

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AND THE CHURCH LIFE

(Saturday—Second Morning Session)

Message Five

The Exercise of the Kingdom for the Building Up of the Church

Scripture Reading: Matt. 16:16-18, 21-28

I. Matthew 16 reveals the way to build up the church and also reveals the enemy of the building:

- A. Christ, the Son of the living God, builds the church on Himself as the rock, with stones such as Peter, a transformed person—vv. 16-18.
- B. The gates of Hades, Satan's authority or power of darkness, attack the church to frustrate the Lord from building up the church—v. 18.
- C. In order to build the church, the Lord had to pass through death and enter into resurrection—v. 21:
 - 1. The church was produced through Christ's death and resurrection—John 12:24.
 - 2. The way to build up the church is to be crucified and resurrected—cf. 2 Cor. 4:10-12; Gal. 2:20.
 - 3. The church exists and is built up only in the realm of resurrection through crucifixion—Gen. 2:21-22; cf. Eph. 4:15-16.
- D. Peter, with a good heart, rebuked the Lord and tried to prevent the Lord from going to Jerusalem to be crucified—Matt. 16:22:
 - 1. It was not Peter but Satan who came out through one of the gates of Hades, the gate of Peter's self, to try to frustrate the Lord from building up the church—v. 23.
 - 2. The self, the mind, and the soul-life are the main gates through which Satan comes forth to attack and damage the church—vv. 23-26.

II. The building up of the church depends on the shutting up of the gates of Hades through the exercise of three keys—vv. 24-26:

- A. We need to learn to exercise the key of denying the self—v. 24:
 - 1. The flesh is the created body corrupted by sin, the nature of Satan (Rom. 6:12, 14; 7:8, 11, 17, 20); the self is the created soul plus the satanic mind, the mind of Satan.
 - 2. When the mind, the thought, of Satan was injected into the human soul, the human soul became the self, the embodiment of Satan—Gen. 3:1-6; Matt. 16:22-23:
 - a. Before Eve took the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil into her body, the thought, the mind, of Satan was injected into her soul.
 - b. After Eve's mind was poisoned by Satan's thought, her emotion was aroused, and then her will was exercised to make a decision to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

- c. By this time every part of the soul—the mind, the emotion, and the will—had been poisoned.
 - d. The self is the embodiment of the soul-life, which is expressed through the mind; thus, the self, the soul-life, and the mind are three-in-one.
 - e. Behind these three is Satan, who manipulates the self in order to damage the church—v. 23.
3. The self is the soul declaring independence from God:
- a. The Lord does not have regard for what we do; rather, He has regard for our dependence on Him—7:21-23; cf. Josh. 9:14.
 - b. The enemy of the Body is the self; because the self is something independent, the self is the greatest problem, the greatest frustration and opposition, to the building up of the Body:
 - 1) We should depend not only on God but also on the Body, on the brothers and sisters—Exo. 17:11-13; Acts 9:25; 2 Cor. 11:33.
 - 2) The Lord and the Body are one; hence, if we are dependent on the Body, we are also dependent on the Lord, and if we are independent of the Body, we are spontaneously independent of the Lord.
 - 3) When we are dependent, the self is gone, and instead of the self, we have the Lord's presence and are full of peace.
 - 4) Only when the self-life has been utterly dealt with by the cross are we able to touch the reality of the Body of Christ and come to know the Body.
4. The following are some expressions of the self (see *Hymns*, #866, stanzas 5 and 6):
- a. With the self there are ambition, pride, and self-exaltation—Matt. 20:20-28; 1 Pet. 5:5; Rom. 12:3; Num. 12:1-10; 16:1-3; Phil. 2:3-4.
 - b. With the self there are self-righteousness, self-justification, and exposing, criticizing, and condemning others—Matt. 9:10-13; Luke 18:9-14; 1 Pet. 4:8; John 3:17; 8:11; Luke 6:37; Matt. 7:1-5.
 - c. With the self there are introspection and self-despising—S. S. 2:8-9; 1 Cor. 12:15-16.
 - d. When we are in the self, we can be offended by the church, the leading ones, or the saints—Matt. 6:14-15; 18:21-35; Mark 11:25-26; Col. 3:13.
 - e. With the self there are disappointment and discouragement—cf. Rom. 8:28-29; 2 Cor. 4:1.
 - f. With the self there are self-love, self-preservation, self-seeking, and self-pity—Matt. 13:5, 20-21.
 - g. With the self there are murmurings and reasonings—Exo. 16:1-9; Phil. 2:14.
 - h. With the self there is natural affection (friendship) based on natural taste and preference—Matt. 12:46-50; Phil. 2:2b; 1 Cor. 12:25.
 - i. With the self there are the matters of being opinionated and dissenting—John 11:21, 23-28, 39; Acts 15:35-39; cf. 1 Cor. 7:25, 40.
 - j. When we are in the self, we are individualistic and independent—16:12.

5. If we exercise the key of denying the self to lock up the self, it is impossible for us to be offended; blessed are those who are not offended—cf. Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60:
 - a. If we can be offended, it is proof that we are full of self.
 - b. If my self has been locked up, I will not be offended no matter what you do to me or how you treat me—Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60.
6. We need to learn to exercise the key of denying the self to lock up the self in every situation:
 - a. Whether a situation is for us or against us, whether the brothers love us or hate us, we must lock up the self—2 Cor. 12:15.
 - b. If the self is locked up, the church will be built up.
- B. We need to learn to exercise the key of taking up the cross—Matt. 16:24:
 1. To take up the cross simply means to take up the will of God; the cross is God's will—26:39; John 18:11:
 - a. The Lord Jesus was not forced to go to the cross like a criminal; He was willing to go because the cross was God's will—Matt. 26:39.
 - b. The Lord Jesus was willing to be crucified so that through His death, His life might be released to produce and build up the church—John 12:24.
 - c. The cross was a great suffering to the Lord, but He cared not for the suffering but for the fulfillment of God's purpose—Heb. 12:2; Col. 1:24.
 2. *Let him...take up his cross* (Matt. 16:24) means that we are not forced to bear the cross but that we willingly take it up:
 - a. Our husband, wife, and children are God's will and are therefore our cross.
 - b. The one church is God's will, and every brother and sister in the church is God's will; thus, to bear the cross is to bear the church and to bear all the saints so that we would have the genuine oneness—John 17:21-23; Eph. 4:3, 13; 1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 2:2.
 3. We need not only to take up our cross but also to carry our cross, that is, to remain on the cross, keeping our old man under the termination of the cross day by day—Luke 14:27; Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:10; 1 Cor. 15:31:
 - a. We have received the divine life through the Lord's crucifixion; now, in order to be built up in this life, we need to willingly and happily take up the cross.
 - b. We should not care for our taste, feeling, or consciousness; rather, we should care only for God's will, which is that we would have the genuine oneness—John 17:21-23; Eph. 4:3, 13; 1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 2:2.
- C. We need to learn to exercise the key of losing the soul-life—Matt. 16:25:
 1. To save the soul-life is to please the self by allowing the soul to have its enjoyment; to lose the soul-life is to lose the enjoyment of the soul:
 - a. God created man as a soul (Gen. 2:7) with the need for enjoyment.
 - b. Receiving God into man's spirit and expressing God through the soul should be man's joy and amusement—cf. Neh. 8:10; Rom. 14:17.
 - c. The Lord Jesus lost the enjoyment of His soul in this age so that He might find His soul-life in the coming age (John 10:11; Isa. 53:12); we must do the same (John 12:24-26).

- d. If we save our soul-life in this age, we will lose it in the coming age, but if we lose our soul-life in this age, we will find it in the coming age—Matt. 16:25.
 - e. We need to love the Lord Jesus and to hate and deny our soul-life, not loving our soul-life even unto death—1 Cor. 16:22; 2:9; Luke 14:26; 9:23; Rev. 12:11.
2. If we are willing to lose all our present soulish enjoyment for the Lord's sake, for the sake of the church, and for the sake of all the saints, others will be nourished by us and will be built up through us; this is not a suffering but a joy—Heb. 12:2.
 3. The kingdom reward of sharing the King's joy in ruling over the earth in the manifestation of the kingdom depends upon whether we save our soul-life in this age or lose it—Matt. 16:25-28; 25:21, 23.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

**DENYING THE SELF
FOR THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCH**

In Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus spoke of the gates of Hades, which signify the power of darkness. In the Bible Hades is the place of death, where people are held in the power of death. Hence, it is a region where death prevails. After the Lord Jesus died, He took a tour of Hades. Acts 2:24 indicates that Hades tried its best to hold Him. However, because Christ is the resurrection, He could not be held by death. Death cannot overcome resurrection; on the contrary, resurrection always subdues death.

THE GATES AND THE KEYS

The gates are mentioned in verse 18 of Matthew 16, and the keys, in verse 19. The enemy has the gates, but we have the keys. The gates do not overcome the keys, but the keys control the gates. The enemy's gates are much bigger than the keys, but the gates are nonetheless under the control of the keys, just as the doors of a building are controlled by the keys that open and close them. Hallelujah, we have the keys! Satan has many gates, but we have the keys.

Now we need to consider what the keys of the kingdom are. Shortly after I was saved, I was taught by a great Bible teacher that the keys of the kingdom given to Peter were two in number. Peter used the first key to open the gate for the Jewish believers to enter the kingdom of the heavens on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38-42), and he used the other key to open the gate for the Gentile believers to enter the kingdom of the heavens in the house of Cornelius (10:34-48). I still believe that this teaching is correct. But, as we shall see, there is more to this matter of the keys than this.

In order to interpret the Bible, we must follow the basic principle of taking care of the context of every verse. In Matthew 16 Christ, the Son of the living God, the church, the kingdom, the gates of Hades, and the keys of the kingdom are all revealed. Verse 21 reveals what must take place for Peter to be transformed from a Simon to a Peter. For this, the Lord Jesus had to be crucified and resurrected. It was through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ that Simon, the son of Jonah, became Peter, a son of God. Without this transaction it would have been impossible for Simon Barjona to become Peter.

THE LORD AS THE PATTERN AND THE PATHWAY

Verse 22 says, "Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You!" With a good heart Peter was telling the Lord that God should be merciful to Him. This verse is difficult to translate. Some say it should be rendered, "Lord, pity Yourself." According to this rendering, Peter was telling the Lord to be merciful to Himself. Another translation is, "God be merciful to You, Lord." It is difficult to determine the subject, whether it is God or the Lord Jesus. At any rate, the emphasis is on the self. Whether the subject is God or the Lord Jesus, the self is emphasized.

Verse 23 says, "But He turned and said to Peter, Get behind Me, Satan!" Then in verses 24 and 25 the Lord said to His disciples, "If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his soul-life shall lose it; but whoever loses his soul-life for My sake shall find it." According to these verses, the Lord is the pattern and the pathway. If anyone desires to come after Him, that is, take Him as the pattern and the pathway, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Him.

SATAN COMING OUT THROUGH THE GATES

Verses 21 through 26 are necessary for the interpretation of verses 16 through 19. As we have seen, verse 18 speaks of the gates, and verse 19, of the keys. In order to know what the gates and the keys are, we need to consider verses 21 through 26. Satan comes out through the gates. The first gate is the self. This means that we ourselves are one of the gates of Hades through which Satan comes out. Satan may come out through the gate of self even when we have a good heart. Whether our heart is good or evil, self is the first gate through which Satan comes out. In addition to the self, verses 21 through 26 also speak of the mind and the soul, both of which are also gates through which Satan comes out. Thus, the self, the soul, and the mind are the main gates through which Satan comes forth. Many times Satan has come out through your mind because your mind has been an open gate for him.

THE THREE KEYS

Verses 21 through 26 not only expose the gates but also reveal the keys. The first key is the denial of the self. Self is an open gate, but self-denial is the key that shuts it. The second key is the taking up of the cross. This means that the cross is a key to shut up the self, the soul, and the mind. The third key is the losing of the soul. Therefore, the three keys here are the denying of the self, the taking up of the cross, and the losing of the soul. Day by day we need to use these keys. Yes, Peter used the keys on the day of Pentecost and in the house of Cornelius. But we also need the three subjective keys found in this portion of the Word.

The principalities and powers in the heavenlies are gates. But in addition, the self, the soul, and the mind are three crucial subjective gates. If these subjective gates are locked, no principalities or powers will be able to come in.

THE CHURCH DAMAGED BY THE SELF

My burden in this chapter is not interpretation; it is application. Throughout history the church has not been damaged mainly by Judaism or Gnosticism; it has been damaged mainly by the self. Martin Luther once said that although he was afraid of the pope, he was more afraid of the stronger pope, the self, within his own heart. Nothing damages and frustrates the building up of the church more than the self. Self is the embodiment of the soul, which is expressed through the mind. Thus the self, the soul, and the mind are three-in-one. Behind these three is Satan, who manipulates the self in order to damage the church life. We all need to heed this word for ourselves.

Simply because of the self, certain saints have left the church life. In 1948 there was a certain brother in Shanghai who was full of self and whose soul was an open gate that no one could lock. He was ambitious to be an elder, and he often complained about the situation in the church. One day he stood up in a meeting to speak many negative things. After his negative speaking, I said, "Brother, there is no need for us to waste our time. If you can find a better place, please tell me about it, and I'll go there with you. But if you cannot find a better place, please be quiet and remain here." He had nothing more to say. A short while later, he stopped coming to the church meetings, began a meeting in his home, and hired a traveling preacher. With the financial support of this dissenting brother, this preacher wrote a long article opposing Brother Nee. No doubt, this brother damaged the church life. At the same time, he himself lost the church life. This was due to the self. With this brother there was no building, for he did not become a Peter but remained the son of Barjona. This was the result of Satan coming out through the self.

THE SERIOUSNESS OF BEING OFFENDED

Let me honestly and lovingly say a word to you all: It is a very serious matter to be offended. Do not casually say, "I have been offended in the church life. The elders and other leading ones have offended me." Although others may offend you, you will always be the first to suffer. On the one hand, I condemn all the offenses; but on the other hand, I must say that there is no excuse for your being offended. If we were not in ourselves, we could not be offended. If I exercise the key of self-denial to lock up the self, it will be impossible for me to be offended. The reason we are offended is that the self is so open and prevailing. Through the open gate of the self, Satan comes forth, and we are offended.

Perhaps in certain matters the church may be wrong. Do not think that the church is no longer the church because it is wrong. For example, when your child makes a mistake, he is still your child. Whether the church is right or wrong, it is still the church. Although you may be offended by something or someone in the church, do not make any excuses for yourself. This frustrates the building up of the church.

USING THE KEY OF SELF-DENIAL

As we have seen, Matthew 16 speaks about the building up of the church and also about the gates of Hades and the keys of the kingdom. Without the keys to lock the gates, the church cannot be built. Because there has been so little exercise of these keys, the church has not yet been built. We may talk a great deal about the building. However, when certain things take place to touch us, the self is open. Because we are open to Hades, something from Hades—Satan—comes out. How we need to use the key of self-denial to lock the self! The way to keep from being offended by others is to lock up yourself by denying yourself. Blessed are those who are not offended.

There is no excuse for being offended. When the Lord Jesus comes and sets up His judgment seat, He will tell us to settle our account with Him. He may ask us why we were offended in certain places. But if we make excuses for ourselves, the Lord will not accept them. The problem is not the offense—it is the self. Certain viruses are very contagious. However, no virus can cause a table to be sick. If you can be offended, it is a proof that you are full of self. If my self has been locked up, I will not be offended no matter what you do to me or how you treat me.

NO NATURAL AFFECTION

I have spoken about being offended. Now I wish to say a word about natural affection.

In the church life there should not be any natural friendships. If you regard certain ones as your special friends, it also is an indication that you are full of self. Certain ones match your taste, and you fit their taste. You feed one another's taste. This is very damaging, and it hinders the building. Among the brothers and sisters in the church, there should be a pure divine love, but there should not be any personal affection. If any personal affection creeps into your relationship with the saints, it proves that you are full of self. In the church life there should be no such affection. To me, all the brothers and sisters are the same. To have a favorite among the brothers and sisters is to be full of self. It is not to be a Peter but a son of Jonah. This damages the building.

We need to receive the mercy of the Lord to regard all the saints as our brothers and sisters but none as our friends. For the Lord's building in the church life, everything natural must be extracted. There should be no natural affection, relationship, or feeling. Rather, we all must be fearful of natural affection and shun it. Whenever a brother loves me in a naturally affectionate way, I am frightened. That is the time for me to exercise the key to deny the self. I will lock myself and avoid that brother's affection. Whenever you discover that you are feeding a brother's self and that he is feeding yours, you must use the key to lock the gate of the self. If you do not lock up the self, Satan will come out through the door of the self. Then you and others will remain sons of Jonah. You will not be Peters, and it will be impossible for the Lord to build the church with you.

THE HIDDEN SELF

More than nineteen hundred years ago, the Lord Jesus prophesied that He would build the church. But why, after so many centuries, do we not yet have the building? It is because the key of self-denial has been neglected. In these chapters I have no desire to talk about doctrines, but I do have a heart to fellowship with you all. Oh, the hidden self! Peter had a good heart, but within him there was the hidden self that became the gateway for Satan to come out. I appreciate the Lord's discernment. If I had been the Lord, I would not have had the discernment but would have appreciated Peter's concern. However, the Lord Jesus immediately discerned that Satan had come out through the gate of the self.

I am glad that in the churches we have the brothers' houses and the sisters' houses. But, through experience, we have realized that there are two kinds of results from living in such a house. Some form natural friendships; others become dissatisfied and disappointed. However, no matter what the situation may be, you should not be disappointed. To be disappointed is a proof that you are in the self. The self of those who live in the brothers' and sisters' houses must be locked up. If the self is locked up, we shall have the building. If you exercise the key of self-denial, others may be offended, but you will not be offended. Instead, you will be built up because the self in you has been locked up. We all need to use the prevailing key of self-denial to lock the self, the soul, and the mind. Otherwise, the building up of the church will be frustrated.

CRUCIFIED AND RESURRECTED FOR THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCH

Verse 24 says, "If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." The "Me" in this verse means a great deal. This "Me" is the pattern, the pathway. Furthermore, this "Me" is the crucified and resurrected "Me." If we are not crucified and resurrected, there can be no church. The church comes into existence through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Not only our self, which is defiled, but even the Lord's pure, sinless self had to be denied. If the Lord had not denied Himself and gone to the cross, He could not have been resurrected, and there would have been no church. We must follow

after Him. This means that we must deny ourselves as He did and must allow ourselves to be crucified as He did. Without this, it is impossible for the church to be built up. Whenever we sense that we are feeding the self-life of another, we must say, "Lord, I will follow You. I will stop having so much contact with this brother." If you do this, the building of the church will proceed.

KNOWING CHRIST, THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION, AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS

When you read this word, you may feel that you are not able to fulfill it. No, we cannot do it. This is why we need to pay attention to Paul's word in Philippians 3:10: "To know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." Here we see that Paul desired to know three things: Christ, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings. The "Him" in Philippians 3:10 is the "Me" in Matthew 16:24. We are not able to deny ourselves and go to the cross. But by the power of Christ's resurrection, we can do these things. Furthermore, through His resurrection we can enter into the fellowship of His sufferings and be conformed to His death. Although in ourselves we cannot do this, we have One living within us who can do it.

WORKING OUT OUR SALVATION

In Philippians 2:12 Paul says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." In the New Testament the word *salvation* is used in various ways. Regarding our eternal salvation, we cannot work anything out. The Lord Jesus has done everything to accomplish this. But we do need to work out the salvation that enables us to be built up together. For the building of the church, we need to work out this salvation.

The entire book of Philippians is a book on the building. Among the Philippians there was division and the lack of building. Thus, the apostle Paul wrote this Epistle to help them to be built up. Paul was telling them to work out the building, for this building was their salvation. Many Christians today are missing the building. This indicates that they are not working out their salvation.

Suppose you are living in the brothers' house. When you first moved in, you thought that living with the brothers would be wonderful. However, after a short period of time, you found that you could not get along with certain brothers. There is nothing you should do about this. Rather, remain in that brothers' house to be killed. Although you cannot suffer this killing, there is One in you who can. You simply need to follow Him to work out your salvation.

GOD WORKING IN US

Philippians 2:13 tells us how to work out our salvation: "It is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure." God is in us doing this work. We simply need to exercise the key of self-denial and say Amen to the Lord. We need to exercise the key to lock up the self. If we all learn this lesson, we shall be built up together, and we shall become a strong testimony. We shall be able to testify that although we have different characters, dispositions, temperaments, and backgrounds, we can be one and can be built up together. This is precisely what the Lord is dealing with in Matthew 16.

LOCKING UP THE SELF FOR THE BUILDING

Matthew 16 has been veiled for centuries. Perhaps you have read this chapter again and again and again without knowing what the Lord was really saying. But now the Lord has given us further understanding to see how the church can be built up through the exercise

of the keys. We need to be afraid of ourselves and use the key to lock up ourselves. We should do this not only in the church life but also in our family life. If you exercise the key to lock up the self, you will have no problems in your marriage. All the problems are from Satan who comes out through the gate of the self. When this gate is locked, Satan is confined, and there are no problems.

In these chapters I am not concerned with mere doctrine. Instead, I am presenting to you what I have learned through years of suffering. We need to find out how the church can be built up. If you say that the church is built up through the cross and the resurrection, that is still too doctrinal. We need to go on to learn to exercise the key of self-denial to lock up the self in every situation. Whether a situation is for you or against you, you must lock up the self. Whether the brothers love you and welcome you or hate you and do not welcome you, you still need to lock up your self. If you do this, there will be no problems, and it will be possible to have the building of the church. But without the locking up of the self, there is no possibility of having the building. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1978, vol. 1, "The Exercise of the Kingdom for the Building of the Church," pp. 69-77*)