

THE EXPERIENCE, GROWTH, AND MINISTRY OF LIFE FOR THE BODY

(Lord's Day—First Morning Session)

Message Seven

Growing unto Maturity to Become the New Jerusalem as the Ultimate Consummation of the Church

Scripture Reading: Heb. 11:10, 16; Matt. 16:18; Rev. 21:2-3, 9-11, 18-20; Eph. 2:20-22;
1 Pet. 2:4-5; 1 Cor. 3:9-10, 12; John 14:1-12, 23

- I. When God builds up the church, He is building up the New Jerusalem; we need to grow unto maturity to become the New Jerusalem as the ultimate consummation of the church—Matt. 16:18; Heb. 6:1a; 11:10, 16; Rev. 21:2-3, 9-11, 18-20; Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-5; 1 Cor. 3:9-10, 12; John 14:1-12, 23:**
- A. The goal of the work of God is to gain the New Jerusalem; our Lord is today's David preparing us as transformed material for God's building; the difficulties in all of our environments strike us to deal with us and to prepare us as living and precious stones for God's building—1 Pet. 2:4-5; 1 Cor. 3:12a; 1 Kings 6:7; cf. 1 Chron. 6:31-32.
 - B. The New Jerusalem is the mingling of God, man, and heaven; the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God implies that the New Jerusalem is filled with the element of heaven and is absolutely heavenly—Rev. 21:2-3, 22; Eph. 1:3; 2:6; Gen. 28:17:
 - 1. While we are in the church, the house of God on earth, we can enter the gate of heaven, and through Christ as the heavenly ladder we can see and experience the things of heaven—vv. 12, 17.
 - 2. At Bethel, the house of God, the habitation of God, which is the gate of heaven, Christ is the ladder that joins earth to heaven and brings heaven to earth—vv. 12-17; John 1:51.
 - 3. Since today our spirit is the place of God's habitation (Eph. 2:22), it is now the gate of heaven, where Christ is the ladder that joins us, the people on earth, to heaven and brings heaven to us.
 - 4. Hence, whenever we turn to our spirit, we enter through the gate of heaven and touch the throne of grace through Christ as the heavenly ladder—Heb. 4:16.
 - C. According to the entire revelation of the New Testament, the unique goal and ultimate issue of the Christian work should be the New Jerusalem, as the ultimate consummation of the church and as the ultimate goal of God's eternal economy:
 - 1. The degradation of the church is mainly due to the fact that nearly all the Christian workers are distracted to take many things other than the New Jerusalem as their goal.
 - 2. Hence, under the degradation of the church, to be overcomers answering the Lord's call, we need to overcome not only the negative things but even more the positive things, which replace the New Jerusalem as the eternal goal;

whenever we touch the eternal goal of God, the New Jerusalem, we need to be very pure; we must not be careless—1 Cor. 3:12, 15-17.

3. An overcomer's goal should be uniquely and ultimately the goal of God's eternal economy, that is, the New Jerusalem.

II. We can see the conditions of a built-up church by seeing the conditions of the New Jerusalem, the ultimate consummation of the church:

- A. A built-up church, like the New Jerusalem, has the presence of God—Ezek. 48:35; Rev. 21:3; 22:3:
 1. That God and the Lamb are the temple of the New Jerusalem means that God and the Lamb Themselves become the center of the city; in other words, God is with the city, and the city has the presence of God—21:22.
 2. When we are built together with all the saints, we have God's presence, and whenever we are individualistic, we immediately lose God's presence.
 3. We must hold on to this principle: God's presence is the criterion for every matter.
 4. If we touch the presence of God in all things, we will see that God will be there as the temple, and the building of God will be with us; reasoning, arguing, and criticizing cause us to lose the presence of God; God's presence is altogether due to the oneness and harmony among the saints.
 5. God's presence is the center of the New Jerusalem; therefore, in the church we must have the presence of God; we must have God as the temple.
- B. A built-up church has the ruling of God:
 1. If the church is built up, it will have the throne of God and of the Lamb, the ruling of God—22:1.
 2. If we want to know whether the saints in a certain church are built up, we have to see whether the throne of God, the dominion of God, is among them.
- C. A built-up church has the flow and supply of life:
 1. In the New Jerusalem there is a river of water of life proceeding out of the throne, and on both sides of the river there is the tree of life, producing twelve fruits and yielding its fruit each month—vv. 1-2.
 2. In a built-up church there is the water of life that quenches people's thirst and causes people to be watered, and there are the fruits of the tree of life that enable the hungry people to be satisfied.
- D. A built-up church has light:
 1. In the New Jerusalem the God of glory is the light and the Lamb is the lamp—21:23; 22:5; cf. Jer. 2:11.
 2. In a built-up church God in Christ expressed through the saints is the light; when we go to the meeting of a built-up church, we will feel enlightened—John 8:12; Matt. 5:14; Psa. 73:16-17.
- E. A built-up church has the mingling of God and man and has passed through death and resurrection:
 1. That there are three gates on each of the four sides of the New Jerusalem, three times four being twelve, implies that the Triune God is mingled with man, the creature (the number four signifies the creatures)—Rev. 4:6.

2. That the twelve gates of the holy city are twelve pearls signifies that regeneration through the death-overcoming and life-secreting resurrected Christ is the entrance into the city—21:21.
 3. Anyone who enters into the city through the gate has to be the product of three times four—the issue of the mingling of God and man—and a new creation in Christ through death and resurrection—2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15.
 4. This shows that we cannot bring anything natural, anything of the earth, into the church; the pearl gate shuts out all the naturalness of man.
 5. Whenever we bring in something natural, something of human effort, something “ingenious,” something resulting from human schemes and methods, or something that has not passed through the cross, then we have not come to our end, and God cannot provide us with a way out—cf. 2 Cor. 4:7-8.
 6. In the building up of the church everything must pass through the cross, must be in Christ, and must be the mingling of God and man; this is the entrance into the New Jerusalem, the entrance into the church; only that which corresponds with the nature of this entrance can be brought into the building of God.
 7. Only a vision can rescue us; we have to learn to bring all our natural thoughts, discernment, schemes, abilities, and strength to the cross to be dealt with; after all these items have been broken, have passed through death and resurrection, and have become pearls, then they can be brought into the building of God.
- F. A built-up church is full of God’s divine nature:
1. There is only one street in the New Jerusalem, and it is pure gold, signifying God’s divine nature—Rev. 21:21b.
 2. That the river of water of life proceeds “in the middle of its street” signifies that the divine life flows in the divine nature as the unique way for the daily life of God’s redeemed people—22:1; 2 Pet. 1:4; John 14:6.
 3. Whenever we completely deny ourselves and live in the nature of God, our service will not only issue in the building of the church but also lead people to the way of God when they come into our midst.
- G. A built-up church has the expression of God:
1. Revelation 21 says that the wall of the city is jasper, the first foundation is jasper, and the light of the city is also like jasper stone (vv. 18-19, 11); furthermore, the One sitting on the throne has the appearance of a jasper stone (4:3); thus, the appearance of the city is the appearance of God.
 2. The New Jerusalem is the enlargement and full expression of God in man; if the church has been truly built up, it will also have the full expression of God.
- H. A built-up church is constituted with the transforming Spirit and with people who are in the process of being transformed:
1. The wall of the city is built with precious stones (21:19-20); precious stones are not created but are produced by the transforming of the things created, after having passed through years of constitution through much pressure; pressure, burning, and constitution are necessary for the transformation into precious stones.

2. In the church life the transforming of Christ's lover is carried out by the transforming Spirit as the consummation of the processed Triune God (2 Cor. 3:18) with the coordination of the lover's companions, the gifted members of the Body of Christ, who do the work of perfecting the saints (Eph. 4:11-12; S. S. 1:10-11).
- I. A built-up church must have a boundary, "a great and high wall"—Rev. 21:12:
 1. The wall is for separation and protection; the New Jerusalem will be absolutely separated unto God and will fully protect the interests of God.
 2. The more God builds Himself into us and constitutes us with Himself, the more we are separated unto God and protected from everything of the evil one; if the saints have been built together in the church life, it will be easy to distinguish what belongs to God from what belongs to man, what is heavenly from what is earthly, and what is of the new creation from what is of the old creation.
 3. All believers need such a great and high wall for their separation and protection—v. 17.
 - J. May the Lord have mercy on us that the churches everywhere may manifest all these conditions of being built up!

Excerpts from the Ministry:

A BUILDED CHURCH HAVING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Now we will go on to see how we can know that a church has been built up. In other words, what is the condition of a built-up church? I would like to point out several things from the last two chapters of Revelation.

First, a built-up church has God's presence. Revelation 21:22 says that there is no temple in the New Jerusalem, for God and the Lamb are its temple. We know that during the Old Testament times the temple was the center of Jerusalem. Therefore, that God and the Lamb are the temple means that God and the Lamb themselves become the center of the city. In other words, God is with the city, and the city has the presence of God.

This shows us that where there is building, there is the presence of God. God's presence follows His building. Does not our experience also tell us that whenever we are built together with all the saints, we have God's presence, and whenever we are individualistic, we immediately lose the sense of God's presence? In the last chapter I used an illustration of three persons who were discussing when to have a gospel meeting. One of them suggested having it in the evening, another one suggested having it in the afternoon, and the third one suggested having it in the morning. Eventually they came to a deadlock. I believe many of us would ask, since there are three different opinions, which one should be accepted? At which of the suggested times should the gospel be preached? My reply is that the gospel should be preached at the time when there is God's presence. This means that when three people are discussing such a matter, the first one should ask, "While I am insisting on having the meeting at 7:30 p.m., do I have God's presence?" The second one should also ask, "While I am fighting to have the meeting at four o'clock in the

afternoon, do I have the presence of God?" And the third one should also ask, "While I am suggesting 6:30 a.m., do I have God's presence?" Therefore, the time of the meeting should be decided altogether according to God's presence. If there is the presence of God, then any time is proper, regardless of whether it is in the morning, in the afternoon, or in the evening. But if there is not the presence of God, then no time is suitable.

If we know this principle and live in it, we will never contend with the brothers and sisters while we are serving God in the church. We know that whenever we argue with them, the presence of God is lost. God's presence is like a dove that cannot stand any disturbance. Once we argue, it will fly away. Recently while I was abroad, in many places, whether it was in the park or even on the street, I saw many doves flying around. These doves were not afraid of people. While we were sitting in the park, a group of doves came in front of us. If we talked loudly, they would all fly away, but if we just sat there and talked gently, one by one the doves would come near us again. Brothers and sisters, it is the same with the presence of God when we are serving the Lord together. Perhaps your reasoning is right, and your suggestion is the best, but because we argue, the Holy Spirit as a dove flies away.

Therefore, we must hold on to this principle: God's presence is the criterion for every matter. Regardless of what we do, we must pay attention to whether or not we have God's presence. Do we have God's presence while we are expressing our opinions? Do we have God's presence while we are saying certain things or taking a certain attitude? Is God's presence in our suggestion or proposal? If we touch the presence of God in all things, we will see that God will be there as the temple, and the building of God will be with us. When we argue with each other, we all may be for the Lord, and our insisting may be quite justifiable. However, due to our arguing we do not have God as the temple—the presence of God. Instead, we have torn down the city.

One thing that grieves me very much is that in all the places that I visit it is rare not to hear the brothers and sisters judging and criticizing one another. In nearly every place I visit, I meet some brothers and sisters who speak to me with words of criticism and judgment. If they are not unhappy with the responsible ones, then they are blaming the workers, or they are dissatisfied with the church. One thing is certain: the brothers and sisters who criticize are the first ones to lose the presence of God, regardless of whether they are right or wrong in their criticism or judgment. They do not have God's presence, and they do not have God as the temple. Among these ones there is no building.

We must see that in the church reasoning does not matter. What matters is the presence of God. The church is not a law court where it is advantageous to present your reasons adequately. This is not the case! In the church the more you reason, the more God stays away from you. Even if your reasoning is one hundred percent correct and all the good reasons are on your side, the more you argue, the further away from God you will be.

Let me tell you more about doves. Doves do not care whether or not your arguments are convincing. They care only whether or not you have a loud voice and

whether or not you have a fierce look. You cannot deceive them. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Scriptures say that the doves' eyes are the fairest. Through careful observation I have found that a dove's eyes are its keenest part. Humans cannot cheat them. That day while I was in the park, I tried various ways to lure one of the doves to come to me. However, when my hand moved, even just a little, the dove quickly ran away. When I rested my hand, it came back again. Brothers and sisters, the presence of the Holy Spirit within us is also like this. The Spirit does not care about how right you are. He cares only about your attitude, your intention, and your condition. In the law court the louder a person argues, the greater his advantage is. In the church, however, the louder a person argues, the greater his loss is. The more we reason, the more we lose God's presence. Please remember that the temple in the New Jerusalem is God Himself. God's presence is the center of the city. Therefore, in the church we must have the presence of God; we must have God as the temple. Then we will be built up to have the condition of the New Jerusalem.

THE BUILDED CHURCH HAVING THE RULING OF GOD

Second, if the church is built up, it will have the throne of God, the ruling of God. In the New Jerusalem there is the throne of God. This throne is not only a matter of God's presence but also a matter of God's ruling. In this building there is the presence of God, and there is also the dominion of God. Because the throne of God is established, God can exercise His authority. If we want to know whether a certain church is being built up, we need to see whether there is God's throne and God's dominion among them.

Sometimes when you go to a certain place and meet some brothers and sisters there, you can sense that among them there is not the throne of God but the throne of man. When you attend their service meeting, you notice they speak as if they are sitting on a throne. Whoever speaks is on the throne. Before one finishes speaking, another one speaks over him. He seems to be saying, "Come down from the throne now and let me get up onto it." Although he does not say this plainly, this is the impression he gives by his attitude and demeanor. After this one finishes, another sister would say, "Brother So-and-so, what you have said is not correct." While she speaks, her voice may sound very gentle, but the impression is the same: "Come down from the throne." This is not my imagination. Many times while I was sitting together with God's children, I saw this kind of situation. This means that the throne of God, the dominion of God, is not there. Rather, everyone is sitting on his own throne. Please remember that once there is such a situation, the presence of the Holy Spirit is definitely not there. This proves that in such a place God's children have not yet been built up.

Although there are numerous Christian groups today, where is the throne of God? In many places you cannot see any building. On the contrary, everywhere you see human skills and organization. People use all kinds of ways to facilitate communication among church members and to win believers over. We have to admit that this kind of communication and winning-over is not building; instead, it is man's organizing work. Therefore, there is no presence of God, and even more there is no throne of God. I hope that we all will remember that wherever we are, if we also

depend on these ways of facilitating communication and winning people over, then the building of God no longer will be among us. The church cannot depend on these ways; the church has to be built up in God.

In the New Jerusalem God Himself is the temple, and the throne of God is there. Therefore, if we want to know whether a certain church has been built up, we have to see whether the presence of God, the throne of God, and the dominion of God are among them. This is the condition of a built-up church. Let me tell you a real story. A brother once gave me his testimony. He said, "Brother Lee, I was saved two or three years ago, and I was meeting with the brothers in the church. However, when the brothers came together, they were very cold. This was especially the case with the responsible brothers. They did not greet people before the meeting, neither did they go to the door to shake hands with people after the meeting. Therefore, I was unhappy inwardly. At that time a certain pastor came to visit me. He was very warm toward me and showed great concern for me. This really touched me. Hence, I decided to go to his place for Sunday worship. When I went, as soon as I reached the entrance to the chapel, the pastor came forward to greet me and to shake hands with me. After the service the pastor went quickly to the door and shook hands with every attendant. I really felt that this was very good. Therefore, I decided to go there regularly. But one thing was very strange. After I went to this place for a period of time, although I did not know why, I felt that I had lost God's presence within me. Although I felt very comfortable outwardly, inwardly I felt as if I had lost something. Therefore, subsequently I went back to be among the brothers. Strangely, when I went back, the presence of God which I had lost was recovered immediately. Another amazing thing is that when I am in any other Christian gathering, it seems that I can speak things loosely, but when I am with the brothers, although they do not prohibit me from doing so, there is something within me that restrains me and does not allow me to utter anything loosely."

This shows us the experience of God's presence and of God's ruling. Therefore, to determine whether or not a church has been built up, we should not look at whether they have communication and warmth among them; instead, we should see whether or not they have God's presence and God's throne among them.

A BUILDED CHURCH HAVING THE FLOW AND SUPPLY OF LIFE

Third, a builded church has the flow and supply of life. The Scriptures show us that there is a river of water of life proceeding out of the throne, and on both sides of the river there is the tree of life, producing twelve fruits, and yielding its fruits each month (Rev. 22:1-2). This indicates that in God's presence and God's reigning there is the flow of life. Here there is the water of life which quenches people's thirst and causes people to be watered. Here there are also the fruits of the tree of life which enable the hungry people to be satisfied. Everyone who comes here can obtain the supply he needs.

A church which has truly been built up surely has this kind of condition. In a built-up church you will touch the flow as well as the moving of God's life. Whoever goes there will receive the supply. I believe that we all have this kind of experience.

In some places the brothers and sisters who rise up to serve the Lord do not know many doctrines, but they are one and harmonious in the Lord. When you go to their meeting, you can sense the presence of the Lord, the authority of the Lord, and the moving of the water of life. When a brother rises up to speak a few words, you sense the watering of the living water which quenches your thirst. When another brother gives a testimony, or a sister offers a short prayer, you also sense that the testimony and prayer are spiritual food which bring you satisfaction. In this place you see a church which has been built up.

After a period of time, however, two able preachers are raised up among them. Both of them are eloquent, and both seem to have much light and to be quite gifted. However, due to the raising up of these two brothers, the church is filled with death because these two brothers are in discord and against each other. If one of them gives a message on the Lord's Day morning, the following Lord's Day when it is the other brother's turn to speak, he gives a message to refute the other one's message. Then the following Lord's Day morning the first brother speaks again and gives a message against the other brother. Their voices are loud and clear, their words are flowing, their utterances are excellent, and their stories, illustrations, and quotations from the Scriptures are very suitable and proper. Their messages are truly appealing, but the pitiful thing is that there is neither living water nor living food. All those who have consciousness in their spirit will tell you that neither the presence of God nor the blessing of God is there. This is because there is no building there.

If a church has experienced the building and there is harmony among the saints, then surely that place will have the flow of the water of life as well as the supply of the food of life. When people go into the midst of these believers, they may not hear a good message, but surely they will touch the living water and food, and they will also sense God's presence and God's ruling. They will be watered, they will be satisfied, and they will have rest.

A BUILDED CHURCH HAVING LIGHT

Fourth, a builded church has light. In the New Jerusalem there is light (Rev. 21:23). This light is not natural light, neither is it the light of the sun or of the moon; this light is God Himself. God is the light while Christ is the lamp. God shines forth His glory in Christ, and this glory is the light of the city. That the city has no need of the sun or of the moon means that in this building there is no need of natural light. The God who is manifested in their midst in Christ is the light. Or we may say that God in Christ expressed through them is the light. Therefore, when you go into the midst of a group of people like this, you feel that it is bright there. This is just like the situation in a meeting hall filled with light. The electricity that shines forth is expressed through fluorescent lamps to become light. Hence, when you walk into a room like this, everything is clear: you can see chairs, people sitting down, the entrance, and the hallway. You can see everything clearly.

Very often when you are in the midst of a builded church, you also will sense that there is light and that it is bright there. You may have some private problems

that you do not know how to deal with although you have prayed, read the Scriptures, and sought the will of God. But when you go to a meeting of a built-up church and sit among them, you will feel enlightened. Sometimes just by listening to a prayer you are filled with light within. Sometimes by their singing a hymn, or by someone standing up to read a verse from the Scriptures, or even just by the atmosphere of their meeting, you become clear and enlightened. This is because there is light there, and the glory of God is expressed. This kind of situation tells us that that church has been built up.

The manifestation of God is altogether due to the presence of God, and God's presence is altogether due to the oneness and harmony among the saints. This oneness and harmony are the building. If among the brothers and sisters there is friction, opinion, disharmony, and discord, then when you go into their midst, you will sense darkness instead of light. Their messages might be very good, and their prayers might be very loud, but you cannot sense any light there. This is because there is no building of God among them.

If a church has been built up, that church surely will have these four conditions: first, it will have God as the temple—God's presence; second, it will have God's throne—God's ruling; third, it will have the flow and supply of God's life; and fourth, it will have God's light. If we have these conditions, this proves that we have been built up because only in the building can we have all these blessings of God. (*The Building Work of God*, pp. 88-96)