

# THE FOUR-LEVEL MEANING OF GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

## Message One

### The First Level—the Teaching of the Apostles

Scripture Reading: Eph.2:19-20; Acts.2:41-42; Heb.1:1-2;

John.14:10, 5:24, 16:12, Col.1:25-27, Rev.22:18-19

#### **I. The first level of the meaning of God's New Testament economy is the Teaching of the Apostles——Acts.2:42:**

- A. The teaching of the apostles can stand in God's economy, and it will stand unto eternity.
- B. We must remember that the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets——Eph.2:19-20.

#### **II. The three thousand believers who were saved on the day of Pentecost continued steadfastly in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles, in the breaking of bread and the prayers——Acts2:41-42 :**

- A. The teaching and the fellowship form one group which is of the apostles and related directly to God's economy for the keeping of the oneness of the church, the Body of Christ; both are unique :
  - 1. The teaching of the apostles was the holding factor of the one accord——Acts 2:42a, 46a.
  - 2. If we limit ourselves to the apostles' teaching, the teaching concerning God's New Testament economy, we will be kept in oneness and will have one way for one goal.
  - 3. In the church there should be only one unique teaching——the teaching of the apostles; furthermore, there should be one unique fellowship, which is produced by the apostles' teaching.
  - 4. Any fellowship outside the fellowship of the apostles is divisive; Our fellowship must be inside the fellowship of the apostles.
- B. The breaking of bread and the prayers form a second group and are practices of the believers' Christian life.

#### **III. The entire teaching of the New Testament, which is the apostles' teaching, is God's speaking, God's oracle, in the Son to His New Testament people——Heb.1:1-2:**

- A. In the universe there is a marvelous matter, God's speaking——Heb.1:2:
  - 1. In the age of the New Testament God does not speak to His people in many portions or in many ways, or through the prophets.
  - 2. In the New Testament age God only speaks in one person, the Son.——John14:10; 5:24; 16:12; 10:30.
- B. God firstly spoke in the Son as a man in the four Gospels——John 14:10; 5:24; 16:12; 10:30.

- C. God secondly spoke in the Son as the Spirit through the apostles in Acts and the twenty-one Epistles ( Romans through Jude )——John 16:12-15; Matt. 28:19-20; Heb. 2:3-4; 2 Pet. 3:15-16; Col. 1:25-27.
- D. God thirdly spoke in the Son as the seven Spirits through the apostle John in Revelation——Rev. 1:2, 4; 2:1, 7.
- E. God's speaking in the teaching of the New Testament was completed through Paul and John :
  - 1. The word of God as the revealed mystery was completed through Paul——Col. 1:25-27.
  - 2. The entire New Testament was completed by John's writings——Rev. 22:18-19.
- F. This speaking in the Son, the apostles' teaching, does not stress matters such as foot-washing, baptism, head covering, etc.; these are not the basic, intrinsic, central, and elementary things contained in the New Testament revelation concerning God's eternal economy.

**IV. The teaching of the apostles is the unique divine revelation of God's New Testament economy from the incarnation of God to the consummation of the New Jerusalem, carried out by the full ministry of Christ in three divine and mystical stages for the fulfillment of God's eternal economy——Eph. 3:8-10:**

- A. The first stage, the stage of incarnation, is for Christ to bring God into man, to express God in humanity, and to accomplish His judicial redemption——Jhon.1:1, 14, 18.
- B. The second stage, the stage of inclusion, is for Christ to be begotten as God's firstborn Son, to become the life-giving Spirit, and to regenerate the believers for His Body——Rom. 8:29, 1Cor.15:45b, 1Pet.1:3, 23.
- C. The third stage, the stage of intensification, is for Christ to intensify His organic salvation, to produce the overcomers, and to consummate the New Jerusalem——Rev.5:6, 2:7, 21:2.

**V. The apostles' teaching is the contents of the full gospel, comprising not merely a part of the New Testament, but the entire New Testament——Rom.1:1-4:**

**VI. The apostles' teaching is the church's constitution; the church must hold it and be under it absolutely——1Cor.4:17, 7:17:**

- A. The apostles' teaching is the constitution of the Christian faith——Jude3; 1Tim. 1:19; 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7.
- B. The apostles' teaching, as the church's constitution, should be universally taught everywhere in every church in the same way——1Cor. 4:17; 7:17:
  - 1. The teaching of the apostles is for God's economy, and the teaching is the healthy words of the Lord Jesus——1Tim. 1:3-4; 6:3.
  - 2. All teachings must be restricted by the limit and sphere of the apostles' teaching.
  - 3. Christianity has many ways because of the many teachings outside the limit of the apostles' teaching.
  - 4. All the problems, divisions, and confusion among Christians today are due to one

thing——not caring only for the unique revelation of the apostles' teaching.

C. In the church there should be one unique teaching, the apostles' teaching, not different teachings.

D. This constitution, like every constitution, must be properly interpreted.

**VII. Any teaching that was different from the apostles' teaching was not allowed by the apostles——1Tim.1:3-4:**

A. No other belief besides the unique faith was allowed by the apostles——Gal. 1:7-9.

B. Teachings that went beyond the teaching of Christ were not allowed by the apostles——2John 9-11.

C. The different teachings, including those from the Old Testament dispensation were different from God's economy.

D. All teachings that were different from the unique revelation of God's New Testament economy were considered by the apostles to be winds of teaching——Eph. 4:14.

E. God's holy writing should not be twisted by anyone in any way but rather unfolded rightly and straightly without any distortion——2Pet.3:16; 2Tim.2:15.

**VIII. The blessing of the church is dependent upon the church's continuing steadfastly in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles——Acts2:42, 46; 6:7.**

**IX. The deciding factor in determining the right ministry, which is the ministry of God's New Testament economy, is the teaching of the apostles——Acts.2:42, 46. 6:7.**

A. A person's work is in the New Testament ministry if he teaches the teaching of the apostles.

B. The unique ministry is the ministry ordained by God according to the apostles' teaching.

**X. We all must serve according to, follow, and be based on the teaching of the apostles——Acts.2:42, Titus 1:9:**

A. We must realize that the way we are taking is the way of following the apostles' teaching in the New Testament.

B. Everything is under the leadership of the apostles' teaching, that is, God's New Testament economy, the faith of God in the New Testament.

C. Whether in the work or in the church, we should rely upon the apostles' teaching. The apostles' teaching is the constitution of the church and the work.

**Excerpts from the Ministry:**

**THE FOUR-LEVEL MEANING OF GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY**

**The First Level—the Teaching of the Apostles**

We shall see that only the teaching of the apostles can stand in God's New Testament economy, and it will stand unto eternity. We must remember that the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The law as the main body of the Old

Testament was supplemented by the prophets. The main body of the New Testament is the apostles, and the prophets also serve as a supplement. The principle in both is the same. This is the first level of the meaning of God's New Testament economy.

### **Serving According to the Teaching of the Apostles**

If tens of thousands of saints in six continents are all doing the one work, who then is taking the lead? It is very mysterious to say that Christ is taking the lead. In practice, the real leader is the teaching of the apostles. We all must serve according to, follow, and be based on the teaching of the apostles. (CWWL, 1988, vol. 2 Words of Life from the 1988 Full-time Training, Chapter 8)

### **THE ENTIRE TEACHING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The apostles' teaching is the entire teaching of the New Testament from the first to the last page. It is not merely a part of the New Testament. All twenty-seven books of the New Testament are the apostles' teaching.

### **God's Speaking in the Son to His New Testament People**

The entire teaching of the New Testament, which is the apostles' teaching, is God's speaking, God's oracle, in the Son to His New Testament people (Heb. 1:1-2). Hebrews 1:1-2 says, "God, having spoken of old in many portions and in many ways to the fathers in the prophets, Has at the last of these days spoken to us in the Son." In the New Testament God only speaks in one person, the Son. It may seem that God spoke in the Son, Jesus Christ, only in the four Gospels and that in Acts and the Epistles God spoke in Peter, Paul, James, John, and Jude. However, we should not consider that Peter, Paul, James, John, and Jude are separate from the Son of God. They are members of the corporate Son of God (1 Cor. 12:27). In Acts 9 when Saul of Tarsus was persecuting the followers of Jesus, he did not realize that he was persecuting Jesus. Saul thought that he was persecuting only Stephen and the other believers. On his way to Damascus, however, Jesus appeared to him. Acts 9:4-5 says, "He fell on the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? And he said, Who are You, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus, whom you persecute." This was not simply the individual Jesus, who is Christ. This was the enlarged, corporate Christ, and Stephen, Peter, and all His followers were His members. The entire New Testament is the speaking of God in the Son, regardless of whom He spoke through, because the speakers in the New Testament spoke as the members of Christ.

Even today God is still speaking in the enlarged, corporate Son. When we speak as the members of Christ, our speaking becomes His speaking. Every time before I speak in a meeting, I like to offer a prayer: "Lord, be one spirit with me that I may be one spirit with You. Lord, speak in my speaking, making my speaking Yours." This kind of prayer makes a difference in the speaking. When I speak in this way, I do not merely speak in myself; I speak in the Son.

God's speaking in the Son to His New Testament people was, first, the direct teaching of the Lord Jesus in the four Gospels. These direct teachings of the Lord Jesus are the healthy words (1 Tim. 6:3a). They were spoken to His first group of disciples and were to be taught to all His disciples (Matt. 28:19-20). The Lord charged His first group of disciples in Matthew 28:19-20 to disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the Triune God, "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (v. 20a).

God's speaking in the Son is also the teaching of the Spirit of truth (John 16:12-15). In John 16:12-13 the Lord told the disciples, "I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of reality, comes, He will guide you into all the reality; for He will not speak from Himself, but what He hears He will speak; and He will declare to you the things that are coming." What the Spirit spoke through the New Testament writers was the speaking of Jesus.

The teaching of the Spirit of truth is the teaching according to godliness (1 Tim. 6:3b). Godliness is not merely piety but the living that is the expression of God, the manifestation of God in the flesh. The teaching and speaking of the Spirit according to godliness is through the apostles. This teaching was first through Peter and Paul in Acts, including their words, their works, and their way of working. The words, works, and way of working of Peter and Paul in Acts were the Spirit's speaking. This teaching was next through Paul in his fourteen Epistles, from Romans to Hebrews. Without the fourteen Epistles of Paul, there would be a gap in the New Testament that could not be bridged. The teaching of the Spirit of truth was next through James in his Epistle, Peter in his two Epistles, Jude in his Epistle, and John in his three Epistles and Revelation.

The arrangement of the books of the Bible was under the inspiration and sovereign control of the Spirit. After the Acts are the fourteen Epistles of Paul, followed by the short books of James, Peter, John, and Jude, and the book of Revelation. Paul's speaking is lengthy, but the speaking of James, Peter, Jude, and John in their Epistles is shorter. The difference in the lengths of the Epistles may be compared to our functioning in the meetings. We all should speak, but sometimes our speaking should be short. The church needs the short speakings. However, some have to speak for a longer time. The longer speakings of Paul and John unveil to us the mystery of our mystical union with Christ. These two writers speak many times of our being in Christ and His being in us. The Gospel of John often uses the phrases into Him and into Me (7:5, 31, 38-39, 48). John 14:20 says, "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." Paul also says many times that we are in Christ and that Christ is in us (Rom. 8:1; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20).

### **COMPLETED THROUGH PAUL AND JOHN**

God's speaking in the teaching of the New Testament was completed through Paul and John (Col. 1:25-26; Rev. 22:18-19). The word of God as the revealed mystery was completed by Paul's writings. Colossians 1:25-26 says, "Of which I became a minister

according to the stewardship of God, which was given to me for you, to complete the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from the ages and from the generations but now has been manifested to His saints.” The entire New Testament was completed by John’s writings. Revelation 22:18-19 says, “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this scroll; and if anyone takes away from the words of the scroll of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and out of the holy city, which are written in this scroll.” No other book in the Bible says this. Only the last book of John declares that his writing is the completion of the entire New Testament revelation.

### **THE UNIQUE, DIVINE REVELATION OF GOD’S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY**

The entire teaching of the New Testament, the teaching of the apostles, is the unique, divine revelation of God’s New Testament economy. This revelation is concerning the mystery of God—Christ (Col. 2:2-3, 9), the mystery of Christ—the church (Eph. 3:3-11), and the great mystery—Christ and the church (5:32). These three items comprise God’s New Testament economy. Items such as baptism by water, speaking in tongues, head covering, and foot-washing are not the focus of the economy of God. These items are in the Bible, but they are not the crucial parts of God’s economy. The crucial constituents of God’s economy are Christ as the mystery of God, the church as the mystery of Christ, and Christ and the church as the great mystery in the universe. The entire New Testament is a unique, divine revelation concerning mainly three persons or items: the Triune God, the all-inclusive Christ, and the church as the organism of the Triune God, the organic Body of Christ. These three are crucial, vital, and basic. Whether or not our speaking is according to the New Testament economy can be measured by its relationship to these three items.

### **THE CONTENTS OF THE FULL GOSPEL OF GOD**

The apostles’ teaching, the entire teaching of the New Testament, the unique, divine revelation of God’s New Testament economy, is the contents of the full gospel of God (Rom. 1:1-4). The gospel of God mentioned in Romans 1:1-4 is the full gospel of God, comprising not merely a part of the New Testament but the entire New Testament.

### **THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH**

The apostles’ teaching is the constitution of the Christian faith (Jude 3; 1 Tim. 1:19; 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). The Christian faith refers to our belief. Our belief, our faith, our creed, is a great matter. It is the entire New Testament. Our creed is a long one. It starts from the beginning of Matthew and continues to the end of Revelation. This creed is our belief, and our belief is the Christian faith.

### **ANY TEACHING DIFFERENT FROM THIS UNIQUE REVELATION**

## **NOT ALLOWED BY THE APOSTLES**

Any teaching different from this unique revelation is not allowed by the apostles (1 Tim. 1:3-4; 2 John 9-11). In 1 Timothy 1:3 Paul tells Timothy, “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.” The different teachings included things from the Old Testament, yet they were different from God’s New Testament economy, God’s New Testament dispensation. Such teachings were not allowed by the apostles. The apostles were strict in this matter. Second John 9-11 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! For he who says to him, Rejoice, shares in his evil works.” John warns us not to say anything to such a one but to stay away from him. Some may feel that they are not able to be so strict. However, even one who claims to be a Christian but teaches differently from the apostles’ teaching, the New Testament teaching, the unique revelation of God’s New Testament economy, is an evildoer, and we should not greet him. To teach differently is not a small matter. It is a direct work of Satan.

## **ANY OTHER BELIEF BESIDES THIS UNIQUE FAITH NOT ALLOWED BY THE APOSTLES**

Any other belief besides this unique faith is not allowed by the apostles (Gal. 1:7-9). Galatians 1:8 says, “If even we or an angel out of heaven should announce to you a gospel beyond that which we have announced to you, let him be accursed.” Paul teaches us in Romans 12:14 to bless and not curse those who persecute us, but here Paul tells us that some people are to be accursed. The apostles were very strict in their teaching, that is, in the New Testament teaching, the contents of the full gospel of God and the constitution of our Christian faith.

## **ALL TEACHINGS DIFFERENT FROM THE UNIQUE REVELATION OF GOD’S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY BEING CONSIDERED BY THE APOSTLES AS WINDS OF TEACHING**

All teachings different from the unique revelation of God’s New Testament economy were considered by the apostles as winds of teaching (Eph. 4:14). In this regard the apostles were very strict. These winds of teaching are in the sleight of men’s cheating. The Greek word for sleight refers to the playing of dice in gambling. The different teachings are like the playing of dice for the purpose of cheating us. This sleight is in the craftiness of men’s deception. The differing teachings are a deception, cheating, and falsehood. They are with a view to inducing men into the satanic system of error. Behind men’s sleight, men’s craftiness, in teaching things different from the New Testament economy, is the satanic system. Satan has a system, and if it were possible, he would induce all Christians into it. The goal, the aim, the purpose, of his system is to carry the saints away from the central lane of the divine revelation with the intention of frustrating

and even tearing down the building up of the Body of Christ. Some winds of teaching do not appear to be evil. However, the factor of evil is there to induce the saints into the satanic system of error, to frustrate them from building up the Body of Christ, and even to tear down the building up of the Body of Christ. The winds of teaching also cause the little children to be tossed by waves and thereby to suffer uneasiness in the church life.

There is a good test for discerning the winds of teaching. Certain teachings cause us to be cold and even deadened. After listening to such a teaching, we are deadened within. A certain teaching may also take away our morale for following the Lord, caring for His interest, and loving the church and the Lord's recovery. If any teaching, regardless of how good or scriptural it may appear to be, has any of these negative effects, this is strong evidence that this teaching is a wind that will blow us away from the central lane of God's New Testament economy. Many of us have suffered the blowing of the winds of teaching. We may have had the morale to follow the Lord, to love the church, to love the Lord's recovery, and to love the Bible, but after listening to such a teaching for half an hour, the morale was gone, and we were deadened.

If the teachings differing from the unique revelation of God's New Testament economy did not appear to be good, no one would accept them. Teachings may be compared to seafood, but according to the typology in Leviticus, certain foods from the sea are unclean. Leviticus 11:10-11 tells us that aquatic animals without fins and scales are unclean. The guarantee of cleanness is in the fins and scales. The "fins" and "scales" of the New Testament teaching are the Triune God, the all-inclusive Christ, and the church as the organic Body of Christ. By these we can measure others' teachings. If a teaching is not related to these three items, it does not have "fins" and "scales." Regardless of how good such a teaching may appear to be, for safety's sake we should not take it.

The New Testament contains only twenty-seven books, but within it there are many facts. One might emphasize a particular point, such as speaking in tongues in 1 Corinthians 14, claiming that it too is a part of the New Testament teaching. Although such a teaching may seem scriptural, it may not have "fins" and "scales." We must learn to have discernment in our "eating," in our receiving of teachings. We must not receive any teaching so easily. Those who bring the winds of teaching often appear to be very loving, apparently showing care and concern for us. However, we should not quickly receive their word. We must consider whether their teaching has "fins" and "scales."

The apostles' teaching, the New Testament teaching, is very crucial. Whenever we hear something differing from the apostles' teaching, we should not be bothered or affected. We should simply come back to the apostles' teaching. However, if we are not able to properly discern a teaching, we should fellowship with certain saints to receive some help. In God's New Testament economy there is only one kind of teaching revealed and recognized by God—the teaching of the apostles. We need to continue steadfastly in

this teaching (Acts 2:42).(CWWL,1989, vol.4 The Apostles' Teaching and the New Testament Leadership Chapter 1)

### **THE LEADERSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT MINISTRY RELYING ON THE TEACHING OF THE APOSTLES**

If a church does not walk according to the apostles' teaching, this is truly a problem...We must realize that the way we are taking is not the way of human organization but the way of following the apostles' teaching in the New Testament. Everything is under the leadership of the apostles' teaching, that is, God's New Testament economy, the faith of God in the New Testament. Whether in the work or in the church, we should rely upon the apostles' teaching. The apostles' teaching is the constitution of the church and the work.(CWWL,1988, vol.2 Crucial Words of Leading in the Lord's Recovery, Book 2: Leading the Saints to Practice the New Way Ordained by the Lord. Chapter12)

#### **References and Reading materials:**

1. The Ministry of the Word, Vol. 2, No 2 The Crucial Contents of God's New Testament Ministry.
2. CWWL,1988, vol.2 Words of Life from the 1988 Full-time Training, Chapter8.
3. CWWL,1988, vol.2 Crucial Words of Leading in the Lord's Recovery, Book 2: Leading the Saints to Practice the New Way Ordained by the Lord. Chapter12.
4. CWWL,1989, vol.4 The Apostles' Teaching and the New Testament Leadership Chapter 1.

## THE FOUR-LEVEL MEANING OF GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

### Message Two

#### Second layer—The New Testament ministry

Scripture Reading: Acts.1:17, 25. 2:42. 20:24. 21:19. 1Cor.4:1-2, 9:17. 12:5.  
2Cor.4:1. 3:3, 6-9. 11:2. Eph.3:2, 9. 4:11-12, 15-16. Col.1:25. 4:17.  
1Tim.1:12. 2Tim.2:4-5. Rev.21:14, 18-20

- I. **The significance of the second layer of God's New Testament economy is the ministry of the New Testament ministry (2Cor.4:1), the apostles' teaching brings in the justification and give life to people (v.18). This is the ministry we all receive.**
- II. **The New Testament ministry is to supply the unsearchable riches of the all-inclusive Christ to people in the household of God—Eph.3:2, 8-9. Col.1:25. Acts.1:17, 25. 2Cor.4:1a. Eph.4:12, 15-16 :**
  - A. God's economy becomes the stewardship, given to all the believers—Eph.3:2, 9. Col.1:25. 1Cor.9:17 :
    1. The Greek word oikonomia has two meanings. To God oikonomia refers to God's economy (Eph.3:9), and to us oikonomia refers to the stewardship—v.2
    2. The stewardship of God dispenses the processed and consummated Triune God in Christ into the God's chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people to be their life, life supply, and everything to build up the church as the unique Body of Christ, the corporate expression—Eph.3:14-21. Col.1:25. 3:4, 10-11.
    3. The Greek word for stewardship is oikonomos, which means dispensing stewardship and household administrator who dispense the supply to the people in the house—1Cor.4:1-2.
    4. God's desire is to dispense GodHimself into the household of God through the sweet and intimate stewardship—2Cor.13:14
  - B. Based on this stewardship, there is the New Testament ministry and this ministry matches God's economy which equals that this ministry is for God to dispense Himself into His chosen people to build up the Body of Christ—Eph.4:16.
- III. **The New Testament ministry is uniquely one and corporate—Acts.1:17. 2Cor.4:1. 1Tim.1:12. 1Cor.3:5. 2Cor.3:6a :**
  - A. From the Lord's perspective there is only one ministry in the New Testament age—Acts.1:17, 25 : .
    1. In the New Testament age, God's unique intention is the building up of the Body. For this one purpose, God has one work and one ministry.
    2. The ministry in God's economy is one corporate ministry, including many people who have various gifts. Paul, his coworkers, and all the other apostles received this unique ministry in the New Testament—2Cor.4:1a. 1Tim.1:12. 1Cor.3:5.

B. These Scriptures reveal the New Testament ministry is corporate, whereas the other Scriptures indicate that the ministry is individual——Acts.20:24. 21:19. 2Tim.4:5. Col.4:17 :

1. We need to know that all the believers are the members of this one Body. In collective aspect, the Body has only one corporate ministry, not many ministries.
2. However, this ministry is the ministry of the Body of Christ, and the Body of Christ has many members, each one has a personal ministry. Thus, from the aspect of the members there is many ministries——Rom.12:4-5. 1Cor.12:5.
3. Many ministries of the members of the Body are not divided ministries but are parts of the corporate ministry. We have seen that putting the ministries of all the members, it equals the corporate ministry——Eph.4:12.

C. We do not receive ministries that damage the Body:

1. Because of the degradation of the church and the existence of many divisions, there apparently are now many ministries.
2. We in the Lord's recovery, who share in the unique ministry, the continuation of the ministry of the apostles, cannot accept the ministries of the denominations and divisions. If we accept them, the recovery will be damaged.

D. We need to supply one thing from different angles. We all need to speak the same thing (cf. Rom.15:6. 1Cor.1:10). This one thing is to build up the church by recovering Christ as our life and everything (Col.3:4. 2:6-7, 16-17, 19. Eph.4:15-16). Speaking the same thing is blessing.

E. We need different ministries, but these ministries need to be piled up with layers——Rev.21:14, 18-20 :

1. The twelve foundations are various colors of precious stones, and each layer is different from the other layers. The reason is that the apostles have various ministries——14, 18-20 節.
2. But these twelve foundations are not laid side by side but piled up layer upon layer. These twelve foundations are all bring in and support the unique expression in the unique testimony——v.18.

#### **IV. We need to see the intrinsic essence of the ministry——2Cor.3:8-9 :**

A. We do not think that our ability can pass the test of supporting a part of the New Testament ministry because our ability is not part of the New Testament ministry or nothing to do with it.

B. In the New Testament ministry we see a pattern of five-fold standard. In carrying out of God's New Testament ministry, Lord Jesus did not do anything by Himself (John.5:19) , did not do His own work (4:34. 17:4) , did not speak His own words (14:10, 24) , did not do anything by His will (5:30) , did not seek His own glory (7:18) .

C. If we lack these five points, no matter what we do, that cause all to be divided and cause division. However, we enter into these points, we are in God's New Testament ministry. If these points have already entered into us, we are in God's New

Testament ministry.

**V. The genuine ministry can stir up love for our bridegroom, Lord Jesus——2Cor.11:2. Ruth3:1-2 and the footnote on v.1.**

**VI. The unique New Testament ministry is based on the apostles' teaching and it's content and it's sphere is the apostles' teaching——Acts.2:42. Titus.1:9 :**

A. It is by the proper ministry, the apostles' teaching that determines the element of God's New Testament economy.

B. If man teaches the apostles' teaching, his work is in the New Testament ministry. If he does not teach according to the apostles' teaching, his work does not have a part in the New Testament economy—— Eph.3:8. Gal.1:6-9.

C. What we supply needs to belong to the nature of New Testament ministry. Whether a ministry is a part of the New Testament ministry can be proved by applying three dominating principles :

1. The principle of the proceed Trine God being dispensed into His chosen people——John.1:1, 14. 7:37-39. 1Cor.15:45b. 2Cor.13:14.

2. The principle of Christ and the church——Col.2:2, 9-17. Eph.3:4-6. 1:22-23. 2:13-22.

3. The principle of Christ, the Spirit, and the church——Acts.2:36. 2Cor.3:17-18. Col.3:4. Matt.16:18.

**VII. The New Testament ministry is to build up the Body of Christ——Eph.4:12 :**

A. God's New Testament ministry is to accomplish God's New Testament economy. That is to gain the Body as the expression of the Trine God——Rom.12:4-5. 1Cor.12:12-13. Eph.1:22-23. 4:4, 16.

B. Ephesians4:12 reveals that the building up of the Body of Christ is the work of the ministry.

C. According to the New Testament Revelation, the church is not for the building up of the ministry but the ministry is for the building up of the church. Therefore, work of workers is not to subdue the church under his ministry.

**Excerpts from the Ministry:**

### **THE APOSTLES' STEWARDSHIP OF GOD'S GRACE**

The economy of the Divine Trinity became the apostles' stewardship of God's grace. Ephesians 3:2 says, "If indeed you have heard of the stewardship of the grace of God which was given to me for you." The word for *stewardship* here and for *economy* in 1:10 is *oikonomia*. *Oikonomia* was first God's plan, God's economy. Then this economy of God became the stewardship that God gave to the apostle Paul. The economy and the stewardship are actually one. This means that what the apostles were doing is what God is doing in His economy. What we are doing should be exactly what God is doing today. We should be those who are carrying out God's economy. The carrying out of God's economy is the stewardship of God's grace. Such a stewardship is

for the dispensing of God Himself as grace to all His chosen people. Out of this stewardship comes the ministry of the apostles, and this ministry corresponds with God's economy. The ministry we have must correspond with God's dispensing of Himself into His chosen people for the producing of the Body of Christ. This is God's ministry given to us as our stewardship. The ministry revealed in the New Testament is unique. God does not have two economies or two stewardships. God has only one divine economy and one divine stewardship. Out of this stewardship is the one, unique ministry of the apostles to dispense Christ as God's grace into His chosen people for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ to be the organism of the processed Triune God for His full and eternal expression. (Living in and with the Divine Trinity, Chapter.2)

### **MINISTRY AND MINISTRIES**

Today many Christians talk about different ministries and speak of receiving all kinds of ministries. The matter of the ministry or of the ministries is not simple. According to 2 Corinthians, there is just one ministry, the unique ministry. In 4:1 Paul says, "Therefore, having this ministry, as we have received mercy we do not lose heart." On the one hand, here Paul says "we"; on the other hand, he speaks of "this ministry," not these ministries. According to this verse, there are many who have the one ministry. However, in 1 Corinthians 12:5 Paul says, "There are distributions of ministries."

How can it be that the ministry is unique and yet at the same time there are many ministries? The answer is that in the New Testament God has only one operation. Furthermore, He has just one ministry to carry out His unique operation. All the apostles—Peter, James, John, Paul, Timothy—carried on the same ministry. Peter did not carry on one ministry, Paul another ministry, and Timothy yet another ministry. This is the situation among preachers, teachers, and ministers today, who carry on different kinds of ministries.

Because there are different kinds of ministries, there are many different denominations. The Baptists carry on the Baptist ministry to accomplish the Baptist operation. The Presbyterians carry on another kind of ministry to accomplish the Presbyterian operation. The same is true of the Episcopalians, Lutherans, and Methodists. All these denominations carry on different kinds of ministries for the sake of their own operations. According to the New Testament, this practice is not right. The New Testament reveals that there is a unique ministry. Today the local churches are not carrying out different kinds of ministries to accomplish many operations. God has one operation to be carried out by the unique ministry.

Now we must see what this unique ministry does. The unique ministry in the New Testament serves Christ to others. It inscribes Christ into people as the Spirit within them and as righteousness outwardly. This is the function of the unique ministry. When we preach the gospel, we should preach in this way. Likewise, when we teach the Bible, edify the saints, or build up the churches, we should do these things in this way.

Everything we do in the church life should be to inscribe Christ into the saints. Regarding this, we do not have many different ministries.

Although the New Testament clearly indicates that the ministry is one and unique, it also speaks of different ministries. These ministries refer to various services in the church. When 1 Corinthians 12:5 speaks of ministries, it means the different services. In the church life the saints are involved in different services. For example, some take care of the children. This is one kind of service. Some shepherd the younger ones or the weaker ones. This is another kind of service. These different services, however, all carry out the unique ministry, the unique service. As we have seen, the function of the unique service is to minister Christ into God's chosen people. In what way should we take care of the children? We should do so in the way of ministering Christ to them. Likewise, how should we shepherd the younger ones or the weaker ones? In shepherding we should minister Christ to others. Even when the sisters meet together to pray, they all should minister Christ. The many services are for the unique service; the many ministries are for the one ministry.

We accept all ministries that are accomplishing the unique ministry for God's operation. But we cannot accept a ministry that is seeking to establish or accomplish something different from God's unique operation. For example, we cannot accept a ministry which has as its goal the establishing of the Presbyterian denomination; neither can we accept a ministry that seeks to carry out the Baptist, Lutheran, or Episcopalian operations. These ministries are divisive; therefore, we cannot accept them. The ministries we accept are those that are for the unique New Testament ministry.

If you take note of this understanding of the ministry and the ministries and read through the New Testament again, especially the Epistles, you will see that this understanding is accurate. I would encourage you to study the Epistles along this line, paying special attention to the words ministry and ministries. If you make such a study, you will see that the different ministries, services, are all for the carrying out of the one new covenant ministry.

For the carrying out of God's New Testament economy, the ministry is uniquely one. But for the accomplishing of this unique ministry, especially in the church life, there is the need of many services, the need of diverse ministries. But again I would emphasize the fact that these different ministries and services are all for the carrying out of the unique ministry, which is the ministry of the new covenant. This ministry inscribes the saints with the all-inclusive God, who is the Spirit within us and righteousness as our expression outwardly. (Life-study of Second Corinthians, Chapter 26)

### **ONE MINISTRY**

In the eyes of the Lord there is just one ministry in the New Testament age. Speaking of the need of a replacement for Judas, Peter said that Judas "was numbered among us

and was allotted his portion of this ministry” (Acts 1:17). The twelve apostles were all in “this ministry.” This indicates that there is one unique ministry in the New Testament. Years ago, I did not see this. But because of the controversy regarding receiving the ministry of others, I have spent time to study the pure Word regarding this matter. My eyes have been opened to see that the twelve apostles were all in “this ministry.” Therefore, when the apostles prayed about a replacement for Judas, they asked the Lord to show them whom He had chosen to “take the place of this ministry” (v. 25).

Some may argue that “this ministry” is limited to the twelve apostles. But Ephesians 4:11 and 12 say, “He Himself gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as shepherds and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ.” Verse 11 is related to the whole period of time from the apostles until the Lord’s second coming. In God’s New Testament economy there are many apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. Throughout the centuries there have been thousands of them. Nevertheless, all of them have been given for the perfecting of the saints to the work of the ministry. Notice that verse 12 does not say “the work of the ministries” but “the work of the ministry.” Although there are thousands of gifted persons, all are for the work of the one ministry.

During the New Testament age God’s unique intention is to build up the Body. God created the universe, formed man, and accomplished redemption all for this. For this one purpose, God has one ministry. God does not have two operations in this New Testament age; He has one operation with one ministry.

The ministry in the New Testament economy is a corporate ministry, a ministry that includes thousands of gifted people. Therefore, in 2 Corinthians 4:1 Paul says, “Having this ministry.” Paul does not say, “I have this ministry” or “We have these ministries”; he says, “Having this ministry.” Paul, his co-workers, and the other apostles all had this ministry, the one ministry in the New Testament.

In 2 Corinthians 3:6 Paul says that God “made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant.” The ministry is the service; all the ministers are the serving ones carrying out this service. The many ministers do not have many services but one service, one ministry.

I like Paul’s word in 1 Timothy 1:12: “I give thanks to Him who empowers me, Christ Jesus our Lord, that He has counted me faithful, appointing me to the ministry.” In this verse Paul does not say, “He appointed me to my ministry”; he says that the Lord appointed him to the one unique, corporate New Testament ministry. We all need to praise the Lord that by His mercy and grace He has appointed us to the corporate ministry that builds up the Body of Christ.

## **PERSONAL MINISTRY AND CORPORATE MINISTRY**

Although these verses reveal that the ministry in the New Testament is corporate,

certain other verses seem to indicate that the ministry is personal. In Acts 20:24 Paul says, “I consider my life of no account as if precious to myself, in order that I may finish my course and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus to solemnly testify of the gospel of the grace of God.” This verse refers to Paul’s personal ministry because Paul speaks of the ministry which he had received from the Lord. Hence, the ministry in this verse is the personal ministry.

Acts 21:19 definitely and clearly refers to Paul’s personal ministry: “Having greeted them, he related one by one the things which God did among the Gentiles through his ministry.” Other verses that seem to refer to personal ministry are 2 Timothy 4:5 and Colossians 4:17. In 2 Timothy 4:5 Paul charged Timothy, “Fully accomplish your ministry,” apparently encouraging him to fulfill his personal ministry. Colossians 4:17 says, “Say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you fulfill it.” This evidently points to Archippus’s personal ministry.

In considering the verses that speak of personal ministry, we need to realize that all the believers are members of the one Body. As a whole, the Body has one corporate ministry, not many ministries. Although there are many functions in the Body, the ministry in the Body is one. For example, when I speak, my whole body speaks: my eyes, nose, ears, arms, fingers, legs, and feet are all involved. Therefore, my speaking is my body’s ministry. This ministry is corporate. However, each part of my body also has its own ministry. The mouth speaks, the hands make gestures, and the feet render support. But when the ministries of all the members are added together, they total the unique ministry of the body. This example indicates that the many ministries of the members of the Body are not separate ministries but part of one corporate ministry.

The New Testament ministry is uniquely one and corporate. But because this ministry is the service of the Body of Christ and because the Body has many members, every member has its own ministry. Thus, according to the members, there are many ministries; however, according to the Body as a whole, there is just one ministry. Your ministry should not be separate from the corporate ministry. The Body has a corporate ministry, and all the members of the Body have their individual ministries. As we have seen, all the ministries of the members added together equal the corporate ministry.

## **THE MINISTRIES IN THE DENOMINATIONS**

Regarding this matter of the ministry, we need to be clear both about the truth in the Bible and about the situation of today’s Christianity. Originally, during the time of the apostles, there was one Body with one ministry. But due to the degradation of the church, the divisions and denominations came into existence. Now every division has its own so-called ministry. The Baptists, the Presbyterians, the Lutherans, the Episcopalians, and the Pentecostals all have their own ministries. The ministers, pastors, and preachers in the various denominations are working to build up the denominations, not the Body. Because each is building up his own denomination, he cannot work together with others.

We can have nothing to do with the denominations. In the Lord's recovery we are for the recovery of Christ as life and everything to us for the building up of the church. For the fulfillment of God's purpose in His recovery, we need to go back to the beginning, back to the pure Word. In the New Testament there is one unique ministry. From the time of the apostles until now, this ministry has not been terminated. I believe that we are the continuation of this ministry. I am happy to say that I am in this ministry, that I am part of this ministry. We are in the unique ministry according to the New Testament economy.

### **NOT RECEIVING MINISTRIES THAT DAMAGE THE BODY**

At the time of the apostles there were no denominations. Because of the degradation of the church and the existence of many divisions, there apparently are now many ministries. Can we in the Lord's recovery, who share in the unique ministry, the continuation of the ministry of the apostles, accept the ministries of the denominations and divisions? No, we cannot. If we accept them, the recovery will be damaged. The proper ministry, the ministry according to God's New Testament economy, is for the building up of the Body of Christ, but the other ministries are for the building up of the denominations. Because this is the case, we cannot receive the ministries that build up the denominations.

When I was in Taiwan, some denominational missionaries told me that they appreciated the work of my ministry and that they wanted to invite me to speak to their people and to help them. They also suggested that I invite them to speak to us. How would you reply to such a suggestion? The correct way to answer is to say that Brother Lee and his co-workers have been commissioned by the Lord to build up the Body of Christ. However, those in the denominations are building up the denominations. We are not burdened to do this. Rather, our burden is to continue the ministry in the New Testament for the building up of the Body. Because the ministries of those in the denominations are for the building up of the denominations, we cannot invite them to speak to us. If we were to give place to such ministries, the Body would be damaged. This is the reason we cannot receive those ministries. We admit that there is something genuine in them, but as a whole their goal is to build up the denominations. This is a frustration and an opposition to the building up of the Body.

Regarding this matter of the ministry, we need the Lord's shining. We need to go to the Lord and open ourselves to Him. If we do this, the light will shine upon this teaching concerning the ministry, and the teaching will become the truth, the reality, to us. From the time the Lord made me clear about this matter many years ago, I have never been distracted from it, because the shining of the light is so bright. The light shines upon all my steps; therefore, I cannot help the denominations. Furthermore, we cannot invite those in the denominations to speak to us and thereby cause damage to the Lord's recovery. Because the ministries of those in the denominations are for a purpose other than God's eternal purpose to build up the Body of Christ, we cannot cooperate with them. We can

neither help them nor receive help from them. Some may think that we are narrow-minded for taking this stand. Actually, we are not narrow-minded. However, the light regarding the ministry is shining upon us; we cannot deny that we have seen it. Because of this light, we cannot change in this matter. (The Collected Work of Witness Lee, 1978, vol.3, Truth messages, chapter 4)

### **THE NATURE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT MINISTRY**

Whatever we minister must be of the nature of the New Testament ministry. Whether or not a particular ministry is part of the New Testament ministry can be proved by applying three governing principles: one, the principle of the processed Triune God being dispensed into His chosen people; second, the principle of Christ and the church; and third, the principle of Christ, the Spirit, life, and the church. If your teaching can pass this threefold test, your teaching is part of the New Testament ministry. Any ministry that is part of the New Testament ministry will be welcomed by the saints in the Lord's recovery. Any other ministry, however, will only cause trouble for the recovery. (The Collected Work of Witness Lee, 1984, vol.2, Elders' Training, Book 3, Chapter.12)

### **THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY—TO BUILD UP THE BODY OF CHRIST**

God's New Testament ministry is for the accomplishment of His New Testament economy, which is to gain a Body for His Son to be the expression of the Triune God. The unique New Testament ministry is to build up the Body of Christ. The apostles in the New Testament, such as Peter, John, Paul, and Timothy, participated in this New Testament ministry. Today the gifted persons should participate in the New Testament ministry to perfect the saints unto the building up of the Body, and the believers should come together not merely to have a good time with one another but to build up the Body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:12 indicates that the building up of the Body of Christ is the work of the ministry. Allow me to testify that in the past sixty years I have thoroughly enjoyed working for the Lord to build up His Body. Our "hobby" should be to build up the Body of Christ. We have the greatest work and the most glorious enterprise—to build up the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. (CWWL, 1988, vol.3, Being Perfected to Build Up the Body of Christ, Chapter 4)

### **References and Reading materials:**

- 1 . Words of life, Chapter 8
- 2 . Life-study of Colossians, Chapter 11
- 3 . Life-study of Ephesians, Chapter 28
- 4 . A Deeper Study of the Divine Dispensing, Chapter 13
- 5 . Life-study of Second Corinthians Chapter 26-27,52
- 6 . CWWL,1978, vol.3 Truth messages, Chapter 4
- 7 . Elders Training, vol.1, Chapter 3

8. The God-ordained Way to Practice the New Testament Economy, Chapter 18
9. CWWL,1988, vol.1. New Testament ministry and the practice of God ordained way, Chapter 1. CWWL,1988, vol.1 VARIOUS TIMES OF FELLOWSHIP IN THE BAY AREA, Chapter 5
10. New Testament Ministry and the Teaching and the Fellowship of the Apostles, Chapter 1
11. Life-Study of Revelation, Chapter 62
12. The Ministry of the New Testament and the Teaching and Fellowship of the Apostles, Chapter 3
13. Elders Training, vol.3, Chapter 12.
14. Crucial Words of Leading in the Lord's Recovery,vol.2, Chapter 11
15. CWWL,1988, vol.3, Being Perfected to Build Up the Body of Christ,Chapter 10
16. CWWL,1988, vol.3, The Record of Talks in Hong Kong, Chapter 4
17. CWWN, vol.61, MATURED LEADINGS IN THE LORD'S RECOVERY (1), Chapter 3

## THE FOUR-LEVEL MEANING OF GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

### Message Three

#### The Third Level—Body of Christ

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:22-23; 2:21-22; 3:19; 4:10, 12, 16; Col. 2:19; 3:15; Rev. 21:10

**I. In Ephesians 4:11-12, Paul says that gifted ones are for perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ. This is the significance of the third layer of God's New Testament economy.**

**II. God's economy is for the Body of Christ—1 Tim. 1:4; Eph. 3:9-11; 4:16 :**

A. God's eternal economy is that through God becoming man, man may become God in life and nature, but not in the Godhead, producing the organic Body, as His organism for His increase and expression—Rom. 8:3; 1:3-4; 12:4-5.

B. We are here to fulfill God's eternal economy and its purpose is to obtain one Body for His Son, Christ. This body must be realized in the local churches—Eph. 1:22-23; Rom. 12:4-5; 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; 12:27.

**III. The Body of Christ is the divine composition of the Triune God and believers in Christ—Eph. 4:4-6 :**

A. Father, Son, and Spirit are mingled with man and are built into the Body of Christ—1:23; 4:12, 16.

B. The building up of the Body of Christ is the structure of the Triune God and the tripartite man in the Spirit of God and the spirit of man—1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:16 :

1. This constitution is a union, a mingling, an incorporation of God and man—John 14:20.

2. This constitution is the constitution of divinity into humanity to become the abode of man, and the building of humanity into divinity to become the abode of God—Eph. 3:16-17; 2:21-22; John 14:23; Rev. 21:2-3, 22.

C. The Body of Christ is an organism, having both divinity and humanity, and expressing Christ—John 15:1; Eph. 1:23; 3:19-21.

**IV. The Body of Christ fulfills the desires of God's heart, expresses God, and destroys Satan—Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12, 27; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4, 16; Col. 1:18; 2:19; Gen. 1:26-28 :**

A. The Triune God works in us to produce and build up the Body of Christ—Eph. 3:16-21; Rom. 8:11; 12:4-5.

B. The New Covenant ministry is to produce the Body of Christ, and without the New Covenant ministry, the Body of Christ cannot be produced—1 Cor. 12:12-27; 3:6, 8-9; 4:1; 5:18.

C. The Body of Christ is the intrinsic significance of the church. Without the Body, the church is meaningless—Rom. 12:4-5; 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; 12:12-13, 27.

D. All problems in the church today are due to ignorance of the Body of Christ. The

biggest problem, the only problem, is not knowing the Body, not caring for the Body, not honoring the Body——Eph. 1:17, 23; 1 Cor. 12:24-27.

E. Knowing the Body of Christ is the proper Lord's recovery. The Lord desires to recover the Body and to recover oneness of the Body——Eph. 1:23; 4:4.

F. The Lord has urgent needs on earth. He desires that the Body of Christ be manifest in the local churches——Rom. 12:4-5; 16:16; 1 Cor. 1:2; 12:27 :

1. What the Lord needs today is not only local churches, “one church, one locality”, but also gain the Body as His fullness——Eph. 1:23; 3:19.

2. Unless the Body of Christ appears concretely, the Lord Jesus will not return——1:23; 4:16; 5:27, 30; Rev. 19:7.

**V. This Recovery is based on the truth that Christ has only one Body——Eph. 1:23; 4:4 :**

A. One Body is one church of God, manifested in many localities as many local churches——1 Cor. 10:32 後半; Rev. 1:4, 11.

B. The Lord's recovery is for the building up of the Body of Christ. The Recovery is for the Body of Christ, not for any individual or for any individual local church——Eph. 4:16; Col. 2:19.

C. In our consideration, the Body of Christ should be first and the local church second——Matt. 16:18; 18:17; Eph. 2:21-22.

D. The Body of Christ is the goal of God's economy, and the local churches are the procedure by which God reaches the goal of His economy——1 Cor. 12:12-13; 1:2; Rom. 12:4-5; 16:1, 4-5, 16 後半.

E. Every local church is the unique Body of Christ in the universe——Eph. 4:4.

**VI. We need to become universal Christians and have a universal view of the universal Body of Christ——Eph. 1:17-23; 2:21-22 :**

A. The Body of Christ is the mysterious Body of Christ, who is all-expanding, all-inclusive, and all extending——Eph. 1:22-23; 3:19; Col. 3:11 :

1. Christ the Head is exalted above all heavens, and we are His mysterious Body, His fullness——Eph. 1:22-23; 3:19; 4:10.

2. The Body is the fullness and expression of the One who fills all in all——1:22-23; 4:10 :

a. Christ is given to the church as the Head of all things, and the church is the universal Body of Christ, and this universal Body of Christ is the fullness of the One who is all in all——1:23.

b. Christ Himself is all-expanding and all-extensive, and the Body of Christ is the fullness of this vast, extensive, universal Christ. This means that the Body of Christ is also universal——3:18-19; 4:16.

B. A universal Christian is one who has the universal view as indicated in Ephesians 1:22-23 and 4:10 :

1. We may have a vision of the Body of Christ, but our vision is very small compared to the universal vision of the Body of Christ——1:23.

- 2 . We need to leave our small, narrow selves, and to see and touch the universal Body of Christ, the fullness and expression of the universal, extensive Christ in ecstasy——3:19.
- 3 . We need to be shaken by the vision of the universal extensive Body of Christ——Rev. 21:10 :
  - a . John was carried away in spirit to a high mountain and saw the New Jerusalem. Like him, we need to be carried away in the spirit to a high “mountain” to gain a universal view of the universal Body of Christ——v. 10; Eph. 1:22-23.
  - b . In our spirit, we need the universal view of the Body of Christ. It is infinitely greater than anything concerning the Body of Christ that we have ever thought about.

**VII. The goal of God's economy is to build up the universal Body of Christ, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem——Eph. 1:22-23; 4:12, 16; Rev. 21:2, 10 :**

- A. The Body is the church, and the church is the miniature of the New Jerusalem.
- B. The New Jerusalem is to come, and the church exists today as its precursor. The New Jerusalem is the full consummation of this precursor, the Body of Christ.

**Excerpts from the Ministry:**

**THE NEED TO SEE THE ONE BODY, THE ONE CHURCH OF GOD**

Look at today’s situation with the thousands of divisions among the Lord’s people. There is a “church market” full of division and confusion. In Anaheim there is a division called the Church of Taiwan in Anaheim. In my hometown of Chefoo in mainland China, there was a division called the Church of England in China. Logically, the Church of England should be in England, and the Church of Taiwan should be in Taiwan. What confusion this is! Today there are not only divisions but also confusion. People have argued and have been divided over whether to have wine or grape juice at the Lord’s table. They have also been divided over what kind of bread to use at the Lord’s table.

**NO PART OF THE BODY OF CHRIST IS AUTONOMOUS**

In the recent past, there was a different teaching among us which said that the local church should be autonomous. If we receive such a teaching, this means that we have not seen that the church is the Body of Christ. Can any part of our physical body be autonomous? If the various parts of our body were autonomous, this would mean that our body was cut into pieces. How could we make our blood circulation autonomous? The circulation of our blood is throughout our entire body. In the same way, no part of the Body of Christ can be autonomous.

But some may argue by saying, “Brother Lee, didn’t you say that the administration of the churches should be local and independent?” I may have said that many years ago, but if you asked me to repeat such a saying today, I would not do it. We may think that the

local churches are independent, but in the Bible I cannot find the thought of independence. Who is independent from whom in the Body of Christ? Is the church in Anaheim independent from the church in Dallas? The word independence should not be brought in when we are speaking about the Body of Christ. We are not independent. Instead, we all are dependent on one another. The church in Anaheim depends on the church in Fullerton, and the church in Fullerton depends on the church in Anaheim. We are not independent. We are one Body. Are the churches in Taiwan independent from the churches in America? In the Body of Christ this cannot be.

The churches may be different in their business affairs, but even in this matter they should not claim that they are independent. What if the church in Anaheim made a decision to meet at two o'clock in the morning? The leading ones there may claim that the local church has its own jurisdiction and that no one can interfere with them. But the church in Santa Ana may ask, "Why have you brothers in Anaheim made such a decision to meet at two o'clock in the morning?" The brothers in Anaheim may say that those in Santa Ana should not interfere with them, that this is not their business, and that the church in Anaheim is independent and has its own jurisdiction. But to meet at two o'clock in the morning is peculiar and odd to the uttermost. In this matter the church in Anaheim needs the helpful advice from the church in Santa Ana. It is not wise to make a decision to meet at two o'clock in the morning. This illustration shows that we need the advice and help from the other churches even in business affairs and practical things.

There are many times when I am adjusted in my fellowship with the co-workers. The brothers may remind me of something that would change our consideration in certain matters. In this particular conference we brothers came together before the meetings to pray and fellowship about certain things. Some of the brothers asked me whether or not we needed to meet before the Lord's table meeting, since this meeting would be a little earlier. We felt that there would be no need for us to come together before this meeting. This is the fellowship of the Body. I should not say to the brothers, "This conference is my conference. This is not your business. Don't interfere with my jurisdiction." That would be terrible. But this is actually the practice in some places—if not outwardly, at least inwardly.

If we claim to be independent, we damage ourselves. We should never forget that God has only one church. The church in Anaheim is just a small part of the church of God. We should not think that there is the church of God plus the church in Anaheim. When we speak of the church of God, we imply the local church. Through the years I have learned the following lesson. The more we honor the uniqueness of the church, the more blessings we will receive. The church in which you are meeting today may be in Spokane or in Anaheim, but we have to remember that these are just parts of the church. They are not independent. We are dependent upon one another. All the churches need the help of the other churches because we are one Body. We have to see the Body.

Because we are on this earth, we are limited by time and space, and we have many business affairs. The saints in Anaheim and the saints in San Francisco and Fresno cannot meet together often. This is impossible because of the inconvenience of distance. They need to have their own particular activities. The church in Fresno may decide to rent a small hall, whereas the church in Anaheim meets in a big hall. This is altogether according to the practical need. But this does not indicate any division, separation, or independence.

When all the churches come together for a conference, those who are coming from another city may not function in the conference. They may think, “This is not my home church.” As a result, they would not function. But certain brothers who live in the locality where the conference is held may function frequently because they think, “This is my home church.” Dear saints, this is wrong. The Lord has only one Body. The church of God is only one. In 1 Corinthians 10:32 Paul speaks of three categories of people on this earth: the Jews, God’s chosen people; the Greeks, the unbelieving Gentiles; and the church of God, a composition of the believers in Christ. The church is uniquely one on this earth. If I go to London, I should not consider that I am from the United States and that this is their church. I should not consider that I am a guest and they are the host, that they have their jurisdiction and that I have no concern in the church there. This is wrong. I should consider that I am a member of the church of God, which is universal and sometimes local. It is okay to say sometimes but not all times.

Two thousand years ago the communication and the means of travel were not as convenient as they are today. Even fifty years ago it took me forty-eight hours to travel by boat from my hometown, Chefoo, to Shanghai. Later, after World War II it took only forty-five minutes to travel this distance by plane. Today the world has become so small. I am so glad that the world situation is tending this way. This is for our experience of the genuine oneness of the Body of Christ. How can we keep ourselves independent and keep our so-called jurisdiction, saying, “This is my city. This is my country. This is my region”? In today’s world and in today’s recovery, we cannot and should not do this.

### **WE NEED TO KEEP THE ONENESS**

The Lord Jesus prayed for this in John 17. He prayed to the Father, “That they may be one even as We are” (vv. 11, 21). We should keep the oneness. If we are narrow, independent, and insisting on our jurisdiction in our locality, we will not even be able to be in one accord with others in our locality. Universally, we should be one. Locally, we should be in one accord. Are you expecting to see the Lord’s blessing? You must learn the “two-layer lesson.” Locally, you must serve with the saints in one accord. Universally, all the churches should be one.

Today’s problems in the Lord’s recovery are all due to one thing—we have not seen the Body. If we have seen the Body, there is no problem. Then minor things, such as whether we use leavened or unleavened bread and wine or grape juice at the Lord’s table,

will not matter. As long as we receive the threefold dispensing of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit, everything is okay. As long as we would stay under the transmission of the transcending Christ from the heavens, everything is okay.

### **THE BODY BEING THE INTRINSIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHURCH**

We need to see the way Paul presents the Body of Christ in Ephesians 1. Paul says that God raised up Christ, seated Him in the heavens, subjected all things under His feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church. Right away in the following phrase he says, “Which is His Body” (v. 23a). The church is the Body. This indicates that the Body is the church’s intrinsic significance. The church without the Body means nothing. In Greek the word for church is ekklesia, the called-out ones coming together. But the significance of this gathering is the Body.

In the recovery today there are over twelve hundred churches around the globe, yet we all are one Body. If we consider ourselves as individual churches or as individual believers, we are through. We should consider ourselves as one Body. If the parts of our physical body would keep their own jurisdiction and be autonomous, our body would be finished. But thank the Lord that all the members of our physical body are submissive to one another so that our body can act and operate smoothly. Suppose that we wanted to go somewhere and that all the parts of our body agreed except our feet. If the feet could talk, they might say to the other members, “Don’t you know that we are tired? You have no love. You don’t sympathize with us. You want to go, but we will not go, because we do not have the strength to go.” What kind of physical body would this be? In practicality, there would be no body. This is to be “disbodied.” Today among the Christians concerning the Body of Christ, it is like this. They are “disbodied.”

At least I can testify for myself and for my senior brother, Brother Watchman Nee. We always behaved, acted, and took action in the recovery as one Body. This is why the Lord’s recovery could exist on this earth over these past approximately seventy years. We do not have any organization to keep anything, but the recovery is still here. The recovery is still existing and has been kept by the principle of the Body. While I was ministering the word, I often considered Brother Nee. I considered what he spoke; I did not like to speak anything that was contradicting with his ministry. If I had spoken in a contradicting way, where would the recovery be today? We must know the Body.

I would like to say again that the Body is the intrinsic significance of the church. If there were no Body, the church would have no meaning. The church makes no sense without the Body. But Hallelujah, there is the Body! Without the Body the church makes no sense, but with the Body there is the intrinsic significance of the church.

What is the difference between the church and the Body? We need to see that the church of God is the frame and the Body of Christ is the organism. We can use an apple tree as an illustration. The tree is the frame, and the apples are the very organic essence

of this tree. If you have only the tree, that does not mean much. The tree is for the apples. We do not eat the tree; we eat the apples. Apples come out of the tree. The church is the frame, like the apple tree, and the Body of Christ is the very organic essence of the church, just like the apples are the very organic essence of the apple tree. These two are one. The church is the frame for existing. The Body of Christ is the very organic contents for people's satisfaction.

We have encountered much opposition due to one thing. We are here not just for the gospel to save souls. We are here to carry out God's eternal economy, with the purpose of gaining a Body for His Son, Christ, and this Body has to be consolidated into the local churches. In this country there have been a number of spiritual giants, but no one would care for the church. They care only for saving souls, but where are those millions of souls today? Where is God's economy? Where is the church for the Body? Where is the "apple tree," and where are the "apples" today? As far as God's economy is concerned, there is very little on this earth for the fulfilling of God's intention according to His heart's desire. But I have the full assurance that the recovery we are taking care of today, by His mercy and grace, is absolutely of the Lord. The strongest evidence of this is the Lord's speaking. Through many years the Lord's oracle on this earth has been and still is in the recovery.

### **THE DIVINE CONSTITUTION OF THE TRIUNE GOD WITH THE BELIEVERS IN CHRIST**

The Body of Christ is the divine constitution of the Triune God with the believers in Christ. Ephesians 4:4-6 shows us the constitution of the three divine persons with all His chosen people. So we have the one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, and one God and Father mingled together.

### **A MINGLING OF DIVINITY WITH HUMANITY**

The Body of Christ is a mingling of the Divine Trinity with all His chosen human beings. It is a mingling of divinity with humanity.

### **AN ORGANISM, BOTH DIVINE AND HUMAN, TO EXPRESS CHRIST**

The Body of Christ is an organism. On the one hand, it is divine. On the other hand, it is human to express the divine and human Christ, who is both the complete God and the perfect man.

### **THE FULLNESS OF THE ALL-INCLUSIVE CHRIST**

The Body of Christ is the fullness of the all-inclusive Christ, the One who fills all in all (1:23). In the book of Ephesians we have these two terms—the riches of Christ and the fullness of Christ. The fullness is the issue of the riches of Christ (3:8) and the expression of these inner riches. In 1962 I was invited to speak to a group of people in the Bay Area. My subject was the riches of Christ issuing in His fullness. They were surprised by this

subject.

A number of Christians think that the fullness and the riches are the same thing. But the fullness is the issue and the expression of the riches. A tall, husky American brother has eaten many of the riches of America. All these American riches have been digested and assimilated by him, and he is now the fullness of America, the issue and expression of the riches of America.

We need to be the same with Christ. We should enjoy the riches of Christ until we become the fullness of Christ. When we are full of the riches, this fullness overflows. A cup may have water within it, but we cannot see the water. But if the cup is filled to the brim with water, it overflows with water. This overflow is the fullness, the expression, of the water. We need to be filled with Christ until we overflow with Him. This overflow is the fullness, and the fullness is the expression.

### **THE ORGANIC AND UNIQUE BODY OF CHRIST EXPRESSED IN MANY LOCAL CHURCHES**

The organic Body is undivided, and it is also indivisible (1 Cor. 1:13a). It is not autonomous. This unique Body of Christ is expressed in many local churches (Rev. 1:11) in the divine oneness as it is with the Triune God (John 17:11, 21, 23) and in the divine nature, element, essence, expression, function, and testimony. There are many churches, yet they have one divine nature, one divine element, one divine essence, one divine expression, one divine function, and one divine testimony because they are one Body. This is why I say that our troubles are due to not seeing the Body. If we have seen the Body, there will be no problem. The principle and practice of the one Body are kept by the believers in the practical one accord (Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25; Rom. 15:6).

### **KEEPING THE DIVINE ONENESS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST**

The divine oneness of the Body of Christ should be kept both in the local churches as the local expressions of the Body and in the universal source and substance. In every way we should keep the divine oneness of the Body of Christ.

### **ONE CRUCIAL POINT OF THE LORD'S RECOVERY IN THE CONSUMMATING AGE**

The genuine oneness of the Body of Christ is one crucial point of the Lord's recovery in this consummating age. The Lord is going to consummate His economy, so to keep the oneness is very crucial.

### **THE IGNORANCE CONCERNING THE BODY OF CHRIST**

All the problems of the church today are due to the ignorance concerning the Body of Christ. Among us this ignorance should be absent, and the full knowledge should be present. We need a spirit of wisdom and revelation with the enlightening of the eyes of

our heart to see and apprehend the Body of Christ. “The Issue of the Dispensing of the Processed Trinity and the Transmitting of the Transcending Christ, CWWL, 1993, vol. 2. Ch6.”

**References and Reading materials:**

1. “Words of Life from the 1988 Full-time Training” CWWL, 1988, vol. 2. Ch. 8.
2. “The Practical Points concerning Blending” CWWL, 1994–1997, vol. 1. Ch.2.
3. “The Issue of the Dispensing of the Processed Trinity and the Transmitting of the Transcending Christ”, CWWL, 1993, vol. 2. Ch6. “The Problems Causing the Turmoils in the Church Life” CWWL, 1993, vol. 2. Ch.3.
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## THE FOUR-LEVEL MEANING OF GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

### Message Four

#### The Fourth Level—the Churches of God

Scripture Reading: Matt. 16:18, 18:17; 1 Cor. 1:2; Rev. 1:11-12

- I. **The churches of God is the fourth level of the meaning of God's New Testament economy—Eph. 1:22-23; Matt. 16:18, 18:17; 1 Cor. 1:2; Rev. 1:11-12.**
- II. **Regarding the church, there are two terms in the Bible: the church of God (1 Cor. 10:32) and the churches of God (11:16). *The church of God* refers to the universal church, the unique Body of Christ, whereas *the churches of God* refers to the local churches:**
  - A. This Body needs to have an expression, a manifestation, on earth; the local churches are the practical expression of the Body of Christ—Matt. 16:18, 18:17; Eph. 1:22-23, 2:21-22; Rev. 1:11:
    1. God is expressed in Christ, Christ is expressed in the Body, and the Body is expressed in the local churches—Col. 2:2, 9; Eph. 3:4; Rev. 1:11; c.f. Hymns, #818.
    2. Without local churches the church only becomes a kind of term; it becomes something in the heavens, something in the future, something for us to look forward to but not so real and practical today on this earth.
  - B. A local church is an expression of the Body of Christ in a certain locality—1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32b, 17; 12:12-13, 20, 27:
    1. The unique Body of Christ is expressed in many local churches in the divine oneness as it is with the Triune God and in the divine nature, element, essence, expression, function, and testimony; there are many churches, yet they have one divine nature, one divine element, one divine essence, one divine expression, one divine function, and one divine testimony because they are one Body—Rev. 1:11; John 17:11, 21, 23.
    2. The church revealed in Matthew 16:18 is the universal church, the unique Body of Christ; whereas the church revealed in 18:17 is the local church, the expression of the unique Body of Christ in a certain locality.
    3. The one universal church—the Body of Christ—becomes the many local churches—local expressions of the Body of Christ—Rom. 12:4-5; 16:16.
    4. The unique Body of Christ is expressed in many localities as the local churches—Eph. 4:4; Rev. 1:4, 11:
      - a. The Body of Christ is the source of the local churches—Eph. 1:22-23; 2:21-22.
      - b. The universal Body is like the father to all the churches, and all the churches are like the children to the father—Rom. 12:4-5; 16:4.
    5. Every local church is a part of the unique, universal Body of Christ, a local

expression of this Body—Eph. 4:4; 1 Cor. 1:2; 12:27:

- a . Universally, all the local churches are one Body, and locally, every local church is a local expression of the universal Body; therefore, a local church is not the Body but only a part of the Body, an expression of the Body.
  - b . The universal Christ has a part of Himself in every local church; every local church is a part of Christ, and all these parts constitute the Body of Christ—Eph. 1:23; 2:22.
- 6 . The local ground of the church is basically the unique oneness of the Body of Christ practiced in the local churches—4:4; 1 Thes. 1:1:
- a . Both the universal Body of Christ and the local churches are uniquely one.
  - b . There is one unique Body in the whole universe, and there is one unique local church in each locality respectively.
  - c . This unique oneness is the basic element in the church life—Acts 1:14; 2:46; 1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 1:27; 2:1-2.
- 7 . The churches in different localities are for the universal expression of Christ—Eph. 1:23; Rev. 1:4, 11; 22:16a:
- a . A local church that makes everything local and that expresses only its locality has become a local sect, a local division.
  - b . All the basic things for the Body are not local—the Spirit, Christ, God, the Bible, the apostles' teaching, and the apostles' fellowship.

### **III. The book of Revelation is a book concerning the churches as the testimony of Jesus—Rev. 1:1-2, 9, 11; 22:16a:**

- A. The testimony of Jesus is not individual Christians—it is the local churches, the church in a practical way—1:2, 9, 11:
- 1 . To show Jesus to those in our locality, there is the need of a local church that testifies who Jesus is; thus, the church in our locality should bear the image, expression, appearance, and virtues of Christ—Col. 1:15; 3:10.
  - 2 . Because the local churches are the expression of the all-inclusive Christ, they are the testimony of Jesus—v. 11; Rev. 1:2, 9, 11.
- B. The central concept of the first three chapters of Revelation is the seven lampstands as the seven local churches to be God's expression—Rev. 1:11, 20:
- 1 . The churches as golden lampstands bear the testimony of Jesus—vv. 2, 9; 20:4:
    - a . The testimony of Jesus is the testimony of the Son coming with the Father by the Spirit to live on earth, to die on the cross to clear up the universe, to release the divine life, and to resurrect from the dead to become the life-giving Spirit, who then comes as the Son with the Father compounded with divinity, humanity, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection, including all the divine attributes and human virtues—John 10:38; 1 Cor. 15:45.
    - b . Such a compound testimony is the testimony of Jesus, and this testimony has a symbol—the golden lampstand—Rev. 1:12, 20:
  - 2 . As golden lampstands, the local churches are a duplication of Christ as the unique

lampstand—vv. 11-12, 20:

- a . In Exodus 25 Christ, the embodiment and expression of God, is typified by the unique lampstand, but in Revelation this lampstand has been duplicated; each lampstand is a reproduction of the lampstand revealed in Exodus 25.
  - b . When all the lampstands, or local churches, are added together, they are the multiplication of Christ, the multiplied embodiment and expression of the Triune God to be the testimony of Jesus—Rev. 1:2, 9, 11-12, 20.
- 3 . The golden lampstands signify the churches as the embodiment and expression of the Triune God shining forth, with the sevenfold intensified Spirit of God as the lamps, to be the testimony of Jesus—v. 20; 4:5:
- a . The local churches as lampstands bear the testimony of Jesus Christ in separate cities, shining locally yet collectively—1:2, 9, 20; 20:4.
  - b . Every local church is a golden lampstand, having the sevenfold intensified Spirit of God as the lamps and shining the testimony of Jesus from its locality in this dark age—2:1, 5.

#### **IV. The local churches are the stepping stones to the New Jerusalem——Rev. 1:11-12, 21:2, 9:**

- A . In the first chapter of the last book of the Bible, we see seven local churches; then in the last two chapters we see the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and the new earth.
- B . The local churches may be considered as the gates into the unique church, which consummates in the New Jerusalem. We are in the churches with the goal that one day we will be the New Jerusalem.

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

##### **WHERE IS THE CHURCH?**

Many people talk about the church as the expression of Christ, but after a little consideration we will ask, “Where is the church?” If we say that the church is the expression of Christ, then where is it? When people speak about the church as the expression of Christ, it sounds nice, but we must put nice things into practice. If you were to talk with me, I would reply, “Brother, it sounds good, but how can I get into it? It is marvelous that the church is the expression of Christ, but I would like to be in it. Tell me where it is.”

If we were to ask this practical question to so many teachers who teach concerning the church as the expression of Christ, we would put them into the corner. Immediately, they would become embarrassed and entangled. They would be confused and find it difficult to answer.

The church as the expression of Christ is so heavenly, so spiritual, and so wonderful. But we want to get into it; we want to have it! Since it is so heavenly and so wonderful, where is it? Where can we find such a wonderful thing?

The teachers may tell us that it is too spiritual and that it is not something of this earth but in the heavens. If this is the case, it is impossible for the church to be in any locality on this earth, and we must conclude that we will have to wait for eternity. Thus, there is no reason for us to have the church today, and it is needless to talk about the things of the church today. If we must wait for eternity, it is unnecessary to care for the church now.

## **LOCAL CHURCHES**

You see, this is the problem. People have seen just one aspect but not the other. Regarding the church, there are two terms in the Bible: the church of God (1 Cor. 10:32) and the churches of God (11:16). Is the church one or many? The church of God is universal, but the churches of God are expressed in so many localities.

The church is the expression of Christ, but how can the church be practically expressed? Only by the local churches, by one church in each locality. As the expression of Christ, the church is universally one, but it is expressed in many, many local churches.

The church could never be expressed without the local churches. Every local church is the practical expression of the church. This is why in Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus mentioned the building of the church upon the rock. But in Matthew 18:15-20 the Lord said something about the local church. The church mentioned in Matthew 18 must be a local church, because it is a place where we can go. The Lord said that if you have some problem with a brother, go to him first. If he listens to you, the problem is solved. But if he does not, you must bring one or two with you to witness to him, expecting him to listen to them. If he still does not listen, then you are to bring the problem to the church. Of course, this must be the local church. It could not be the universal church. We could never bring a problem to the universal church.

Suppose you have a problem with a brother. Do you have a church to go to? Is there a place in your locality where you can go? If not, there is no practical expression of the church in your city.

What is the practical expression of the church which is the expression of Christ? It is the local churches. Without local churches there is no possibility for the church to be expressed. Without local churches the church only becomes a kind of term; it becomes something in the heavens, something in the future, something for us to look forward to but not so real and practical today on this earth.

According to the Bible, however, the church is exceedingly practical. In Matthew 18 the Lord Jesus said that if we have a problem with a brother and it cannot be solved with two or three brothers, we must bring it to the church. There is no doubt that this is the local church in practicality.

Then in the book of Acts we immediately see the first expression of the church on the earth: "The church which was in Jerusalem" (8:1). It does not speak of the church in the

heavens but the church in Jerusalem. It is a local church, and this local church is the expression of the universal church. In Acts 13:1 there is the local church in Antioch. This is another expression of the church, another local church. Now we can see one church with at least two expressions: one is in Jerusalem; the other is in Antioch. All local churches are the expressions of the one (universal) church.

As we continue through the New Testament, we see “the church which is in Cenchrea” (Rom. 16:1) and “the church of God which is in Corinth” (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1). The Bible never speaks of churches in one place but always of the church in a certain place—in other words, the church in Jerusalem, the church in Antioch, the church in Cenchrea, and the church in Corinth. Every local church is an expression of the one church. The church is one, but the expressions of the church are many, and these many expressions of the church are the local churches. “The churches of Judea” (Gal. 1:22; 1 Thes. 2:14), “the churches of the Gentiles” (Rom. 16:4), the churches of Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:41), “every church” in every place (1 Cor. 4:17; Acts 14:23), “the churches of God” (1 Cor. 11:16), “the churches of Christ” (Rom. 16:16), “all the churches of the saints” (1 Cor. 14:33), and “all the churches” (7:17) mentioned in the New Testament refer to local churches, which were many local expressions of the one universal church in the first century on this earth both in the Jewish world and in the Gentile world.

### **ONE CITY, ONE CHURCH**

Regarding the local churches, three provinces of the ancient Roman Empire are mentioned in the New Testament: Asia, Galatia, and Macedonia. Because Asia, Galatia, and Macedonia were all provinces, the Bible mentions “the churches of Asia” (1 Cor. 16:19), “the churches of Galatia” (Gal. 1:2; 1 Cor. 16:1), and “the churches of Macedonia” (2 Cor. 8:1). There were many churches in one province because there were many cities in a province.

In one province you may have many churches, but in one city you should not have many churches. One city should only have one church, one local church. So Revelation 1:11 tells us that in the province of Asia there were at least seven local churches in seven cities. There was a church in the city of Ephesus, in the city of Smyrna, in the city of Pergamos, in the city of Thyatira, in the city of Sardis, in the city of Philadelphia, and in the city of Laodicea. In each one of these seven cities, there was one local church. In many cities there are many local churches, but in one city there must be only one local church. The local churches are the expressions of the one universal church. When we say the practical expression of the church, we mean the local churches. (CWWL, 1968, vol.1, The Practical Expression of the Church, Chapter3)

### **THE LOCAL CHURCHES BEING THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS**

Revelation 1:1 says that God gave this revelation to show to His slaves the things that must quickly take place. If we know the revelation of Christ, we will realize that this is

not merely a prophecy of events that will transpire in the future. Rather, these are all matters related to Christ, the divine Lion, and His many doings. Verse 2 says of John, “Who testified the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, even all that he saw.” Then verse 9 says, “I John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” Since I first came to the United States, I have considered speaking about the testimony of Jesus, but the time was not ripe to speak in this way. At this time, though, I am burdened to release this point of the truth. The testimony of Jesus is the enlarged Christ. A testimony of a person is something that gives us a clear picture of him. If someone looks at a picture of me, they will know the kind of person I am; this is my “testimony.” In this universe there is a wonderful, mysterious person by the name of Jesus, but where is He today? He is in our city, but how can people see Him? No doubt, the local church, the church in each locality, is the testimony of Jesus today.

The testimony of Jesus is the practical church, not the church “in the air” or the church to come. A church yet to come cannot show Jesus to people, and a church “in the heavens” may show Jesus to the angels, but it cannot show Jesus to people on the earth. To show Jesus to the people in our locality, there is the need of a church in our locality that testifies who Jesus is. If someone in a locality wants to see Jesus, he must come to the church in that locality. Therefore, we need to consider whether we truly bear the image of Jesus. If we show someone an unclear picture of a person, it will not be a proper testimony of him with his image and appearance. We may see something in the picture, but it will not be the person we claim to show. The church in our locality must bear the image, expression, appearance, and virtues of Christ. (CWWL, 1975—76, vol.1 The testimony of Jesus, Chapter1)

### **The Local Churches Needed for the Producing of the New Jerusalem**

The fourth and final vision in Revelation is the vision of the New Jerusalem, the bride, the wife of the Lamb, in chapters 21 and 22. Nothing of the world or of Christendom will be in the New Jerusalem. Only those persons and matters that are in the church today will be there. We are in the churches with the goal that one day we will be the New Jerusalem. In this sense, the local churches are the steppingstones into the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is one, but the gates into it are twelve (21:12-13). In the same way, the church is one, but the churches are many. The local churches may be considered as the gates into the unique church, which consummates in the New Jerusalem. The gates of the New Jerusalem are toward the four directions of the compass, that is, toward the entire populated earth. Through the many churches, all the people of the world have an entrance into the New Jerusalem.

At the beginning of Revelation there are the local churches, and at the end there is the New Jerusalem. The local churches are for the New Jerusalem. We cannot skip over the

local churches today and enter directly into the New Jerusalem in the future. Many Christians today have passed over the world and apostate Christendom, but they also try to pass over the church in its local practicality, caring only for the church in a “heavenly” and abstract way. To pass over the world and Christendom is certainly right, but we must not pass over the local churches. We are not in the new heaven and the new earth yet. We are still on this earth today, and we cannot go on without the local churches. (CWWL, 1969, vol. 2 The Recovery of the Local Churches with the Sevenfold Spirit, Chapter1)

**References and Reading materials:**

- 1 . The Word of Life, Chapter 9.
- 2 . CWWL, 1968, vol. 1, The Practical Expression of the church, Chapter 3, 4, 6, 8-10.
- 3 . CWWL, 1969, vol. 3, The Recovery of the Local Churches with the Sevenfold Spirit, Chapter 4.
- 4 . CWWL, 1957, vol. 1, The Ground of the Church and the Service of the Body.
- 5 . CWWL, 1957, vol. 2, The Testimony and the Ground of the Church.
- 6 . Life-study of Romans, Chapter 32.
- 7 . The Conclusion of the New Testament, Message 192.
- 8 . The Divine Economy, Chapter 14. God’s New Testament Economy, Chapter 24.
- 9 . CWWL, 1969, vol. 2, The Recovery of the Local Churches with the Sevenfold Spirit. Chapter 1.

**General subject: Continue steadfastly in the breaking of bread  
until the Lord's coming back**

Scripture Reading: Luke22:19-20; Mark14:25;  
1Cor11:20, 23-26; 1Cor10:16-17, 21; Act2:42, 46; 20:7

**I. The Lord Himself told us that we should partake the bread breaking meeting—  
Luke22:19-20.**

**II. The breaking of bread is to eat the Lord's supper and to attend the Lord's table  
—Acts20:7; 1Cor.11:20; 10:21 :**

A. The Lord's supper is for His satisfaction—11:20

1. The emphasis of the Lord's supper is the remembrance of the Lord—vv.24-25.
2. The Lord's supper should serve as a reminder that we are living on earth for the Lord's satisfaction; eating the supper reminds us to have a life in the church to bring in the kingdom for the satisfaction of the Lord Jesus—Mark14:25.

B. The Lord's table refers to the enjoyment of the Lord in fellowship— 1Cor. 10:21:

1. The significance of the Lord's table is enjoyment for participation, enjoyment for fellowship—1:9.
2. Participating in the Lord's table is the best way for us to be spiritually nourished for our growth in life—10:3-4; 3:6-7; Eph4:16.

**III. The Lord's supper, His table, is a symbol of the entire New Testament economy  
of God—Mark 14:2-26**

A. God's New Testament economy is that God became flesh, passed through human living, died, resurrected, and became the life-giving Spirit to enter into us as our life and to dispense Himself into us so that we may be transformed for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ—John1:14; 1Cor.15:45b; 6:17; 2Cor.3:18; Rom.12:2; Eph.4:16.

B. This new practice of the new testament is to remember the Lord by eating the bread, which signifies His body given for us, His believers, and drinking the cup, which signifies His blood shed for our sins—11:24-25; Matt.26:28:

C. The significance of the eating the bread:

1. The bread signifies the Lord's physical body that He gave for us on the cross, in order to impart His life into us—Luke22:19.
2. The bread also signifies the Lord's mystical Body, the means for Christ to carry out His heavenly ministry for the accomplishment of the divine administration—Eph.1:22-23; 4:16; Rev.5:6.
3. By participating in the Lord's divine life, we become the mystical Body—of Christ, His enlargement; by enjoying the bread, we become Christ's mystical Body—1Cor10:17.
4. Eating the bread of the Lord's table indicates that the Lord comes into us as our life supply and then becomes us by being mingled with us—Col3:4.

D. The significance of drinking the cup:

1. The cup denotes blessing, which is God Himself as our portion—1Cor.10:16; Psa.16:5:
  - a. As sinners, our portion should have been the cup of God's wrath, but the Lord Jesus drank this cup for us—Rev.14:10; John18:11.
  - b. The Lord's salvation has become our portion, the cup of salvation that runs over, the content of which is God as our all-inclusive blessing—Psa.116:13; 23:5.
2. The blood of Christ as the blood of the new covenant ushers God's people into the new covenant, in which God gives His people the blessing—Luke22:20; Heb.8:10-12.
3. Ultimately, the blood of the covenant, the eternal covenant, leads God's people into the full enjoyment of God from now to eternity—13:20; Rev.7:14, 17; 22:1-2, 14, 17.

E. By instituting His supper, His table, the Lord Jesus indicated to His followers that He prepared them to receive His death and resurrection, to become His enlargement, His mystical Body, for the producing of the new man as the full development of the seed of the kingdom—Rom.6:6; Eph.2:5-6; 4:16; Mark4:26-29.

F. Today the Lord Jesus is still bringing us into the reality of His table for the fulfillment of God's economy—Matt.26:26-30; 1Cor11:23-26; Eph1:10.

**IV. We need to continue steadfastly in the breaking of the bread until Lord's coming back—1Cor11:26:**

- A. The blessing of the church in early stage is on continuing steadfastly in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, in the breaking of bread and the prayers—Act.2:42.
- B. The saints of the church in early stage often partake the breaking of bread; Other than the practice on the Lord's day, they even practice day by day continuing steadfastly from house to house—1Cor16:1; Act.2:46.
- C. The Lord Jesus wants us to remember Him as we break bread for His coming back; For this, we should keep His commands so that when the Lord come back, we will not miss Him—cc. Luke15:20.