

## THE RECOVERY OF THE CHURCH

(Friday—Second Morning Session)

Message Five

### The Recovery of the Church Life

Scripture Reading: Matt. 16:18; 18:17; Rev. 22:16; Eph. 2:21-22; 3:16-21; 1 Cor. 1:9

**I. Before the Lord Jesus comes back, He will fully recover the proper church life—Matt. 16:18; 18:17; Rev. 1:11; 22:16, 20:**

- A. Nothing touches the Lord's heart as much as the recovery of the church life.
- B. In this present age, before His coming back, the Lord must have the church life to shame His enemy.
- C. No matter what Satan does to damage the church, the Lord Jesus will return, and His church will be waiting for Him.

**II. The church life is Christ lived out through us in a corporate way—Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21a; 3:9-10:**

- A. The church life is a life in which we take Christ as our life and our person—Col. 3:4; 1 John 5:11-12; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:16-17.
- B. The Christian life is not a religious life; it is a life that is Christ Himself lived out through us—Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21a.
- C. When we live Christ, He joins us together in oneness, and Christ will be lived out through us in a corporate way—Rom. 12:4-5.
- D. Christ Himself is our life, and He is the Spirit within us; the church life is Christ Himself realized as life and as the life-giving Spirit dwelling in us—Col. 3:4; 1 John 5:11-12; 1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:17.
- E. The way to practice the church life is to put ourselves and everything on the cross and take Christ as life; then we will be permeated and saturated by Christ and with Christ—Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:4.
- F. We need to learn to be inward Christians who are being transformed for the practice of the church life—2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2-21:
  - 1. The church life is Christ Himself as the Spirit permeating, saturating, and transforming us—1 Cor. 15:45b; Eph. 3:16-17.
  - 2. The church life is a transformed life, not a natural life; it is Christ Himself as the subjective Spirit living within us—Rom. 12:2.
  - 3. The more we are transformed and filled with Christ, the more we will be living, real, and practical members of Christ and realize the genuine church life—Eph. 3:17; 2 Cor. 3:18.
  - 4. If we are transformed, it will be easy for us to be joined, knit, and built up together with others; this is to be built up in the church life—Eph. 2:21-22.

**III. The genuine experience of Christ always issues in and requires the church life—1 Cor. 1:2, 9, 30; 2:2, 10; 5:7-8; 10:3-4; 12:12-13, 27:**

- A. The more we experience Christ, the more something within requires that we live in the proper church life.

- B. When we experience Christ in a genuine and living way, He will require us to get into the church life because the dispensing of Christ into us is for the producing of the church—Rom. 8:11; 12:2-21.
  - C. God dispenses Himself into us as everything for the purpose of gaining His corporate expression, which is the church—Eph. 3:16-21.
  - D. When we take Christ as our life, our person, and our everything, this Christ within us will require the proper church life; in fact, the Christ in us will become the church life.
- IV. The church life is a life of being headed up under the unique headship of Christ—1:10, 22-23; 4:15-16:**
- A. God is heading up His chosen ones to be the Body of Christ, with Christ as the Head—1:4, 22-23:
    - 1. The first step in the heading up of all things in Christ is for God to place His sons under the unique headship of Christ—vv. 5, 10.
    - 2. When the church takes the lead to be headed up under the headship of Christ, God has a way to head up all other things—vv. 22-23, 10.
  - B. In the proper church life we are being headed up in Christ—1 Cor. 11:3:
    - 1. If we do not know what it is to be headed up in Christ, we cannot know the church—Eph. 1:10, 22-23.
    - 2. In the church life we are taking the lead to be headed up in Christ; for this we need to grow up into the Head, Christ, in all things—4:15-16.
- V. Fellowship is the reality of the church life—1 Cor. 1:9; 10:16-17; Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:3, 7:**
- A. This fellowship involves not only the oneness between us and the Triune God but also the oneness among all the believers—John 17:21-23; Eph. 4:3.
  - B. The church is the fellowship, the communion, the co-participation, the mutual enjoyment of Christ—1 Cor. 1:9.
  - C. Fellowship also implies a mutual flowing among the believers—1 John 1:3, 7:
    - 1. In the New Testament, fellowship describes the flowing both between us and the Lord and between us and one another—Phil. 2:1.
    - 2. The flow, the current, that we have in our spiritual fellowship involves both oneness and life; our fellowship is a flow of oneness.
    - 3. This fellowship, this mutual flowing, is the reality of the church life—1 Cor. 1:9, 2.
- VI. The church life is the continuation of the divine glorification—the continuation of Christ being glorified by the Father with the divine glory—John 12:23-24; 13:31-32; 17:1, 5, 22; Acts 3:13:**
- A. Glory is the expression of the divine life and the divine nature—7:2; Eph. 1:17:
    - 1. If we live by the divine life and nature, we will express the divine glory—4:18; 2 Pet. 1:4.
    - 2. The more we live by the divine life and the divine nature, the more divine glory there will be in the church—Eph. 3:21.
    - 3. The expression of this glory is the glorification of the Lord Jesus.

- B. The divine glorification began with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and it is continuing today—Luke 24:26; Rom. 6:4; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 3:21.
- C. The church has been produced in this glorification, and it continues to grow in the divine glorification—John 14:2; 15:1, 4-5; 16:21.
- D. Whatever the church does in the matter of fruit-bearing is a continuation of the divine glorification—15:8.

**VII. The church life is the corporate expression of Christ—Eph. 3:16-21; 4:16; 5:27:**

- A. The key to the church life as the expression of Christ is the spirit of the mind—4:23:
  - 1. If we live according to the spirit of the mind, there will be in the church life an expression of the divine character—v. 24; Col. 3:10.
  - 2. We will be a corporate people with the flavor of Christ and the expression of God.
- B. In our virtues of lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, and love, there should be the expression of Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God—Eph. 4:2-6.
- C. The church life must be filled with the aroma and flavor of Christ and with the character of God; such a living is the living of the Triune God through our humanity—Phil. 1:20-21a.
- D. For centuries the Lord has been longing for such a church life—Eph. 1:5, 9:
  - 1. We pray that before long this kind of church life will be fully practiced among us in the Lord’s recovery—Col. 1:9; 4:12; Matt. 6:10.
  - 2. May the Lord be satisfied by seeing such an expression of Himself through the recovery of the genuine church life throughout the earth.

**Excerpts from the Ministry:**

**CHRIST BUILDING THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH**

The church that Christ is building is the universal church, not the church in a nation or the church in a city. In Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus said to Peter, “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church.” In this verse the Lord considered Himself as the rock (cf. v. 16). Christ Himself is the very rock upon which the church is built. The church in Matthew 16:18 is the universal church, the one church in the entire universe.

**The Universal Church**

**Being the Unique Body of Christ**

The universal church is the unique Body of Christ. According to Ephesians 1:22-23, Christ is the Head, and the church is His Body. Christ the Head has only one Body (4:4). It is abnormal for a head to have more than one body. If you saw a person with one head and two bodies, surely you would consider him a monster. In Christianity today, the unique Body of Christ has been divided into countless “bodies.” These bodies are the many so-called churches in existence around the globe. All the different “churches” claim that their Head is Christ. This means that the one Head, Christ, has many bodies. This is not only wrong, but this is grotesque. In the midst of today’s abnormal situation, we strongly affirm that the Body of Christ is uniquely one. There is one Head and one Body. Surely this one Body cannot be a particular local church. This one Body must be the universal church, the church as a whole. Christ as the Head is unique, and the universal church as the Body is also unique.

## **The Universal Church Comprising All the Local Churches**

This one universal church, one Body, comprises all the local churches. There may be thousands of local churches, but together they constitute one universal church. Each local church is only a part of the universal church. The universal church is the unique Body of Christ, and all the local churches are simply the local expressions of that one Body.

The local churches compose the one universal church. Acts 15:41 speaks of the churches in Syria and Cilicia, and Romans 16:4 mentions the churches in the Gentile world. Second Corinthians 8:1 speaks of the churches in the province of Macedonia; Galatians 1:2, of the churches in the province of Galatia; and Revelation 1:4, of the churches in the province of Asia. According to Revelation 1:4, there were at least seven local churches in the one province of Asia. In the New Testament we can see many local churches, and together these local churches are considered as one universal church. Today in the Lord's recovery there are nearly six hundred local churches on six continents. All these local churches together are just one universal church.

### **THE BELIEVERS LIVING IN THE LOCAL CHURCHES**

The believers are living in the local churches. Actually, we cannot live directly in the universal church. It is impossible for us to live in the universal church without living in a local church. The Lord is building up the universal church, and each of us is living practically in a local church. In Matthew 18:17 the Lord said that if, as a believer, you have a problem with another believer, you should tell it to the church. Surely the church mentioned in this verse is not the universal church; it must be the church in the place where you are. If you are in Seoul and you have any problem, you should tell the problem to the church in Seoul. If you are in Pusan, you should go to the church in Pusan; if you are in Hong Kong, you should go to the church in Hong Kong; and if you are in New York, you should go to the church in New York. The church to which you should tell your problem is the local church.

### **The Local Churches Being the Local Expressions of the Body of Christ**

The local churches are the local expressions of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 2:22). There is only one Body, but there are many expressions. Universally, all the churches are one Body, and locally, every local church is a local expression of that universal Body. A local church is not the Body; it is only a part of the Body. It is a local expression of the Body. The church in Seoul is not the entire Body; it is a part of the entire Body as the Body's local expression.

### **All the Local Churches Constituting the One Body of Christ**

All the local churches constitute the one Body of Christ (4:4). In Matthew 16:18 the Lord said, "I will build My church." Here *the church* is in the singular number, indicating that it must be the universal church. But in the Acts and the Epistles, a number of times the Bible says "the churches"—the churches in Syria, the churches in Asia, the churches in Macedonia, and the churches in Galatia. How could the Bible refer first to one church and then to many churches? It is because the one church, the universal church, is the totality of all the churches, and all the churches are local constituents of the one universal church.

### **THE GENUINE GROUND**

Now we need to consider what the genuine ground of the church is. The ground denotes

the site on which a building is built. Every building is built upon a certain piece of land, and this land is the ground on which the building is constructed. The church has spread to many nations in Europe, North and South America, Africa, and Asia. In all the different nations the church is built upon the proper ground.

### **The Ground of Locality—One City, One Church**

The proper ground for the building of the church is the ground of locality. When the church spread to Korea, it first came to Seoul. The church is now being built in Seoul. Thus, the city of Seoul has become its ground.

In the Bible the church does not bear any particular name. In this respect the church is like the moon. The moon does not have a particular name; its name is simply the moon. We do not name the moon the American moon, the Chinese moon, the Korean moon, or the German moon. There is only one moon, not many moons. However, we may speak of the moon in Seoul, the moon in Osaka, or the moon in Shanghai. This does not denote many moons but one moon appearing in different cities.

The city is the ground on which the church is built. Therefore, taking the city as the ground, we may denote the church according to the city (Rev. 1:11). For example, you may say that you are a member of the church in Seoul. Since my wife and I live in Anaheim, California, we are members of the church in Anaheim. Many of the saints attending this conference came from different cities. We use the names of these cities to denote the different local churches. Because of this, we may say that there are many churches. But actually, the many local churches are simply the one universal church appearing in many cities.

We may say that there are many churches, yet the many churches are still just one church. Are we all in different churches, or are we in just one church? The proper answer is that, locally speaking, we are in many churches, but universally speaking, we are all in one church. Are you in the local churches, or are you in the universal church? It is wise to answer, "I am in the universal church by being in a local church." We are not in the Roman Church, the British Church, the American Church, or the Korean Church; we are in the universal church by being in the local churches. Since we are now in the city of Seoul, we should say that we are in the universal church by being in the church in Seoul. Although my wife and I reside in Anaheim, we should remember that during our stay with the saints in Seoul, we are not in the church in Anaheim but in the church in Seoul.

Now let me ask, of what church are you a member? The best answer is that you are a member of the universal church, which Jesus Christ is building, by being a member of a proper local church. While we are in Seoul, we are members of the universal church by being members of the church in Seoul. This is the proper practice of the church. We are members of the universal church by being members of one of the local churches. As long as we are members of a proper local church, we are members of the churches universally.

The ground of the church in Seoul is the city of Seoul. Therefore, in one city there can be only one church (Titus 1:5; cf. Acts 14:23). Furthermore, the city can never be divided; a city always remains one city. Thus, the ground of locality is permanently one. Just as the city cannot be divided, the church ground can never be divided. Since we do not have two cities in Seoul, we do not have two churches in Seoul. In Seoul there is only one city; hence, in Seoul there is only one church. This unique ground keeps the church in oneness.

Today in a given city there may be many so-called churches. This may be likened to one city having many city halls. If a particular city has more than one city hall, this would mean that that city is divided. In any city there is only one city hall. This preserves the oneness of the city. A local church is built on the ground of its locality. This unique ground may be termed

*the ground of locality.* The ground of locality is a protection to ensure that a church in a particular locality will always be preserved in oneness.

### **The Ground of the Genuine Oneness— One Body Universally**

The ground of the church should not be merely local; it should also be universal. Locally, the ground of the church is the ground of locality; universally, the ground of the church is the genuine oneness. Christ has only one Body. The oneness of Christ's Body is the universal ground of the church.

Suppose all the local churches in Korea are one with each other but are not one with the churches in other continents. If this were the case, the churches in Korea may have the local ground, the ground of locality, but they would not have the universal ground, the ground of the oneness of the Body. In the entire universe Christ has only one Body. All the local churches in the six continents—in North America, in South America, in Europe, in Africa, in Australia, and in Asia—are one Body. This is the universal ground of the genuine oneness.

The churches in England may say to the churches in Germany, "We are the churches in England, and you are the churches in Germany; therefore, don't bother us." Locally, they may be right, but universally, they are wrong. They may keep the local oneness, but they destroy the universal oneness. Locally, the ground of the church is the ground of locality, and universally, the ground of the church is the oneness of the universal Body of Christ. Hence, there is the local aspect of oneness, and there is also the universal aspect of oneness.

### **THE LOCAL ADMINISTRATION AND THE UNIVERSAL FELLOWSHIP**

At this point we need to consider another two items related to the proper practice of the church life: the local administration and the universal fellowship. In the proper church life the administration of the church is local, but the fellowship of the church is universal.

#### **The Administration Being Separate and Equal Locally**

The administration of each local church is separate from the administrations of all other local churches. Furthermore, the administrations of all the local churches are on an equal level. In administration, no church is higher than another church, and no church is lower. In a country or nation there are different levels of government. The highest is the central government, and under the central government are the provincial, or state, governments and the city governments. This kind of government with different levels may be likened to a pyramid. The central government is the highest level, and the provincial and city governments are on lower levels.

But in the proper church life there is not such a thing. All the local churches are on one level. In the Roman Catholic Church the highest level of administration is in the Vatican. The pope is at the top, and around him are the cardinals. The pope exercises control over Roman Catholics in all the nations. All over the earth he has a number of archbishops. Under the archbishops there are the bishops, and under the bishops are the priests. This kind of governmental organization is a religious hierarchy. Such a hierarchy should be condemned. In the proper practice of the church life, all the churches on the whole earth are on one level. On the top there is only one throne, the throne of the Head, Christ, in the heavens. Only the Head is on the throne. Under the Head all the churches are on the same level.

Suppose the church in Seoul is the largest local church in Korea. Would it be right for the church in Seoul to control all the other churches in Korea? Suppose the church in Pusan

is the second largest church in Korea. Would it be proper for the church in Pusan to be under the church in Seoul? Then, suppose there is a smaller church in the vicinity of Pusan. Would it be right for the church in Seoul, as the largest church, to control the church in Pusan, and for the church in Pusan to control the smaller church in the same vicinity? In answer to such questions I must say strongly that this kind of hierarchy and control is absolutely wrong.

In reference to the administration of the local churches, I have used two adjectives: *separate* and *equal*. The administration of the church in Seoul is separate from the administrations in Pusan and Geochang. The administrations of these churches are separate and equal. Even the administration of the smallest local church in Korea is equal with the administration of the church in Seoul. If I were an elder in the church in Seoul, I might consider that, since the church in Seoul is the largest, I should exercise some control over the smaller churches. The elders of the smaller churches may also consider that, since the church in Seoul is the largest and the oldest, they should surely submit to the elders in Seoul. In human eyes this may seem right, but in the practice of the proper church life, it is absolutely wrong.

Every local church has its own administration, and this administration is separate from all the others. It is also equal with all the others. Although the church in Seoul has been in existence for a number of years, and a much smaller church may have come into existence only two days ago, the administrations of these two churches are separate and on the same level. The administration of the church is local. No church, regardless of how large and mature it may be, should control another church.

### **The Fellowship Being One Universally**

Although the administration of the church is separate and equal locally, the fellowship of the church is one universally. In fellowship there is no separation. On this entire earth there is only one fellowship, and this fellowship is universally one. The fellowship of the church is one not merely in a particular nation but in the entire universe. There is not one fellowship in England, another fellowship in the United States, another fellowship in Germany, another fellowship in China, and another fellowship in Japan. In these nations there are separate churches in many cities, but there is only one fellowship in the entire universe.

This fellowship is called the fellowship of the apostles. Acts 2:42 says that the three thousand who believed in the Lord Jesus and became the members of the church on the day of Pentecost continued steadfastly in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles. In the church both the fellowship and the teaching should be one universally. In all the churches we should teach only one thing—Jesus Christ as the Spirit to be our life for the producing of the church. This is the teaching of the apostles. If a different teaching comes in, we must reject it (1 Tim. 1:3-4). We accept only one kind of teaching, the teaching of the apostles, and have only one fellowship, the apostles' fellowship.

This fellowship is expressed at the Lord's table. When we eat the bread, we participate in the fellowship of the body of Christ, and when we drink the cup, we participate in the fellowship of the Lord's blood (1 Cor. 10:16). The Lord's body and blood are unique, and the fellowship of Christ's body and blood is also unique. By partaking of the one bread, we have become the mystical Body of Christ (v. 17). Therefore, this universal fellowship is the fellowship of the Body of Christ. It is the fellowship passed on to us by the apostles. Hence, it is the apostles' fellowship, and this fellowship is with the Triune God. Such a fellowship must be universal. In administration the churches are separate locally, but in fellowship they are united to be one universally.

## **THE ELDERSHIP**

### **The Elders Not Lording It over the Believers**

The elders should not lord it over the believers. Instead, the elders should be patterns, examples, taking the lead to love the Lord, to seek after the truth, to grow in life, and to serve in the church (Matt. 20:25-28; 1 Pet. 5:1-3). They should not think that, as elders, they are rulers over the believers. This kind of concept is wrong. In Matthew 23:8-12 the Lord Jesus said that all the believers are on the same level. We all are brothers, including the elders. Among us there should be no lord except the Lord. We have only one Lord, and we have only one Leader. This unique Leader, the Lord Jesus, is our Guide, our Instructor, and our Director. The elders are not lords governing the believers; all the elders are still only brothers. They should set themselves up as a pattern, as an example, to take the lead in loving the Lord, in seeking after the truth, in growing in life, in preaching the gospel, and in serving in the churches. This is the right way.

## **THE GROUND AND THE REALITY**

The ground of locality is the outward expression of oneness (1 Cor. 1:12-13). As we all are meeting in Seoul, the city of Seoul is our ground. But this is merely the outward oneness. The inward reality of oneness is the Spirit (Eph. 4:4). We must have the Spirit moving in us, living in us, and working through us. Outwardly, we have the ground of locality to keep the oneness; inwardly, we live by the Spirit for the oneness of the Body. If we have only the ground of locality without the Spirit, we have something merely outward with no inward reality. We need to have both the outward ground of locality and the inward reality of the Spirit. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1984*, vol. 4, "Vital Factors for the Recovery of the Church Life," pp. 488-497)