is the same as Solomon in life, nature, expression, and function, as Eve was to Adam—Gen. 2:20-23.
 - 2. This signifies that in the maturity of Christ's life the lover of Christ becomes the same as He is in life, nature, expression, and function but not in the Godhead—2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29.
- B. In Song of Songs 7:1-9a the Shulammitte is qualified to be Solomon's co-worker; this indicates that eventually Christ's lovers need to share in the work of the Lord—1 Cor. 15:58; 16:10; Eph. 4:12.
- C. Song of Songs 7:9b-13 reveals that the lover works with the Lord, the Beloved, for the Body:
 - 1. To share in the work of the Lord is not to work *for* the Lord but to work *with* the Lord—1 Cor. 3:9a; 2 Cor. 6:1a.
 - 2. To work with the Lord we need to be one with Him; actually, to work with Christ we must become Christ—1 Cor. 6:17; John 15:4-5; Phil. 1:21a.
 - 3. To work with the Lord for the Body we need the maturity in life—Eph. 4:13-14:
 - a. To enter into God's New Testament economy requires that we grow and mature in the life of God—1 Cor. 2:6; Col. 1:28.
 - b. Maturity is a matter of having the divine life imparted into us again and again until we have the fullness of life—John 10:10b; 2 Cor. 5:4b.
 - 4. To work with the Lord our work must be for His Body—Eph. 4:4, 16:
 - a. The Body is the governing law of the life and work of the children of God today—1:22-23; 1 Cor. 12:4-6, 12-13, 27.
 - b. The work of the Triune God in us is to produce and build up the Body of Christ—Eph. 3:16-21; 4:4-6, 12, 16.
 - c. Our work in the Lord's recovery is the work of the Body of Christ—1 Cor. 15:58; 16:10; Eph. 4:12.
 - d. All the co-workers should do the same one work universally for the one unique Body; the starting point of the work is the oneness of the Body—v. 4; 1 Cor. 16:10.
 - e. According to Song of Songs 7:11, Christ's lover wants to carry out with her Beloved the work that is for the entire world (fields) by sojourning from one place to another (lodging in the villages); this indicates that our work must be for the Body—Eph. 4:12.

- f. “Whenever God’s children see the oneness of the Body, they will also see the oneness of the work, and they will be delivered out of individualistic work into the work of the Body” (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 37, p. 244).
- 5. In the churches (vineyards) Christ’s lover renders her love to her Beloved—S. S. 7:12:
 - a. At the place of His work, she expresses her love to the Lord; in the midst of the Lord’s work, we give Him our love—Mark 12:30.
 - b. Here we see the relationship between the first love and the first works—Rev. 2:4-5:
 - (1) The first works are works that issue from and express the first love.
 - (2) When we are filled with the first love of the Lord, everything we do issues from and expresses our love for Him, and we will work with the Lord, the Beloved, for the Body—Eph. 3:19; 4:16.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

**LIVING AND WORKING ACCORDING TO
THE CRYSTALLIZED SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BODY OF CHRIST**

The essential, crystallized significance of the Body of Christ is that the Triune God is constituted with His chosen and redeemed people to become a constitution, a constituted entity. Unless we see this crystallized, essential significance of the Body of Christ, there will be no way to carry out what we are trying to do in the church today. If we see this essential significance, there will be no problem whatever.

In the New Testament it is not a matter of the oneness of the church; oneness is not something of the church but of the Body. The Lord’s prayer for the believers in John 17 was concerning the Body. He prayed, “Holy Father, keep them in Your name, which You have given to Me, that they may be one even as We are....That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us” (vv. 11b, 21). The believers can have this oneness only by being in the Holy Father, in the Holy Son, and in the Holy Trinity.

The oneness that the Lord aspired for and prayed for in John 17 corresponds with the oneness of the Spirit in Ephesians 4:3-6. We must see that the church is the Body of Christ, which is a constitution, an entity constituted with the Triune God and His chosen and redeemed ones. In this Body there is the reality of oneness. The genuine oneness is not of the church but of the Body; the real oneness is the organic oneness of the Body. In a locality, this oneness is called *one accord*. Without the oneness of the Body, there is no possibility to have one accord in the church.

Brother Nee truly knew Christ and the Body. His work was not for himself at all; he did not have his own work. He never put any church he established “in his pocket.” Brother Nee was the pioneer, and I am a follower. Thank the Lord, he truly was an excellent pattern to me that enabled me to still be ministering here today...Today you can also testify that I have never put the churches in Taiwan “in my pocket.” Neither Brother Nee nor I carried out our own work; rather, we carried out the work of the Lord’s recovery. The Lord’s recovery is for the building of the Body of Christ.

Doing Only the Work of the Lord’s Recovery

Anyone who has a vision today can be clear at a glance that neither Brother Nee nor I carried out our own personal work; our work is the work of the Lord’s recovery for the building of

the Body of Christ. I say this with the hope that you will be influenced by me. I was greatly influenced by Brother Nee, and I hope that you will also be influenced by him.

The co-workers should go out, but they should never do the work of building fortresses, the work of the feudal princes; they should only do the work of the Lord's recovery. If we all do the work of the Lord's recovery, there will be the one Body.

If we look back, what did Brother Nee accomplish, and what have I accomplished? All that we have done is left here for the Lord to show grace to His children; the work that we have done is the Lord's recovery. I hope that we all can see this. We must see the Body of Christ and be very clear concerning this vision. This vision must become our governing and controlling vision. We must do the work of the Lord's recovery under this vision. The work of the Lord's recovery is the work of His economy, the work of the Body of Christ.

If a local church does not care for other local churches, that is a fortress under a feudal prince. Anyone who does the work of the fortress and the feudal prince will not have a long-lasting spiritual life. Although Brother Nee passed away over twenty years ago, today we still see his ministry remaining here to minister to the churches for their going on. We all must see the Body and do the work of the Body. All our problems, whether in the church or in our personal life, are due to our lack of seeing the Body. Even our wrong attitude toward our wife is due to our not knowing the Body. Knowing the Body changes not only our church life but also our attitude toward our spouse.

Whether you are doing the work of the fortress or the work of the Lord's recovery does not depend on me but on you. Do you work in your locality merely to guard your hall, merely to work on your district meeting, or merely for the locality where you are? We should not have feudal princes among us; we should have only one Head, who is Christ, the Head of the Body. What we are doing today is the work of the Body of Christ. Christianity is full of fortresses: the Catholic Church is a big fortress; the Presbyterian Church and the Baptist Church are also fortresses. Every small free group is a small fortress. We cannot see the Body of Christ among them.

We need to see that the Body of Christ is not the oneness in a locality but the oneness of the Body, the oneness of the Spirit. There are thousands of local churches, but the Spirit is one. In the Body we need to keep the oneness of the Spirit; in the church and among the churches we need to be in one accord. This is the genuine oneness. (*The Governing and Controlling Vision in the Bible*, pp. 29, 31-34)

THE ETERNAL PURPOSE OF GOD

We have seen that the seeking one in the Song of Songs reached several attainments. First, she attained full satisfaction for herself. Then as a crown, she satisfied the Lord. Finally, she became a garden to satisfy the Lord and the Lord's people. In today's Christianity, nearly everyone would say that nothing else is needed. Our own need is taken care of, and we are taking care of others' needs. Seemingly, nothing else is required, but where is the fulfillment of God's purpose, the building up of the Body, the building up of the city?

Today, nearly all Christians care only for their own needs, while some of the more improved Christians care for the needs of others. This might be considered the highest goal of today's Christian work. But all of this cannot reach God's goal, the building up of the Body. Almost no one cares for God's building. In these last ten years, many have begun to talk about the Body life and the Body ministry, but hardly anyone really understands what the Body is. The Body is a building; it is not a heaping up of materials.

Regardless of how much we undertake for our own satisfaction and how much we help others to be satisfied, we can only reach so far. God's purpose still is not fulfilled. This is why,

after all the attainments of the seeking one, yet another step remains: that is, to care for God's eternal purpose, the building up of the Body, which is the building up of the city. It is not simply a matter of our being satisfied or of satisfying others, but of the completing of the eternal purpose of God.

TWO ASPECTS OF THE LORD'S SUFFERING

How could the building up of the Body be accomplished? With the Lord's suffering, there are two aspects. One is for the accomplishment of redemption. The Lord Jesus suffered on the cross to accomplish redemption for us. This has been easily seen by all Christians. But there is another aspect of the Lord's suffering: His suffering for the formation and the building up of the Body. Most Christians today are completely ignorant regarding this very important aspect of the Lord's suffering. This is why Paul in Colossians 1:24 says, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh *for his body's sake*, which is the church." Paul says that he fills up the lack of the sufferings of Christ. The Lord's suffering for redemption has no lack. To say that would be heresy. For redemption, the Lord's suffering has been completed and is altogether sufficient. But His suffering for the producing, forming, and building up of the Body has a big lack. This is why Paul told us that his suffering was a filling up of the lack of the Lord's suffering. We cannot suffer for the accomplishment of redemption, but we all must suffer for the building up of the Body.

If you are one who is simply seeking spirituality for your personal satisfaction, you will not suffer much. Rather, all the people of God will appreciate you and speak well of you because you are seeking spirituality. If you would go further to meet the need of others, you would be even more admired. All the religious people would never give you any trouble. But once you begin to see the need for the building up of the Body and to give yourself to this, you will suffer. Most of the suffering will not come from the world, but from Christianity.

The Lord Jesus suffered for the producing of the Body, not from the Gentile world, but from the Jewish religious world. Paul and the other apostles suffered very little from the Gentiles, but they suffered very much from the Jewish religion and even to some extent from the Christian religion. Philippians chapter 1 shows us that even some Christian preachers persecuted him. That was simply because Paul was for the building up of the Body.

Today it is exactly the same. If we would seek just to be spiritual and to care for others, not seeking to care for the Body, all Christianity would be happy with us. They would welcome us, invite us, and make a great name for us. We could become a famous preacher, pastor, or missionary. But once we see the vision of the Body and forget about all our individual seeking and caring for others in order to build up the Body, all Christianity will rise up against us. We must suffer to fill up what is lacking of the suffering of Christ for His Body's sake.

Even after the seeking one in the Song of Songs has reached the fourth attainment of being a garden, the Body still has not been attended to. There has been no building up of the city. She needs a further step to fulfill God's eternal purpose of building up the Body. If we would take this further step, surely we must share in the sufferings of Christ. This is why the Apostle Paul used the term "the fellowship of His sufferings" in Philippians 3:10. We must share and participate in His sufferings, not for redemption, for that has already been accomplished, but for the building up of the Body, which has not yet been fully accomplished. We all must participate in the fellowship of His sufferings that we may be conformed to His death for His Body's sake. (*Life and Building as Portrayed in the Song of Songs*, pp. 129-131)

WORKING TOGETHER WITH HER BELOVED

We have seen the portrait of [the lover's] qualifications. Now we will see that she works together with her Beloved (S. S. 7:9b-13).

“Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields; / Let us lodge in the villages” (v. 11). This reveals that she wants to carry out with her Beloved the work that is for the entire world by sojourning from one place to another. This indicates that she is not sectarian. In the Lord's work it is not easy to keep our work open, to not keep our work “in our pocket.” We must learn to keep the work open, so that others can come to sojourn there and we can go to sojourn elsewhere. This is to keep one work in one Body.

“Let us rise up early for the vineyards; / Let us see if the vine has budded, / If the blossom is open, / If the pomegranates are in bloom; / There I will give you my love” (v. 12). She and her Beloved work diligently not for herself but in the churches, for others to bud, blossom, and bloom, in which she renders her love to her Beloved. If we work in this way, others will receive much help.

“The mandrakes give forth fragrance, / And over our doors are all choice fruits, / New as well as old. / These, my beloved, I have stored up for you” (v. 13). In her working together with her Beloved there is a mutual love (signified by the mandrakes—Gen. 30:14) giving forth its fragrance between them as a couple loving each other, signifying the bridal love between the lover of Christ and Christ, and in their working places there are plenty of fragrant and choice fruits, new and old, which she stores up for her Beloved in love.

We need to learn to work for the Lord in a way that the Lord will enjoy. If in our working we care only for our own joy, we have already failed. We must work for His joy, bearing many fruits of love with much fragrance of love.

To share in the work of the Lord is not to work for the Lord but to work together with the Lord. This requires a matured life.

Through our experience we have learned that to work together with the Lord we must be mature in life and we must teach the high truths. Song of Songs does not emphasize truth, mentioning it only once (*Amana* means “truth”—4:8). However, in Song of Songs we see that to work with the Lord we need the maturity in life, we need to be one with the Lord, and our work must be for His Body. Our Lord is Solomon and we must be the Shulammitte; that is, we must be one with the Lord. Actually, to work with Christ we must be Christ. Paul was a real Shulammitte because he lived Christ (Phil. 1:21).

The Shulammitte works as Solomon's counterpart, taking care of all the vineyards (S. S. 8:11). This indicates that our work should be for the Body, not just one city. We must have a work that is for the entire world. This is what Paul did by establishing local churches and then working to bring them into the full realization of the Body of Christ. (*Life-study of Song of Songs*, pp. 58-61)