

# The Church and the Work

## III

### *Church Affairs*

WATCHMAN NEE

Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc.

New York

*THE CHURCH AND THE WORK*

(In Three Volumes)

Copyright ©1982  
Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc.  
New York  
All Rights Reserved

ISBN 0-935008-57-8 Cloth Edition

ISBN 0-935008-58-6 Paper Edition

Available from the Publishers at:

11515 Allecingie Parkway  
Richmond, Virginia 23235

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Ten years after the original publication in Chinese of *Rethinking the Work*\* (1938), there arose in China a need for a further reconsideration of the Work. Yet it was not because the principles or practices of the church laid down in that book proved to be wrong or impracticable, but because light on the parallel subject of the Work was found by that time to be insufficient. Thus in 1948 further instructions concerning the principles and practices of the Work were given during training sessions held at Mount Kuling to the workers who gathered there.

*Rethinking the Work* had in its day dealt especially with the understanding that *the church is local*, based as that book mainly was on *Acts chapter 13 onwards*; but later, by means of the Kuling talks which now comprise this *Church Affairs* volume, the fact that *the Work was found to be regional* was presented in 1948 on the basis of *Acts chapters 1-12*. And this latter book thus makes more complete the author's treatment of the overall subject of the church and the Work.

The opening chapter of this final volume of the trilogy serves as an introduction,\*\* for it sets forth the complementary concept of the Work as being regional. Following this, twelve different aspects of church affairs are then discussed. Since these talks were originally

---

\*The reader needs to have it brought to his attention again that this Chinese publication of January 1938 appeared in *English* in Great Britain under the title *Concerning Our Missions* (London, 1939), and was much later published in the United States under the more popularly known title of *The Normal Christian Church Life* (Washington, D.C., 1962). For the complete publishing history of the book, see the copyright page of Volume Two of this present trilogy.—*Translator*

\*\*Which is the substance of an address given by the author to fellow workers at Mount Kuling near Foochow, China, on August 19, 1948.—*Translator*

spoken to younger fellow workers, a special approach to the subject will be evident to the reader. They were never meant to be a general treatise on behavior in the house of God; instead, they were presented in a form for helping younger workers to know how they were to conduct themselves as they were sent forth by the Lord to establish churches everywhere. It was not unlike the apostle Paul in his giving instructions to young Timothy so that the latter might “know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3.15).

These talks are now being offered to the reader as guidelines and not as rules and regulations. The aim in the publication of such a volume today is not towards uniformity of outward appearance, but is only meant to illustrate that these principles can in fact be put into practice. Spiritual principles must be applied spiritually. They will become letters if only applied technically; and, as we know from the Scriptures, “the letter kills” (2 Cor. 3.6). May those who read this volume keep this in mind continually so as not to be tempted to treat this study as a technical manual or some kind of fixed procedure which they must follow, but instead be truly benefited by receiving whatever divine light (or principles) may be found in its pages.

# CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	7
1 The Order of Church Offices	21
2 Priestly Ministry	43
3 Levitical Ministry	59
4 The Minister of God's Word in the Church	67
5 Various Meetings in the Church	79
6 The Deacons Office	89
7 District Meetings	109
8 The Local Assembly That Is Also a Work Center	115
9 The Relation between a Local Assembly and the Work	125
10 The Coordination of the Workers	137
11 Co-Workers and Apostles—Who Are They?	165
12 The Matter of Finance	183
<i>Let Us Talk</i>	197

Scripture quotations are from the  
American Standard Version of the Bible  
(1901), unless otherwise indicated.

## Introduction\*

During the disturbed period which has now passed,\*\* we had to acknowledge that we found some practical difficulties in the conduct of the Work of the Lord. This has led us to inquire again of Him and of His word; and accordingly, in recent months, in conferences at Foochow and Shanghai, we have spent considerable time in seeking God's help to solve our problems. What follows is the outcome of those inquiries.

Whereas in the past we had received from the Scriptures much clear light on the church, we confess that we have had insufficient light on the parallel subject of the Work of God. *Rethinking the Work*, which was published in January of 1938 after our 1937 conference for workers at Hankow, presents what we understood at that time on the matter of the church. What we saw then, and stated plainly in that book, is that the question of the churches is one of locality, and that this local character of the church cannot be clearer to us even today. With regard to the Work, however, we have lacked the same clarity, and we now see the reason for this. It was because, in our approach to the matter then, we took as our guide the history which began with the sending forth of Barnabas and Saul, and overlooked what went before. We stressed Antioch and practically ignored Jerusalem. We made Acts 13 our starting point and missed the purpose of Acts 1-12. We did not, at that time, have sufficient light to understand this.

But now God has in mercy come to our aid. The difficulties and trials of the past decade or so have driven us back to those earlier chapters in Acts and shown us their value in a new way. So with

---

\* See the second footnote of the *Translator's Preface* above.—*Translator*

\*\* A reference to the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945).—*Translator*

humility we can say this, that just as at Hankow in 1937 we confessed that never before had we such clarity concerning the latter part of Acts which deals with the churches, so today, because of the help we have recently received at Foochow and Shanghai, we can thank Him that never till now have the first twelve chapters of the book of Acts been so real to us.

### ***The Work Is Regional***

Among several things which have been shown to us, the first is *the important principle of region* or area. Whereas the churches are local, the Work, we have come to see, is regional. To us this is something which has become crystal clear from the Scriptures. To put the matter differently, a church is in one locality, whereas for purposes of the Work, many such localities together form one region. This is evident from the New Testament, although ten, or even five years ago, we did not have the light to see it. It is apparent to us now that the Twelve worked in one region, while Paul, Silas, Timothy and Barnabas worked in another—or in more than one. And if we study the Epistles we shall discern a number of such different regions. Let us note also the words in 2 Corinthians 10, where we find Paul writing of his labors as follows: “Now we will not boast out of measure, but according to the measure of the rule which the God of measure has apportioned to us, to reach to you also” (v.13 Darby). He seems here to allude to the matter of appointed spheres of work, as though God drew a circle for them and drew another circle for another group of His servants, and that within these limits was to be found the sphere of work of a particular company of workers.

This, therefore, is the difference of operation, as we see it, between the church and the Work: that the Work is regional, but the churches are not. No church can exercise jurisdiction over other localities, for its authority is essentially local. The sphere of the

Work, on the other hand, is wider and embraces several localities in a single area or field.

At one time we tended to confuse the sphere of the Work with the locality of the church. Today we see clearly that the Work comprises a number of localities, and that its sphere of operation is wide. For example, we find Peter and John cooperating as a team or unit in the Work of one region, while Paul and Timothy labor together as another unit in a different region. The different groups of workers maintain contact and have fellowship with one another, yet they equally have their respective working areas within which they move.

### *The Region Has a Center*

We come now to a *second principle*. Each region, we find, has a center; whereas the churches, of course, have no such center. The church in Jerusalem cannot—as a “central church”—rule the church in Samaria. No local church can control another local church, nor can one church control several churches. The widest scope of a church’s authority is its locality; no more. There is no such thing as a regional church or an association of churches. The Church has neither regional council nor headquarters. But with the Work it is otherwise. The Work has a region and the region has a center, and that is why in the book of Acts we see Jerusalem as a center and Antioch as another center.

This will help to explain what may until now have been a problem to some of us. If we have not yet seen that the Work is centralized in this way, then we shall probably have found Jerusalem a difficulty to us rather than a help. We have not understood its special character. While the whole New Testament confirms that the Church—in its practical expression—is local, nevertheless there seems something special to be learned from both Jerusalem and Antioch. What we have come to realize today is that the church in Antioch is one thing, while a Work taking Antioch as its center is another. From the

standpoint of the churches, Jerusalem and Antioch are of an equal level with, say, Samaria; but from the standpoint of the Work, Jerusalem is a center and Antioch is also a center.

At the beginning of Acts the Lord's promise is that, when the Spirit is come, they shall witness "in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (1.8). Here Jerusalem is distinctly a working center in the divine plan. Again, in the thirteenth chapter, there emerges a new beginning at Antioch. The Holy Spirit makes a new departure, and from there men arise and go forth to work in other places. Thus Antioch is constituted another center of the Work. It was the Spirit who made a beginning at Jerusalem, and now it is the Spirit who makes a beginning at Antioch.

In Jerusalem Peter, we must remind ourselves, was an elder. Here is something of value we have discovered through reconsidering Jerusalem. In days past we have stressed Peter as apostle, but have overlooked Peter as elder. In Jerusalem he had a double ministry. With regard to that city he was—like James and John—an elder of the church; but with regard to the whole Work that was centered there, he was an apostle and so were they. For this reason, when writing to the church at Antioch they wrote as "apostles and elders" (Acts 15.23). How otherwise could elders in Jerusalem write a letter giving command to the church in Antioch? Are they elders who write? But there are also elders among those to whom they write! Going outside their locality as elders, they would automatically become involved in a conflict of authority. If, however, they were not only elders but also apostles, then the letter they sent to Antioch in fact carried the weight of the Spirit's witness, both in the church at Jerusalem and in the Lord's Work through the apostles.

So today we see how the Work of God operates regionally. God would have His Work in an area centered in one place, from which workers go and to which they return. In the local churches it is elders

who bear responsibility; but in a regional center of the Work, there are not only elders as such but also workers bearing responsibility jointly with them.

Scripture gives no support for the common practice of assigning a worker to a given locality for work and for government there. Unless he migrates to that locality and becomes a resident elder of the church there, a worker should settle in his Jerusalem. For two thousand years Peter has been blamed for not leaving Jerusalem, and some have even suggested that it was because Peter and John remained there that persecution fell upon the Jerusalem church. There is no basis in the Bible for this view, and the Lord tells us plainly that it is “because ye are not of the world” that “the world hateth you” (John 15.19). No, neither by travel nor by staying at home shall we avoid the persecution which comes when we begin to follow the Lord. That is certain!

But on this question of going and returning, we can be assured that Peter was in his right place. He went to Samaria, for in Samaria was the Work of God; but from there he returned to Jerusalem. He went also to Caesarea; but once again he came back to Jerusalem. All this was because Jerusalem was his center, whereas Samaria was only one of the cities in that region of the Work. Thus it was that the fellow workers, moving from place to place through the region, set out from Jerusalem and returned there repeatedly.

When we come to the choice of a center for the Work, we must be quite clear that this is a matter not for man but for God. Only He can decide the place, and only the Holy Spirit can initiate the Work. Human judgment and initiative have no part in this. We cannot consult together to choose a site for Jerusalem. Only the Jerusalem of the Spirit’s choice is Jerusalem indeed.

So Peter moves to and from Jerusalem. Later, Paul moves to and from Antioch. They do not settle permanently in other places, but

always return to their starting point. Their work is carried on within definite bounds or regions or spheres—call them what you will—and from divinely chosen centers. For each group of workers in any place, it is “according to the measure of the rule which God has apportioned.”

We should never appoint a worker from outside as elder of a local church. It was only in Jerusalem that Peter was an elder as well as an apostle. If you are resident in a place, you may be both elder and apostle simultaneously *in that place*, but nowhere else. You may go out as a worker to help other churches, but you must return. It is wrong for you not to return. Like Paul you may take a large circuit and come back, or like Peter you may go out and return directly. Either is correct; but you must return. Paul came back to Antioch, Peter to Jerusalem; this is the Lord’s word, and it could not be plainer.

### ***Preaching by Apostles and by Scattered Saints***

Now we must ask ourselves, how should the Work of God be carried forward? Here we come to our *third important principle*. We find there are two ways of preaching the gospel and of establishing churches—two distinct methods illustrated respectively by Jerusalem and Antioch. From Antioch apostles go forth; from Jerusalem scattered saints go forth. In the one case, bands of apostles move out—it may be Paul and Barnabas, or Paul and Silas, or Paul and Timothy—to preach the gospel from place to place, to form churches, and to return. In the other case, those who believe emigrate to new cities and new lands, preaching and telling of the Lord Jesus wherever they go; and wherever these who migrate are found, churches spring up. Whether they are distributed abroad by peaceful means or by persecution matters not; the fact is that by the scattering of the saints, the gospel itself is scattered abroad.

Here, I think, the Lord has left us unmistakable footprints in which to tread. Never let us regard these early chapters of Acts as inapplicable today. Like the book of Genesis, the Acts of the Apostles reveals the beginnings of God's ways, and what He did then sets a pattern for His Work always.

In Jerusalem it was persecution which God used to scatter His saints. They were compelled to emigrate. At that time there must have been many thousands of believers in the Jerusalem church. From that city there was a great outward movement; and yet, when Paul returned there after many years, there were still the same large numbers (Acts 21.20—"Thou seest, brother [Paul], how many thousands [Gr. *myriads*] there are among the Jews of them that have believed").

Here is an important secret of God's working: that after this year's harvest, wheat will grow again just as richly next year. You must not remain stationary, but must move on and make room for other believers; for it is the measure of the outgoing that determines the increase. As many more will be added as moved out, and if there is no moving out there is no adding. The way of God is to send out group after group of Christians, and so to scatter the seed in new fields.

*Hence we have discovered three things:* that the work is regional, that it operates from divinely chosen centers, and that the movement out is two-fold, by workers who go and return, and by the migration of scattered saints. Let us on no account let go these new lessons, for it is through years of opposition and many difficulties that we have learned them. For many of us, at least half of our time is gone; for the remaining half, let us steer a straight course. For my part, I believe that the light we have now been given is both clear and timely. Throughout these two thousand years the Church has sought in vain to fit Jerusalem into its place; and today, for us at least, God has graciously fitted it in. Just as at Hankow we saw the local

responsibilities of the churches, so currently we see the regional character of the Work based upon a strong testimony at the center. If we should still hold on to the traditional idea of one worker per church, we would soon reach an impasse, for in the region of Pin Yang alone there are more than a hundred assemblies of believers, and these in themselves would devour more workers than we now have. How could we ever hope to meet the need of all China?

But if a strong testimony is preserved at the center, and if workers move to and fro, always returning to that center, but leaving the affairs of each assembly in the care of local brothers, then there is no such difficulty. Even the Twelve might have been hard put to it to preserve on their own a permanent preaching ministry throughout all Judea and Samaria, but for them to preserve such a ministry in Jerusalem was no problem at all.

And this is what is needed today. Let us take Shanghai as an example. In the purpose of God, it has served as a center for work that has grown up along the railroads to Nanking and Hangchow and in the region of the Kiangsu-Chekiang border. A strong testimony should therefore be maintained in Shanghai, reinforced by the presence of workers who move about the region from that city as their center. But all other churches in the area should be maintained by their own local brethren, not by workers posted there from Shanghai as “ministers” or “pastors.” And at the same time some of the many believers now in Shanghai should be encouraged to migrate to fresh places—group after group going forth with the gospel. For the principle of Jerusalem is the principle of emigration, even if in our day it may not be persecution which sends us out preaching the Lord Jesus, as it did them.

Or take again Foochow. If Fukien Province and Taiwan Island together represent a region of the Work, then according to our present understanding, Foochow may be regarded as its center. It is the brethren’s responsibility, therefore, to maintain a strong

testimony in that city, as they move from thence back and forth throughout the area. In such a center there will be apostles and elders ministering God's word, and from time to time two or three from among them will go out to one place and another to strengthen and help forward the Work. But that is not all; for the Work of the gospel in that area does not depend on these alone. The many brothers and sisters who have been brought to the Lord in Foochow we should now exhort to move out to other places. Encourage a score of believers to go to Nanping and settle there for the Lord's sake; let thirty go to Putien, thirty to Amoy; exhort other groups to cross over to Taipei and Tainan in Taiwan. As they move forth they carry the gospel with them. That is the right way. Should you instead attempt to send out so many evangelists within a number of years, you would be severely burdened with their financial support, you might have difficulty in finding enough suitable candidates, and the end results would probably be insignificant. No, it is the Church as a whole that must go forth with the message—band after band of believers moving out for the gospel's sake and penetrating even into the interior villages.

### ***Need for Basic Training***

It will be apparent from what we have said that the state of things at the center of such a field of Work comes to take on a new significance. Not only must a strong preaching ministry be maintained there in the face of a continual drain away of believers by emigration, but also the many who are sent out must go forth properly instructed if they are to become a source of strength and not of weakness in the places to which they go. Be they peddlers, ricksha men, domestic servants, or people of whatever trade or profession, they must know how to preach the gospel and win others to the Lord, and to be a definite help towards building up the local church in the areas to which they emigrate. All this calls for concentration of effort at the center. The labors of the workers must not be dissipated by

scattering, but each center should be fully cared for, and provision made there for the saints to be instructed and prepared for the tasks ahead of them.

For it should be clear to us how important a matter is this training of the believers in the fundamentals of Christian life and witness. In order to prepare them for such adventuring forth as we have outlined above, all brothers and sisters need to be given a basic training. In Foochow and Shanghai we have already made some beginning in this. What are needed in all such centers of the Work are special instruction classes alongside the other ministries in the church. Such special meetings should continue weekly throughout the year, following a planned yearly curriculum. These meetings should not aim to progress too far, but should rather be repeated annually, so that no matter when a person joins them, after fifty-two weeks' instruction he will have completed the course. Thus those who move out and have opportunity to carry the gospel further afield will at least have completed this series of basic lessons.\*

Only in this way will the tremendous task be completed, for if the preaching is to be left only to fully-trained evangelists, what impression will be made upon the whole of China? Today this country has 450 million inhabitants, only one million of whom are Christians.\*\* But give all these Christians the same fundamental

---

\* Published subsequently in Chinese and delivered originally by the author as messages during the same 1948 training sessions for workers (held at Kuling Mountain near Foochow, China) at which this present address was also delivered. Much later they were translated into English, re-arranged and variously grouped together into six volumes, and published under the general title of the *Basic Lesson Series* (New York, Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc., 1972-75). The six individual volume titles in this series are as follows: *A Living Sacrifice* (1972), *The Good Confession* (1973), *Assembling Together* (1973), *Not I But Christ* (1974), *Do All to the Glory of God* (1974), and *Love One Another* (1975).—Translator

\*\* The author's figures as of 1948.—Translator

training and then send them forth, and very soon you will see the Church proclaiming the gospel to the farthest limits. They need not wait for tribulation. Whether persecuted or not, go forth they must. They can move out today, a few at a time, to different kinds of employment; and when they have led others to the Lord in the places where they are found, workers from the center may perhaps visit them; but already a church will have come into being in each new place.

Few will deny the superiority of this method of preaching the gospel, for when it is the Church that witnesses like this, God begins to work and people get saved. Even if in some localities the platform ministry may, we feel, leave something to be desired, by this method of spontaneous personal witness by the whole Church, the gospel at least is scattered widespread in every new area where believers are found, and where it is scattered the seed springs up and fruit is borne.

### *Workers Together*

Furthermore, we see now, do we not, the supreme value of coordination in the Work? Without some true coordination, the sure result of all our labors will only be failure. In days past, perhaps, fellowship among some of us has been too weak. You have gone your way and he has gone his, and too often there has been loss as a result. From now on there must be among us all a new relatedness, if the great needs we have spoken of are to be met. No one can afford any longer just to be independent and make his own plans.

For here is the challenge. Since we have been shown the way, everything turns now upon the human vessels. True, until we saw the principle of Jerusalem, we could not but feel there was something wrong with our *way* of working, and this we have just reviewed at length. But today, as I read the book of Acts I look at Peter, the servant of God, and, observe how he conducted himself in those early days and learn a lesson from him. He might easily have gone

off on his own and settled in, say, Joppa or Caesarea. But he did not, and I cannot but sympathize with him for the centuries-old misunderstanding of his motives in not doing so; for I now see clearly that he was right in coming back each time to Jerusalem and to the other apostles. The Work of God in any field does have a center, and that center implies fellowship.

Now, with new meaning, the way has been shown to us the way of relatedness. God has made plain the need for coordination among the workers in any region, and the need too for coordination of the different responsibilities. If today, as brethren working from various centers, we will be faithful in this, and if the Lord is merciful, I believe it will not be many years before the whole of China is won to the gospel. And what a great prospect, to win the whole nation to Christ!

But if we should fail the Lord, I do assure you that in fifty years' time we shall be no further forward than we are today. Oh, I acknowledge that there has been much blessing from God upon us. For God desires to save souls, and in His mercy He has graciously saved quite a number among us. Yet I have not felt satisfied with the progress we have seen; and during recent days I have gone back to God's word again and again for light. It is true, I agree, that at Hankow eleven years ago we saw very clearly His way for the church; yet it is equally true that the gospel has been hindered, and even the churches have suffered, because we did not also see His way for the Work. Today, thank God, after many trials and sufferings, He has made known to us more clearly His way of working.

The opening chapters of Acts have a special lesson for the Church of God in every age. Just as the Jerusalem above is a figure of the Church in heaven, so Jerusalem on earth sets an example to the Church down here. Peter first worked there; and then, from there as his center, he went out to preach the gospel and returned. From there,

too, the saints were driven forth by persecution; but, praise God, they could not flee Jerusalem without, in doing so, carrying everywhere the gospel with them. How glorious it is!

Today the question is not merely one of methods but of men. Will we be faithful to the Lord? If we will not, I say most solemnly that He may be compelled to set us aside, and to choose, perhaps ten or twenty years hence, others who will press on in His way. But I ask myself, need twenty years be thus thrown away? Surely they need not. Let me do my part and you do yours. As we go forth in His Name, let us go in fellowship, speaking of Him everywhere. And before long we shall see the Church's testimony established in many more places yet, until this whole land has heard the good news of the gospel. What tribulation we have been through to discover this road! May we not lose it.



# 1

## The Order of Church Offices

In the church, there are only two offices: one is the office of the deacon, and the other is that of the elders or bishops.

### *(1) THE DEACONS*

According to the Scriptures, the work of the deacons is to serve. They have no other duty. God has not set up deacons as authorities. Their function lies exclusively in the area of serving or waiting upon others. The word for “deacon” in the Greek is the same as that which is translated “minister,” as in the case of “the minister of the word.” It means to serve or to manage affairs. One may call it either service or ministry, yet they are the same. Among the Protestants, for example, the Anglican Church prefers to use the English word “ministry,” whereas the Wesleyans prefer the word “service.” Since the Wesleyans have come out of the Anglican Church, they consider the word used by the Anglicans as sounding too official; hence they prefer to use a comparatively more common word. Nevertheless, whether ministry or service, they mean the same thing.

### *For Those with Spiritual Understanding*

Since this office of deacon is set up in the church exclusively for the purpose of service, it is well from the inception of a local church’s existence to allow all the brothers and sisters to serve. Some of them will be steady and dependable, and will therefore have spiritual weight. These brethren the church may set apart as deacons (or deaconesses). Accordingly, all the brothers and sisters serve, but only the trustworthy with spiritual weight should formally be made deacons (or deaconesses). The work is performed generally; but the office is for the trustworthy and spiritual only, for we do not wish to see the constant changing of deacons.

In this regard, let us be careful in the choosing of deacons that we do not select those who, though they may be long on the ability to do things, are short on spiritual understanding. This is a great danger as well as a great temptation to the workers. Some brothers and sisters are very capable, and how we like to make such ones deacons. Capable though they are, however, they tend to inject their worldly wisdom and worldly ways into the church. Consequently, in the selection of deacons, we must seek for brethren who know the way of the Lord as well as know how to do things. We must look for a person who has spiritual understanding before the Lord as well as spiritual worth; otherwise, worldly maneuverings and worldly ways and means will all be brought into the church. For although things may be successfully accomplished, the church will, by such a one, be changed into a society. This is completely out of order.

Keep in mind that we must maintain the spiritual standard of the church. On the one hand, we should not despise talent; on the other hand, we must not indulge too much in it. We cannot permit people to bring worldly ability and wisdom into the church, because a slight carelessness in this area will invite worldly maneuvers into the church. And the problem thus created for the future will not only be great but will also be a difficult one to solve.

As to the rest, I think the Bible has given clear instructions on the qualifications of the deacons. Here I would wish to emphasize only two things: that (1) a deacon be one who not only is able to serve but will do so diligently; and that (2) he have spiritual understanding. Such kind of person may then be made a deacon.

## ***(2) THE ELDERS***

The Scripture also speaks much concerning the office of elder. This office is for the purpose of managing or governing the church.

### ***May Not Be Simultaneously Ministers of God's Word***

An elder may not necessarily be a minister of God's word. It is of course more commendable if he is also such a minister. According to the Bible, a minister of God's word is different from an office in the church. And it is clear that elders fill a church office—an office that was established for the purpose of executing, governing and supervising the whole church. Yet an elder may or may not at the same time be a minister of God's word. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor," wrote Paul, "especially those who labor in the word and in teaching" (1 Tim. 5.17).

### ***Basic Qualification Is Spirituality***

The Bible has clear instructions on elders. Here I wish to remind brethren of the basic qualification for an elder—that such a person must have spiritual worth: that he knows spiritual things and possesses spiritual understanding, that he is familiar with God's ways. In other words, an elder must be experienced in spiritual matters and be able to discern the spiritual conditions of God's children so that he may manage the affairs of the church. This spiritual foundation he must have to begin with. And with the gift and ability which God has added to him, he is then able to take care of the church. Only such persons can become elders in the church.

I hope you brethren will not choose one to be an elder simply because he is capable—simply because he can manage things, but at the same time he has no spiritual understanding before God. I am aware of the problems which have arisen in a number of places, and this is due, in my opinion, to selecting people to be elders who are well known in society, who have position and ability, and who have depth of worldly experience. Please recognize that a person may be able to manage a society or a home, but he is not necessarily capable of governing the church. And why is this so? It is simply because the basic requirement for governing the church is one of spirituality.

### ***Executive Experience Is Useless***

Once there was a brother who had had twenty years of executive experience. Many brothers asked me why he had not been invited to be an elder. My reply was this: twenty years of executive experiences in the world does not count for even one single year in the church, that although he was a good Christian, his understanding of spiritual things proved to be insufficient. The Church is something spiritual, and therefore only the one who has spiritual measure before God and who knows spiritual ways and is spiritual can be an elder. Otherwise, you will have a problem on your hands immediately.

We would rather choose people to be elders who have spiritual measure but without much or any working ability rather than those who have the latter but not the former. Of course, it is better to have elders who possess both qualities—who understand spiritual things and are also capable of managing affairs. For how can a person take care of the house of God if he is not able to manage his own household? Yet does this imply that whoever can govern his own house can equally govern God's church? Not at all, for if spirituality is the basic requirement in being an elder, then one can reason that not all who are able to manage households can necessarily manage the house of God. Quite a few, including unsaved people, can govern their houses well; nevertheless, can we on that basis alone ask them to govern the church? No, only a person who knows the spiritual way and is successful in his home management may govern the church of God.

Hence in selecting responsible brothers, we must choose those men with spiritual measure, who are acquainted with the spiritual way, who are not prone to pride, vaunting, and self-importance. Their life before God must be steadfast. Choose only those whose life is trustworthy; do not pick the proud. Do not select as elders the so-called genius among you, but choose the reliable. Such ones must

be steady and trustworthy, who possess spiritual weight, knowledge and understanding. These and these alone may be chosen as elders.

### ***Rule Well His Own House***

Yet even finding a few men such as these, attention then must be turned to their ability to rule their own households. Those who rule their own houses well can be made elders, but anyone who cannot govern their own houses cannot at all govern the church.

If the Church were a worldly institution, we would only need to choose capable people. But the Church is a spiritual organism, and therefore the first qualification to be raised is the one of spirituality, and *then* ability, and so forth. Moreover, an elder must be dependable. He cannot be a person who changes every so often like the swaying of a drunkard this way and that way. Such a man cannot possibly rule the church. To govern the church, an elder must be one who is steadfast and reliable. At the same time, he must know how to rule his family well. Many problems in the church can be eliminated if those chosen as elders have spiritual understanding as well as an ability to rule well; otherwise, the spiritual side of the church will be damaged even if various matters are successfully being managed. Hence do not reverse the order between the foundation and its superstructure—that is to say, do not choose a man who is only capable of management. Such a person may at most be a deacon, but never an elder: he may *receive* orders but not *give* them in the church.

### ***An Example***

There was once a brother, now dead, who was at one time an elder in a church. During our early Shanghai days, he frequently visited me and conversed with me. He was a good brother, capable and zealous, but with little or no spiritual understanding. He was very much

lacking in spiritual experience. Once during a conversation with me he said: "There was a sister among us. She wept in the meeting because she had committed sin. Mr. Nee, do you not think this laughable?" When he had finished speaking, he just sat there and laughed aloud. A church elder had considered the weeping confession of a sister to be laughable! You can see by this, can you not, where he stood spiritually? Without a doubt he would be reckoned as top management in any worldly institution, but how poorly he bore responsibility in the church. And why? Because he himself had never cried over his own sins, and consequently, as an elder who witnessed someone else crying, he treated it only as a joke! What spiritual insensitivity! To cry over sin is the most elementary of spiritual experience, and yet he was totally ignorant of it. He looked at spiritual matters in a bizarre fashion, even viewing them as quite laughable. He had no spiritual understanding. I only mention this as an illustration. Similar incidents occur throughout the Church in large numbers. If these such as this man become elders it will spell the end of the spiritual life of the church.

### ***The Church Specializes in Spiritual Things***

Let me use another illustration. Suppose you meet a most clever and capable person today. If he were to be invited to join a hospital, he could at most be asked to serve as the general manager of the hospital, he could not be asked to serve as a resident physician. This is because he might be able to look after business affairs but he most certainly could not attend to patients' sicknesses, since a hospital is basically a medical and technical institution and not a business corporation. Or if he were asked to join a commercial school, he could be the business manager of the school, perhaps, but not the dean or principal of the school; for to fill these latter posts requires special technological background and knowledge. Now just as a hospital is particularly specialized in healing the sick, and just as a commercial school is specialized in teaching commerce and finance,

so a church exists in a special way for performing spiritual functions; and therefore, only those with spirituality can govern its affairs.

Let it be known that the Church is first and foremost spiritual in nature, its business or administrative aspect being only secondary. Hence in your choosing elders in various localities, spirituality must be the first thing you look for, and only then is the ability to direct, supervise and lead to be a consideration. To have the ability to lead is not enough to be an elder; he must also have spiritual experience and understanding. Having experience in spiritual things and an ability in managing affairs are the criteria for eldership. Yet spirituality is the predominant qualification for the choice of any elder.

### *Train the Elders*

As you may recall, Paul himself lived in Ephesus for a time and there were elders in the Ephesian church. While there, he gave these elders sufficient training. So that he could say to them at his farewell: "I shrank not from declaring unto you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly, and from house to house. . . among whom I went about preaching the kingdom . . . For I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God. Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. . . . Wherefore watch ye, remembering that by the space of three years I ceased not to admonish every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20.20-31 mg.). He by the Holy Spirit had not only appointed them as elders but had also trained them. He did not merely commit the church into their care and let them try their best; he in addition helped them and instructed them how to function as elders.

Later on, Paul left Timothy at Ephesus and Titus in Crete so that they themselves should appoint elders. By reading Paul's letter to Timothy and his letter to Titus we can readily see that it is not

enough simply to appoint elders, but additionally they must be helped to serve together. In these letters Paul advised the two young apostles that they must train the elders whom they appointed in the churches. There are many charges in these two letters, and these charges pertain to instructions as to how to work together with the elders in the church: “These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly; but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3.14,15).

What is the relationship between the apostolic worker and the elders? In appointing elders in a certain locality, the worker does not merely appoint them—committing all authority into their hands—and then let them carry on (even as it were, let them go wrong). Not at all. After the elders are chosen, you as a worker must continue to observe how they operate, and train them to do things. Only then may you go to another place to appoint and to train. Otherwise, shortly after a local assembly is established and the elders are appointed, it will cease to grow. For here is a group of men who have never managed church affairs before. True, they may have a *little* spiritual experience; nevertheless, they do not know how to govern in the church. How can you expect them not to go wrong?

Today your responsibility as workers is rather weighty. You should seek opportunity to train elders to be such. Many people are by habit somewhat frivolous. And if later they are the ones who come to manage the affairs in the church, they may be frivolous and careless as before. You must therefore help them. Whenever their attitude displays itself as being loose and flippant, they should be reminded that they are dealing with spiritual matters before God; and consequently they cannot afford to be so light and playful. Some people are used to speaking and criticizing in a thoughtless manner when managing worldly affairs. And more likely than not they may bring this very same habit into the church. Now if you hear such

critical and careless words fall from their lips, you should immediately let it be known that in the church it is submission and not opinion which is important. We need to learn obedience and not be so opinionated.

Perhaps some people will manipulate spiritual things. You need to remind them that among God's children there is no place for manipulation. We must *deal* with situations in the church, not try to avoid them. Those who can deal with situations are truly qualified to be elders, not those who attempt to avoid matters.

Some others may be so accustomed to being heads of their families or their firms that their attitude tends to be forceful, their speech tough, and their spirit hard. You must help them to speak firmly yet in a tender spirit. It is the combination of these two that will accomplish things.

Although all these facets of being an elder may seem small, they nonetheless are basic. How terrible it will be if the elders of a church are afraid of anything happening and so they let things slide without dealing with them. Such persons cannot be elders. Yet neither should elders always be seeking opportunity to breathe out anger and disapproval. Their spirit must be broken before God. They have to be smitten by the Lord so that they are delivered from any personal feelings. They must be tender before God, yet firm in dealing with the matters that confront them.

As you train the brothers in so conducting themselves, then quite naturally, when they approach the church in terms of managing its affairs, they will not be careless nor will they bring their hardness into it. Remind them continually that they are in the church, not in their homes or offices. You must help them by means of spiritual admonitions, and after some days they will be able to rule the church well.

### ***The Elders Meeting***

I believe all the responsible brothers who serve as elders in various localities must meet together once a week. You may call such a time the elders meeting or caring meeting. This is the time when the responsible brothers pray together. This is also the time when they see brothers and sisters.

I know of a local assembly (not in China) where on a certain day of the week the responsible brothers gather themselves together. In the morning those brothers will come with their lunch, and there they engage in the management of the affairs of the church. They pray over every item which needs to be considered. Although we may not be able to spend an entire day, we can at least set aside half a day or a few hours each week for the responsible brothers to meet.

### ***Using Half the Time Considering Affairs Before God***

During the first half of the appointed time, the responsible brothers should close the door to everything else except the consideration of church affairs before God. They should reverently and carefully consider every item in the presence of the Lord. They can discuss these matters, and fellowship on the light they receive. Yet things are not to be settled by discussion. The Bible shows us that one facet to dealing with church matters is discussion; even so, discussion is for the sake of finding light and not necessarily for making any decision. Discussion is for finding out the facts—to lay the matter out; it is not for making the decision.

### ***Using Latter Half of Time Receiving Brethren***

Set apart the latter part of the elders' time to receive the brethren. Whether there will be brothers or sisters actually seeking an interview, the responsible brothers must nonetheless be there and

available. Time must be set aside for this purpose, for it will greatly help in the governing of the church.

### ***The Worker Should Meet with Responsible Brothers***

The worker or workers should stand by and observe how these responsible brothers function. There are certain things which need to be exposed and communicated to these responsible brothers. For example, their frivolity needs to be corrected, their attitude and spirit must be adjusted. Remind them also that they are dealing with spiritual affairs. Sometimes they need to be taught how to answer questions or how to explain things. At the beginning, perhaps the worker should answer the questions which are asked, and should afterwards explain to the responsible brothers why the questions are answered in such ways, explain what is the scriptural basis for such answers, and identify what the inner feelings are. Moreover, when some brother comes for an interview, he may need to be reprimanded. Then after that brother leaves, an explanation for such an action should be given to the responsible brothers. Later on, the worker may sit by the responsible brothers and let them answer.

### ***Train Some Trustworthy Responsible Brothers***

We believe in the ministry of the body—that is to say, the entire church is to serve. It is not two to three persons serving; rather, the whole church must serve. Hence it is a serious mistake if the Work does not cause more brethren to serve. Yet even with many people being saved and many serving, the Work is still a complete failure if it does not produce some trustworthy brethren to bear responsibility in the church. I hope as you go forth to work that you will be very busy and not just generally busy, because there are many works you will have to commence from the beginning.

Do see that much work awaits you, not least of which is the matter of training some responsible brothers. Do not so labor that you end up bearing all the responsibilities, thus leaving no strength in yourselves to train others for responsibility.

The principle of the church is seen in our Lord Jesus putting himself in the midst of the twelve disciples, then the Twelve putting themselves among the three thousand, and the three thousand then placing themselves among the millions. Accordingly, as workers, place yourselves in the midst of a few responsible brothers, and these responsible brothers shall in turn put themselves in the midst of the brothers and sisters, who in turn again shall place themselves in the midst of a number of sinners: with the result that the circle grows ever wider and wider. Unless this is done, I will consider our ministry to be a huge failure.

You must therefore train the elders at various localities to be able to take responsibility. Paul did not leave Titus at Crete and Timothy at Ephesus merely to appoint elders and then to depart. He instructed them to train those whom they appointed as elders until the latter themselves could know and handle responsibility. Such is the way for the church.

Hence I hope hereafter that you all will be busy, very busy. May there be no one who is lazy, for the lazy are of no use to the Lord. Do realize that for you to put yourselves in the midst of the responsible brothers, your spiritual condition must be superior to theirs; otherwise, you will not be able to help them.

### ***Show Them How to Do Things***

Concerning the training of responsible brothers, each time you gather with them, you should show them how to do things. Suppose you stay in one locality for three months. During that period you should arrange a time to gather the responsible brothers and train

them how to manage church affairs. Talk with them about all the matters of the week ahead which concern the church and pray with them. During the first half of that time do not see anyone, but shut yourselves in to God alone, because this part of the time is devoted to taking care of things before the Lord. It is not unlike the time when Moses and Joshua were up on the mountain.

After you have settled these affairs, you go out and notify the deacons as to what needs to be done in the week. There are things which all the brethren should be notified about by the deacons, and there are also things which need to be distributed by them to the brethren to do.

In managing church affairs, the first thing is in knowing how in fact to manage, but the second is in knowing how to supervise. Here you must never be passive. In the early stage you have to be more active, taking the lead and superintending. Only when the brothers and sisters have been built up must you let them go ahead and do the work. This is the church. At the beginning you cannot let the brothers and sisters do things by themselves. You must give yourself to the responsible brothers and then the responsible brothers must give themselves to all the local brothers and sisters.

The elders meeting must be very solemn. During those few hours they are shut in with God. They will place everything concerning the church before Him and seek to know how to deal with each item. Decisions should then be made known to the brethren or to the deacons. And later on have a few hours set aside in which to receive the local brothers and sisters who seek help. And make sure that at that time brothers and sisters can find all of the elders there, not just one of them.

### ***The Church Is All Brothers and Sisters Serving***

You workers must work until one day all the brothers and sisters start to serve. That is to say, everyone is to be serving God, everyone is to be functioning as a priest. Then you will really see what the church is.

I wonder if you have truly seen this way or not? You must understand this way. And the way is to give yourself to some brothers, and these brothers in turn are to give themselves to all the brothers and sisters. And as all the brothers and sisters are serving, you shall witness the church. If in the church only one ministry (that of the elders) is active and all the brothers and sisters are passive, at that point it is not a church but a denomination. Let me reiterate that if you cannot arrive at the ultimate goal of getting all the brothers and sisters to rise up and serve, your work is a total failure because there is not the reality of the church. Be ever mindful that this we have been saying here is your way—that you give yourself to the elders and that you show them they are not to monopolize all the church affairs. They are overseers, not monopolizers. They are not to be a substitute for the whole church in its work, but rather they are to supervise the whole church itself in working. The elders do not do all the works themselves; on the contrary, they encourage and teach all the brothers and sisters in the church to perform its work. And when that point is reached, you do have the reality of the church.

### ***Elders Meeting Is Source of Activities***

The elders meeting is the source of all activities. Many things originate from it and many problems find their solutions there. When the brothers and sisters notice how the responsible brothers deal with various affairs before God, they realize these are not casual and nonessential matters, and therefore the brethren must walk softly before the Lord. If the elders meeting is conducted in this matter, all the brothers and sisters will be helped.

### ***Read More of Timothy and Titus***

More and more people need to read Paul's letters to Timothy and his one letter to Titus. Observe how God through Paul instructs them to train and to lead. Learn from these letters how to help the responsible brothers place themselves among all the brothers and sisters and lead the whole church into service.

### ***Appointment of the Responsible Brothers***

Someone asks how the dilemma can be solved when in appointing people to be responsible brothers there is still a little reservation about them and yet the need is obviously there to appoint them? The answer is as follows: gather together some whom you sense are promising, and tell them to first come and learn to take responsibility. You should train them how to bear responsibility. Some might be made deacons first before they are made elders. So that in choosing them and gathering them together, be careful as to what you say to them. Tell them you are readying them for the work of deacons. Do not tell them at the outset that they have been chosen to be elders. By so doing you will be in a position to observe which of them are fit to be deacons, and which of them are more advanced than the rest. Then, after a certain time has elapsed, you can put them either in the position of elder or in that of deacon. But if you were to make them elders at the very beginning, it would be very, very difficult to change their position afterwards. To change the position of a deacon is comparatively easy, but to change that of an elder is extremely difficult.

### ***Observe Spiritual Future***

Especially in the choosing of elders, eyes need to be wide open to perceive what is the spiritual future of this or that person. This is not said to suggest that we cannot be mistaken, since we do indeed often

make mistakes. It is only meant to convey that the issue is one of spirituality. You should be very careful before God in bringing these brothers into such a realm. For in the event an elder is unfit and needs his position to be changed, he no doubt will be hurt by it. It is a hard thing to set up authority and then attempt to overturn it. We must therefore learn to discern before God the current spiritual condition of these brothers and also their spiritual future.

Many people are good material. Do not spoil them but train them well. Do not be hasty about setting in people as elders. Whether or not you have confidence in these brothers, it is best if at the outset you tell them you are asking them, as the more promising ones among the flock, to come and learn how to manage church affairs, and that you will show them how.

### *Helping Responsible Brothers in a District*

In the future, where a local assembly is also a Work center, the following can be done. Suppose the center is in Peking. You notice that there are three brothers in the region of Suiyuan and also two brothers in the assembly at Taiyuan who are very promising. You can invite them to Peking and ask them to attend the responsible brothers meeting there.

However, such a meeting is not open to everyone. It is a holy time, a privilege given only to those for learning. At first, let such brothers sit in on the meeting to observe how spiritual affairs are handled before God, how problems are solved, how questions are discussed, how prayers are offered, and how decisions are made. Also, they can be shown how brothers and sisters are received, how fellowship is extended to brethren who come from abroad, and how requests for baptism and the breaking of bread are answered. Set an example before them. After a while, you may even ask them to answer some of the questions that confront you in order for you to see how well they conduct themselves.

After some time, they may be sent back to their original localities to allow them to try it out but without giving them any position. A few days later you may visit their places and hear what the brethren there say about them. Of course all criticisms are not necessarily correct, but at least you will know the things which they have done. The criticisms of some people are untrustworthy because such ones never submit to authority. But if a brother is really wrong, you should try to find out where the root of the problem lies. And then on your next visit, you will be clear as to the fitness of that person to take responsibility.

### ***Must Be Solemn***

At the elders meeting, you must hold the reins but you must let the local responsible brothers also hold the reins. Show them that such a time is even more solemn than was the time when Moses was on the mountain, for he merely passed on the Law, but we today govern the church. I truly consider the management of the church as far exceeding in seriousness the receiving of the two tables of the Law of Moses at Mount Sinai.

During this time, let the whole atmosphere be solemn. No flippancy is to be allowed. As soon as people come to such a meeting, let them see that we have come to manage the things of the church in God's very presence, and therefore we cannot afford to be careless. This is similar to the time when the high priest entered the holiest place of all. It is the time when we serve our God. Let there be few idle words, for if there are many such words, the time will be wasted.

### ***Speak Nothing Behind the Back***

Anyone attending the elders meeting who fails to voice his opinion in the meeting and yet speaks his view to brothers and sisters

afterwards should be reprimanded at the next session. Such a person is not fit to be a responsible brother. If anyone has feelings on a matter and has words to say about it, he ought to express them when the responsible brothers are gathered together. Silence in the elders meeting but talkativeness outside its precincts is being double-tongued. Such a person should not be in the elders meeting, for such conduct is unchristianly. If anyone has any feeling about a matter, he should express it in the elders meeting; otherwise, he should keep his mouth closed anywhere else.

Please realize that in the early church, the very life of a local assembly lay in the elders meeting. If the elders meeting becomes something loose and careless, if matters are decided without prayer, God's work is finished in that locality and there is no spiritual weight there.

I hope all the responsible brothers know that they are all wholly responsible for anything said behind the back of the elders meeting. There should be no personal consideration shown towards any elder, but on the contrary, the one who conducts himself in such a fashion must be strictly admonished by saying to him: "Brother, this was not true Christian behavior. If you have something to say, say it before the other responsible brothers. For you destroy the oneness of the body if you talk behind the back of the other elders."

### *Cannot Tell One's Wife*

Another thing to be noticed here is that whatever happens in an elders meeting should not be told to any other brother or to any sister—not even to one's own wife. This is a sacred trust which all must maintain. Nothing in the elders meeting can be carelessly spread. There must not be any leak of information. The brothers must be strictly trained in this respect. Unless all agree otherwise, nothing should be told outside the meeting. There is no need, however, for the elders assembled to be reminded of this each time they meet,

since not to tell anyone on the outside is the understood rule among those elders.

### ***How Decision Is Made Need Not Be Told***

As the responsible brothers make things public, they have no need to tell how the decision was arrived at in the elders meeting. It is best to leave this information buried.

### ***All Meetings Must Be Brought High***

If the elders meeting is strong, all the other meetings of the church will naturally be lifted to a higher level. For this meeting is the center of everything. Much spiritual energy must be spent on this meeting. All the brothers who attend must concentrate themselves in weighing every matter before God.

### ***“Watchtower” of the Church***

This elders meeting is “the watchtower” of the church. Many things yet unknown to the brethren are known by the responsible brothers. Many things still unseen by the brethren are already seen by the responsible brothers. Oftentimes the responsible brothers sense things before the other brethren do. The fact of the matter is that everything concerning the church must be first sensed in this meeting. Before problems arise, they are already known there. And therefore, certain things may be done before the problems even rear their heads. Learn to perceive things in advance.

I do not say that there is no need to pray individually or to wait. I only say that at the elders meeting it is time to deal with matters collectively. Naturally, each one must have preparation beforehand. For without being prepared there will be nothing to say and to decide in the elders meeting. If there is nothing to discuss or implement in

the elders meeting, it is a positive proof that the responsible brothers are lazy before God. If some of them are strong and have their eyes open, there will doubtless be many things to deal with at the meeting. The high priest wore the breastplate with the names of the Twelve Tribes inscribed on it. Each time he went into the presence of God he wore this breastplate. Not on a single day could he put aside the breastplate. Similarly, you should learn to bear the assembly before God daily, and daily some concerns for the brethren will be found. And as a result, you will discover that normally there will not be enough time in the elders meeting to handle all such concerns. Several hours can so quickly pass away that sometimes words have to be cut short because there is no time left.

If the elders meeting is strong, whatever follows will be easy. All the other meetings in the church are to be watched over in the elders meeting. If, for example, the gospel meeting happens to be weak today, the elders will focus their strength on it and mobilize the strength of the whole assembly towards it. The elders meeting is therefore “the watchtower” of the church.

### ***Respected by All***

The elders meeting should be so conducted that it draws respect from all the brothers and sisters. All know that this is a time when the responsible brothers are managing the affairs of the church before God. I often view the elders meeting as being somewhat similar to the prayer room of John G. Paton’s father. His house was not large: a bedroom on one side, a kitchen on the other, and in between a small study. But when the door of the study room was closed, all his sons knew that their father was engaged in business with God. Every child tiptoed around the house and dared not make any noise. They could never forget the groanings in the study even after five decades. John himself commented that “even today I can still hear my father praying for me in that room.” Let all the brothers and sisters know

that this is the time when the responsible brothers are doing business with God as they give their all for the church.

### ***Two Different Situations***

Today we need two different situations before God. One is the need of *fellowship* among brothers and sisters. I believe that after working on this problem for the past twenty years, there has been gradual progress. Thank God that today brothers and sisters have at least some consciousness and feeling towards other brothers and sisters. The other situation is the need to recognize God's *authority*. Brotherly love is one thing, to be servants before the Lord is another. We must learn to obey God's orders. As we go out to serve, we need to hear His word before we go out. This we must learn together today.

### ***The Most Solemn Hour***

This hour among the elders is most solemn. It is a time when we learn to wait on the Lord with single-mindedness and to know how to manage things before God. There should be no hindrance, and everything must be done well with godliness and assurance. I tell you, the church has a future.

We may become very familiar and easy at other times, but when we come to the hour of the elders meeting, familiarity is out of the question, for we are truly approaching the presence of God. During ordinary times we focus on brotherly love, but at this hour we draw near to God together as His servants in order to receive orders and to implement His will. Let us learn to be still before God and hear Him. And if we are not clear concerning His will, we will inquire and search before Him. Learn before the Lord and pray.



## Priestly Ministry

# 2

Concerning priestly ministry, I believe the first thing to do is to set forth the basic underlying principle, which is, that all God's children are priests and all should therefore serve God. If we are governed by this principle, we shall see how to help all the brothers and sisters to function as priests in their local assemblies. In other words, we shall seek how to arrange spiritual activities so that the entire body of believers—both beginners and those who have trusted the Lord for a number of years—may participate. We will now spend a little time together finding out what are the various spiritual endeavors in a local assembly the brothers and sisters can all take part in.

### *Several Spiritual Activities All Believers Should Do*

A few things to begin with which all the local brothers and sisters can participate in are the following:

- (1) Preach the gospel.
- (2) Visit those who profess to have received the gospel they have heard, and lead them into the right path of being Christians.
- (3) Visit new Christians. They have believed, and have been led into the right path; now they need to be helped to go on.
- (4) Take care of special needs. In the church there are many such needs. Some have family problems, some are sick. Some experience distress, some have funerals, and some have weddings. All these should have the help of the church. We may put all such activities under the general heading of "care visitation." This is a kind of work in which all the brothers and sisters can be involved.

(5) Care for saints who go abroad or come from abroad. I look upon this kind of service as being a very important one. For after we issue letters of recommendation to brothers and sisters who go to other localities, we still need to look after them. And with regard to people who come from outside, we must provide them special care as well.

Let us take up each of these various works one at a time.

(1) *Preaching the gospel*. Let us notice that among the ministers of God's word whom the Lord sets up in the Church is the evangelist (Eph. 4.11). But Paul exhorts Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4.5). By comparing these two passages, we shall see that some people are called by God to be evangelists whereas some may not be evangelists and yet they are to do the work of an evangelist. In other words, the evangelist must preach the gospel, but whoever is not an evangelist should nevertheless do the work of an evangelist. An evangelist is a special "gift-person" from God given to the Church. If God calls you to be an evangelist, you should preach the gospel with singleness of heart and bring people to the Church. If God has not appointed you as an evangelist, you and all God's other children should nonetheless "do the work of an evangelist"—even as the word of the Lord has indicated.

To put it another way, "the work of an evangelist" is to be done by those who cannot do it as well as by those who can. This work must be carried on universally. Young people like Timothy should do it. Everybody else should do it.

For this reason, encourage the entire assembly of brothers and sisters to spend time in doing the work of an evangelist. We should never be lazy and forget the sinners, nor should we simply let a few carry on this work alone. Let all the brothers and sisters be reminded that they all are priests and all must therefore serve God.

(2) *Gospel care*. This is also what we ought to do before God. We expect all the brothers and sisters to learn responsibility in this area too.

This responsibility starts with bringing unbelievers to the meeting and does not cease until they are baptized. The work of gospel visitation includes bringing people from home, school, hospital or office to the meeting, and looking after them until they know the Lord themselves and are baptized.

### ***Bring People to Gospel Meeting***

Have the brothers and sisters bring people to gospel meetings. Do not have them bring too many at one time. Though it is good to bring more, yet in order to take care of them properly it is better that only three or four persons be brought each time. This is not a rule, but probably four is a good maximum number. This does not mean that if there is opportunity to bring more, people cannot bring them. In case they wish to bring more, have them seek out the responsible brothers and ask them to arrange some other brothers and sisters to share their responsibility.

### ***Sit with Them***

Let us discuss how we should take care of the friends in a gospel meeting. If you bring four people, seat two of them on each of your two sides. When the Bible is read, find the place in the Scriptures for them. When singing, find the hymn for them also. Do not treat them as geniuses. Since they may never have sung hymns or read the Bible before, you must help them.

During the preaching, if someone does not understand, explain it in a whisper. When G. Paget Wilkes was preaching in Shanghai, he told the following joke. An Englishman went to Japan and preached

the gospel in a large public auditorium. Many people were there that day. At one point the English preacher said to his audience, "You all know, of course, how the children of Israel came out of Egypt." Paget Wilkes hurriedly went up to him and whispered that he might have to spend two hours to explain to the people who these Israelites were and what the exodus was all about! From this story we should realize that there are many things our unbelieving friends may not understand. Although we cannot spend two hours as humorously suggested by Paget Wilkes to explain, we may at least use two or three sentences to do so.

### ***Strengthen and Help the Preaching with Prayer***

The greatest work any of the brethren can do is to support the gospel preaching. For the preaching of the gospel is not for believers to hear or to criticize. It is aimed at the sinners. So that while you sit by the people you have invited, and as you sense that certain words spoken carry a great impact, or that the spirit of the preacher is being released, you should silently pray, saying something like the following: "O Lord, send this word into people's hearts. Use this word to save this person. Lord, use this word to save even these two people." Thus you add weight to the word preached with such prayer. And you also pray for the people in your care.

### ***Accept Seating Arrangement***

Some who have not brought anyone to the gospel meeting may help by taking care of those who have brought more. It will be good if all the brothers and sisters sit either on one side or at the back, or stand near the door so that the brothers in charge of care that day may make the necessary arrangements. The friends from outside who attend need to be escorted. They are coming to hear the gospel, hence we can keep them company. Even if they are not brought in by you, you can still be one of those who sit with them. Gospel care is

therefore twofold in nature: one is to bring people in, the other is to take care of them in the meeting. We who are responsible for the management of the church must so work until all the brothers and sisters are serving in the assembly.

### ***At Time of Drawing Net***

At each gospel meeting, there should be “the drawing of the net” so to speak. To cast a net is one thing, to *draw* a net is another. When the gospel net begins to be drawn in either by asking people to raise their hands or to accept the Lord, brothers and sisters need to join in and help. The ways of drawing in the net are varied. There is much liberty as to the ways, so long as the net is eventually drawn. At that time, there are many things one can do. Some hitherto unconverted ones need a little nudging and then they will come in. Others need to be pushed and then they fall in. Brethren should pray on the one hand and persuade on the other. If you know for sure that your friend’s refusal to stand up is due to pride, then you should exhort him to humble himself. Or if you know it is the love of the world that hinders him from standing up, you can plead with him by saying, “Why do you still long for the world? Why will you wait until the next time? If you feel you are ready, do not wait”.

### ***Do Not Wait Till Four Months Later***

One matter which is of great importance in the preaching of the gospel is this: do not wait till four months later. Many people involved in gospel preaching have the wrong concept of waiting four months; but the Lord Jesus declares this to us: “Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white already unto harvest” (John 4.35). How very strange is the Lord’s answer here. We need to see that the harvest of the gospel far exceeds human expectation. Do not be so foolish as to imagine that

there must necessarily be four months until harvest once the seed is sown. The Lord Jesus views it differently here, for He says that whenever you sow, you may harvest immediately! There is no such “four months’ principle” in His thinking!

Some people may appear to be totally ignorant. Yet keep in mind that whether their understanding is opened or not does not depend on you but on the enlightening of the Holy Spirit. I know of at least a few brothers who pretended to believe but who nonetheless ended up being really saved. We therefore must encourage them in season and out.

### *After the Meeting*

After the meeting is over, brethren can stay with their friends, praying with them and conversing with them. Bring them to the Lord, lead them in prayer, and help them to accept Christ. Then you can obtain from them their names and addresses. Be sure the address is correct, since this will save the time of those who do gospel visitation. If possible, ask them when they will be free and what will be the most convenient time to visit them. Write all this information down quickly lest they get bored. Then give the record to the responsible brothers as reference for future visitation.

### *Instill Need and Knowledge*

Some people accept Christ out of felt needs, but they do not have any gospel knowledge. Other people have gospel knowledge but they do not sense need. Still others have both need and knowledge, yet they cannot make a decision at once. All these people must be helped. Create need for those who feel no need, supply knowledge to those who have no knowledge, and help the hesitant ones in making a decision.

### ***Tell Them of Baptism***

After people have been brought clearly to the Lord, they should be informed immediately of baptism. Look after them, seek them out many times until they are brought to the place where they are ready to be baptized.

### ***Before Meeting Begins***

Another thing to be added here is that sometimes it may be embarrassing for people in a gospel meeting. For example, long before the gospel meeting has ever started people may already be sitting there. Some of them may come as much as an hour early. I can assure you that there are two places where time seems unbearably long: one is in hell, the other is in the church. For the one who goes to hell, he finds time intolerably long there. But to the unsaved who come to church, he too feels that time is terribly long. If these people come early and the gospel is not being preached yet, they may go away or they may sit there wondering what it is all about. At times I have a deep feeling inside me as I have looked out at the faces of the people sitting there waiting: they have always appeared to me to be like sheep without a shepherd. They surely need to be taken care of before the meeting starts.

One of the ways they can be taken care of is to not let the unbelievers sit together. Instead, try to arrange at the beginning to have one or two believers sitting on either side of them. All who participate in such work must be fully equipped with tracts, gospel messages, and a Bible. If because of our neglect these unbelievers just sit there unattended, even the most enthusiastic among them will turn cold.

### ***All Function As Priests***

None of the work already described can at all be accomplished without the entire body of believers participating in it. Show the brethren they *all* are priests, and that accordingly everyone has something to do. This will make the gospel meeting strong, for this will be the entire church preaching the gospel rather than just the few. Unless all are involved, where is the church?

### ***As Many As Are Priests***

Let me underscore what we have said before, that as many as are the people who serve, so that many are the people in the church—as many as are priests, so that many are the people of God. Do not invert the order and say that as many as are the people of God so that many are priests. That is the wrong order. It should instead be: as many there are who serve, so just that many are the people of God.

### ***Functionless Members***

When I was in England, a brother once said to me: “Many in the body are functioning members, but many others are functionless members.” To this I replied, “According to the Bible, all are functioning members, there *is* none functionless. If there is any who is functionless, that one probably is the appendix.” My response caused that brother to laugh. But is it not true that in the thinking of many brethren some members in the body of Christ have functions while some other members have no function at all? But may I ask this, Where in the physical body is there a functionless member? Where can you find any? Let me answer that in the whole body, the only functionless member to be found is probably the appendix. Can it be that in the spiritual body the appendix happens to be you? Let me remind you that all members have functions. And so it follows

that as many as are *functioning* members, that many are the members in the body of Christ.

### ***We Are a Priesthood***

Let us correct our thinking here. Today we must see that service pertains to the *whole* church. It is the *church* preaching the gospel and not just a few brethren. Priesthood includes all the brothers and sisters. As many brethren as are serving, just that many are there who are brethren in the church. Let it be that the number of those who serve determines the number of brethren who are in the church. We cannot let it be that only a few serve among five thousand brethren or even among just a thousand brethren. We cannot allow any non-functioning members. All are members of the body of Christ; and therefore each of the brethren must be reminded that he or she has his or her function; none can be functionless. This fundamental principle must be seen and maintained. Otherwise, this work that we are about is not New Testament work. It is but a modified form of Catholicism—a system of limited priesthood. Since all are priests, we all belong to the priesthood.

(3) *Care for the beginners.*

### ***Meeting for Beginners***

After a person has believed and been baptized, he should be brought into a series of meetings for beginners. In such meetings, a special subject involving one single aspect of basic truth and conduct will be presented every week.

### ***Help and Care***

After a person starts to come to the beginners meetings, he should be assigned a more advanced brother to take care of him. How will

that brother take care of him? By helping him to enter into every subject lesson experientially.

In case of absence, the advanced brother should go and give him the lesson(s) he missed. Whenever he attends the beginners meeting, the advanced one should find out afterwards if he understands what has been taught. On this point, let me share my feeling with you workers, especially with those of you who are ministers of God's word. I think we all have had that painful, shameful, and even indignant experience of having preached a rather deep message in a meeting, but later as you made contact with the brethren you discovered that your message had been like the wind which blows over the roof—it did not touch the ears of the audience. If you do not believe this is true, then you should try to encourage them to ask questions after you have finished speaking. I have often observed that asking questions reflects the condition of the hearer, while giving a message reflects the condition of the preacher. How frequently it is that when a most spiritual message has been given it has fallen a thousand miles distant from the mind of the hearers.

For this reason, do not assume that people understand what they hear. These beginners must be visited and helped until they clearly understand these words.

### ***Beginners to Look After Unbelievers***

All the beginners should be engaged in looking after unbelievers. Put a few stronger saints in their midst to help them do the work. Show them that since they have believed in the Lord, they are now priests of God, and all priests are to serve. How well these beginners shall serve will depend on how well they are helped.

### ***Be a Foreman***

Today it is no longer the workers who go out to work, it is instead the workers who help others to work. If the worker always does the work, he can never finish the work. I repeat, if you go out to work, if you yourself only work, you are a failure. Paul not only works with his hands, he also is a foreman. Learn to work and learn to be a foreman. Learn to train other brothers and sisters to work.

(4) *Care for special needs.* In this regard do not have too many brothers and sisters involved. In gospel work, in gospel care, in care for beginners—almost all the brethren should be mobilized. But caring for special needs is a different matter. It should be done by a few brothers and sisters who carry spiritual weight before the Lord.

When a brother encounters difficulty, let him be helped by these few. In case of joy or sorrow, again let these few help and pray with such ones. Or if there is a family problem, let these few pray and comfort them. Or if there is need for relief, let it be done through these few brothers and sisters.

As soon as brothers and sisters hear of anything of this nature, notify those who are responsible for special needs. They will distribute money to the poor, send food to the hungry, give clothes to the naked, render comfort to the troubled. They will visit prisons, pray for the sick, and help solve problems for the family.

### ***A Foolish Concept***

I do not know when this foolish concept commenced, but many seem to have the thought that the church ought not to have any problems. But do not forget that from the time of the early apostles the Church of God has encountered *many* difficulties. Do not fancy such difficulties as being abnormal for the local church. The Church

since the apostolic days has been marked by many, not a few, tight situations.

Let us recall that not long after the day of Pentecost, there occurred the affair of Ananias and Sapphira. This was followed closely by the matter regarding the Hellenistic widows. Not many days after that, Stephen was martyred; and then Peter was jailed. Such problems have continued on without ceasing. So that from ancient times till now, the history of the Church has been full of obstacles and problems.

In this regard, we need to look more closely at the seven Asian churches mentioned in Revelation: five of these local churches were corrupted and seemed to have no difficulty; yet one of them received no reprimand—even the church in Smyrna, but it was a suffering, “martyr” church; and there was one church among them that was praised by God—Philadelphia; but interestingly, the Lord said to it, “Thou didst keep the word of my patience” (Rev. 3.10). *That* is the word of the Lord the Church of God is always to keep—not the word of *success*, but the word of *patience and “steadfastness”* (margin). A local church must pass through many difficult times requiring patience in the face of many problems and hardships. Only a worldly church will meet with less hardship. A true church will encounter many problems and some defeats.

So never say if a local church is always peaceful and uneventful that that is the sole evidence of the blessing of the Lord. What usually happens is that it is blessed on the one hand and encounters difficulties on the other. A church may undergo many hardships, yet still have the Lord’s blessing.

(5) *Care for those who move and for the brethren from abroad.* When a brother has departed for another locality, the writing of a letter of recommendation on his behalf is not the last responsibility of the church. At the very least, there should be some people

responsible for corresponding with him to keep him informed on the condition of the local assembly as well as to supply him with the gist of the messages spoken during his absence. For quite a long period of time I felt ashamed and as though I had sinned, as I thought of the many brothers and sisters who over the past five years had gone to other places without anyone having corresponded with them. We could not and did not know how they had fared.

Let us today see that whenever a brother or sister goes out from us, there should be one or several of the brethren taking up responsibility to do some correspondence: a letter a week or a letter every other week or at least a letter a month. In that letter inform the brother or sister of the condition of the church and of the other brothers and sisters. If we send out ten letters of recommendation today, we must find two or three people to take up the responsibility of corresponding with those ten or so who go out. No matter how busy we are, we must correspond; for this is a service unto the Lord. And in writing such letters, they should not be just chit-chat, but a summary of the spiritual condition of the church. And in so doing, we will be blessed by God, and all the brethren who go out may perhaps stand even more firmly in the Lord.

Another thing which can be done is to send to them the gist of any special message given during the week. It is not necessary to relay the whole message but simply give the central thought. Nor is it needful to record all the messages spoken during the month but to share merely the essential points. This will at least supply the needs of the absentees. Some may have gone to places where they have no fellowship or perhaps they are lonely and in precarious situations. Except they are kept by God, they have no way to grow. How can they grow if they receive no supply? Therefore, such sharing of the principal thoughts of messages will help stabilize the spiritual condition of these brethren.

### ***Write to Local Assembly As Follow-Up***

I often consider the writing of a letter of recommendation as not being the last thing for us to do. So far as the church is concerned, after a month or two a letter should be written to that local assembly where the brother or sister goes, making an inquiry about him or her and asking for a reply. In the letter, such questions as the following should be included: What is the current spiritual condition of that particular brother or sister? How do you help him or her to grow? How do you take care of the person? Let me say that the lazy church will find itself unable to answer such questions as these. Frequently people are lazy, and sometimes churches may be lazy too. Laziness is what we are fearful of. Let me say, in addition, however, that such letters as the above will awaken some of the churches from their laziness, for they must answer them.

### ***Take Care of Brethren Coming from Outside***

Brethren from abroad need to be taken care of too. I hope there will be many people in the assembly serving in this area, for this also is to be included in the various priestly functions of the church.

Let those who are responsible for taking care of the absentees take care of the brethren from abroad as well. And why? Because they read the reply letters from other assemblies, and this thus enables them to know the problems of those who have gone out from those same assemblies. It is therefore most convenient for them to take care of the brethren from abroad.

Such care does not need to be prolonged beyond two or three months since by that time these brethren from abroad will have now become local brethren. As local brothers and sisters, they should by that time have begun to fulfill their local functions.

I wonder if you have now seen what is the ministry of the church? The local church is to serve in all of these areas. These five areas which we have just discussed pertain to the spiritual side of the church. There are many other miscellaneous things which can be added to this list, but these that have been mentioned already are only meant to serve as a suggestive outline, but even these few need to be done well.

### ***THE WAY OF SERVICE***

#### ***Rather Not Have Sunday Morning Preaching***

I do not know if you have ever thought about what I am going to say next, but I would like to have a heart-to-heart talk with you all. Are you able to see that perhaps the Protestant churches currently put too great an emphasis on Sunday preaching? I for one consider this emphasis as contributing to today's problem. I hope you will think very carefully on whether you would like to maintain such Sunday preaching. I myself would rather have *no* Sunday preaching if I could witness the fact of every brother and sister busily serving: if I could see everybody involved at the time when the gospel is preached; if I could see everyone engaged in gospel care, if I could see everyone taking part in harvesting, and after harvesting, everyone participating in gospel visitation; and if I could see that the various kinds of needs were being met by brothers and sisters assuming their responsibilities to meet them. This that I have just described is the church. Let me illustrate it in this way. Suppose in a certain locality, the Sunday preaching is very strong but not all the body is serving. That is Protestantism. If only four or five brothers are active there and the rest of the body is passive, that is the priestly system of the Roman Catholic Church or the pastoral system of the Protestant churches. It is certainly not the church as God would have it.

### ***No Non-functioning Member***

Our future lies in the *whole* church serving. I hope all the brethren will pay special attention to this rule. Although this vision may easily be forgotten because of much activity, we must put it before ourselves each time we go out to work. With vision we can work. Without vision we cannot work. Brothers and sisters must rise up and serve. We need not be anxious about the greatness of outward difficulties or the amount of people's resistance. The real issue lies in whether we have truly seen the way of service. If we are clear, let us focus our entire strength on it. And never mind the number of people, as long as all of them serve; for it is bewildering if in an assembly of, say, two thousand people, only five hundred serve and the rest do not. Let us see that if there are five hundred brethren in a local church, all five hundred of them must serve.

## Levitical Ministry

# 3

Concerning Levitical ministry, not much needs to be said because it is so simple. The work of the Levites was different from that of the priests in Old Testament times. The priests ministered to God as well as in the tabernacle; the Levites, on the other hand, ministered to the priests and assisted them. In other words, what the priestly ministry represented in the Old Testament was spiritual service; but the Levitical ministry, mundane service. The Levites washed the sacrifice, poured out its blood, cast away its dung, and helped in stripping its skin, as well as bore upon their shoulders the things of the tabernacle. For as God's pillar of cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle and the latter commenced to be moved, the Levites stepped forward to bear the things of the tabernacle. Such was the Levitical ministry.

### *Temporal Yet Not in the World*

What the Levites did was of course related to God. It was not spiritual and yet was closely related to the spiritual side of things. It was temporal, and yet was not in the world but in the church. We can therefore conclude from this that the work of the deacons in the New Testament period is of this Levitical nature. It is parallel to the ministry of the Levites of old.

There are deacons in a local assembly; and even though their work is to manage business affairs, these affairs are related to the church nonetheless.

### *All Must Learn*

All brothers and sisters should have a concern for, and be clear about, the affairs of the church. All must be actively involved.

Cleaning the meeting place, taking care of guest rooms, keeping in order the towels, blankets, sheets, and so forth—all these are Levitical-type services. Taking care of the poor saints in the midst is also a work of the Levites. To meet or to send off brothers and sisters who are from abroad is likewise a Levitical-type work. Many works in the church office also belong to those who perform like the Levites did.

So, when a person serves God, he may on the one hand do the work of the priest and on the other hand do the work of the Levite. He must do both. He takes part both in spiritual service and in mundane work. Recall the example of Stephen and the other six: they had served the tables. Such was Levitical work—the work of deacons. Recall, too, how the disciples had distributed the loaves and the fish to the five thousand and the four thousand, as well as gathered the left-overs in twelve baskets and seven baskets, respectively. These were works of deacons. Take as another example that of Judas, who took care of the purse among Jesus and the Twelve. That had been especially what would be termed a deacon's work today. Furthermore, the disciples had been sent by the Lord Jesus from the well at Sychar to buy bread in the nearby town. Was not this also a kind of deacon's work? As a matter of fact, much Christian activity today belongs to this category. And the entire body of believers needs to learn to serve in this capacity.

### *Home Helps*

I would like to make a suggestion for brothers and sisters to consider. Many of you have leisure time, whereas many others—particularly the sisters—do not have any time for leisure at home. They must cook and take care of the children. Why cannot some arrangement be made to send brothers and sisters to these homes to help? Whoever is responsible for such service could tell a needy sister, “We have two sisters who will help you in washing for two

hours every week.” This is another example of Levitical work. In the instance in the book of the Acts when the supplying of the Hellenist widows had been overlooked, there had been murmurings. And why? Because this was the church, and if there was a need, it had to be met. And although it was mundane and not spiritual in nature, it must nevertheless be done, because this is the expected thing.

### *Twelve Mundane Affairs*

We ought to mention a number of things before the Lord for you to consider as mundane matters of a deacon nature: (1) Cleaning jobs. (2) The arrangement of furniture and such like, as well as the ushering work in the church. (3) Special care for the Lord’s table and for baptism. Some must be responsible for preparing the loaf and the cup. Some trained persons should take care of baptism in such aspects as helping those to be baptized in the going down and coming up out of the water, in the changing of their clothes, etc. (4) Distribution of relief to the unbelieving poor. (5) Sending relief to flood and fire victims. (6) Sending off and meeting those brothers and sisters who travel from one place to another. (7) The management of church finance. (8) The management of the kitchen. (9) The management of the church office. (10) The management of transportation, and making the means of transportation available. (11) The management of correspondence and documents. (12) Assisting in needy homes.

I trust that every brother and sister will bear some burden in such church affairs as these. Do not let some brethren work while others do no work at all. The service of the church must involve the entire body.

### ***Principle of Body Ministry***

Let all be clear on this principle. The entire body of believers must engage in Levitical as well as in priestly ministry. All must work, whether little or much; and all must work heartily. We have a natural tendency to use those people who have the two talents. Church history bears this statement out. On the one hand, the five-talents people know how to exercise themselves; they do not need any encouragement to serve. The one-talent person, on the other hand, tends to bury the talent he has, and once done, it is difficult to stir him to action. Yet the two-talents individuals are most available. They have a little ability but they will not bury it. They will put themselves to work. Nevertheless, if only the two-talents brethren are used and the one-talent brethren are left unused—that is a total failure.

What is the church? The church is that in which all the one-talent people engage in temporal as well as spiritual services. You who are assembled here at these training sessions, do not shake your heads and sigh, “This person is useless or that person is useless.” I tell you, if such attitude exists among you, the church is finished. For if you *treat* him as useless, he *will* be useless. You can of course tell him that he is useless *in himself*, but you are to also tell him that *the Lord has given him one talent and commanded him to trade* with it. *The Lord* will use him. Now if you do not know how to use the single-talented ones, by this very fact you are proven to be lacking in leadership ability before the Lord. You who are leaders are to use all the so-called useless brothers and sisters, for this is the work of a worker. A worker will use all the useful brothers and sisters and he will also transform all “the useless” into usefulness.

The basic principle to recognize is that the Lord never gives anyone less than one talent. In the Lord’s house, no servant is without any gift. He has at least one talent. And hence none can make excuse, saying, “The Lord has not given me anything.” I want

you to know that all God's children are servants. We all are servants as well as children. In other words, being members one of another in God's house, we all have ministries. If we consider anyone to be useless to the Lord, we do not know what the grace of God is. We ought to understand His grace fully, seeing that if He has said that this person or that person is His servant, can anyone of us stand up and say that that person is not? If it were left up to us to choose, more often than not, we would consider only three or five in the entire assembly as being useful and choose only them; yet God declares that *all* are His servants. Accordingly, we must let all serve.

Whether or not we shall succeed in our work hereafter will depend very much on how we see the work done. Will it be done by a few especially gifted persons, or will it be done by all the servants of the Lord? Is the entire church working? That is the critical question.

### ***Body of Christ Is Living Organism***

The body of Christ is not a doctrine; it is a living organism. If such is so, then we must be sure to learn this one thing: that only when all the members are functioning do we have the reality of the body of Christ. Only then can we see the church.

Today's problem lies too much in us, for we have inherited the priestly system of the Roman Catholic Church and the pastoral system of the Protestant churches. And if we become just a little careless, we may end up monopolizing among ourselves as elders and workers all the services of God. It is futile to only *preach* the message of the body of Christ; we must also be bent on seeing that it *operates*. If we believe in the concept of the body of Christ, we need not be afraid of its functioning. We should believe that the Lord will call all the members to function.

### ***God Has Walked Before Us***

I do not expect any brother who is going out, to work by substituting certain people for others instead of leading them all to serve. When you arrive at a certain place, you may at the beginning lead eight or ten people to serve. But after a certain period has elapsed they will lead sixty, eighty, or a hundred more to serve. If you must use those with five talents to suppress the one-talent person, you are not a wise and faithful servant of the Lord. You should indeed get the five-talents and the two-talents brethren to serve, but you should also get all the one-talent people to serve. Those whom you may look upon as useless should all be serving as well. Then you shall see the glory of the church.

I desire to see all the simple people serving; I do not want only a few prominent ones preaching. I have no more admiration for the highly gifted than I do for the one-talent people.

### ***Let Philadelphia Appear***

If through God's dealings with us and our work we are able to open the way of service to the one-talent persons, we shall see for the first time what brotherly love actually is: Philadelphia shall appear. Today we must have brotherly love as well as government. I believe in authority, but I also believe in brotherly love. Without authority, the church can make no progress. "Didst keep my word"—this is a statement that reflects authority. "And didst not deny my name"—this too is a statement that reflects authority (Rev. 3.8). So that Philadelphia is identified by these two authorities; yet Philadelphia itself is brotherly love. All the brethren serve in love. And when this appears in our day we shall know what the church truly is; otherwise, we will simply follow in the train of the Roman Catholic and the Protestant systems. We will not know what the brotherly love and the authority of Philadelphia are.

## ***Two Ways—Gift and Authority***

### Cannot Be Left Unused

*First*, you should not use a brother because you see he is useful and leave another brother unused because to you he seems useless. In the church there cannot be any member left out. To recover the testimony of the Lord Jesus, all the one-talented must rise up. All who belong to the Lord are members of the body. Everyone must rise up and exercise his gift. And then you shall see the church. Do not despise the one-talented. Do not substitute others for them or suppress them. Believe in God and put them to work. Since God has confidence in calling them servants you must have faith to cause them to work.

### Authority Solves Problem of the Flesh

*Second*, in the church we need have no fear of the activities of the flesh. For two things must be established in the church: one is authority, the other is gift. All the one-talent people should come forth to serve, to work, and to bear fruits. What if the one-talented come with their flesh? Let me say to you that their flesh must be dealt with. The solution to this lies in authority, for authority represents God.

Gift is gift, and authority is authority. They are two different things. All the one-talented people must exercise their gifts, and the problem of their flesh is to be solved by authority. Suppose a brother is serving, and his flesh is brought in. Tell him this: "Brother, you cannot do that, you cannot bring in your flesh." Or say to him, "This attitude of yours is not right, we will not permit such an attitude." When he hears this, he probably will go home tomorrow and refuse to do anything. If so, you must seek him out and say to him, "You cannot quit, you must do the work." Although he has brought his flesh in, he should still be allowed to do the work; only he must be

told what he can do and what he cannot do. Deal with him with authority.

This that has just been discussed looms as a very great temptation. As soon as the one-talent person is used by the Lord, his flesh immediately comes in. The flesh of the person and his one talent appear to be joined together. We must resist the flesh but use the one talent. Today's practice is that we too often bury the one talent as well as bury the flesh. Where, then, is the reality of the church in all this? No, we must do differently! Use authority to deal with the flesh, but also encourage the one-talent people to function. Perhaps they will say, "To do is wrong, and not to do is also wrong; what, then, should I do?" The answer is, "To do is indeed wrong, because the flesh has come in; yet not to do is also wrong, because the talent is buried. The one talent you have must come in, but the flesh must go out."

If authority can be maintained and all the functions of the members of the body can be brought in, you will behold on earth a glorious church. The way to recovery is then made easy. I do not know how long a time our Lord will grant us in the future. I believe, however, our way is becoming clearer and clearer. We must concentrate all our thinking and galvanize all our energy on helping brothers and sisters to serve together as a body. And thus will the life of the church truly begin, and the Lord will surely come soon.

# 4

## The Minister of God's Word in the Church

Let us spend a little time together looking into the matter of the minister of God's word in a local assembly.

### *NO NEED TO MAINTAIN SUNDAY PULPIT*

According to past custom, we used to maintain a Sunday pulpit in all the local assemblies. Yet even in *Rethinking the Work*,\* we had already come to see that a local assembly has no need to maintain such a Sunday pulpit. For this kind of meeting is not strictly a church meeting. A prayer meeting is a church meeting. The kind of meeting described in 1 Corinthians 14 where gifts are exercised for the edification of the body is also a church meeting. The breaking of bread is a church meeting too. But the Sunday morning preaching is the product of the Roman Catholic, as well as the Protestant, Church. It is not a church meeting, but as a matter of fact it is a ministry meeting.

### *Reason for Its Retention: "Like all the Nations"*

Although there is no need to maintain a Sunday pulpit in a local assembly, what has been our experience? It has been retained these many years. It has made us to be "like all the nations" (1 Sam. 8.5). We are reluctant to give it up because all the "nations" around us have this Sunday preaching. Why can we not be delivered from it? Wherein lies the problem?

---

\* The book written by the author which forms Volume Two of this present trilogy and which was published in China in early 1938. —*Translator*

I think one of the big reasons is that if the Sunday preaching were taken away there would be nothing to fill in the gap. Since all the nations around us are doing it, we find it extremely difficult to maintain a local assembly if we do not have such preaching on Sunday. It appears to be very hard for people to come into our midst and be treated to no sermon, whereas the opposite case is true elsewhere in the denominations.

### ***Difficulties of Its Retention: an Outside and an Inside One***

In our past experience we have not followed through on what we had earlier seen because of both an inward as well as outward reason. The outward reason has been that since all the nations around us have practiced it, we felt that many brothers and sisters would go elsewhere to hear preaching if we did not ourselves have Sunday preaching. This has revealed to us, however, just how few have really been priests among us. Too many among us have had to be served instead of their serving. To be a priest is not to be served but to serve. And listeners, as we know, are to be served; they far too often do not serve. Thus this, as you can see, has been an outside difficulty.

In addition, without any Sunday preaching, there would have also been an inside difficulty. Many brothers and sisters among us, who had already been Christians for ten or twenty years, would have felt uneasy because this would have been so different from their former habit and customary expectation.

### ***See Accurately***

I wish to consult with you on this matter. Here I am not preaching, I am merely suggesting. But we do need to see very accurately.

Up till now I have not been able to read from the Bible anything regarding a Sunday pulpit. Especially in a local assembly, there is no biblical justification for maintaining a Sunday pulpit. In order to strengthen any such pulpit, you will probably need to have a worker stationed there. You may call him a worker, a priest, or a pastor, but the fact is that someone is needed there if the Sunday pulpit is to be maintained.

We do not believe in a restricted system of priests, because *all* of us are priests. Can we accept a modified form of the pastoral system resulting in something such as a worker system? We cannot. We must instead learn to help all the brothers and sisters to be priests. As they all come forth to serve, the number of those waiting to be served will automatically be decreased among us. We must eliminate the number of those to be served. As long as the served are there, all will expect others to be priests and themselves to simply be God's people. And if so, then there will be no way to eliminate the Sunday pulpit and there will never be a true reflection of the body in that locality, for there will be too many people who are passive in behavior—they waiting to hear but not prepared to speak. If ever the Church is going to be the Church in reality and if ever Christ is going to have a true expression of the body in a locality, all the brothers and sisters must serve—the one-talented person as well as the two- and five-talented persons. Only this can be the condition in which a group can truly be said to be the body of Christ.

### ***The Way of the Church: Working Instead of Listening***

I think the way through the problem is this—that just as soon as people are saved and brought in, they are immediately to be put into the work of the assembly so as to turn us from the habit of listening to Sunday preaching to the habit of working and serving on Sunday. In the past we had correctly taught that the habit of listening to Sunday preaching was wrong and yet we had nothing to fill the void

which would have been created had we ceased such preaching. We had not perceived the concept of Sunday serving and working as a substitute for Sunday listening. Today, we realize that Sunday working is right and proper.

If all the one-talent people everywhere would rise up and work, we could quickly restore to the body of Christ the condition of the early church. Let us imagine that on the Lord's Day morning, we preach the gospel. On that day the entire body will be mobilized to save souls. Accordingly, everyone will be busy on Sunday, because on that day we shall all be preaching the gospel together.

No doubt the Church on earth needs to be fed. I believe in feeding, but I also confess that the mission of the Church on earth is not only feeding, it is preaching the gospel as well. All the brothers and sisters should go out to bring in people. We advocate that each one bring in two or four more. And thus, the entire body will be busy. All will be preaching the gospel, all will be saving souls.

If every Sunday we can bring in people and lead them to Christ, then I assure you that after a time the habit of listening to a sermon will pass away, and the reality of the church will appear. Who today are the church members? Those who merely listen to a Sunday sermon. But a Christian is one who goes out to save souls.

### *All Are Priests*

The universal priesthood of believers is a subject which has been preached for over a hundred and twenty years, from 1828\* till now. Yet even in our day priestly function is still not a universal fact in the Church. The Church as the body of Christ has been a truth which has

---

\*This specific year marked the beginning of the so-called Brethren movement, which has asserted a tremendous influence on the course of Church history ever since.—*Translator*

been recovered since over a century ago; and especially during the last decade, some have come to a clear understanding of its spiritual value and worth. Nevertheless, it is possible for this truth concerning the body of Christ to remain but a teaching in the Church and for the reality of church life to still be very much lacking.

May God open our eyes to see what the body truly is. The concept of body life means that every member of a local expression is functioning—just as in the physical body, there is no member that is without any function. In like manner, therefore, no one who belongs to Christ is to refrain from being a serving priest. All the members must function, and all the priests must serve.

### ***Serve Men in Morning, Serve God in Evening***

I do not know if you have caught this vision. If one day the habit of listening to a sermon is ruled out of the mind of God's people, the whole church will be serving according to the word of God. On Sunday morning the entire body of priests will serve men in preaching the gospel, and on Sunday evening the entire priesthood will again be serving—except that at this time they shall be serving God in the breaking of the bread. How good this will be.

Hereafter there is not to be much difference between the workers and the brethren. The former may merely be spiritually stronger before the Lord than the latter. So far as the Work is concerned; there is no difference, because all are fellow workmen. Only when we enter into the *practice* of this will we understand the New Testament, since the Scriptures consider all the children of God to be fellow workers because everyone is working. The only difference lies in the fact that the so-called workers are sent out in order that they may devote all their time and energy to the Work.

### ***THE SUPPLY OF THE WORD***

Let us turn for a while to this matter of the supply of God's word before we return again to a further discussion of the way of the Church.

### ***The Supply of the Word for Beginners***

If the preaching of the gospel is strong, many people will be saved. As the saved people increase, the church will naturally have more problems. This is because all kinds of people will come in, just as in the drawing of nets all kinds of fishes will be gathered to the boat. And accordingly, we need to take care of them and give them some help in the word of God each week.

To this end we have prepared fifty-two basic subjects or lessons.\* We desire that once a week all the new believers will be gathered to hear God's word. At least a year's time will be spent in presenting them with all the principal subjects in the Scriptures which are concerned with the Christian walk. Thus will they be amply supplied with the word of Christ.

God's word may be repeated even as God's anointing may be repeated. Of course, if we are not living before the Lord, these messages will become dead. But if we *are* living before Him, the repeated sharing of the fifty-two lessons can continue to be living. Year after year these topical lessons may be delivered. And as the word of God is repeated, the anointing is repeated, and life is also freshly quickened again.

---

\*These basic lessons, published subsequently in Chinese, were eventually translated and published in English in six volumes. See the fuller explanatory footnote on this in the "Introduction" chapter to this present volume, at the sub-head in that chapter entitled, "Need for Basic Training." Complete bibliographic information is therein given.—  
*Translator*

We have now seen two kinds of meetings: one is the Sunday morning meeting when the gospel is preached that people may be saved. And after people are saved and brought in, they can be given good care through these basic lessons. The word of God supplied on Sunday morning pertains to the gospel; God's word supplied during the week pertains to the edification of new believers.

### ***The Supply of God's Word According to 1 Corinthians 14***

Some may ask this: if we have older brothers and sisters in our midst—the many brethren who are not beginners—how do we supply *their* need in God's word? Let me mention that this can be supplied by means of the fellowship meeting according to 1 Corinthians 14. At that meeting time, some may have the word of the Lord, some may have revelation, some may have a song, and some may have prayer. Let those who have the burden of God's word receive the burden from the Lord and not be passive. They should speak at such a gathering.

Today, such a meeting is often weak because many gifted brothers with ministry are too passive. Unless a burden is impressed upon them such as for speaking on Sunday morning, they will not go to God and seek for His word. They just breathe a sigh of relief at a fellowship meeting. Yet if *they* do not have a sense of responsibility, how can the meeting be strong? If all are passive, who will be active in the meeting? And hence the meeting according to 1 Corinthians 14 is not the kind of gathering where all come without responsibility. It is a meeting in which all are responsible. Let us understand that it is wrong for one to take upon himself *all* the responsibility, but it is equally wrong for all not to take *any* responsibility.

How should such a fellowship meeting be prepared? Just as in the other meetings, the responsible brothers should come together and pray at least half an hour before the gathering begins. They should have assurance from the Lord before they enter the meeting. None of

them can rush into it at the last hour. Every one of the responsible brothers must be prepared beforehand in order that only those with a real burden and who are fearful of hurting the meeting if not properly prepared will come to share, instead of it being people unspiritual but ambitious who end up sharing. First, you need to pray that the Lord will control the fellowship meeting according to His will. And second of all, the responsible brothers should not be passive in such a gathering.

I often wonder why some brothers who are ministers of God's word sit back and let other brothers speak, and when the meeting proves to be weak, they then shake their heads! It is strange to me that people who *can* take responsibility end up doing nothing at a fellowship meeting.

### ***The Supply of God's Word by Apostles***

The supply of God's word by the apostles is the supply through the ministers of God's word. Preaching of the gospel and the edification of beginners should be adequate in ordinary days. And this will help form the habit of serving among the brethren. As a further aid and in order to strengthen the supply of God's word, we can also have the meeting according to 1 Corinthians 14. All this, then, is the arrangement for a local assembly.

What, though, is the responsibility of an apostle? When such a brother passes through a certain place, he may stay for a few days, even as did Paul when he passed through Troas and spent seven days there. He may give the local assembly or a combination of several assemblies some special time in the ministry of God's word.

### ***MUST GO THE WAY OF RECOVERY***

Permit me to say that the condition of the Church today is too far from New Testament order! We must therefore correct the situation.

God walks in the way of recovery. And we too must walk that way. We must help the brothers and sisters into service. They should serve new believers as well as sinners. They should learn to edify one another with the work of God according to 1 Corinthians 14.

For the church as a whole to preach the gospel—that is truly a tremendous thing. It is a glorious work. There is no need to have some greatly gifted persons such as a Charles Finney, a Charles Stanley, a George Whitefield or a John Wesley. Let me tell you that the power of all the brethren in preaching the gospel far exceeds the power of these great men.

We may have to wait twenty or even fifty years for a person with five talents to appear on the scene. How rare it is to have such a man. But by putting forth five of the one-talent brethren, you *have* the five-talents person. As you put the most untalented five together, you get the five talents. The church does not have many five-talents people; but when it as a whole begins to preach the gospel, you have five-talents brethren many times over! And they are always there, and they are everywhere. Whether or not the gospel can reach the world depends not on the workers but on the Church.

Hence today the vision must be clear, the revelation from the Lord must be thorough. O Lord, I pray that You put the burden of work upon the Church. In the physical realm, what the head directs is the body and not just the individual members of the body. It takes the entire body to manifest the full strength and power of the head. So too is it in the spiritual realm of the Church as the body of Christ. I therefore desire that there be true local representations of the body of Christ in China. Do not think of the body of Christ as only a heavenly concept. It is too idealistic for anyone to try to find a local assembly in heaven. The body of Christ must and will be manifested on the earth. For even though it is so spiritual, it can still be manifested on earth.

## ***MIGRATION—ANOTHER WAY OF PREACHING THE GOSPEL***

In the book of Acts, we see two different ways of preaching the gospel: (1) one of them is found in Antioch, from where the apostles go forth to preach the gospel; and this has been the way which the Church has emphasized these many years. But (2) let us today recognize that Jerusalem symbolizes another way of preaching the gospel—one that is quite different from that of Antioch. The way of Jerusalem is, that after a number of people are saved, they migrate to other places to preach the gospel. By reading carefully Acts chapters 8, 10, 11 and 12, we see that it is right to migrate for the gospel's sake, whether it come through persecution or by other means. If many people are saved in one place, as happened in Jerusalem, they should be sent out; or else, persecution will eventually come to disperse them.

As people migrate to other places, they go out to preach the gospel. Workers must never entertain the thought that they are the only ones who go out to win souls. At times it will be the apostolic workers who venture forth to gain souls, but at other times it will be the ordinary saved ones who are sent out to gain souls. These two ways must both be adopted.

During the days of the early apostles, preaching the gospel had a definite priority over listening to a sermon. As we read through the Acts of the Apostles, we can perceive that at that time there were not as many ministers of God's word as we have today. For then the children of God paid more attention to the preaching of the gospel than to listening to a sermon. Today, though, it seems as if the basic thing for a Christian to do is to listen to the Sunday sermon rather than to preach the gospel. Hence we must see clearly and accurately the way which lies before us. We must help brothers and sisters along this new way so that they will put the preaching of the gospel first before they do something else. And the result will be that more

people will be saved, there will be no need to maintain at different places so many workers, and we shall see the local church being raised up.

I thank God for what Romans 12 says: “he that teacheth, to his teaching; or he that exhorteth, to his exhorting” (vv. 7b, 8). It does not say: “he that heareth, to his hearing.” Had there been such a word as that, the Church would have disappeared. Do keep in mind that there is to be no such thing as only listening to a sermon. This is *not* what is meant by body functioning. May God be gracious to us that we may all rise up to serve and to preach the gospel.

### ***THE VISION OF THE WORK***

This vision is now put before us. Henceforth, let us work daily according to this vision. So long as all the brothers and sisters do not have the vision to serve, we who are workers will need to work on. Yet they all must eventually rise up to work—to preach the gospel. The whole church locally must serve, the whole church locally must preach the gospel. Only in this way shall we have the New Testament church.

According to many Bible scholars, the Roman Catholic Church is the church in Babylonian captivity. Just as the children of Israel had been taken captive into Babylon, so the Church generally has also been taken captive. The Protestant Church came back from Babylon, but she has not built the temple. Although many have returned from Babylon, the holy temple has not yet been rebuilt. Today you and I, in the current history of the Church, are those people who must rise up to rebuild the temple. Like Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah and the remnant who rose up and rebuilt the temple and the city of Jerusalem, we too must learn to bring forth again God's Church and its testimony in our time. Many have come out of Babylon, but they still carry with them many Babylonian traits and manners. Up to this present moment, the Church is not as it ought to be. The Catholic

Church may be stricter than the Protestant churches, yet neither comes close to the Church that is on God's heart. If there is a local assembly, it must collectively preach the gospel and it must collectively serve within these years. Oh, how I hope that these two words will be repeated a million times over: the local assembly must preach the gospel, the local assembly must serve. When this happens we shall then have the local church as it ought to be; otherwise, it becomes a mystifying group, with nothing about it approaching any resemblance to the church on God's heart.

Now I know that it will certainly be difficult at the beginning. Nevertheless, the vision must be seen clearly and accurately. The responsible brethren should come together to inquire of God—to pray and to take counsel: O Lord, how should all the brothers and sisters rise up to serve? This is therefore our way: not that the few work all the time, but that all come to work. It will not do if a few of you do everything and the rest do nothing. *You* must work, but *they too* must work: you work in order to bring *them* into working.

### ***CHURCH MUST BE IN LIBERTY OF HOLY SPIRIT***

We have said enough on the ministry of God's word in a local assembly. Concerning the mutual edification that is in accordance with the fellowship meeting described in 1 Corinthians 14, it really depends on the spiritual condition of the local brethren. I think most would agree that the strongest supply of God's word happened among the Brethren during the last century. Yet why was this? Because they followed the principle of 1 Corinthians 14 by letting the Holy Spirit have His liberty. Though there were many *weak* words, there were also many *strong* words being released. So that in such a meeting, even if many who should not have spoken did speak, those who should have spoken were given the opportunity to speak. As the Holy Spirit has His freedom, we may expect Him to speak in the assembly as well as to order things in the assembly. Let the church be in the liberty of the Holy Spirit.

# 5

## Various Meetings in the Church

Let us take up the various meetings of the church, one by one, and discuss them in some detail.

### *(1) The Gospel Meeting*

The local brothers should set apart a special time, possibly on Sunday morning, when all the brethren in the church work together in the preaching of the gospel. Or, the gospel may be preached in different districts of the city. It needs to be preached with all our strength.

At the time of preaching, we need to bring people in, to sit among them and talk with them. After the meeting is over, send them home. But continue relating to them until they are baptized.

The gospel messages may be presented strongly. At the same time it is essential that the attitude of the brethren must be right in a gospel meeting. Frequently it is the brethren who ruin the meeting. We need to remember that the gospel is not preached for us to hear. We must help the meeting instead of weakening it. Learn to lead the people who sit by our sides to believe in the gospel. Naturally, *we* do not need the gospel, but the *friends* do. If the attitude of all the brethren is right, it is much easier for the brother who preaches the gospel to do so. Otherwise, he has to cope with the reaction of the brethren as well as with that of the sinners. Remember that he is not there to pass the test of preaching the gospel but to lead people to Christ. Let us therefore work together, and then there will not be much of a problem in a gospel meeting.

Do not let a gospel meeting be too long or too short. Two thirds of the time may be spent in casting the net, the other third of the time in gathering the net.

## ***(2) The Beginners Meeting***

Since the topics of this series of meetings are prescribed in advance, the delivery of them must be definite. In each local assembly find two or three brothers who are able to deliver these messages. In case one brother is absent or sick, the other may stand in. In a large assembly, this can be done according to districts and can have more brothers involved in the delivery of these messages.

Hopefully, these lessons for the beginners will not be subject to change so that they can be covered once a year. And if these lessons are given according to order in various localities, people who travel elsewhere will hear the same message. Thus they will be edified in many subjects. Due to the fact that many brethren have not learned these basic lessons of the Christian life, we have encountered numerous difficulties. Hence we hope hereafter that this meeting for beginners will be effectively done so that all new believers will learn these basic lessons\* well.

### ***Make-Up Lessons Must Be Carefully Given***

One point which needs to be emphasized is that those who are responsible for visiting the beginners must themselves learn these lessons well. Otherwise, they will not be able to supply the beginners with the lessons missed due to their absence. I hope the brethren will realize this problem. Perhaps a basic lesson may have been given in one and a half hours, but in giving a make-up lesson on it, it was done in two minutes! It was presented not just as an outline, it ended up as an outline of the outline! I remember one brother, in giving a

---

\* Again it should be pointed out that these basic lessons, published subsequently in Chinese, were eventually translated and published in English in six volumes. See the fuller explanatory footnote on this in the "Introduction" chapter to this present volume, at the sub-head in that chapter entitled, "Need for Basic Training." Complete bibliographic information is therein given.—*Translator*

make-up lesson, merely said a single word: “The topic for today is, to read the Bible daily.” And that was it! If you go to a person’s home to give him lessons he has missed, you cannot say only this word! Unless the Holy Spirit works in a special way, one word like this is not enough. There needs to be detailed explanations presented by means of different sub-headings so that the hearer may feel as though he had personally attended the beginners meeting himself. If not, the loss is great.

Remember that once the gospel is preached, the future of the assembly will depend much on how effectively the beginners meeting with its program is carried on. This meeting can very largely decide whether the next generation is going to be strong or weak. If this meeting is weak, how can the next generation be strong? Yes, people have believed in the gospel and are saved; but where is the church?

### ***The Teaching and Fellowship of the Apostles***

I hope you will remember especially what the book of Acts says: “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers” (2.42). The verse preceding this one spoke of baptism, and it is followed immediately by the apostles’ teaching and fellowship. So that after three thousand were saved and added to the Jerusalem church, they were given teaching and fellowship by the apostles immediately. How very important is the building up of the new believers. Our so-called edifying of the beginners in our midst is to be none other than the apostles’ teaching and fellowship.

Once the gospel meeting has brought people in, the work of nurturing them must follow. If not, many shall be born but few shall be nurtured. How can the local assembly ever be strong if this is the case? Therefore, on the one hand the preaching of the gospel must be

strong, and on the other hand the edifying of the beginners must be strong too. If both are strong, we shall have a promising future.

### ***(3) The Fellowship Meeting According to 1 Corinthians 14***

I believe we have to look to God and learn much before Him concerning this meeting. In this particular gathering of the saints, the entire body of brothers and sisters assemble together to be led by God to rise up and serve. Many are there serving, and so it provides much help to the church there. Here, personal testimonies as well as God's word may also be given.

#### ***Responsible Brothers Must Supervise This Meeting***

Find out a few brothers and sisters who are gifted in helping people. Ask them to share more at such a meeting. Some brothers and sisters do not have much to share. It is evident they possess less gifts, and also less grace. The responsible brothers can inform them privately not to speak too often. With respect to some brothers, they may be given a limited time in sharing, but be careful not to offend the Holy Spirit. For some of them may stand up and share two minutes with great profit, but they like to extend their sharing too long. It needs to be understood that if all who stand up to share have received deep dealings from the Lord, such a meeting is bound to be strong.

Many think they can help people. They are so self-confident; yet they do not know how to touch peoples' spirits. Such will never realize their weakness if they are not told. So the responsible brothers must tell them that when they get up to speak before God, they should speak briefly, since any prolonged speech of theirs will not help the people. On the other hand, if someone speaks and people are edified, the responsible brothers should encourage him to speak again. Although the responsible brothers may not be ministers of

God's word, they nevertheless govern the church. And as such, they cannot be lax. Some brothers may need to be *encouraged* to speak more so that the church may be edified; whereas some other brothers may need to be *discouraged* from speaking too long since only as they speak briefly will the church be edified.

If the responsible brothers are not passive but can give a little supervision to the meeting, I believe the 1 Corinthians 14-type fellowship meeting may produce rich supplies to the church.

What is extremely important is that the responsible brothers must not speak to, or deal with, people casually, since a little carelessness may result in offending against the Holy Spirit. What the elders of the church should fear most is offending against the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit is the true representative of Christ. He represents Him in exercising authority on earth. Elders can speak only when they understand the thought of Christ. Not knowing the mind of Christ, they must not speak.

Can a sister give her testimony in such a meeting? I personally think she may.

#### ***(4) The Prayer Meeting***

There are a few points which brethren should remember concerning a prayer meeting.

*Brevity*—The first point for all the brethren to learn is to be brief in prayer. All prayer meetings are ruined by lengthy prayers. Learn to pray short ones. New believers should pray briefly at the beginning; the more advanced brethren may pray longer. I believe for a prayer meeting to be strong and powerful, the prayers must be short. Lengthy ones are frequently filled with empty words.

*Realness*—The second point the brethren must be reminded of is that the prayers in a prayer meeting are to be real. The brethren should be warned not to see too much difference between private prayer and public prayer. This means they must learn to be real. It is true that in a prayer meeting the words uttered need to be clear. Frequently in private prayer, the words need only be half-uttered. Nevertheless, it is a fact that many words *not* used in private prayers *are* used in public prayers—and for ulterior reasons. Such prayers are false. Sometimes at a prayer meeting you wonder whether the brother is praying for *you* to hear or for *God* to hear. The brethren must be taught to pray out of their hearts and to pray for *God* to hear. Do not ever allow any brother or sister to make prayer a kind of preaching, or to make it a kind of report to God. Teach them to pray briefly and genuinely. These are the two basic conditions for a good prayer meeting: to say only as much as is in the heart, and to not stretch what you do pray beyond reality.

*Concentration*—Finally, the third matter to be noticed is for the brethren to decide on the subjects to be prayed for. We must learn not to pray for whatever each of us deems fitting. If a prayer meeting has presented to it twenty or thirty matters to pray for, and with everyone praying for his/her subject, the agreement spoken of in Matthew 18 evaporates. Where there is not one mind and one heart, how can we expect God to hear?

Accordingly, the matters for prayer must be decided upon. They should be mentioned. Perhaps at a given prayer meeting only one thing is to be prayed for. Suppose, for example, there is a problem in one locality, and so we decide to pray for that locality. At the time of prayer, all the brothers and sisters lay aside other matters and concentrate on praying for just this one item. From start to finish, the church prays for only this one thing, with all present bringing merely this one matter before God. Such a situation as this sounds more like a prayer meeting.

A prayer meeting is not when everybody brings in his own personal prayer and prays for it. Such a meeting must be concentrated, and its prayer must be with one accord. Hence the responsible brothers may mention but just this one subject for prayer and all will pray for it and not for anything else.

But if there are five or six matters to be prayed for, then when the announcement is made, make it one at a time. Let one subject be prayed through first until the burden seems to be lifted through prayers, and only then is the second matter to be mentioned. And thus, even in the case of many matters for prayer, the prayer offered up is concentrated, since they are mentioned one at a time.

In view of this, the responsible brothers must learn how to lead the meeting before God. Their spirits need to be opened so as to be highly sensitive. For example, a certain matter has been prayed for, and it may now have arrived at the point when either stopping the prayer or continuing with it may be called for. If the burden is thus discharged, the next matter should be mentioned and prayed for.

Keep in mind that many prayer meetings fail because there are too many subjects to pray for.

### ***(5) The Breaking of Bread Meeting***

This is the time of true worship. It can be divided into two parts of worship: the first part is towards the Lord Jesus, the second is towards God. In the first part, we see the One who was sent; in the second, we come to the One who sent Christ. In the first part, we meet the Lord; in the second, we meet God.

Brothers and sisters should learn to enter into the first part quickly. If the feeling towards the Lord be slow, there will not be time for the second part. In the first part let the Lord be touched quickly. It should not take too much time or too many prayers before

He is touched. As soon as we touch the Lord, we should begin to break the bread. After the bread is broken, we should go immediately to the Father.

Most likely our problem today centers upon a weakness which we have at the beginning of the breaking of bread. Or it may be that oftentimes the feeling of the brethren towards the Lord has definitely reached its height, and the bread lies on the table unbroken; and thus the spirit of worship ebbs away. With the result that it may take two or three peaks before the breaking of the bread finally occurs. The best is at the first peak, when immediately thereafter, the bread should be broken. If so, this will allow time for worshiping the Father. During this latter time, the Lord Jesus will lead us to worship the Father, He now taking a different position in that He is now leading us in singing. The Lord Jesus leads us to draw near to the Father and to sing praises together. The Son and the many sons join together in praise.

### ***(6) The Sisters Meeting***

The sisters meeting is also a helpful one to the church. In some localities, there *is* such a need for the sisters to meet; in some other places there *may not* be such a need.

If one or two sisters who are entrusted by the Lord with His word come to a local assembly, we should arrange to have a sisters meeting for them so that they may have the opportunity to exercise their gifts. Or if there are sisters already in the locality who are being used by the Lord, such a sisters meeting is in order. For this meeting enables these sisters who are used by God to have opportunity to give other sisters some spiritual assistance. But if there is not such a sister around, then such a meeting is not necessary.

### ***(7) The Children's Meeting***

The children's meeting is also needed. It is one of the works of the local assembly. Some brothers and sisters, especially the sisters, should undertake this work. The children may be taught to learn and to memorize Bible verses. They may learn to sing songs whose words consist of Scripture verses. They may be helped with visual aids.

If the children's meeting is well conducted, it has a good chance of adding to the number of believers. As more and more people are saved, the importance of the children's meeting increases accordingly, since the future of the church is to be found in the next generation.



## The Deacons Office

# 6

*And they sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, according as any man had need. (Acts 2.45)*

*For neither was there among them any that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto each, according as any one had need. (Acts 4.34,35)*

*Now in these days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a murmuring of the Grecian Jews against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. (Acts 6.1)*

*Let none be enrolled as a widow under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man. (1 Tim. 5.9)*

The Bible records in detail the spiritual—but not the physical arrangements—of the church. This is a most amazing thing. In the New Testament, the spiritual arrangements are shown us in great detail and perfection, but its physical arrangements are simply mentioned without any elaboration. The Bible tells us clearly how to exercise spiritual gifts, how to meet, and what the purpose of gathering together is (which is that of edification). It reveals to us distinctly how the church is local in practice—with the brethren, deacons and elders—and also how the elders are bishops or overseers. It plainly discloses to us as well how the Work is regional—with apostles being sent out and they then returning to their center. So that the Bible does indeed give us very clear guidance on the spiritual arrangements of the church. Anyone who is simple, pure and attentive enough before God, as well as being willing to learn, will find no great difficulty in this area. He will be able to receive clear light.

We may perhaps find it rather puzzling, however, that even though the New Testament *mentions* a goodly number of physical

arrangements, they are not recorded in any great detail—as though the Bible shies away from doing so.

We have purposely quoted three passages from Acts. In two of them we are told that distribution was made according to the need of each person; and in one passage the Grecian widows were being neglected in their daily ministrations. At that time there were tens of thousands of believers in the church at Jerusalem. Today as we read these passages, the phrase “according as any one had need” may appear to be a very simple statement. But in what manner did the apostles actually make distribution according to each need among the tens of thousands of believers who had been saved not too long before? Let us understand that such activity had to involve much work with many and varied arrangements. It was not done in one or two days nor by just one or two persons. It was not merely a matter of serving one or two meals; it involved a tremendous undertaking to distribute according to each person’s need.

I think all who have ever managed any substantial affair know how difficult this must have been. Here on Kuling Mountain there are presently only about one hundred people, but we have nonetheless felt the problem of supply. You should know that there are three or four brothers in the city (Foochow) and two or three brothers here on the mountain who are busy with supplying the need of all one hundred of us. And even in this current case, the task undertaken has not been a perfect one. If that be the case here with just a few of us, then how about tens of thousands of people?!? Yet the Bible simply records one descriptive word to summarize that gigantic undertaking: “According as any one had need”! To determine how many “any man’s” there were there is difficult enough; to learn how they distributed “according as any one had need” is even more difficult. Yet even though the Scriptures use but a few words to describe what was done, we can begin to understand that those few words had to have represented an enormous amount of work. It must have required a great deal of organization and

calculation and have involved many people. Yet in an amazing way, the Bible treats in only a few words that which must have surely required weeks and months to do as though it could have been done in half an hour. What happened on the Day of Pentecost was recorded in great detail in Acts 2, but the kind of physical arrangement whereby distribution among the saints according to every man's need was made was not revealed here in any particular.

### *Learn Both Sides*

#### (1) Church Affairs Must Be Arranged

We desire the brethren to learn a basic principle, which is, to see both sides of a matter. On the one hand, the Bible shows us distinctly that church affairs must be arranged. Perhaps some brothers entertain the erroneous concept that church affairs need not be ordered, as though they will just spontaneously be done. But the Scripture says plainly that distribution was made in those early days according to the need of each believer. Nothing was distributed casually, but all was given according to need. Hence, there *is* arrangement.

#### (2) Man, Not Method, Should Be Emphasized

On the other hand, we wish the brethren to notice that God does not *stress* arrangement. God does indeed order things, but He does not record such ordering in the Bible. The *fact* of arrangement is recorded, but the *method* of arrangement is not disclosed in the Scriptures. For God does not consider the method of arrangement so important as to deserve to be written up in His word. You may ask why. Simply because what God needs in the body of Christ are men of wisdom and spiritual understanding. If God's grace is upon them, His grace will also be manifested in the mundane affairs of the church. A person who is full of the Holy Spirit will know how to manage spiritual things. He may also be a skillful artisan to make the tabernacle of God. This too is spiritual work. So that God wants us to

learn in spiritual things. In the Bible, from beginning to end you see spiritual arrangements—spiritual things and spiritual principles—but you see very little, if any, of physical arrangements. The facts are there, but not the detailed methods.

### ***Danger of Recording the Methods***

God knows human temptations and perils. After a while, all the spiritual principles will be lost, with only the physical affairs remaining. People may use methods which originate from God, but they may not necessarily be spiritual persons. Had the rules and regulations which the apostles adopted in managing the church affairs been recorded in detail, let me tell you that all who would read the Bible would be intent on learning these methods before they would try learning to be spiritual. For men are just naturally carnal, and therefore they can learn fleshly things far faster than spiritual things. Many brethren, when they learn about baptism, first argue about immersion or sprinkling before they notice its spiritual meaning. Instead of learning the meaning of baptism, they quarrel over the outward way of baptism. If there had been one book in the Bible which as a kind of manual had dealt exclusively with managing the mundane affairs of the Church, let me assure you that people would probably have thrown away the present twenty-seven books of the New Testament and would have made this one book a “must” reading for everybody. And thus this manual would have caught the attention of the entire Church and become the attraction of all Christians throughout the generations. It is for this very reason, therefore, that the Bible exhibits the characteristic of showing us only the grace of God without giving us His managerial techniques.

In many churches, there *is* such kind of manual. From Church history we learn that each time after God had given a revival in which many souls had been awakened and some servant or servants of the Lord had been used, people said that the church was now in

need of arrangements—both in her spiritual and physical aspects. With the result that they devised many arrangements and wrote them down in a manual lest these arrangements would later be forgotten. Such record-keeping served as operating procedures for the later generations to follow. But let us be reminded once again from Church history that as time went by, the spiritual blessing began to ebb away, the living water was lost, and the power evaporated. The second generation became weaker than the first, and the third generation became even weaker than the second. So that while the spiritual blessings almost all ebbed away, the operating procedures were left intact. Now this describes in general terms the present-day condition of Protestantism.

It is for this reason that God refuses to show us in the Bible His methods for managing affairs; instead, He leaves them to the leading of the Holy Spirit. As the Holy Spirit fills the people, He gives them wisdom to manage things, thus avoiding the danger of one day having the shell, the method and the procedure in hand but the blessing, the living water and the spiritual power totally gone.

Is not this the basic problem with the Church? For in its long history, whenever a group of people have been raised up by God, there came forth a method or procedure which after one or two generations was the only thing left.

In view of this, we have tried for many years to avoid developing a fixed method or procedure. We do not want to have any method among us. If there is spiritual power and life, if the Lord's blessing continues, the maintenance of such a method may be convenient. But if one day these spiritual things are forfeited and only a method is left behind, we will simply be following in the footsteps of the Protestant churches. Only a shell will be left, with the inward spiritual reality gone.

Nevertheless, we must be careful not to fall to the other extreme as many others have done; for they contend that the church should have no method whatsoever. I wish all to pay attention to this point. Anyone who reads the Bible carefully knows that there are methods or procedures spoken of in the Scriptures. If we look at the physical care that was needed after Pentecost, I am sure we will be convinced that there must be operating procedures. And even though the Bible—as we have seen already in the case of the Jerusalem church—seems to touch on this matter lightly in just a few words, much attention to management methods and operating procedures lie behind those simple words. For it would have been terribly chaotic for the early apostles had there been no arrangements at all. So I would have all the brethren see that in the apostolic church of yesteryear there was indeed a working procedure.

Even so, God does not wish such procedure to remain to be copied by later generations. In a given period when the Spirit of God is working in a certain place, a method will just naturally be produced. But whenever the spiritual blessing which came expires, let such a method expire with it. We do not expect the method or procedure to linger even a day longer than does the spiritual blessing.

Oh, do let us find a way out of these two extremes. Some people are like the Protestants, always looking for a method or procedure. Yet the less water there is in a cup, the more attention there will be given to the outward appearance of the cup. For the day when finally a cup is not used to contain water at all, it will be hung up on a wall to be admired as an antique. Then will the people really stress the outside when that happens! But we know that God does not approve of such an emphasis on the outward. On the other hand, however, it is not entirely without external method. This is clearly demonstrated for us in Acts chapters 2, 4 and 6. As long as the problem with the widows of the Grecian Jews remained unsettled, the apostles considered the matter of the physical needs of the entire Jerusalem assembly to still be unsatisfactory. Out of the tens of thousands of

believers who had been in need, only some widows still had problems unsolved, and yet the apostles were not satisfied, and felt bad about it until a solution was finally found.

Let us also recall Paul's word to Timothy (1 Tim. 5.9). It would appear as though Timothy had been keeping the names of widows in a book, yet we do not find a record of such a book of widows anywhere else in the Bible. Once again, a method or arrangement is but casually recorded in Scripture. And although we can safely infer that Timothy was familiar with such a book, Paul did not specify how big a book it should be nor how the names should be recorded in it. He only mentioned the matter of widows being enrolled, since he treated this subject as being something commonly known. He did advise that none was to be enrolled as a widow under sixty years of age. Even so, he did not state where this book came from and where it went afterwards.

### *Pray for the Method*

I wonder if you are beginning to recognize God's way from all this that has been shared? The Bible cites the fact of an arrangement and of a book, but it does not place much emphasis on the matter. God will not spend more than a few words on it. Yet is there not already enough in the Bible to enable us to manage church affairs? The principle is already given: there is a book! The principle of a book is there, but as to the how and the what and the where and so on *about* that book as it may pertain to us today—that must be carefully prayed over. We know the early church had a book, but we do not know how they kept the book. And hence, we must ask the Lord to show us how. He refuses to describe for us the details concerning this book lest we could conveniently come to know the how without there being any need for prayer. On the one hand, then, the Bible makes plain that the Church is to have methods and arrangements; but on the other hand, it must find the way through from God for itself.

Therefore, I wish the brethren assembled here could see this before God: Do not stress method or procedure, for that will be death. As soon as your attention focuses itself on method, it will kill. For when the spiritual blessing goes, the corpse will remain. Yet neither do I wish brothers and sisters to become careless about searching out ways to manage church affairs. This too would not be right. Though the Bible never tells us how, it does give us a principle for managing affairs. For God always has a way. It behooves us today, through prayer, to find out that way. Do not be so spiritual as to be methodless. There is a method, there is a book. Things will need to be done “according as any man has need.”

### *The Method for Today*

#### (1) A Deacons Office

If there are only a *few* believers in a local assembly, then naturally there is no need for a deacons office. But if there are *hundreds* of people, confusion will set in without there being a deacons office. Accordingly, this will be the first arrangement to be made.

#### (2) The Principle of a Book

The second thing to consider will be the principle of a book—that is to say, the principle of having records kept. Now if the book had been an action and not a principle, then God would have no doubt told us how thick and how wide the book was to be and how things were to be recorded in it. But He merely mentioned it in passing, thus indicating that this book actually represents a principle. Whenever something is merely mentioned in the Bible without giving any pertinent details, we can be assured that this thing is a principle, not a particular concrete action or activity to be undertaken.

Why do we need a book? Because human memory is so undependable. If things are to be done from memory, many will be

left undone. For sometimes we remember, but some times we forget. Of course, there are some brothers and sisters who have wonderful memories. Yet even with them, something may be forgotten. What, then, can you do? Well, if things are recorded in a book, they will not be so easily forgotten as is the case when depending on one's memory.

Furthermore, even if one's memory is good, it will not always be available. If the one who can more easily remember is absent, what will happen to the matter which is to be done? If, however, the matter is recorded, anyone who opens the book can know it. Timothy must instruct the church at Ephesus as well as the churches in the surrounding areas. Titus must look after the different assemblies in Crete and to appoint elders in those cities. Suppose Timothy went to Rome and Titus returned to Jerusalem, what might happen to the widows if there were no books kept? Must people be sent to Rome to ask Timothy? And even should that happen, what if Timothy could not remember?

Thus we see the necessity of having church records. And that is what is to be derived from this principle of a book. Nothing is to be dependent upon memory. As days go by, even the best memory will fail. I cannot suppose that after so many years very many people can still remember everything. And even if someone can still remember, what will happen if he is not available at the critical moment of need? The principle of a book is therefore introduced to us in God's word. In the New Testament the Lord does show us that such recording is a principle. And hence we should record the things of the church.

For this reason, we sense the need of having a deacons office in any assembly with a considerable number of people in it. If you do not feel like using the name "deacons office," you may use whatever name is comfortable for you. We will not stress the name, we only wish to follow the principle.

### (3) Things Done in Deacons Office

#### (a) For Maintaining Communications

The principal works of a deacons office are two in number. The first is to maintain communication among the brethren. When there are hundreds or perhaps thousands of brothers and sisters in a local assembly, it will be difficult to find one or two particular persons. Visitors coming from abroad will not know whom to seek. People working in the deacons office can help them make the necessary arrangements.

In order to distribute to each according as any one has need, it will be necessary to have a local record which tells the kinds and degrees of need, the number of people in the families, and so forth. A few people must be there taking care of the distribution. In order to fulfill such a function, the deacons office can be the center of communication.

#### (b) For Keeping Records

The second use of a deacons office is to keep many records. The church conducts many affairs. Within a given week, many letters of recommendation may have to be sent out, many announcements made, many prayer requests taken up, many people received to the breaking of bread, and many baptized. All these matters need to be recorded. Moreover, some brothers and sisters may change their addresses, some may be sick, and some may have family problems. These too must be recorded so that proper help can be rendered.

I do not say these things must be kept forever. I rather expect them to fade away when spiritual reality fails. In the days of blessing, these things are needed, method is useful. But when the blessing disappears, these procedures should not be preserved.

### (4) The Needs in the Deacons Office

Here we require some training and some knowledge. I do not expect every place to adopt exactly the same measure. Since our needs are somewhat similar, however, the steps taken will probably not be too far apart from one place to another. Please keep in mind that we wish to follow the principles given in Acts chapters 2, 4 and 6. We will use the principle of a book. We need to ask God to give us a method which suits our special need. The Bible does contain methods, but it does not propagate them. Accordingly, we too will use methods, but we do not expect the methods adopted to be passed on. At the beginning, there is a need, and so we search out a way to meet that need. But after five or ten years, it may be necessary to adopt a new method for the need of that hour.

(a) Need a Place to Receive People

Because of the need, there must be a place where people can be received and matters can be transacted. At least a place where a few desks and shelves can be placed, and where people may have room to stand. You can call this place the deacons office if you wish. Such a place should be near or within the meeting place.

(b) Need People Working There

There need to be people working there to receive others. Such people are deacons or whoever else may desire to help.

Now I realize that it is easy for the church to hire people to manage its daily affairs, but I feel this is very much unlike a church. If a church can hire Levites by paying them salaries, why not hire priests as well? In so doing, however, a salary system will be restored. I would hope that the works of the Levites and the priests would not be accomplished by hiring people but by the brothers and sisters themselves performing these tasks in rotation. It is best if some brothers and sisters can set apart a day or an hour in a week to take care of the various church affairs.

### ***To Notify and to Inquire***

If a certain brother is sick, the deacons office can be notified. Immediately the deacons can notify the responsible brothers or others concerned; moreover, as soon as something happens, notice may be sent from the deacons office so that within a short time all the brothers and sisters in the locality will know about it.

Or if any brother or sister wants to contact another brother or sister, he or she can call the deacons office. The person on duty can look at the record and give the address or telephone number.

Or another assembly elsewhere may write to ask if a certain person was baptized in your assembly. What if the elders cannot remember? As the number of those to be baptized increases, there will be a need for a record to be kept. By examining the record, the answer can readily be ascertained. Another matter which can be solved in the deacons office need not go to the responsible brothers. Only those things which it cannot handle should go to the responsible brothers. Otherwise, the latter will be so busy receiving people or whatever else, that they will have no time to take care of the church.

I thank God for the way things were managed during the time of the early apostles. For when there were murmurings among the Grecian Jews concerning their widows, the apostles were able to hear them. This is actually the work of the deacons. Their eyes must be open. As soon as something develops, they should notify the responsible brothers. Consequently, let us remember that a church is not as complicated as is a group in Protestantism, yet neither is it so simple as we sometimes tend to think. Protestantism has tended to over-organize itself, but we have tended to overturn the organization that *is* mentioned in the Bible. Both tendencies are wrong. What we need is a place in which to take care of the necessary business of the church.

### *To Receive and to Care*

There need to be people in the deacons office to receive all who come in. From morning till evening, whenever there is any inquiry, it can be readily answered. Local brothers and sisters must not only serve in other capacities but also serve in the deacons office. The deacons office can help the church in many ways.

Some may look at such an office as being unspiritual. Our reply would be this: Does not David say, "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God" (Ps. 84.10)? Let us not become so spiritual that we cannot even keep the door of the house of God well. Do not assume that there is a great deal of difference between the Levites and the priests. They are *equally* important. Without the service of the Levites, there can be no local church.

May we all have the desire to spend two or three hours of each week working in the assembly. We are taking care of God's affairs. We are serving Him and serving His people so that all may grow. Never make this a personal work. Let the entire body serve in the many church affairs which need to be taken care of, such as arranging to meet brothers or sisters who come from abroad, taking care of orphans and widows, helping people to locate brothers or sisters, or assisting when accidents occur or family troubles arise. Then, too, someone may come to the church to inquire about the gospel. As more and more tracts are distributed, there will naturally be more inquirers who will knock on the door of the meeting place. The brothers or sisters who are in the deacons office can themselves talk to them or they can find other people to talk with them. This is why we need a place and people to staff such an office. Those brethren who do such deacons work can immediately render helps of all kinds when needed.

### ***To Record Works***

Always remember the principle of the book. Except for emergencies and unsettled matters, the brothers or sisters on duty should record all the works done. This will serve as a reference in future days. These records are very important. An assembly should keep a record of all who have been baptized; it should also keep a record of all who have been received to the Lord's table. It should have a record of all the letters of recommendation written as well as a copy of each letter. It should also have a record of the names and addresses of, and important information concerning, all the brothers and sisters. It should keep a record of all who have signed their names at the gospel meetings, and also keep a record of visitation—gospel, beginners, and elderly saints respectively. The works of the priests require a record too—how many people are put into what work.

The greatest use of record-keeping lies not in preservation but rather in inducement. Through such record-keeping, the responsible brothers are able to ascertain if certain matters are well taken care of by certain brothers and sisters. The responsible brothers are overseers, and they can be helped in their oversight of the church through these records.

To sum up, at the very beginning tell the brothers and sisters in the deacons office that when people come in they must be received politely but not in too businesslike a fashion. All the records must be kept neatly and accurately. Nothing should be done carelessly, for this is God's work. Let me tell you that all the lazy people will soon resign. Let us mean business before God. Even only an hour put in will help the church to be built a day earlier.

### *The Way Today Is All Serving*

Please understand that responsible brothers do not speak from the platform once and then their responsibility is finished. Their duty is to get all the brothers and sisters to work. Without accomplishing this, we have no future. If all is dependent upon the Sunday preaching, then let us all be preachers. We rest six days and work one day, whereas God worked six days and rested one day. No wonder preachers have become lazy. No, we must work every day and cause all the brothers and sisters to work. The question is not whether *you* have done it, but whether the *others* as well as yourselves have done it.

Hence your work is, on the one hand, that *you* work, but on the other hand that you get *other* people to work too. You must lead them to work. Do not give them works and leave them alone. Follow up on them and see how the works have been done. Ask if there is any problem which you may help to solve. Thus shall the church be truly brought forth.

For the church to indeed appear, people must come forward. One day you shall see the whole church serving, the whole church preaching the gospel. In this way shall God's endeavor of recovery begin on earth, and God will have His Church. Otherwise, Christianity—which was taken captive into Babylon—will not have returned today. For currently people are still passive and there is still the intermediate class: on one side is God, on the other side are men, and in between is the intermediate class through whom men approach God. I wonder if you have recognized this problem.

So we see that the deacons office is instrumental in managing affairs. Recognize it for what it is—the instrument by which the brethren manage church affairs. By such records as are kept, the actual condition of the church may be known. Do you now see what God's Work is? It is not only preaching from the pulpit. We

acknowledge the importance of the ministers of God's word. It is a very precious ministry. Even so, we want everybody else to serve.

### ***Starting from Consecration***

Someone may ask the question, How do we activate the entire body to work? I think the way to do this begins with the matter of consecration. This is a new way, and therefore it needs to be well ordered. *First of all*, all the brothers and sisters must be shown that service belongs to the whole church and that every member in the body has his or her function. The universal priesthood of all believers needs to be affirmed and underscored repeatedly. The truth about authority must also be told. *Second*, we must pay special attention to this principle of consecration—of selling all. Unless people sell all, their service will be false and unsuccessful. They must put everything on the altar for the sake of serving God. Hence the basic thought is that all must offer everything for the service of God. Today the Lord calls all who belong to Him to serve. Otherwise, all that we have seen and suggested will become merely dead method which will end in nothing. It is not a mere method, it is a way given by God.

When this that we have just now said is presented to the brothers and sisters, it must be presented strongly. Do not deliver it in such a way as though asking for their help or asking them to help God. Such a position is totally wrong. We must let them see how noble and glorious it is to serve God. Tell them that their vocation today is to serve the Lord, that their professions are but avocations. The main purpose is to learn to serve God, the other professions are mere sidelines. Do not fall so low as to *beg* people for God. No, we cannot beg them to serve Him. They must come to be accepted by God. If He wants them to serve, they must come and serve. The entire body of believers must serve; but if not, there will be no church. All the

brothers and sisters must prostrate themselves before God and then rise up and serve.

### ***Use Whomever God Has Apprehended***

Some may further ask this: How are we to deal with a situation wherein some of the brethren do give themselves to God but others do not? The answer is that we can only use those whom God has apprehended. As many as have been apprehended by Him, just that many will we draw in. Nevertheless, we must be careful to get the rest to also be committed to God.

### ***Work Till Everyone Serves***

This is the way we wish to establish this: Let all the workers put everything they have into the Work, and let us call all the brothers and sisters to put their all in too. This is not something which a few can accomplish. It requires each and every one to be in the Work. All our strength, life and wealth must be put in. The higher we climb the more blessing God gives. The lower the note sounded, the fewer the number of people who will come. The more we are fearful, the less the number of people who will join in the Work.

Let us clearly understand that to be God's servants today is a great honor conferred upon us by the Lord. It is not *we* who favor *God*. Otherwise, how can we ever serve Him? If someone asks you to do an earthly work, *you* will thank *him* for the privilege, will you not? Then why should you think that God ought to thank you because you come to serve Him? Pardon me for having little patience with such thinking. If I hear someone say, "God loves you, therefore you ought to serve Him"—as though God should be very pleased to have that person's service—then let me tell you that I have no patience with such words. What you *should* say to that one is this: "You should be most pleased to be allowed to serve God, for shouldn't all people be

pleased when they realize that a person such as they may serve the true and living God?"

### ***Serving God Is My Glory***

I need to see that if in my life I could serve God by crawling, that that would be my glory. If God would want me, then that is my greatest honor. How utterly foolish any of you are who think God needs to use such as you are. If He is willing to accept you, then this ought to be viewed as the *highest grace*. How odd for people to think they favor God or grant Him honor when they serve Him. I deem this to be most strange. I therefore hope that you all will see before God that there is no glory greater than that of serving Him. If I may stand at the gate and beg to serve God, that will be glory for me. For the Lord to be willing to accept me, that is most amazing. Does not God say, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (Rom. 9.15)? Such is His mercy that He wants *me* to be *His* servant. How totally wrong you are if you consider yourself cleverer, higher, richer, or wiser than other people by your coming to serve the Lord.

Hence do not persuade people to serve God. Instead, convey this attitude to them: If people reckon it glory to serve a president, how much more is the distance between that president and God! If I am able to serve the Lord, *that* will be my greatest glory. When people offer things to God, it is not a question of how painful is the sacrifice but whether the Lord will accept them. For how do you know what He will accept? Do realize that this is more than even a matter of consecration, it is a matter of divine acceptance. Tell the people that whether or not God will accept them is really the central question. If He is willing to accept them, then that will be their glory. Consequently, it is really not a question of whether men are willing to offer, but a question of whether God will accept. Let the way be

straight and the position high. Speak from His ground and from His perspective.

How dare people be arrogant before God. How pitiful if anyone should think about himself when he comes to serve. Will the Lord ever use such a person? Never! For man to be allowed to serve the Lord of Lords, that is the utmost glory! May God be gracious to us that we may walk straight in His way and manage the church affairs well.



## District Meetings

# 7

If a locality is too large and the people are too many, district meetings become a necessary arrangement. We do not believe in the congregational church system which makes each congregation a separate unit. For the Bible teaches locality, not a congregation, as the unit—such as Corinth or Rome. So that when there are multitudes of brethren in one locality, such as Jerusalem which had tens of thousands of people, you realize immediately how impossible it was for them all to meet in one place. Even during the first few days, what with three thousand and then five thousand believers added, it was quite impossible for them all to meet together in one place. One can readily see, therefore, the need for some arrangement.

### *“By Hundreds, and by Fifties”*

We do not use the particular portion of Scripture found in Mark 6.34-44 as *evidence*; we only take it as a *guide*. Recall how at the time our Lord Jesus multiplied the loaves, there were five thousand men present—besides the women and children. How, then, will you distribute loaves to such a multitude? Quite naturally, the Lord ordered them to sit in companies of hundreds and fifties. Today we would accept the Lord’s principle of such an arrangement. As the brothers and sisters increase in larger number, we can adopt the Lord’s way by dividing them into hundreds and fifties.

Please notice that our Lord did not divide the multitude into either *all* fifties or *all* hundreds. He divided them both by hundreds *and* by fifties. This means that the dividing was by convenient numbers. So that today as the brethren in a church increase, we can divide them in convenient, not in fixed, numbers. According to convenience and geography fifty or a hundred people may meet separately. Since the

difference between these two numbers was double, the Lord merely gives us a convenient number.

According to this principle, I think responsible brothers in various localities should learn to make such an arrangement. As people increase, divide into districts. The number of people meeting in one place or another will vary somewhere between these two numbers. Such kind of dividing will be most convenient because there will be fewer people and they will be easier to look after. Furthermore, with fewer people in a given meeting, there will be more opportunity for all to participate.

### ***Meeting Separately***

The gospel meeting, the prayer meeting, and the beginners meeting may all be held according to the individual districts. Even the ministry meetings and the breaking of bread meetings may be conducted in the individual districts. However, if a worker is in the region, and some special ministry of God's word is to be given, it will be more expedient to hold joint sessions.

### ***District Care***

Care may be performed according to district. The responsible brothers should learn to so arrange themselves that there will be one or more of them in each district. Thus they can take up responsibility and take care of the spiritual situation of the district.

### ***Possibility of Balanced Growth***

If the districts are properly divided and district needs are well met, we can expect a general and balanced growth in the meeting. For people may all pray and share together before God.

### ***Church at Jerusalem Met in Districts***

The Bible has not shown us how Jerusalem was divided into districts, but as we read the book of Acts we nonetheless know that the church did meet in various district settings. We find, for example, that their prayer meetings were held in different homes. Recall the story of Rhoda the maid after Peter had been delivered by God from jail (see Acts 12.3-17). In that home a prayer meeting was in progress when Peter knocked at the door. Let me reiterate the point made earlier that the Bible does not tend to describe *in detail* those matters which pertain to church affairs, since God is not willing to let us have a framework. But it does contain a *shadow* of things arranged. Only *shadows* are found in the Bible in order that the Church throughout the generations to come might learn something from God when a similar circumstance arises requiring an arrangement to be worked out for the management of a church matter.

As a matter of fact, it was impossible for all the brothers and sisters to assemble together to break bread either. This was a physical impossibility. If there was but one cup, how big must that cup have been! If but one loaf, how could it have been passed? How long a time must have been consumed in passing the loaf and the cup to a group of a thousand people which later on grew to tens of thousands of people! This obviously became absolutely impossible. Even if all seven days in the week had been used for the breaking of bread meeting, the passing of one loaf and one cup could hardly have been well distributed. Thus we can see clearly that there must have been district-type meetings held at that time. The house where Rhoda answered the door (in this case the home of Mary the mother of John Mark) was but one of the many houses for meeting.

### ***Let Us Maintain This Principle***

I trust we will be able to maintain this principle before God: on the one hand, we confess that the Bible does make some arrangements; on the other hand, we concede that it does not give us the detailed rules and regulations concerning these arrangements.

The Bible mentions, for example, letters of commendation, yet it never tells us how such letters should be written. You will remember that Paul said he did not need such a letter: “Are we beginning again to commend ourselves? or need we, as do some, epistles of commendation to you or from you?” (2 Cor. 3.1) This implies that there *were* letters of commendation. But Paul did not describe at all how these letters were written. So that as we write our own letters of commendation today, we must learn to write them well. There is no form which we can fill in. We must instead learn to write them continuously.

As God touches upon various church affairs in His word, He always gives us a principle. He merely shows us there is something He does, for He never takes into consideration that the Holy Spirit will ever leave the Church. From God’s viewpoint the Holy Spirit is Christ’s representative in the Church. The Holy Spirit dwells in the Church. And consequently, if we truly submit ourselves to the Head of the Church, we will be taught by the Holy Spirit how to act according to the particular principle given.

I hope you will be able to understand this matter of the district meeting. Though we do not have any Scriptural evidence of rule telling us what to do, we nonetheless recognize that the district meeting is a must—physically speaking. In the book of Acts, we notice it was definitely created: “from house to house” (Acts 2.46 AV, literal Greek). And the house where Rhoda was present was one of these very houses. These passages disclose the principle of having district meetings.

I therefore hope you will keep this principle ever in mind: that regarding spiritual things, the Bible gives us great details so that nothing significant is left untold; but that regarding physical things (Levitical service) it only gives us hints but no rules and regulations. It shows us something, but without revealing how. Yet as we do it, we realize that the Holy Spirit has not left us. The Holy Spirit is in the Church; He is the Head of the Church. We can wait and pray and receive light as to how to meet in districts.



# 8

## The Local Assembly That Is Also a Work Center

Another matter to be considered: a local assembly where the Work center is. There are two kinds of local assemblies: one is the ordinary local assembly, the other is the local assembly where a Work center is located. These two are actually not much different from each other, the only distinction being what place the apostles have in a local assembly.

### *Elders, Deacons, and Brethren in a Local Assembly*

Let us look at the church at Philippi. The church there had the saints, the elders, and the deacons: “To, all the saints in Christ Jesus that are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons” (Phil. 1.1 mg.). This statement of greeting makes it very clear that the letter was written to all the believers in the church there with its elders and deacons. This is the arrangement for an ordinary local assembly.

### *Apostles in a Work Center*

In a local assembly where a Work center was located, apostles were being added. Ordinarily, in a local assembly the elders form the governing body; but in a local assembly that is additionally a Work center, apostles also reside there.

### *Apostles Who Are Also Elders*

Apostles are responsible for the Work in a given region; they are there specifically for the Work. But at the same time some of these apostles may also be involved in the affairs of the local assembly. So that in the place where the local assembly and the Work center co-exist, some apostles act in a dual capacity both as apostles *and* as

elders. So far as the Work is concerned, the apostles take care of it in this region. But since this is where the local assembly is, they also take care of the church. However, they cannot govern the local assembly as apostles, but these apostles must also become elders.

The Bible shows us how things were done in a church council (the only instance of it, incidentally, recorded in the Scriptures). When a letter sent from this council was written, it was written by “the apostles and the elders, brethren” in Jerusalem (Acts 15.23).

I wish to point out here that Peter was an apostle, perhaps even the chief among the apostles. But in Jerusalem, he was also an elder (as his First Epistle in the New Testament would indicate: “The elders therefore among you I exhort, who am a fellow elder”—5.1). So that Peter not only was an apostle but also an elder. Likewise with John: “The elder unto . . .” (2 John 1), “The elder unto . . .” (3 John 1). Hence John, one of the original twelve apostles, was an elder as well.

In 1 Peter 1.1, Peter tells us that he is an apostle. And he *writes* the letter as an apostle. But in 5.1 of the same letter, he further reveals to us that he is also an elder. 2 and 3 John both begin with the same greeting: “The elder unto . . .” John, however, does not mention that he is an apostle. This is rather unusual. He is neither like Paul nor Peter, in that these two always wrote as apostles.

In any case, the two great apostles in Jerusalem (Peter and John) were also elders in Jerusalem. They were noteworthy among all the apostles who were in that city, and they were also elders there at the same time. Except for James, the other original twelve apostles were not identified by name at all. Of the twelve, these three apostles—Peter, John and James—were the only ones noted in the book of Acts. But two of these three, from the record of the New Testament epistles, are singled out as also being elders.

Now there was another James—brother to our Lord Jesus—who also being an apostle (Gal. 1.19) seems to have made the final decision at the church council in question. Both from the word of the Bible and from Church history, we can be certain that at the time of this council, he too was an elder in Jerusalem. And it would appear as though he had surpassed even Peter in leadership, for it was he who made the final decision of the council.

### *Apostles Cannot Deal with Affairs in Local Assemblies Directly*

From all of this, then, it becomes clear that if you are an elder of a local assembly, you cannot rule over things in other assemblies elsewhere. If you are an elder of the church at Jerusalem, you cannot manage local affairs in the local assembly at Samaria. For the elders in the Bible are all local in character. You cannot transcend the scope of a local assembly and control other local assemblies. As apostles, you cannot touch matters in a local assembly directly. You may deal with the elders, but you cannot deal directly with local affairs.

Take as an example the labors at Corinth done by Paul. It is quite plain in the book of Acts that Paul visited Corinth and labored there. The relationship between him and the church at Corinth was indeed very deep and strong. He even wrote at least two letters to the believers there; not only *he* visited Corinth, but he sent Timothy and Titus on visits there as well. All this represents Paul's work. Even so, when in the church at Corinth a person had sinned, Paul himself had no way to cast him out, simply because he was an apostle and not an elder in the church at Corinth. He had no authority to post an announcement that said: "I have excommunicated so-and-so." He must instead write to the church at Corinth, saying, "(You) put away the wicked man from among yourselves" (1 Cor. 5.13b). *He* could not excommunicate that person *for* the church, for Paul was not an elder; he was only an apostle. Nowhere in the Scriptures are we shown that Paul ever became an elder in some local assembly. He

was strictly an apostle, an apostle to the Gentiles. He thus could not control any local assemblies. As elders cannot control other assemblies but can only manage their own local assemblies, so apostles cannot touch directly the government of any local assembly but can only govern the regional Work. And hence affairs in the church at Corinth must be handled by the Corinthians themselves; Paul cannot manage for them.

So what did Paul end up doing? He wrote: “In the name of our Lord Jesus, ye being gathered together and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, to deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5.4,5). As an apostle, he could exercise spiritual authority to deliver to Satan the brother who had sinned, but he had no way to excommunicate the brother. And this is the way the Bible prescribes for handling church affairs.

### ***Peter Bears Double Responsibility***

In a local assembly, such as in Jerusalem, where there was also a Work center, the apostle Peter bore a double responsibility. He had authority to take care of the Work in the region surrounding Jerusalem, but at the same time he also acted as an elder in the local assembly there. If you are not an elder in Jerusalem, you cannot directly control the affairs of Jerusalem. So that Peter and John were both elders in Jerusalem, and James was an elder there too. But Peter must additionally handle the Work in Samaria because he was also an apostle. He managed the Work in that region in the capacity of an apostle and managed the affairs of the church at Jerusalem in the capacity of an elder. This is quite clear in Scripture.

This is why one day when there was a problem in Antioch and people were sent to Jerusalem to make inquiry, the letter written by the brethren in Jerusalem could say, “The apostles and the elders, brethren . . . For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us” (Acts

15.23,28). The apostles in Jerusalem were in relation to the region; the elders in Jerusalem were in relation to the local assembly. Such decisions were thus made by both the apostles and the elders.

I feel good about all this, for in spiritual matters pertaining to the local church, God has not left anything for us to fill in but has given detailed direction. The apostles are responsible for the Work while the elders are responsible for the local assembly. In this case, however, Peter held a double responsibility.

### ***Some Apostles Were Not Elders***

Some apostles were not elders, such as Paul and Barnabas. In reading the New Testament carefully, we cannot find any place where Paul was also an elder. In the church at Antioch, Paul and Barnabas had part in the ministry of God's word but no part in any local office. They had ministry but occupied no governmental office. They were neither deacons nor elders. They were instead prophets and teachers. Accordingly, in Antioch these two apostles belonged to ministry and not to government.

### ***Antioch, Another Beginning of the Holy Spirit***

Let us take note that just as Jerusalem was begun by the Holy Spirit so Antioch was begun by the Holy Spirit too. Antioch did not conceive a new way of work by itself; it was simply another beginning of God's Work by the Holy Spirit.

### ***Antioch—Fatal to Roman Catholicism***

Please be aware that this new beginning of the Work in Antioch has tremendous significance for the Church. If we know God, we will bow our heads and worship Him each time we come to Acts chapters 13 and 14. I often thank Him for these two chapters.

Chapter 13 serves as a fatal blow to Roman Catholicism. Without that chapter, we would have had to return to Rome—whether Rome was right or wrong. And why? Because the Holy Spirit had commenced in Jerusalem, and Jerusalem had then become a center of the Work. And had the Holy Spirit not made a new beginning in Antioch, we would have had to confess that God had but one center on the earth.

Do you now perceive this significance? If you do not have the Work in your mind, you will not sense the immensity of what happened at the time of Acts 13. But if you have the Work on your heart, you can see that this was a great step—a most strategic step—taken by the Holy Spirit. For up through the time of chapter 12, all you could see was the Work of Jerusalem—that even the Work done at Antioch was also that of Jerusalem; for in reading from chapter 11 onwards you will notice that the Work in Antioch had been done by the brethren coming out of Jerusalem. If only this evidence were available, you would just naturally have to confess that God’s Work has a single center on earth, which center was Jerusalem. At some future time in Church history it might have been removed to another place—this we cannot be sure about—but nevertheless there was a center. In other words, you would have to acknowledge, on the basis of only *this* amount of evidence from the Bible that Christianity was to have but a single capital. Jerusalem would become the capital of Christianity just as Mecca became the capital of Islam and Chufoo, the capital of Confucianism. But thank God that the Holy Spirit made *another* beginning in the Work—this time at Antioch. Because out from Antioch the Holy Spirit sent apostles also.

### ***Paul and Barnabas Become Apostles Too***

How did Paul dare to take up the “title” of apostle? Barnabas was a good brother, but in Jerusalem he was just an ordinary saint and not an apostle. And Paul himself was certainly not an apostle originally.

However, after the Holy Spirit singled them out by name in Antioch, then set them apart and sent them out, we will notice that Luke in his narrative described them as apostles. Later in his account, Luke wrote: “The multitude of the city was divided; and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles [Barnabas and Paul]” (Acts 14.4). The Holy Spirit, through Luke here, did not declare that He had ordained them as apostles or had set them up as apostles; it was simply recorded that they were apostles. In other words, God himself made a new start by His own Spirit. It was not begun by Paul and Barnabas themselves. Had this new adventure been started by them, we could disavow it. But the Holy Spirit was the one who had commenced anew at Antioch. *He* appointed apostles and sent them out to the Work. And immediately we come to realize from the *additional* evidence that there is *more* than one Work center. For now there are at least *two* regional areas of God’s Work in existence. And the concept of one single center on earth is thus forever destroyed. Christianity has *no* capital.

Let us thank God that wherever the *Holy Spirit* commences a Work, there is the capital of Christianity, and against such there is no human restriction. After all, the *Lord* is the Head of the Church, and the Holy Spirit is *still* His representative on earth. Oftentimes He uses us, but many other times He works outside of us. For Jerusalem and its saints had no way of monopolizing the Work of the Lord! We observe on the one hand that God had already set up Jerusalem as a center; but we observe on the other hand that He could also set up Antioch as a center too. He can therefore set up Shanghai as a center, and in addition set up Foochow as a center. Let us clearly see, then, that there is not just one center of God’s Work. If there be but one single center, then the principle of Rome would be right.

### ***May Have Third Or More Regions***

This that we have been speaking about is a matter of great consequence. Acts chapter 13 is a foundation stone of Christianity. Without it, we would be confronted with many monumental problems. Without it, the idea of a pope would be all right. Without it, the Roman concept of a capital for Christianity would undoubtedly be correct. But we now know that before God there is not just one center, but two centers; not only one regional area of God's Work but two regional areas. As a matter of fact, as it pleases the Holy Spirit, He can set up the third, the tenth, the hundredth, the thousandth or even the ten thousandth region on earth. Everything is according to the thought of the Holy Spirit in His labor on earth, for nothing is to be according to man's idea.

### ***Apostles Not Being Elders May Go Out Continuously***

The uniqueness about these two apostles who were sent out from Antioch is that they were not elders in the church at Antioch. Thus as they went out to work, they traveled as itinerants from place to place. Paul and Barnabas did return to Antioch, but they did not return quickly. Paul, for example, stayed in Ephesus for three years. Had they been elders in Jerusalem, they would probably have been in Ephesus for three weeks and then would have returned to Jerusalem. They could have ventured out from Jerusalem, but they would then have had to return quickly. They would have gone out because they were apostles; they would have returned within a reasonably short time because they were elders.

Paul and Barnabas being apostles but not elders could go out for many years without their absence creating any problem in Antioch whatsoever. They could go wherever the Holy Spirit led them. For they were only apostles, not elders as well. Peter and John, on the other hand, were *both* apostles *and* elders. So they went out for a short while and returned quickly to Jerusalem; otherwise how could

they have ever taken care of their responsibility back in Jerusalem? They could not but go out because they were apostles, yet they could not but come back—and that quickly—because they were elders. This is truly something remarkable. They were apostles, so they frequently went out; but they were also elders, and therefore they always came back. They had to take care of their responsibility in Jerusalem, hence they could not travel too far away.

### ***Need Strong Meeting***

Why do we spend so much time these days together in explaining this matter? Because this has much to do with your future work. This is a principle you must accept. If you are responsible for the Work in a region as well as responsible in establishing a local assembly, you will need to learn to be apostles as well as elders. And this will also require you to have a strong meeting in the locality. A number of Bible commentators tell us that the church at Antioch was the strongest one of that time. Many tell us that it was a model church. In fact, I recall in my youth having read a book called *The Model Church*, and it spoke at length of this very church at Antioch.

Now if anyone is not in responsibility for the local assembly, he should devote himself to apostolic work—that is to say, he should always go out to work and later return. Even if he should stay longer on the outside, he will create no problems by his lengthy absence. Yet there will be other people who shall return shortly after they go forth, such as Peter did in going out to Samaria and to Caesarea but very soon thereafter coming back to Jerusalem because he also was an elder there.

Henceforth, those brethren who act as apostles must go out and those who act as both apostles and elders must return. The way is neat and clean.

***Only Difference Is in Platform***

A local assembly which is also a Work center is not different from any other local assembly except in one respect; in a local assembly that is also a regional center live the apostles as well as the local elders; moreover, some of the apostles may also be elders. So that probably there will be some difference in the platform, for due to the presence of apostles and their willingness to share, there will undoubtedly be a special ministry of God's word. And this is something which an ordinary local assembly would not have.

# 9

## The Relation between a Local Assembly and the Work

What is the relationship between a local assembly and the Work? What is the relationship between a local assembly and the apostles? We wish to look into this matter. Local assemblies such as Jerusalem and Antioch were special and exceptional because they were Work centers as well as local assemblies. So far as being a local assembly was concerned, they were no different from any other local assembly of that day. But so far as the Work was concerned, they at the same time were Work centers. And therefore we do acknowledge Jerusalem and Antioch as having been somewhat different from other assemblies. So the question now comes down to what the relationship of the *other* assemblies was to the Work?

In our book, *Rethinking the Work*,\* we attempted at some length to show brothers and sisters that the local assembly is the highest church authority on earth. And why? Because apart from the individual local assemblies, our Lord has not established any union of churches on earth whatsoever. The Scriptures do not contain any idea of a mother church; it only confesses a local assembly as a unit. The local assembly is the only unit, above which there is no other church authority.

### ***Highest Authority in Local Assembly Rests upon Elders***

The highest authority in a local assembly is represented by the elders. Everything in the church is governed directly by them. An apostle cannot touch a local assembly directly—that is to say, he

---

\* See footnote on opening page of Chapter 4 above.—*Translator*

cannot directly deal with local affairs. A person in Corinth needed to be excommunicated, but Paul himself could not cast him out. This is a very revealing case. For here is shown the relationship between a given local assembly and the Work or between a local assembly and an apostle. In other words, the apostle cannot intervene directly; he must do it through the elders. For God has not ordered the local assembly to obey the command of the apostle directly, He only calls for all the brothers and sisters in a local assembly to accept an order of its eldership. If the spiritual condition of the elders is right, they themselves should receive the apostle's word.

### ***Elders Are Appointed by Apostles***

Let us note again that elders are appointed by apostles. Timothy and Titus were also apostles; they were especially sent by Paul. One was in Ephesus, the other was in Crete. They appointed elders in different cities. Do not forget that the authority of the elders does not come from the church. No elder is elected by the local assembly. Elders are not chosen by the local brethren; they are set up by the apostles. A local assembly has no right to choose its elders, and therefore should not do so. God shows us that it was Paul, Timothy, and Titus who appointed elders; that is to say, the apostolic workers appointed them.

### ***Church Must Learn to Obey Elders, Elders Learn to Listen to Apostles***

A local assembly that has elders established must listen to the words of its elders, and not to the words of a Timothy or a Titus. For elders are the bishops or overseers of the church. The highest authority of a local assembly is vested in them. But elders do receive their authority from apostles. The apostles give elders authority to govern the local church's affairs directly. So hence it behooves the elders to learn to listen to the words of the apostles. They must not

despise the counsel of the apostles. It is possible for the church not to obey the apostle's order directly, but it is not permitted for the church not to accept the order of the elders. This is God's way with local assemblies.

### ***Apostles Responsible for Work, Elders Responsible for Church***

The apostles are responsible for the advancement of the Work; they are not involved in the care of local church affairs, which is the responsibility of the elders. The apostles are concerned with the promotion of the Work of the entire body of Christ. Thus the Bible gives us clear arrangements for workers, the local assembly, and the elders.

### ***How the Church Decides on Issues***

I believe all workers and elders share a common notion: a preaching meeting can easily be handled, but a business meeting is rather difficult to conduct. There does not appear to be much problem in spiritual things; the biggest headache is tending to the church's affairs. For in such situation it is quite easy for each one to have his own idea. Many things cannot be settled because of differing opinions.

### ***Acts 15: the Pattern for Church Council***

Acts 15 is the only place in the entire New Testament where there is a record of the church having met for business. As you know, the Roman Catholic Church has had many councils, but in Jerusalem there was only one council held. Let us keep in mind that God puts this in the Bible as a pattern for all church councils. Do not incorrectly interpret Acts 15 as being a bad experience. On the contrary, it is a most precious chapter in the book of Acts. Without it we would be at a loss when we today try to manage church affairs.

Acts 15 provides the pattern given by God for the Church to follow during these two thousand years ever since.

### ***A Problem Arises***

Here in Jerusalem a problem arose. Many foolishly assume that having no problem is a sign of spirituality in a church. Let it be known that a sign of spirituality in a church is not that it is without any problem but that it has the means to solve problems. If a church is spiritual, it will have many difficulties because it has to consider many things. A church that is not spiritual is so permissive that it can do anything in any way. The more it is under the hold of a “strong man” (see Matt. 12.29), the more uneventful it will be; whereas the more spiritual it is, the more matters it will have that need to be solved.

Jerusalem has a problem. Where did this problem originate? Many who were formerly zealous in Judaism traveled widely to many places, even to Antioch. They told the believers there that they must be circumcised according to the Mosaic Law. Under such a circumstance, Paul and Barnabas felt it necessary to go to Jerusalem, and some other brothers in the church at Antioch went with them.

### ***Apostles and Elders Meet, but Brethren Allowed to Speak***

They went to Jerusalem to see the apostles and the elders: “Go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question” (Acts 15.2). “And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church and the apostles and elders” (v.4). The church received them, the apostles received them, and the elders received them. All three received Paul and his party.

But there were believers present who had been Pharisees before. With their Pharisaic background, they rose up and declared: “It is

needful to circumcise them [the Gentile believers], and to charge them to keep the law of Moses” (v.5). I trust that all brothers and sisters can begin to perceive from the Bible how a council on business is to be held. The Jerusalem council was one consisting of the apostles and the elders. It was not a council of the local church. Its responsibility fell on the apostles and the elders.

Now there was no difficulty over this matter of circumcision and the Mosaic Law among the apostles and the elders themselves. But some believers with a Pharisaic background were strongly advocating that the Gentile believers be circumcised and that they keep the Law of Moses. Let it be understood right here that the main body which was discussing these Church matters were the apostles and the elders. They also were the ones to make the final decision. But before they made any decision, they felt they must hear what some opposing brothers had to say. It was a meeting of the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem, yet they allowed these brothers to come in and present their view. Those who opposed the matter of grace alone had their reason, and they were given opportunity to voice it. Do not interpret this as being unspiritual, for God desires the responsible brothers—those with authority—to be persons who can listen. They should be able to sit there and listen to contrary views. Anyone who cannot listen to an opposing view is not fit to be a leader in the Church.

“And the apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider of this matter. And when there had been much questioning...” (vv. 6,7a). Many words had been said, all sorts of arguments had been offered, and many opinions had been raised. Many brothers agreed and many brothers disagreed. The apostles and the elders allowed all who had opinions and who wished to express them to come forward and speak. Although the meeting belonged to the apostles and the elders, they permitted anyone and everyone from the entire body of believers to come and express himself as he wished. Let me tell you that this is the principle for managing such

affairs to be found in the Bible. It certainly is not by suppressing or by refusing to hear what people have to say. Even words which appear weak and nonsensical have to be heard out. By so doing, the responsible brothers whose spiritual condition is right may, in the process, come to know how to decide as they sit and listen. Many responsible brothers in the Church lack this habit of listening. Or if they do listen, they may simply listen to one or a few, rather than all the brethren who may wish to speak. The Church is not like the Roman Catholic Church—which is as dictatorial as Thyatira was (Rev. 2.18ff.), nor is it democratic as was Laodicea (Rev. 3.14ff.). The Church follows the Jerusalem principle: let all the brethren speak, but let the responsible brothers decide. The people themselves are not to make any decisions.

### *Apostles and Elders Decide, Church and Holy Spirit Approve*

How was the matter ultimately settled? It was really amazing. The brethren had spoken, and now the apostles and the elders spoke. The first one among them who stood up to speak was Peter. He rose up to tell his experience and to offer his own opinion: “Brethren, ye know that a good while ago God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, who knoweth the heart, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as he did unto us; and he made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now therefore why make ye trial of God, that ye should put a yoke upon the necks of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” (Acts 15.7b-10)

Next Barnabas was invited to speak since he had originally been a part of the church at Jerusalem before moving to Antioch. He was followed up by Paul.

Here we see that Peter spoke, Barnabas spoke, and Paul spoke. Finally, James rose up to speak. How beautiful verse 13 is: “And

after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Brethren, hearken unto me.” He stood foremost among the brethren in Jerusalem. After Peter and Barnabas and Paul had all testified to the same effect, we now observe what James had to say: “Brethren, hearken unto me: Symeon hath rehearsed how first God visited the Gentiles . . . Wherefore my judgment is [this is a word of authority], that we trouble not them that from among the Gentiles turn to God; but that we write unto them, that they abstain from the pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from what is strangled, and from blood. For Moses from generations of old hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath. Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church...” (vv.13-22). Thus was this matter settled. This was the first church council ever recorded in the Bible and it was also the last one!

I wish you to see that *this* is the way the *church* should decide on issues. It is different from the ways the *world* practices. In the world either the majority of the people rules (as at Laodicea) or one or two at the top make the decision (as at Thyatira). In the church, all the brethren have the opportunity to speak and to argue. Everyone who wishes to speak may speak. But this is *not* for the purpose of deciding there and then accordingly; rather, it gives the church time to wait upon the Lord, for a simple brother in the midst may quite possibly speak out the mind of God. And hence each may speak and argue, but the arguing does not continue endlessly. After much questioning and discussion, let the responsible brothers—those with spiritual stature before God, and whether apostles or elders—express their thoughts. Finally, through the one with the highest authority, God discloses His mind. And you see that the opinions of all the responsible brothers are the same. After hearing the same from them, the decision is at last made. And all the other brethren learn to accept this decision: “Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church.” This is the way the church manages its affairs.

In managing its affairs, the church does not resort to casting a vote. It leaves the final decision to those with spiritual weight. All the arguments must be heard; we must learn to allow all the brethren to speak, and to learn to listen to their arguments. Do not view this as wrong. Let them speak indeed; but on the other hand, ask God to give you a right decision.

Subsequently, we find that this was not only the decision made by the apostles, the elders and the whole church, it was also made by God. How marvelous is the word which follows: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (v.28a). The anointing of the Holy Spirit was there. This matter was decided by “the Holy Spirit and us,” who then direct the apostles and the elders to write a letter.

I expect all the brethren to see that the way the church manages affairs is neither dictatorial nor democratic. In the church there is no such thing as the majority listening to the minority or the minority listening to the majority. It is neither one man’s opinion nor a majority opinion. There is only the brothers and sisters speaking their minds and those who are spiritual deciding for them. The final decision in church matters is indeed to be in the hands of those with spiritual authority; nevertheless, they must let all who wish have an opportunity to speak. And as those with authority are listening, they must try to touch the Spirit. And ultimately they may rise up and say that a few of us brothers make such and such a decision. And after a decision has been made, the whole church follows it with one accord. How different is this way from that of the world.

### *Touch the Spirit of Scripture*

The most important thing in reading the Bible is for us to touch the spirit of the Scriptures. I hope you will take Acts chapter 15 and try to touch its spirit. There was “much questioning” from the brethren (v.7). When the Bible records “much” it must have been

much. Possibly those believers who had formerly been Pharisees probably still had many foolish things to say.

### ***Peter Untouched by Much Questioning***

The spirit of the man we first wish to touch is Peter's. When Peter rose up, what did he say? Evidently he was untouched by the arguments of these men. As he stood up and spoke, he was like a newborn baby without any outward feeling, and in no way was he touched by the spirit of argument just manifested in these brothers. This must be the condition of the responsible brothers. Each time when the church convenes for business, a responsible brother whose inside is touched by outside discussion is unfit to take responsibility. When Peter stood up, he did not have any spirit of questioning. If anyone in responsibility joins in the argument, he is not fit to lead or to exercise authority. For authority never argues. In arguing, the position is lost.

How beautiful it was that when Peter got up, he had not a word of questioning. How lovely when he said: "Brethren, ye know that a good while ago God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel, and believe" (Acts 15.7). It is not just today that I speak thus; I speak today what I have spoken before. And that was a good while ago. "And God, who knoweth the heart, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as he did unto us" (v.8). Peter had neither laid hands on them nor baptized them. If I myself had laid hands on them, Peter might have said, then you might be able to argue that it was because I was the one who had given them the Holy Spirit. If I myself had baptized them, you might be able to argue that this is what I have done. No, I neither laid hands on them nor baptized them nor even prayed for them. It was the Holy Spirit himself who came upon them. Therefore, you cannot blame me for this thing having been done. "And he made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their

hearts by faith. Now therefore why make ye trial of God, that ye should put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in like manner as they” (vv.9-11). So clear, so simple, and without any argument or spirit of questioning.

Let me declare to you that the Bible has a spirit behind its words. And as you touch this spirit, you will be touching the Book. Peter put forth his case simply, without being affected by much questioning and debate. He maintained his dignity and spoke as one with authority. Hence I do hope that at a church council none of you falls into argument, for once you do, you are not fit to make decisions.

### ***Barnabas and Paul Brought in Presence of God***

Let us next focus on Barnabas and Paul who rose to speak in succession. Please notice especially the solemnity before God when these two brothers testified. They did not stand up to deliver some stirring but careless words. They did not utter any trivial statement. This was the time to stop arguing, not a time to inflame the passions of argument. The best way to put argument to an end is to bring in the presence of God. In such a meeting, idle words must cease. *Your* words cannot stop any *idle* words, only the presence of the Lord will stop them. You need to be a person who brings in the Lord’s presence. After Peter finished speaking, “all the multitude kept silence” (Acts 15.12a) and listened to Barnabas and Paul. These two could then bring the people to the Lord. Though the people present were their seniors, they nevertheless brought them to the Lord and brought the presence of God to the meeting. All the noise of argument ceased, and everyone was listening quietly to what God had wrought through them.

Every servant of the Lord should be able to bring the presence of God to His church. For when the Lord’s presence is brought in, all

will keep silent. I hope you can discern this fundamental principle. Never use words against words, opinion against opinion, reason against reason, and strife against strife. It will be total failure if you resort to such tactics.

As we saw earlier, Peter began first. As he rose, his spirit was not affected at all by the much questioning of the brethren. He showed the brethren his condition before the Lord. He stood there and spoke as one who knew the authority of God. Thus he had opened a way for Barnabas and Paul to speak next. When they spoke, they brought in the presence of God, so that all hearkened silently. Allow me to say that as soon as God's presence and authority come in, opinion goes out. Without His presence and authority, no church council will ever be successful. For men's opinions create confusion.

### ***James Brought in God's Mind***

“And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying” (v.13b). This is the last authority. As a recognized leader among the brethren, James arose and spoke briefly: “Brethren, hearken unto me; Symeon hath rehearsed how first God visited the Gentiles . . .” (vv.13c,14a). And after he had concluded the word about Peter, James quoted a passage from the Old Testament Scriptures and then declared: “Wherefore my judgement is [here he made a decision], that we trouble not them that from among the Gentiles turn to God” (v.19). Here was neither argument nor strife. The authority, the presence, and the word of God were all brought in. The deliberation brought in the mind of God. And thus the church council was brought to a successful conclusion.

### ***Not Imitating Scriptural Method, but Having Spirit of Bible***

Consequently, let the brethren learn to touch the spirit of the Bible, instead of merely imitating the method in the Bible. Method

without spirit is totally useless. We must have the spirit of those people in the Scriptures as well as have their method. If we live in such a spirit, we can shut the mouths of those who love to talk. But if we are loose and careless, and the presence and authority of God is not manifested in our lives, we will not be able to accomplish any good results in such meetings. If our flesh is not under restraint, it will not be restrained in the meeting. Before we can bind the flesh in our brethren, we must have our own flesh bound. If we do not allow the presence of God to be manifested in our lives, we cannot expect His presence to be manifested in the lives of the brethren. Without submitting ourselves to the authority of God, we cannot make the brethren submit to His authority.

Hence the question lies in our spiritual condition. If our condition is correct, the result will be right. To take Acts 15 as but a method is utterly useless because no method in the Bible can be used automatically. The word in the Bible is not a formula which we can adopt technically. Even if it proves to be useful, there is nothing of the Spirit in it. It is therefore not a matter of method but a matter of Spirit—not of formula but of Spirit.

# 10

## The Coordination of the Workers

We will now approach this subject of the coordination of the workers.

### ***(1) RECOGNIZE AUTHORITY***

There is one thing we need to recognize, that in God's Work there are many workers but that some are like foremen set up by God in a particular work. This is intimated from what Paul says concerning himself: "According to the grace of God which was given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder . . ." (1 Cor. 3.10a).

### ***Laying a Foundation and Building on It***

We can see that some are laying a foundation whereas others are building on it: "As a wise master-builder I laid a foundation; and another buildeth thereon" (v.10b). Everybody is at work building, but some are building the foundation and some are building upon the foundation. So that nobody is building according to his own pleasure. Some people seem to be appointed by God to build the foundation, while others seem to be appointed to build upon the foundation. Accordingly, some are set up as foremen.

I believe we all know what a foundation means. Those who lay a foundation must seek for the rock. They need to find the place and select the proper location for the foundation to be laid. The people who build on it have no such need for locating and deciding on the place to build. They are only responsible to build on wherever the foundation has already been laid.

Paul also wrote this: “Yea, making it my aim so to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man’s foundation” (Rom. 15.20). Here Paul was referring especially to the work done by the brethren in and around Jerusalem. He had no wish to build upon their foundation, for he was set apart by God to be a man who lays a foundation. However, according to 1 Corinthians 3, we see that other people must build on the foundation which Paul has laid. In the future, at the judgment seat of Christ, everyone will be judged according to how each builds on it. Some build with gold, silver, and costly stones; some build with wood, hay, and stubble. Thus the judgment meted out at the judgment seat of Christ will be according to how each builds on the foundation (see 1 Cor. 3.10-15).

There are Bible passages which I personally feel are quite abused. Many brothers and sisters quote them thoughtlessly. I frequently hear young people say they will not build upon another man’s foundation. This is really absurd, since God has not raised up that many to lay foundations.

God did indeed raise up some brothers in Jerusalem, and He also raised up Paul. It was right for Paul to say that he would not build upon another man’s foundation. That was definitely what he ought not do, since God had called him also to be a foreman to lay a foundation. But if all God’s children are thinking of laying foundations like Paul and a few others, where will be the building? It will turn out to be what is described in Hebrews 6 as men always laying a foundation without ever building upon it. Paul declared that he came to lay a foundation, and that he had laid a good one. This was what he had been appointed by God to do, and he considered himself to have been a *wise* master-builder. He was not assuming a hypothetical position here, since God had truly appointed him as such.

Now all who followed after Paul had to learn to build on the foundation which he had laid. In the future each will be judged not on whether the foundation was right but on how each had built upon it. At the hour of judgment, the work done upon the foundation—whether it be gold, silver, costly stones; or wood, hay, stubble—is to be judged. Not the foundation, but what was built *upon* the foundation. Consequently, we cannot thoughtlessly say that we in our day will not build upon another man’s foundation. Paul could say this word in his day, but others could not.

Hence we see here that there was one who laid a foundation. Paul was a wise master-builder. And the other brothers who came after Paul were appointed to build on this foundation. Many had responsibility for the work above the foundation, but Paul had the responsibility for the work of laying the foundation in the first place. This is quite clear.

### *Leaders Among the Apostles*

Paul was an apostle, and so was Barnabas. Now there is no such thing as chief apostles—that is to say, there is no such position. Nevertheless, in the Bible we can distinctly discern that some apostles are leaders among the apostles.

### *Andronicus and Junias*

In Romans 16 we notice that Andronicus and Junias were “of note among the apostles” (v.7). Evidently, some apostles are more prominent among the apostles, and some are less known among them.

## *Peter*

It is evident that Peter led among the original twelve apostles. On the Day of Pentecost, it was not a case of the twelve apostles standing up together; it was *Peter* who stood up, and the eleven who stood up with him. Please notice the arrangement found in God's word. During the time of Pentecost, many people came to Jerusalem. They heard the sound from heaven and wondered what was happening. They came to where the apostles gathered. The Bible records that "Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and spake forth unto them" (Acts 2.14a). Peter stood up first, and the eleven other apostles followed in standing up with him. Peter then lifted up his voice and spoke. Naturally, we can recognize Peter as being the leading person there.

Further on in Acts (3.1ff.), the record indicates that Peter and John went up to the temple. Again we shall see the Spirit of God putting the name of Peter first. Although the beggar saw the two of them and asked alms from both, Peter's name is again placed first. Both Peter and John fastened their eyes on the beggar, yet the one who spoke was Peter and not John. Shortly afterwards, it was Peter, not John, who took the beggar by the right hand and raised him up. Still later in Solomon's porch, it was Peter and not John who addressed the people (3.11ff.).

In the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), Peter once again was the one who personally handled the matter. Even though all the apostles were in touch with God and worked closely together, it was Peter who was there taking the lead.

After the apostles were brought out of prison by an angel of the Lord and were subsequently brought to the council by its officers to be judged, as recorded in Acts 5, we find that Peter and the apostles answered and said, "We must obey God rather than men" (v.29). Here was Peter once more doing the speaking, even though the Bible

states that Peter and the apostles together “answered and said.” As we continue to read on through the first part of the book of Acts, we shall notice how it repeatedly puts Peter especially at the front.

Then there was a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and the disciples were all scattered abroad. They preached the gospel wherever they went. Even Samaritans heard the word of the Lord, and workers were sent out from Jerusalem: Peter and John went out again. And it was still Peter who took the lead here.

I suppose all are most familiar with what happened at the house of Cornelius as recorded in Acts chapter 10. Although there were twelve apostles, *Peter* was the one sent for. And it was to this same apostle that the vision of a vessel as of a great sheet was given. Afterwards it was Peter who brought some brothers from Joppa with him to the home of Cornelius. The Bible does not mention the names of these other brothers.

Hence up to this time, the way of God was such that among the workers at Jerusalem there was one particular worker leading the rest, and that one distinctly was Peter.

### *Barnabas*

Now as the brethren were scattered abroad from Jerusalem due to persecution, they went out preaching the gospel. The gospel was spreading out from Jerusalem to all of Judea and to Samaria. So that many believed in the word of the Lord in various places. Barnabas was then sent out from Jerusalem to visit these places. He went as far north as Antioch. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And upon arriving at Antioch, he began to help the assembly there. After a while, he went to Tarsus to find Saul, who had in the meantime become a Christian, and brought him to Antioch. There Barnabas remained a whole year. He had no office in Jerusalem and therefore he *could* stay a year outside Jerusalem. He had no need to

return as Peter and John would have had to do, since he was not an elder there. And we may surmise that during that year Saul received much help from Barnabas.

Some time later, the brethren in Judea suffered great destitution because of famine. The brethren at Antioch sent relief to the elders in the assembly at Jerusalem through the hands of Barnabas and Saul. Since the relief was for the local saints, it was delivered to the elders and not to the apostles.

Later there were in Antioch in the assembly some prophets and teachers. Barnabas and Saul were numbered among them. The Holy Spirit commanded by name that these two were to be set apart to be apostles, and were subsequently sent out to work abroad.

Keep in mind that, up to this moment, Barnabas was always standing at the front. It was he and not Saul who established the assembly at Antioch. When relief was to be sent to Jerusalem it was these two who were sent: Barnabas being mentioned first, with Saul next. And when the Holy Spirit sent out workers from among the prophets and teachers, the narrative reads that “the Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them” (Acts 13.2). Barnabas still came first.

### ***God Is God of Authority and Order***

Let us remember that in God’s Work as well as in God’s Church, there is an order. Even with but two persons, one is put ahead and one is placed next. When there are twelve together, one is at the front and the other eleven follow. For God is a God of order as well as of authority. The Bible never endorses a committee system of three or five members. Although there are a few elders, God does not set them up as members of a committee with a presiding officer. Nevertheless, when elders manage the things of the Lord, God does indeed use one among them to give the final word. Now in the Work,

the same principle holds true. In Jerusalem there were twelve apostles, yet God placed Peter at the front and the rest after him. Later on we find in the local assembly there that James (not the brother of John) stood at the front. Then, too, it is not simply a matter of Barnabas and Saul, but the fact that Barnabas stood ahead of Saul. In the Work we shall see that there is always someone who is ahead. The first thing to observe in the coordination of God's Work is the coordination of God's authority. If that coordination is lost, everything coordinated is lost.

The word of the Bible is exceedingly careful: "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, then . . ." (1 Cor. 12.28). God is not a God of *disorder*. He is a God of *order*. He does not believe in confusion or chaos. He believes in order and authority. And hence this word says "first" in this passage. He is not saying that here is a system—a committee system—in which everyone has the authority to speak and to cast a vote. God never endorses such a system, or any system for that matter. For that is the human way. When God states in His word—"first . . . secondly . . . thirdly," it reveals God's arrangement. So that whether in the Work or in the management of church affairs, we need to recognize our place. We must learn to line up ourselves. We should know who is ahead of us that we may stand on the ground of submission. This is a principle of the church which is most marvelous. Yet such does not come by appointment or distribution. It comes quite naturally.

### ***Whoever Is Ahead Is Vested with Authority***

God never suggests that the authority He sets up is perfect, and that because of *that* we must hear him. No, he simply says that this one has more authority than you do, and therefore you should listen to him. It is not a matter of being more perfect but a matter of being ahead. The basis of submission is not perfection but priority (or precedence). For example, God declares that wives should be in

subjection to their own husbands. Yet it is not because the husband is perfect that the wife should therefore be in subjection to him. If that were the case, then no wife in the whole world need subject herself to her husband because no husband is perfect. So that the question here is not one of perfection or imperfection in a husband. It is only one of whether he is a husband. If he is, then the wife should be in subjection to him.

Similarly, in God's Work, among the coordination of workers there is also an order. Learn to take your place and say, "Brother, what do you say?", because that brother is ahead of you. Submission is not submitting to *men's* choice, but to *God's* authority. It would be most surprising if we can find no one to whom to submit. If so, it is most likely because we have not seen God's arrangement about authority.

Now when these two brothers at Antioch came together in the Work, Barnabas just naturally stood ahead of Saul. That was the order and arrangement when they were sent out by the Holy Spirit. Beginning from Acts chapter 13, we learn that Barnabas as they traveled along was always named first in the account by Luke. For instance, just look in verse 7: "The same called unto him Barnabas and Saul."

Let us also notice in the very first verse of chapter 13 that among the several prophets and teachers, Barnabas was mentioned first and Saul was listed last. Do not imagine that Paul was most advanced spiritually soon after he began. No, not so! At the outset of his service to God, he was at the bottom of the list: "Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers, Barnabas, and Symeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen the foster-brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul." First Barnabas, then Symeon, next Lucius and Manaen, and last of all Saul. Even at the moment when the Holy Spirit separated them, God recognized that Barnabas was ahead of Saul: "And as they ministered

to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them” (v.2)

### *Paul*

But *then*, something odd happened. The Bible records that at a particular point in the Work, Paul was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13.9). Now we know he had been filled with the Holy Spirit when he was baptized (see Acts 9.17,18). But that was different from this occasion. That had been after his repentance and salvation. On this occasion the record tells us that “Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit,” was used by God to perform a miracle which caused a person to experience immediate and total blindness!

Later on, when they came to Antioch of Pisidia they went into the synagogue on the sabbath day and sat down. The rulers of the synagogue invited them to speak. Paul stood up. On the one hand Paul performed miracles, and on the other hand he preached. Now we find that from the Day of Pentecost onward, the book of Acts recorded a number of sermons or messages. Peter gave several long ones, and they were recorded. Stephen also gave a long speech, and this too was set down. This message of Paul’s was the first one recorded since those earlier ones by Peter and Stephen. The Bible did not record any long sermon of Barnabas, though. Here the Holy Spirit used Paul to deliver a very strong message. The Spirit used him as a minister of God’s word.

And interestingly enough, hereafter the order in the Scriptures changes with respect to these two traveling apostles: “Now when the synagogue broke up, many of the Jews and of the devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas” (Acts 13.43a). At this moment Paul now stands at the front. Here are further evidences of this from the record: “And Paul and Barnabas spake out boldly” (13.46a). “But the Jews . . . stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and cast them out of their borders” (13.50). All the way, Paul now stood at the

forefront. Even at Lystra, it was Paul who spoke and Paul who healed the cripple.

Yet this matter was not so conclusively ended, for later in chapter 14 Barnabas was once again placed first as they entered Lystra: “And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercury, because he was the chief speaker” (v.12). Jupiter and Mercury were gods which the people in Lystra worshiped. They called Paul Mercury because he led in speaking. In verse 14, though, we read this: “But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul.” Barnabas’ name was placed first here. This was exceptional, and there was a plausible reason for it. When the priests of Jupiter learned that their god had come that day in the form of a man, they hurriedly brought oxen and garlands to the gates and would have done sacrifice with the multitude. They thought Barnabas was Jupiter, and so they put him ahead. The priests of the temple of Mercury had *not* come, and therefore the priests of the temple of Jupiter would quite naturally sacrifice to their *own* god. Accordingly, this is why, “when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they rent their garments.” Barnabas had only taken the lead because they had taken him for Jupiter.

Between here and chapter 15, there was one other instance in which the name of Barnabas was placed before Paul, and that too had a very good reason. Other than these two cases, however, Paul always took the lead.

Some days later after the apostles had rejected their sacrifice, “there came Jews thither from Antioch and Iconium: and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead” (Acts 14.19). Earlier they had wanted to offer sacrifices, but now they nearly stoned Paul to death. “But as the disciples stood around about him, he rose up, and entered into the city: and on the morrow he went forth with Barnabas to Derbe” (v.20). Once again you see Paul in the center.

The record of chapter 15 brings the apostolic party back to Antioch. Almost immediately a problem arose in Antioch. “And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and questioning with them, the brethren appointed that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem” (Acts 15.2). Paul’s name was again listed first.

However, at the council in Jerusalem, it was Barnabas who spoke first and Paul followed afterwards. This order is firmly understandable in that Barnabas had originally come out of Jerusalem. So that quite naturally in the council meeting there he would speak first and then Paul would give his own reply. The one with more weight usually spoke last. And hence in speaking later, it was given to Paul to have a more honorable position. In this connection, did not James speak at the very last?

When in the council meeting, the decision had been made, “then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men out of their company, and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas” (v.22). Notice, once more, that Paul stood at the front.

Yet in the letter finally sent forth, it was written to read: with our beloved Barnabas and Paul” (v.25). Barnabas was again named first simply because he originally was of Jerusalem

Finally, “Paul and Barnabas tarried in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also” (v.35). The order resumes, with Paul at the forefront once again

### ***No Submission, No Coordination***

Before God, there is this natural, spontaneous arrangement. In the Work, there will be the worker who leads. Among Christians there must be submission as well as fellowship. What I hope is that

brothers and sisters may so well learn this that they come to the point where, when two are together, one of them will be in subjection. Remember that if there is no submission there can be no coordination. Do not come to the place where, when two or more brothers are together, no one knows to whom to submit. This indicates how little we have learned before God. If we *have* learned, we just naturally know whom to submit to as we come together. We know our place.

So that in God's Work, and as it pertains to the matter of the coordination of the workers, the first thing is to ask the Lord to open our eyes that we may recognize the authority among us. As I am together with my brethren, I will know which brother is ahead of me and thus will seek to be a man of submission. This does not come through election or promotion. It comes naturally. I am to stand in my place, recognizing as I do that authority is the first principle of coordination.

## ***(2) HAVE FELLOWSHIP***

In this matter of coordination of the Work, the first principle is authority, as we have seen. The second principle is fellowship.

### ***Co-Workers: People to Whom You Can Open Your Heart***

There is a basic need among co-workers for people who work together to be able to open their hearts to one another in real fellowship. Coordination opposes individualism. Coordination is for the sake of body ministry. I serve indeed, yet I serve according to the principle of the body. There must therefore be the kind of fellowship where heart is opened to heart and where there is mutual help given. If one member is honored, the whole body rejoices. If one member suffers, the whole body suffers with it. If one member is sorrowful, the whole body is sorrowful. This is coordination.

### ***Not Two Persons, but As One Man***

Coordination does not mean simply the being together of two or more persons. A brother whose outside shell is so extremely hard to crack is an individual when he is alone. Even when he is among ten people, he is still an isolated individual. This is not coordination at all. Many are the people who, when they are alone, pray alone and seek the Lord alone. But if they are put among ten people, they still pray and seek the Lord alone. How can anyone call this coordination? For two persons to be co-workers, it is not simply a matter of putting two individuals together. Do not make the mistake of thinking that because you formerly worked alone, that you can still work that way when you are with somebody else and call it coordination. I assure you that there is no coordination at all. No, it cannot be two people still working individually. It must be two working as one man. Yet how can this be? The two of them must be of one mind and one heart before the Lord. This means that before God I can open myself to my brother, and vice versa.

### ***Open Your Burden up to Co-Workers***

Many brethren cannot pray with other people. Nobody knows their affairs. They never open themselves up to their brethren. Many bear their burdens alone; they will not consult with their brethren. Their problems are many, yet when they encounter them they hold on to their individualism. Their attitude is, "I take care of my own things before God, and I will do them myself." Do understand that with such an attitude as this, you may indeed live among the brethren, but your spirit is not in their midst. Your body is with the brethren, but you do not live as a member of the body of Christ.

For this reason, coordination requires knowing fellowship as well as knowing authority. He who really desires fellowship is he who is able to open up himself. When there are one or more co-workers present, he will share his burden. He will say, "Brothers and sisters, I

have something I cannot get through on by myself. What do you think I should do?” or, “Brothers and sisters, I cannot get through before God in this matter; will you please make this a matter of prayer and pray with me?” Whoever is unable to bear another’s burden cannot be coordinated with anyone. But likewise, whoever cannot open his heart to another is not able to be coordinated with anybody else either.

### ***Bear Others’ Burdens***

Some people are so fully occupied with their own burdens that they have no way to carry other people’s burdens. From dawn to dusk they can only think of themselves. They do not pray for others even when they are requested to do so. They do not care for anything other than their own affairs. There is absolutely no concept of coordination in them. They are strong individualists. Though they are members of the body, they act independently. Yet in the physical realm, if I cut off my finger and put it elsewhere, it becomes useless. If I sever my foot from my body, there will be no unity nor fellowship between my body and my foot and therefore the latter will be without usefulness. The basic principle of the body is fellowship. And likewise, the basic principle of work is also fellowship.

Perhaps we are accustomed to following our own will, perhaps we are used to bearing our own burden and to disregarding others’ business. If so, we need to learn to bear the burden of others. In so doing we shall find out how difficult it is in fact to do; we shall find that it is hard to submit and to fellowship.

### ***Seek Fellowship***

I do not suggest that some of you brothers are to cast all your burdens upon other people and consequently not bear your own burdens. What we have been saying here does not mean that we

never need to go to God and wrestle with our problems nor that we never need to inquire of Him. We still must bear our own responsibility before the Lord; we still must seek to draw near to Him. We cannot push our responsibility onto others' shoulders and bear none ourselves. It is as we are bearing our own responsibility that we are to seek fellowship with our brothers and sisters. When I am confronted by some matter which I know could greatly affect my future, I will say: "Brethren, will you not fellowship with me, and seek with me for God's mind? Will you wait on God with me?" So that I am bearing the burden myself, but at the same time I am fellowshipping in coordination with some other brothers and sisters. We need fellowship and coordination in work as well as in life.

Let us therefore learn to be an open person. Many brothers and sisters can only be open when other people open first to them. They have to wait till others open to them. Let me say that it is of course good to have other people open first; but it is equally important for you to learn to be a person who opens up too.

I can assure you that when you really understand the principle of fellowship, you will be surprised how much help you will receive from those who are commonly labeled as weak Christians. Those members of the body who are deemed to be not very useful will strengthen your hand beyond your imagination.

### ***Seek the Lord Together, and Power Comes***

In the Work, suppose some of you go to a certain place. If everyone is an isolated individual, there can be no coordination. You may live together, but your spirits are not open to one another. Many may be working as you all go out to labor, but it will be useless if all go forth as mere individuals. If you all pray your own prayer, this is not of one mind. Physically you may be together, and you may call yourselves co-workers, yet everyone wraps himself up tightly and does his own work independently. Where can such a body be found

on earth? Where can such members be found on earth? This is not members one of another, this is paralysis! No, the many of you must work as one man. After you arrive at the place, each one of you is to be an open person. Together you seek the Lord's face. And by so doing, you will see power coming from above. Because two or three are seeking with one accord, such prayer God will hear.

### ***Forsake Individualism***

We must forsake our individualism. Let us learn to be open. Open your spirit to your brethren. Open your thoughts and also frequently open your mouth. Sometimes when the mouth is shut, the spirit is shut too. Some people have never in their lives made any request. I hope some of us will at last be able to say to our brothers and sisters, "For many years I have not been able to get through on this matter; will you please help me?"

Alas, we do not know how proud a person we are. Many of us are proud without realizing it. Many of us hold ourselves tightly without being conscious of it. Many profess to have been broken before God, but when we are in touch with people we reveal the fact that we are not broken at all. Let me tell you that a person who is broken before God is broken wherever he is put. This is fellowship, stretching forth the hand to seek out fellowship with others.

I repeat, do not lay your responsibility upon the shoulders of others. The prayer of a person who does this will not be answered. But let a responsible person, one who seeks God, learn to be broken before Him. As a broken person, seek the help of the other members. And as you do so, you will find that wherever you go people will be praying and consulting with you. Otherwise, where will your co-worker be? In reality, you will have none.

A given brother may work for ten or twenty years, and yet—sad to say—I am afraid no one can bear responsibility together with him.

He has never learned to work with other people nor ever learned to bear responsibility together. He may be too proud to share his burden with others. He may not wish to be concerned with the affairs of other people. When requested to do so, he will not really pray and fast and seek to know the mind of God for other people. Oh, if such a brother never learns how to seek help for his own burden as well as how to bear the burdens of others, he will never know what the body is nor will he ever truly experience any coordination in the Work.

I hope that in every region of the Work, brothers and sisters will be praying together. This is an excellent phenomenon to behold: brothers and sisters praying together without any inhibition. Naturally, there is a definite place for a person to touch God personally. However, in God's Work there are many things which can be shared in prayer through the opening up of hearts and the bearing of one another's burdens.

If, on the contrary, everyone is tight and unbroken—each taking care of his own affairs without also caring for the affairs of others—each looking after his own labors without also helping in the others' labors—then there is absolutely no coordination in the Work. It is right and good for a person to rise up before God and face any and every problem which comes, but if he never says, "I need the supply and support of my fellow workers," he does not know what body coordination is. And the result? He will never be able to bear the burden of others since he is too busily occupied with his own.

The greatest test, then, is whether or not co-workers can pray together. Can they talk over matters with one mind before God? Can they bring themselves to say, "I have this problem before God, and you have that problem before God; let us lay these matters before Him"? This is a great test. I hope hereafter there will be no more bearing burdens alone. Burdens must be borne, but let us learn to seek fellowship in the sharing and the bearing of our burdens together.

### ***Head Gives Authority, Members Have Fellowship***

The use of the body lies in fellowship. The first body principle is that of authority, the second principle is that of fellowship. The supply of coordination is based on the supply of authority and the supply of fellowship. What comes from the head is authority, what comes from the body members is fellowship. The head gives authority that we may have order in the body—that is to say, order in the church. Further, though, within the members there is mutual fellowship. These are the two fundamental principles of body life.

May we test this out before God by saying, “O Lord, am I a person whose heart is closed and who never asks for help?” If you search throughout the whole Bible, you will not find such a superior Christian. Superiority is not the path of a believer. Do not boast that you take care of everything yourself before God and that you never mind the business of your brothers and sisters. You cannot be such a Christian on earth and still serve the Lord. For as you learn to serve Him, you must learn at the beginning the necessity to coordinate with your brethren in the Work. Otherwise, you will be spiritually useless. Learn on the one hand to submit to authority, and on the other hand learn to have fellowship with others to such a degree that you can say: “Thank and praise God, we bear the same burden together with one heart and one mind. We have fellowship and authority. Everything is done step by step with order.” Fellowship, you discover, is absolutely necessary.

Today if there is any failure, you will see that such failure falls either into the area of authority or the area of fellowship

### ***(3) AUTHORITY AND FELLOWSHIP IN THE BIBLE***

In the New Testament, there is evidence of many arrangements—involving both authority and fellowship in God’s Work. Especially can this be seen in the life of Paul. Let us review at some length the

record of the Scriptures that pertain to this matter in Paul's life and ministry as he relates to others in the Work. We shall see in many places where there were arrangements, and how the younger brethren followed these arrangements. These expressed authority, but they also indicated fellowship. In putting these arrangements before the younger ones, not only was authority used to get these brethren to work, but in addition, fellowship with them in knowledge and light was experienced. We here need to recognize that these arrangements in Scripture were not merely an expression of authority, for then the apostle could have simply said, "I, Paul, order you to do this, and so you had better do it!" Not so, for in these arrangements which Paul set forth, he received light from God, that is to say, he had knowledge before the Lord. And thereupon he shared the knowledge and light which he had received from God in fellowship with those younger brothers. Authority on the one hand and fellowship on the other—these are what I trust we all will come to see as we now review Paul's experience in some detail.

### ***Paul Sent Tychicus and Onesimus***

"All my affairs shall Tychicus make known unto you, the beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord: whom I have sent unto you for this very purpose" (Col. 4.7,8a). "Together with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother" (v.9a). It was Paul who sent both Tychicus and Onesimus to Colosse.

In God's Work, there is a foreman who has the authority to send out people. Tychicus was a very good brother. This is revealed to us in a number of Paul's epistles. And Onesimus, as told to us in the Letter to the Colossians, was a very lovely person. And both of them were sent by Paul.

### ***Sent Timothy and Epaphroditus***

“But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state” (Phil. 2.19).

“But I counted it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus” (v.25a).

Timothy was like a son to Paul, just as Onesimus had been. Epaphroditus was a fellow worker of Paul’s, but he came to the Work later than had Paul. They were both young, and both were sent by Paul.

In the coordination of God’s Work, those who act as foremen send out people. The younger must learn to listen, and the older must be certain before the Lord before they send out the younger: “I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy shortly unto you.” Paul was quite certain before the Lord that he should send Timothy. May we all learn this.

### ***Tychicus Went to Ephesus***

“But that ye may also know my affairs, how I do, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things: whom I have sent unto you for this very purpose” (Eph. 6.21,22a). Paul sent Tychicus not only to Colosse but also to Ephesus.

### ***Exhorted Titus and Sent Other Brother***

“I exhorted Titus, and I sent the brother with him” (2 Cor. 12.18a). Notice that the word used here is “exhorted.” This time Paul did not send Titus but exhorted him to go. Though Paul had authority over Titus to send him, he in this instance would rather exhort him. Sometimes it was exhorting for Paul and not a sending. The other

brother—whose name was not identified—was *sent*, however. Titus, on the other hand, went because he responded to an exhortation.

***“Besought Apollos . . . Not His Will to Come . . . but He Will Come”***

“But as touching Apollos the brother, I besought him much to come unto you with the brethren: and it was not at all his will to come now; but he will come when he shall have opportunity” (1 Cor. 16.12). Here we can observe something quite remarkable. Paul exhorted Titus, and Titus being a young man listened and he went. Apollos, however, was *not* a young man but was a contemporary of Paul’s. In other words, he was in generally the same age bracket as Paul. Cephas, though, was senior to them both. In the assembly at Corinth, some believers there had said, I am of Cephas, some others had said, I am of Paul, and still others had said, I am of Apollos (1 Cor. 1.12). The position of Apollos in the assembly at Corinth was equal to Paul’s. Hence Paul *besought* Apollos, he did not *send* him; for Paul could not have sent Apollos but could only beseech him. And he besought the latter, *not* once, but many times. How significant it was that Apollos would not go. Paul had besought him again and again to go with the brethren, but Apollos replied that he would not go now. He emphatically said he would not go. Yet Paul added a word here, saying that Apollos *would* go later, for he had the assurance of it. How very beautiful it was that when an older one was besought to go but would not go, Paul was not disturbed at all but had the confidence that Apollos would go eventually.

The exhortation given to Apollos described in 1 Corinthians 16 and the exhortation given to Titus mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12 are different. Paul could order Titus, but he would rather exhort. Nevertheless, Titus took the exhortation as an order. On the other hand, Paul exhorted Apollos a number of times, but the latter would not go. Yet Paul had the confidence that Apollos would go later on.

Such is the arrangement in God's Work. There is fellowship as well as authority in the Lord's Work. And how precious that is!

### ***Directed Timothy's Movement***

“Now if Timothy come . . . set him forward on his journey in peace, that he may come unto me” (1 Cor. 16.10,11b). Paul left a word with the Corinthian believers to give to Timothy, that when the latter came into their midst they should do their best to send him forward to Paul, for, added the apostle, “I expect him with the brethren” (v.11c). Do you perceive how Paul was directing the movement of Timothy here? The word of the Scriptures is quite clear: the authority whom God has set up can control the movement of the younger worker, but with the older workers there can only be exhortation and not orders.

### ***Look Further into Letters of Paul to Timothy: Paul Shared Revelation***

“This charge I commit unto thee, my child Timothy, according to the prophecies which led the way to thee, that by them thou mayest war the good warfare” (1 Tim. 1.18). This plainly shows that Paul gave direction to Timothy. He gave the young man a charge by which the latter could wage a good warfare. “These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly; but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3.14,15).

In chapter 2 of this same letter, Paul had talked about the things pertaining to men and women. In chapter 3, he now speaks of the things concerning elders and deacons. Why did he write these things to Timothy? He expected to be with Timothy shortly, yet he was afraid that if he were delayed in coming, Timothy might not know

how to conduct himself in the Church well enough in the meantime to carry on well till Paul arrived. Hence Paul wrote ahead. In other words, Paul did not leave room for Timothy to search out his own way nor let him do what he pleased. He wrote to him specifically. When Paul was present, Timothy could ask him. When he was absent, Timothy could read his letter.

I repeat, this arrangement includes both the principle of authority and the principle of fellowship. Authority, because Paul was the older brother; fellowship, because he wrote to the younger brother. Since he knew but Timothy did not, Paul shared what he knew with Timothy. And as Timothy submitted, he received the benefit of fellowship. Keep ever in mind that submission like this will never cause you to lose your position in the Work; rather, it will help you to gain what the older brother possesses, so that you may receive in your work that particular revelation which the older brother has received.

We can find a number of other passages which are similar to what we have just quoted above. All of them point out to us the way in the Work of God.

“Give diligence to come shortly unto me” (2 Tim. 4.9). Paul was not consulting with Timothy, nor did he merely expect Timothy to come. For not long after he wrote this letter, Paul was martyred. This was his last letter. And hence he wrote in this fashion: “Give diligence to come shortly unto me.”

“For Demas forsook me, having loved this present world, and went to Thessalonica”(v.10a). Here was a rebellious soul who had left.

“Crescens to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia”(v.10b). No doubt, these two were being sent by Paul.

“Only Luke is with me” (v.11a).

### ***Brought Mark***

“Take Mark, and bring him with thee” (v.11b). This was the brother over whom Paul had contended with Barnabas. In Acts, we find that Paul would not agree with Barnabas to take Mark along on their second apostolic journey, because on their first trip—at a critical moment in the Work—Mark had left them. More than likely, Barnabas had wanted to take Mark along due to their kinsman relationship to each other. Paul and Barnabas had such strong contention over this issue that they parted from each other. The ironic twist to this whole matter was that later on Barnabas had no more chance to work with Paul, whereas Mark—as we learn from 2 Timothy—did have a further opportunity! We know that Mark later learned a great deal from Peter and was greatly helped by him spiritually. In fact, the Gospel according to Mark most probably came from the mouth of Peter himself. So that before Paul died, he wrote in his Second Letter to Timothy: “Take Mark and bring him with thee.” And why? Because “he is useful to me for ministering” (v.11b). Yes, Mark was indeed useful to Paul in the ministry.

“But Tychicus I sent to Ephesus” (v.12). This implies that the Work was so arranged that Paul could ask Timothy to come to him with Mark and send Tychicus away to Ephesus.

“Erastus remained at Corinth” (v.20a). How knowledgeable was Paul about the situation of the Work.

### ***Left Trophimus at Miletus***

“Erastus remained at Corinth; but Trophimus I left at Miletus sick” (v.20). Trophimus was one of the noteworthy sick persons mentioned in the New Testament. Epaphroditus was another of these.

“Trophimus I left at Miletus.” Oftentimes a patient should learn to hearken. He cannot in all circumstances insist, “I want to travel.” Because of sickness, he may have to remain behind for a while. And in this instance, Paul felt he should leave Trophimus at Miletus. It was better for him.

To Timothy, however, Paul instructed: “Give diligence to come before winter” (v.21a). He gave Timothy a definite time frame instead of leaving it to *him* to decide when to come.

Can we now begin to see this way in the Work? One who walked before God as did Paul must be listened to by Mark, Timothy and Trophimus. From all this evidence we can begin to perceive that in the Church there just naturally develops not only fellowship but also authority.

### ***Left Titus in Crete, He to Give Diligence to Come to Nicopolis***

“For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that were wanting, and appoint elders in every city, as I gave thee charge” (Titus 1.5). Titus was a younger brother. In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, it is recorded that the apostle exhorted Titus to go to Corinth. When Paul decided to go to Crete, Titus went along. And then Paul left him at Crete to complete whatever unfinished business remained, according to Paul’s instruction. Again, there is authority as well as fellowship.

“When I shall send Artemas unto thee, or Tychicus, give diligence to come unto me to Nicopolis: for there I have determined to winter” (Titus 3.12). This is the way of the Work. Paul said he would send either Artemas or Tychicus to Crete. Although the matter in Paul’s mind was not yet fully decided, at least one of these two would come to Crete. And then Titus was to hurry to Paul at Nicopolis.

An elder brother arranged many things, whereas the younger brother learned to listen to the word of the older brother.

### ***Give Timothy Charge***

Finally in this review, I wish to go back to Timothy for some concluding comments.

“I charge thee in the sight of God, who giveth life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed the good confession; that thou keep the commandment, with out spot, without reproach, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Tim. 6.13,14). Notice how solemn this matter is. The charge was given before God who gave life to all things and before Jesus Christ who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate. And the charge was to keep the commandment.

“O Timothy, guard that which is committed unto thee” (v.20a). Whatever charge Paul had given to Timothy, the latter was to keep.

I would say here that the younger brothers should learn to keep the charge which the older brothers give. As the younger workers learn to submit to the older workers, they can proceed on the way very well.

### ***Paul Also Needed Fellowship***

I hope we may today see what the Work, as spelled out for us in the New Testament, is: how it is arranged, and how it is done with authority and how it is also done with fellowship. With respect to fellowship, let me point out that even though Timothy was a comparatively younger person, the book of Acts records something quite revealing about Paul when Timothy came to him at Corinth: “But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was

constrained by the word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ” (Acts 18.5). I consider this to be a most excellent word found in the Scriptures. Paul was one greatly used by the Lord, one who knew God very well. Yet the record acknowledges that he was constrained by the word only after Silas and Timothy had come to him from Macedonia. Paul *too* was in need of fellowship. The coming of Silas and Timothy was actually a good encouragement to Paul.

To be able to appreciate this more fully, we need to see the background. “And then immediately the brethren sent forth Paul to go as far as to the sea” (Acts 17.14a). Here Paul listened to the word of the brethren in Berea, who urged him to leave because of the Jews who had followed him there. “And Silas and Timothy abode there still” (v.14b)—that is, in Berea which was a city in the region of Macedonia. “But they that conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timothy that they should come to him with all speed, they departed” (v.15). By means of those brethren from Berea who had accompanied the apostle to Athens and who had then returned to Berea, Paul sent a message ordering Silas and Timothy to come to him quickly. After a while, he left Athens and went on to Corinth; and only when Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia was he constrained by God’s word to preach again. How beautiful everything was! Fellowship, as well as authority, has its part to play in the Work of God too.



# 11

## Co-Workers and Apostles— Who Are They?

We have before us today a very important question to be answered: Who are co-workers and apostles?

### *A Great Misunderstanding*

I think this question has been greatly misunderstood by the children of God. Even today this misunderstanding still exists. Many people misconstrue the matter of finance as determining who co-workers are. In these people's estimation, co-workers are a class of people who lay down their professions and trust wholly in God. If this is a correct definition, then Paul could never be our co-worker today because he did not completely give up his profession.

Who are apostles? Many people mistakenly think that those who have no other income and who devote their entire time to the Work of God are apostles. If this concept be correct, then Paul was never an apostle because he did not leave his profession but continued to make tents. According to the current view of God's children, Paul was neither a co-worker nor an apostle. For he did not devote all twenty-four hours per day to the Work, because he sometimes made tents. Leaving aside any consideration as to why he made tents or what he did with the income from them, the very fact that he made tents disqualified him from being a co-worker or an apostle, in the view of modern Christianity. This, of course, is a fundamental error.

I hope that brothers and sisters will come to thoroughly understand what God says in His word as to who are apostles and who are co-workers. Being an apostle does not depend on a person quitting his job. To be a worker is not based on whether or not he has

a profession. In the Church today, due to tradition and custom, men always judge apostles by their finance or profession. In the opinion of many in the Church, if this matter of finance or profession is not solved, one cannot be an apostle or a worker. In their view, an apostle must quit his job and put all his time in the Lord's Work. I trust you will see that this misconception is not altogether without some reason. It is not accurate to call it an error; but it is accurate to say it is a misunderstanding.

### ***Apostles Must Abandon Profession***

We know that when John and James were called, they at the time were mending nets. The Lord actually told them to forsake their nets and boats and follow Him. We also observe that when Peter was called, he was casting a net. The Lord told him to leave his boat and fish and follow Him. Matthew was working in the customs house. When the Lord called him, He asked him to quit his job and follow Him. Let us see clearly before God that an apostle is one who does indeed need to abandon his profession. What God in His word requires of a worker is to accept His call and to relinquish his profession. He is truly to put all his time in the Lord's hand.

This is a fact, because it will be very difficult for him both to be an apostle and also to have another profession on earth. An apostle will be sent abroad. He will be like the apostles in Jerusalem who were sent by God to Samaria and even as far as Caesarea. If an apostle has a job, he cannot easily leave because his work for the Lord must in that case be largely restricted to but one locality.

In view of this, an elder, who is based locally, is not required to give up his profession; whereas an apostle does seem to have such an example in Scripture of leaving his trade. Some elders may need financial supply from the church because they so give of their time (most if not all of it) to manage the church's affairs that they have no time to earn a living. Under such circumstances, these elders are

worthy of double honor. Part of this honor is to be in the form of financial support. Nevertheless, it is exceptional for an elder to leave his job. The Bible does not give such a command.

With apostles, though, it is different. The Lord plainly tells them to forsake all and follow Him. To be an apostle is to accept the Lord's command to go places. Such a man should therefore lay down his profession; if not, he is not free to travel around to serve the Lord. And thus we find all twelve apostles received such a calling, responded with such a following of our Lord, demonstrated such a forsaking, and evidenced such a looking to the Lord for their physical and material needs. Obviously, therefore, this is to be the way. The Lord called all twelve of them to come out completely. And as a matter of fact, He called Paul and his companion Luke to come out completely too.

### ***But Paul Made Tents***

Yet here I wish to point out that not only did Paul make tents but Aquila and Priscilla did also. Moreover, Luke remained a physician. A careful reading of the Bible will reveal that as soon as a person leaves his profession, he is no longer identified as still being that in the rest of the Scriptures. Peter had been a fisherman. But after he left that trade he was no longer identified as Peter the fisherman. The same with Matthew, who had previously been a publican or tax-collector.\* But in the case of Luke, before God called him to the Work, he had been a physician by profession; but the Scriptures still continued to call him a physician, and therefore he must have

---

\*By the time of Matthew 10.3, this Gospel writer was still identifying himself as "Matthew the publican." Yet this only reflected the writer's humility (in the face of God's grace in saving such a one as he) and not the name by which he was called by others to identify the profession he pursued in life. After the Lord's call on his life, Matthew never returned to the customs office.—*Translator*

continued on with that profession. Had Luke ceased practicing medicine altogether, the Bible would no doubt subsequently have referred to him as Luke and not Luke the physician. We must see that Luke was still practicing medicine, that Paul was still making tents, and that Aquila and Pricilla were also still making tents. Hence let us be very careful in our ascertaining what the meaning of all this is.

Paul lived with Aquila and Priscilla because they were of the same trade of tentmaking as he. When he bade farewell to the elders of Ephesus at Miletus, he mentioned “these hands” (Acts 20.34). Allow me to say that this is probably one of the most woeful passages in the Bible. When these Ephesian elders and many other brethren were with him at Miletus, he put forward his hands for them to look at as he said: “Ye yourselves know that these hands ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me” (Acts 20.34). I must observe here that these two hands must have truly been noteworthy to look at! How different in appearance they must have been from ordinary hands! For these two hands had gone through many trials and conflicts. There must have been wounds and scars from all those trials. But then too, because of his having to make tents to meet his own necessities, his hands probably suffered many additional wounds; doubtless much skin peeled off as a result. Yet Paul here did not say how by these hands he had done many things in support of many people. He simply mentioned that those hands of his had ministered to the needs of many others as well as his own. How different indeed were these hands from the ordinary lazy kind!

### ***Paul's Occupation Is Apostle, Not Tentmaker***

I hope you can perceive here what the relationship is between an apostle on the one hand and financial resources and a profession on the other. By looking at Peter and his peers together with Paul and his companions you can discover the straight path. If you only look at the Gospels, you will *not be able* to discover the straight path,

because there you can only ferret out half the truth. Later on, with the establishment of the Church, Paul conducted himself very differently—or may I say it, he made an improvement. Yes indeed, an apostle must leave his occupation completely. In this respect he was no different from Peter, for Paul too was one who completely forsook his former profession. As you read these pertinent chapters in Acts about this man, who can possibly imagine that Paul remained a tentmaker by trade? I can assure you that after anyone reads the book of Acts, he will go away with the distinct impression that Paul was in very truth an apostle. I myself have absolutely no notion of him being a tentmaker after reading Luke's narrative. Perhaps the professional tentmakers might argue that Paul was a tentmaker, but I can only acknowledge him as an apostle, not a tentmaker. Only those whose hearts are focused upon tents, the profit to be had from making tents, and the advantages which living in tents provide will deem Paul a tentmaker. But I believe any simple believer, when he reads the accounts of Paul's life, will have but one impression: Saul of Tarsus who became Paul the servant of the Lord was in very fact an apostle appointed by God. He will never have the idea that Paul remained a tentmaker by trade after God's call on his life. Clearly Paul was an apostle and no longer a participant in the profession of tentmaking as an occupation.

Hence let us recognize that in apostolic ministry, one must definitely be freed from his profession, but this only refers to one's not taking fishing or tax collecting or even tentmaking as an occupation anymore. If—for one who has been called to be an apostle—making tents is an occupation, then that profession must be given up; otherwise, he cannot be an apostle. Why does God require a person to leave his profession in order to be an apostle? Because apostolic ministry is an occupation in itself, and one cannot have two occupations. Particularly in this occupation of apostleship, it is absolutely forbidden to hold down two jobs. Paul declares that we are ambassadors of Christ. How can an ambassador hold another job?

No, all our time is to be devoted to being apostles. We have no time for other pursuits.

Hence after God's call to the Work, Paul's tentmaking was no longer for him an occupation, neither was tentmaking the occupation of Aquila and Priscilla, nor was practicing medicine Luke's occupation.

### *Conditions Were Different Then*

What do we see here? We see Paul being sent out from Antioch by the Holy Spirit to do itinerant work. I trust we realize that the conditions for travel and work then were very different from what they are today, especially with respect to communication! At that time, if the brethren at Antioch had wanted to send some money or other needy items to Paul, there would not have been a post office or telegraph office or bank through which to remit the money or to deliver the goods. In the record of the New Testament, there were several occasions mentioned about gifts having been sent, but all were delivered in person. When Paul was at Antioch, he did this very thing once. On that occasion he had gone out not for the sake of preaching the gospel but for the purpose of bringing financial relief to the saints of Jerusalem. He was then a messenger of the church. Later on, when Paul himself received the gifts, they were all delivered in person by messengers sent out by the various churches. How difficult it must have been without any telegraph, automobiles, airplanes, or many good roads! And those who went out for the sake of the gospel took *nothing* from the Gentiles.

Leaving Jerusalem for a short period and covering only a short distance would create no real financial problem. For people could bring with them sufficient funds for the trip to Samaria—or even to Caesarea—without taking anything from the Gentiles. Furthermore, there were assemblies in both places. So that finance would not be a problem. But now Paul was sent out from Antioch on a different

errand by God. He was to go to the Gentiles, he was to take long trips from place to place. So that anyone can readily see that supply would have been a big problem back in those days.

It needs to be pointed out here that Paul's way was quite different from the way the gospel was preached during the earthly days of Jesus. At that time the twelve apostles had gone to cities and stayed in the homes of worthy ones. They were even told by Jesus not to bring staff or purse (see Matt. 10). But as the day of our Lord's death was approaching, He declared: "But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise a wallet; and he that hath none, let him sell his cloak, and buy a sword" (Luke 22.36). This indicates that the times would be changing. For in that new day, the gospel would be preached not only to the Jews but also, and especially, to the Gentiles. John made it very clear that "for the sake of the Name they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles" (3 John 7). Thus one can see how heavy must have been the burden on Paul—not only for himself but also for the brethren who were with him.

In going out from Antioch, at first there were only two men, Barnabas and Paul. On later trips others went also—those such as Titus, Timothy, Luke, Silas, and so forth. These were added to his party from time to time. The farther they traveled, the larger the group grew. Aquila and Priscilla were also added. It was in light of this that Paul mentioned how "these hands ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me" (Acts 20.34). We need to understand that this was not a question of occupation. Paul's profession was that of being an apostle. Where necessity arose along the way, however, he worked with his hands to supply the needs of his fellow companions as well as of himself.

How very beautiful all this was. Dean Alford has informed us that during those early days, tentmaking utilized a kind of dye with which to color the cloth. That kind of dye was fairly strong. It would stain the hands so that color was not easily washed away. Furthermore, the

dye would soak one's skin and damage it. Paul could therefore say in so many words to the Ephesian elders: "Behold, my hands." This was truly a big problem then, and it still is today. I hope brethren here will recognize this financial problem for the apostles. You who are to be workers in God's Work, be thankful to the Lord if supplies come in from the various assemblies. But if it does not come in, it does not mean that we can leave our occupation as apostles and take up other jobs. Quite the contrary, in order to maintain this apostolic occupation, I—like Paul—must make tents. Today, for the sake of enabling those brothers with me to continue in fulfilling their apostolic mission, I as it were will make tents. Tentmaking was obviously no longer Paul's livelihood. Yet, for the sake of providing the needs of himself and of the younger workers with him, he did make tents. While Timothy, Titus, Silas, Luke and others were with him, he was able to supply their needs because he could make tents. Behold, these two hands!

### ***Making Tents Helped Him to Be an Apostle***

Forsaking one's own profession and having but the one occupation of being an apostle does not exclude a person from earning some money. Paul became an apostle and always remained one thereafter. In reading the book of Acts, we would never dream that Paul would ever contemplate changing his occupation. Among the Ephesians Paul made tents, yet he remained an apostle. He probably made more tents in Ephesus than anywhere else so that he might know what the church was. Whether making tents or practicing medicine or doing something else, all was done by a given worker for the sake of fulfilling his occupation as an apostle and not to disqualify himself from being an apostle. It could well be that had Paul not made tents, he would not have been able to continue being an apostle. This point we must be clear on before God. For oftentimes God permitted Paul to take up a little work in order to make him a better apostle.

I hope we see that this that Paul did is quite different from a person taking another occupation. It was not the same as having a profession as such is commonly understood. If today Matthew were to go back to being a full-time tax-collector, we would probably say that Matthew had gone back to seeking an occupation. But when Paul in his day busied himself to make a few tents, no one could legitimately say that he had found another profession. Matthew could not say today that by his being a tax-collector he could still be an apostle. Yet Paul could say, "Behold, my two hands. Without these hands, it seems as though I cannot be an apostle." This tentmaking of his enabled him, in fact, to be a better apostle. His aim, his life, his work, his living, his very all were for him to be an apostle. Those two hands, far from interfering with his being an apostle, actually helped him to be an apostle. Is the way now clear to all of us? I trust so.

### *Question of Avocation*

A couple of months ago a brother asked me if it were necessary for us to completely leave our job in order to go out for the Lord to preach the gospel and to do apostolic work? Could we in the future have an avocation? This would be my answer today: Everyone who is to be an apostle must forsake his profession as it is commonly understood. But on the other hand, let us notice that while you are out working and traveling here and there for the gospel's sake, it is far better for you to do something on the side which will enable you to be an apostle rather than—as some other people are doing—blaming the church for any lack of love shown. Instead of being weak in faith yet maintaining an outward appearance of trusting God while in actuality you are expecting from men, would it not be better if you could say as Paul, "Behold, these hands!"? At such a time, it would be much better to work with your hands that you may supply your own needs and the needs of other people. I consider looking for the love of the church as being far more dishonoring to God than lacking faith in the Lord. I also believe murmuring against men and

not believing in God is very disgraceful. I think what is most shameful is for a person to give the outward appearance of looking to God but in fact inwardly his eyes are not looking at heaven but are instead looking around him.

### ***The Principle of “Behold, These Two Hands”***

I must reemphasize this point: that the principle of “Behold, these two hands” is for the sake of enabling me to be more of an apostle. For many, these two hands have no need to go fishing. We must know ourselves as to what we are about on the earth. What kind of person are we before God? Let us not ever forget that you and I are called by God to be an apostle. And because we are to be such, we must forsake all our professions.

Hereafter, if you ever work again, it will not be as an occupation; it will simply be to supply the necessities for yourself and for your co-workers whoever may be in need. How come there are such necessities? Because of the very fact that you *are* an apostle. You will therefore work with your hands because you will not allow any financial lack to hinder the Work or to lead you away from your calling. You will do some outside work with the hope and intention of maintaining your co-workers as well as your own self in the apostolic work.

This is a different way. Yet it is not a change of occupation but is a way to use an avocation in support of the apostolic ministry. It is not a change from being an apostle to being a tent maker. It merely means making tents to sustain the apostolic mission.

### ***Fishing and Tentmaking Are Two Different Things***

If some apostolic brothers find their work too difficult and their finances too inadequate, they go teach school or they go fishing. Let

us be reminded that at the moment our Lord died many *did* go fishing. Yet could they at the same time say that their Lord lived forever in heaven? Only the despairing and the disappointed went fishing in that day—and they could not say this because of their unbelief. But here in Paul we find a man who did not make tents because of any despair—he *believed* in the risen and ascended Lord. These two reactions were very different.

Peter's "I go a fishing" (John 21.3) and Paul's tentmaking were not the same. Peter went fishing only because he had nowhere to go—he was finished. He went fishing because he considered the Lord dead and everything else hopeless. He himself was a failure, and his Lord was no more; and so he went fishing out of despair. But look at Paul. His making tents was not at all an occupation. He firmly acknowledged that the Lord was living and that therefore he could not help but be an apostle. Whether in comfort or in suffering, whether receiving supply from the brothers or not receiving any supply, he must still be an apostle. How different this is from Peter's reaction and going back to fishing. To live or to die, Paul would still remain an apostle. He had to give his all to fulfill his apostleship. And hence he put forth his two hands and did some work. Extra though this outside work was to his regular labors and toils, he was willing to do something more so that his apostolic work might not be crushed. That was Paul's attitude. What his two hands did supported both his co-workers as well as himself. That was the way of Paul.

### ***Not a Changing of Occupation, but Giving One's All***

Today I believe brothers and sisters are going to see this fundamental principle of which we have been speaking. All who are called by the Lord to go out and preach the gospel—all who are to serve the Lord as apostles—must forsake their professions in order to be apostolic workers. This is the correct way. Yet, in case need arises, you can work for a short period if you are able to bear the

double burden, but not to go back as a tax-collector who has to work at the customs house from morning till night. If there is no such need, then you have no need to work. When there is no supply coming from the church or when the church is not able to supply, you can work. Just as when the children of Israel, whenever they ceased offering sacrifices, caused the Levites to suffer hunger, forcing them to work in the fields (Neh. 13.10). At such a time of need, you can do something involving a side job to help your co-workers as well as yourself. Nevertheless, during that time you do not automatically cease being an apostle.

Recognize that this principle of tentmaking does not dissipate your heart, but on the contrary, it actually increases your singleness of heart. It is not a hindrance, rather a help. It is not a changing of occupations, it is to fulfill your present and lifetime calling and occupation better. This means that you must give your all. You must do the work and responsibility which the Lord has given you, and you must try everything which will enable you to fulfill your calling. It is right and proper for an apostle to travel on this path that we have described

### ***Scope of Co-workers More Inclusive Than That of Apostles***

With regard to co-workers, that really includes much more than the apostles. As an example from the Bible, we have Aquila and Priscilla who were co-workers. Phoebe too was a fellow worker. All the elders and deacons of the various assemblies are fellow workers.

### ***Let All Vocations Be Avocations***

We would ask all the brothers and sisters engaged in the Work to change their vocations into avocations. It would be very good if while serving God in a certain locality you forsake your profession because you have enough means to support yourself. Or if you are

serving God by either bearing local responsibility or engaging in the ministry of God's word, and you work at some job in order to supply yourself and also others, that would likewise be good. Let us see that no brother or sister lives for himself or herself. Such being the case, this matter of vocation can easily be solved. With your ministry solved, your occupation will also be solved. Without having your ministry settled, your profession is really useless before God.

### *Purpose Is to Serve*

One day a brother asked me if it was good to carry on an extra job. On that day I replied that it was good. But the question really revolves around what your principal work is. We all must have some sort of idea or desire before God: "Wherefore also," said Paul, "we are ambitious, whether at home or absent, to be well-pleasing unto him" (2 Cor. 5.9 mg.). Hence the first question we have to answer is, Why am I engaged in business today? Is it for earning money? For getting rich? Some people want to get rich simply to be rich, and not for earning money. Our aim before God should not be to get rich but to earn money to support the Lord's Work. We therefore need to have this foundation firmly established in our hearts. We must make a decision within ourselves as to what we really want before the Lord. Paul wanted to please Him; how about you? I have only one aim before the Lord, and that is, I want to serve Him, and I want to do His Work well.

### *Profession Is a Small Thing*

In these days as all the brothers and sisters move forward to have this matter solved of wanting to give all to serve the Lord, I can tell you that the question of profession becomes a very small matter indeed. If your heart before the Lord is weak and your service to God is weak, you cannot bear the pressure of a job because it will soon swallow you up. But if your service before the Lord is strong, you

can take up an avocation and your way will remain straight before God. Some brothers may wish to go back into practicing medicine or to undertake some other trade, but these things must be as it were a sideline affair. They are done only to maintain one's living. And if what brethren engage in on the side remains small, then it will not cause any problem to their ministry because their heart will not be in that undertaking.

Suppose a brother decides to return to manufacturing lace or embroidery in order that he may use the money he receives from its sale to maintain his ministry before God. His ministry before God is so weighty and earnest that all the other things he does are but sideline activities to help support that ministry. And suppose further that there is another brother who also produces lace or embroidery for sale, but his heart is set on getting rich. In comparing himself to the first brother this brother thinks that since both of them are doing the same thing, then the first brother must without any doubt be aiming at getting rich just as he himself is. There is therefore no difference between them in the thinking of this second brother. Yet his way is not right before God, and his ministry will be bound. His aim is simply one of getting rich, whereas the other brother's aim is not. Outwardly they may appear to be the same, but only that which serves God—and not mammon—is the right way.

### ***Whatever We Do Is to Serve God***

If we want to serve, then everything we do must be done for His service. We must give our all. We need to realize that not only *not* making tents is for the sake of being an apostle, even *making* tents can be for that purpose. I therefore hope all who are working as apostles will not upset the priority, and that all who serve God locally will not miss the point. Serving God is our vocation, our basic occupation. Whatever we do is for the purpose of serving Him. Earning money is for the purpose of serving God, and likewise *not*

earning money. Devoting all our time is for that purpose, and devoting part of our time can be also. Whichever way we take, we serve God. Even our very life is all given to him. This is how the problem of occupation is to be solved.

### ***All Whose Everything Is for the Lord Are Co-Workers***

All whose everything is for the Lord are our co-workers, for our principal vocation is the same. All the brothers and sisters in the Work are to serve the Lord. We can therefore say that all are our co-workers, even as Paul writing in Romans 16 said that all those whom he mentioned there were fellow workers. All who serve the Lord become our co-workers. When we really see this, then our concept of co-worker will be different from how we thought before. Many may put in twenty hours a day, but they are not our co-workers. Some may work only two hours in the evening per day, and yet we can say that they are truly our co-workers.

Let us see that the matter of co-worker is neither dependent on profession nor on finance. It depends on how big a place God's Work is in your life. A person may wash clothes or sweep floors, and he is our co-worker. Another person may weave cloth or mend clothes, and he is also our co-worker. It does not depend on what he does. One brother may work on the train, another may work in a steamer. One may labor on land, another on the sea. Yet they all can be our co-workers. As long as we serve God, our basic aim is the same. For the sake of letting God have His way in China, we must put everything into it—our time, our money, our very life. We all are therefore co-workers. We work with one another: we work with a Peter, and we also work with a Paul. We are fellow workers of all who now serve God and of all who have served Him throughout these many centuries.

### ***Not Same Work, but Same Aim***

There is an erroneous view abroad which causes people to look always at the sameness of work but neglect the sameness of aim. They tend to lay stress on how people do the same thing rather than on discovering how strong the aim is. Doing the same thing does not constitute a co-working relationship. There may be fifty physicians working in the same clinic, yet they may not be considered co-workers. Their work is the same, but they are not strictly co-workers. Only one thing determines the status of co-workers one to another, which is that we live here for the Lord, we live here for the gospel, and all our income is for the gospel.

Let me illustrate this point further as follows: Being a physician is a noble profession; and yet a washerwoman can be a co-worker to the physician. A young man who is highly educated and trained and another young man who is illiterate can likewise be fellow workers. And yet, it is also possible that another Christian who has received a similar education to that of the first young man may not at all be qualified to be a co-worker.

The principal and basic issue here is, Do you give your all? If people are really violent for the Lord, giving their everything to Him and caring nothing for the world, if they live on earth wholly for the Lord under any circumstance, then they will do everything to serve God. Notwithstanding where they are and what they do, you recognize that they truly are the light of the world.

### ***Serve God Anyway***

We do not have many co-workers, and we have never had many co-workers. May God in these last days do the work of recovery. May He raise up many people who can serve Him in any circumstance, whatever may come. I love those two hands of Paul. Ordinarily, many things are not necessary. According to rule, the

church ought to be responsible for the necessities of the apostles as well as for the needs of the Work. But the church is not being responsible. The church has failed in her responsibility. The church takes care of her own needs only. When the church forgets to support and begins to criticize Paul, Paul can assert. Behold, these two hands! I trust we have now seen through all this, how Paul's ministry not only did not decrease but was actually strengthened and more firmly established. His apostolic ministry depended on his two hands. In other words, those two hands—which ought never to have had to work for a living if the church had been normal—those two hands were willing to work. As long as there is any possibility of serving, let us serve this way too!

Who are co-workers? Co-workers are people who have one mind, one purpose, one ambition before God: they will serve the Lord alone and do everything to please Him. Notwithstanding what their hands may perhaps do, if the aim is the same, these people are co-workers in the Lord.



# 12

## The Matter of Finance

We will now deal with the matter of finance. How are the finances arranged? On the one hand, how is the income the church receives to be distributed? And on the other hand, what should be the financial relationship among the fellow workers?

### ***ONE: DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS BY LOCAL ASSEMBLY***

#### ***(1) Current Expenses***

The money a local assembly receives is first of all to cover current expenses. A local assembly should not be in debt. It incurs a good deal of expenses, such as the purchasing of bread and wine for the Lord's Supper, payments for electricity, water, and sometimes rent, and so forth.

#### ***(2) Care for the Poor***

God wants His people in the church to look after the poor, especially the poor among the saints. Hence a primary responsibility of the local assembly will be to take care of the poor brothers and sisters.

However, in caring for the poor brothers and sisters, extreme caution must be exercised. Under no circumstances are they to be treated ungraciously because they *are* poor. Do not create a sense of shame on their part when they receive help from the church. In just the same humble attitude of spirit that you send money to your elderly parents for their use, so let the church give alms to its poor. Just as you never allow your parents to feel you are pitying them, so those who from the church bring relief to the poor must likewise be

very sensitive. Do not let those who are dull of spirit be the bearers of the gifts, for why must these brothers and sisters who must receive financial help be hurt?

Suppose, for instance, that a brother falls and is injured. As we put him in bed, we cannot let people rough in hands and dull in minds do the job. His bones may not yet be broken, but rough handling could very well break them! I often feel that many brothers who take care of church funds are much too insensitive. When a brother or sister is in need, and you are helping him or her, you must be very careful; if not, something adverse may happen. Be very delicate in your handling of the situation. Do not create the feeling that everybody is helping him or her. When a brother or sister is in distress, you must help that one to maintain his or her self-respect, for you do not know when you yourself will fall into the same situation. Let us not hurt one another in this regard.

### ***(3) Care for Needs of Responsible Brothers***

If a local responsible brother has to spend so much of his time in managing the church affairs that his own profession suffers, the local assembly should replenish him with extreme care. This is what is meant by the phrase in 1 Timothy, “worthy of double honor” (5.17). It cannot be that the church only provides money to workers but not to responsible brothers as well. It is not right to let the local responsible brothers suffer financial loss because they have to spend more of their time in the church. A local assembly should learn to take care of the needs of its elders.

### ***(4) Send to Other Local Assemblies***

A local assembly can also extend funds to other local assemblies for their use. At times an unusual instance of financial need or hardship may arise, such as occurred when Antioch felt a burden to

send relief funds to the brethren at Jerusalem who were in distress because of famine. It is important to have such fellowship in this matter of finance among the local assemblies. You will recall how at the beginning, many brothers and sisters in Jerusalem had sold their houses and fields. But during the time of famine, Antioch now sent relief to them by the hands of Barnabas and Paul. I love the fact that the elders at Antioch did not ask if the assembly at Jerusalem had already spent the vast amount of money it had received at the beginning or whether there was still some of it left over. That was surely none of their business. No, the saints at Antioch simply sent relief to the saints in Jerusalem to supply the latter's need, just as in an earlier time Barnabas had come from Jerusalem to provide help to Antioch. Now, Barnabas along with Paul were chosen to bear the funds forward. How fitting! And how beautiful to behold!

### ***(5) Gifts to Individual Workers***

A local assembly should send gifts to individual workers. This was what the church at Philippi had done towards Paul. After the apostles had labored in Macedonia (including the city of Philippi), he left for Thessalonica; and the church at Philippi thereafter sent gifts to him repeatedly. As we read the letter to the Philippians, we know that while Paul was in Macedonia and Thessalonica, all his supplies came from Philippi; otherwise, he would not have been able to work in those places. Today the brethren in various localities need to learn to send gifts to those who labor for the Lord. The church at Corinth was a backward assembly; their spiritual condition was not good at all before God; for although they knew how to criticize Paul they did not support him in anything in this matter of supply. Let local assemblies be aware of the needs of those who serve the Lord and send gifts to them.

### ***(6) Gifts to Regional Work***

There is another need. If our interpretation is correct, a local assembly not only can send gifts to individual workers but also to a regional Work. Paul advised the Corinthian believers to have their money ready to be sent to Jerusalem. At that time, the churches in Macedonia had already collected money to be sent to Jerusalem. Macedonia was a province in which there were a number of local assemblies. Paul exhorted the church at Corinth to do what the churches in Macedonia had done. For there was now famine not only in Jerusalem but also in the whole of Judea. So that when the relief was sent, it was not just earmarked for the local assembly there, it was also to be used to support the regional Work then occurring in the region of Judea as represented by the Work center—Jerusalem. In other words, the funds were sent to Jerusalem that from there relief could be sent out to all Judea. Hence we have a principle here: money can be sent to a local assembly for its own use, but it can also be sent to a local assembly for that church to distribute it to the brothers and sisters throughout the entire pertinent region.

I trust you are now clear as to what a local assembly should do with its money. The contributions it receives are to be used for local current expenses, for taking care of the poor among the saints, for caring for the responsible brothers, for the workers abroad, for the needs of the assemblies abroad, and for regional Work.

## ***TWO: RELATIONSHIP AMONG CO-WORKERS***

### ***Leaders Should Care for Co-Workers***

I want to mention here that besides the local assembly having responsibility in this matter of finance, people like Paul have also a responsibility. Timothy, Titus, Silas, and Luke were known by the Church in the latter days. But at the beginning of their ministry they were not known. Consequently, all who are like Paul must learn this

principle: “These hands ministered unto my necessities and to them that were with me” (Acts 20.34). No brother can be a leader in the Work and be extremely tight on money. I have known two or three brothers in China who at the start of their ministry were probably quite useful in God’s hand, yet they could not be leaders among the brethren because of this issue of finance. They could live by faith but they could not give by faith. Hence they were not able to lead other servants of the Lord on. I have also known a sister in the past who really knew God, was godly, and capable of helping people, yet she did not have the faith to supply others. All who are well known by the churches must learn to be like Paul, who cared for those whose names were little known. Be mindful of the fact that your income is not for your own self, it is for both you *and* your fellow workers. If you keep all your income for yourself, at a certain point it will become manifest that you are not fit to lead your fellow workers.

Leaders among co-workers who are recognized everywhere must cultivate the habit of giving—especially giving to fellow workers. Those of you who fall into this category need to see that what the Lord has given you is for others’ use as well as your own. If you hold the money tightly in your hand, sooner or later you will be taken away from the Work. If you are foolish, you may think you are serving the church by spending on yourself alone what God has given you, yet without realizing that only by giving to others as well can you *really* say that you are serving the church. Hence I hope all may do as Paul did, and learn to give to their co-workers so that they too may live. Older brothers in every place should use what they have received to care for their fellow workers. They should not only remember their own needs, they must also remember the needs of their co-workers.

### ***Distribute According to Each Need***

How should the leader distribute funds to his fellow workers? Let us suppose you have ten co-workers. How will you give to them? I believe the Biblical principle is to give according to each one's need and not according to each one's spiritual gift. Oftentimes brethren in the church will give only according to the spiritual gift of a brother in the Work. Yet to those who are useful in the Work, you must give not according to their spiritual gift but according to their personal needs. Some co-brethren in the Work may in fact act wrongly, but you cannot afford to do wrong towards them in the matter of finance, for you are a leading brother in the Work. You ought to know better.

For this reason, in ordinary times, the brother who is responsible for the Work should prepare a list of all the brethren who are involved in the regional Work. I do not mean to say that you should have a formal document. All I mean is that you simply need to know. You need to have their names and the number of children, if any, they have; for the need of a single person will be very different from the need of a family with children. Further, you should note how many of these children are of school age. You ought to know which brothers have little family responsibility and which brothers have more such responsibility. By having such information at hand, you will know how to distribute according to their respective needs whenever such funds come your way.

### ***All Must Look to God, None Can Take Full Responsibility***

In case the Lord does not bring in funds, all must continue to look to God for meeting their own needs. No one can take on the full responsibility, nor can anyone take on complete responsibility for other people. Only when there are funds can they be distributed—and then, not according to ministry but according to need. By doing so, there will be equity. A leader cannot assure any co-worker by means of any formal commitment. All the co-workers must learn to look to

the Lord. I hope we may all do well in this matter of finance so that God will be glorified.

## **QUESTIONS**

### ***(1) How to Distribute in Practice***

*Question:* In a local assembly where there is a Work center, how should funds be distributed? There are both workers and elders, and therefore some elders should be included in the distribution. How in practice is this to be done?

*Answer:* This is why there needs to be some arrangement. Though there is to be nothing formal, it requires a definite disposition nonetheless. In case of extra need, each must look directly to God.

In distributing funds, a local assembly must first of all take care of its current expenses. In a certain assembly, for example, the monthly income is a thousand dollars. Its first responsibility is to cover current bills and to take care of the poor among them. The need of the elders may often be included in the needs of the co-workers. According to principle, the church should send out whatever is left over.

A local assembly keeping its funds within itself will soon cause some unpleasant things to appear. If, for example, Rome is the place where money is, all the apostles will go to Rome. No Roman apostle will go to the place where there is no money. And in England, if ever a pastor feels called to go to a place, he will more than likely say "I am called to Rome" (where, coincidentally, there is money). How strange that many are called to places where money is plentiful, but no one is called to a poor place! I must say that the world has invaded the Church. It is something very ugly and totally unspiritual. The worldly concept of money has encroached on the Church.

I have meditated much before God on this entire matter. I look at Paul (and Barnabas for that matter) and see that at the beginning of his time in Antioch he on the one hand was one of the messengers who carried money to Jerusalem, but that on the other hand he never once mentioned the need of Antioch nor of the need for the Work at Antioch. He simply delivered the financial relief to Jerusalem. Later both Achaia (including Corinth) and Macedonia—with Paul’s encouragement—all sent contributions to Jerusalem and its region. There might have arisen at that time a serious misunderstanding to the effect that Paul probably had no need of support since evidently his tentmaking company was apparently very prosperous. Hence I think the best way is for a local assembly that is also a Work center to send extra funds abroad instead of expending all such funds on only the co-workers in the local region who will doubtless also receive gifts from other assemblies that are elsewhere. This will thus place the church there on spiritual ground.

Let the brethren in one region think of the Work in other regions. How commendable was the way Paul did it. He came out of Antioch to deliver relief to Jerusalem. He exhorted the saints in the regions of Macedonia and Achaia to send help to Jerusalem. Without drawing their attention to himself and his co-workers’ needs he made these people feel that there was great need in Jerusalem and its surrounding environs; but those same people thought that he himself had no need at all, when actually his hands never ceased working when it was required. For listen again to what he said to the Ephesian elders at Miletus: “Behold, these hands!” It is common for a man to think of his own needs first. But not Paul. I hope you will learn to take care of the needs in other places first and let God take care of your own needs. As to individual need, God will lead the brethren to care for you. For we believe in the control of the Holy Spirit, and therefore we do not need to be anxious about ourselves. If, for example, I have a special need today, I look to God for a special miracle: suddenly some brother sends me a gift, and my problem is solved. God is in truth a *living* God.

On the other hand, we should not stick to a dead method. I am fearful of having a formal way. I believe the brethren who have been with us for these years know how much we are afraid of anything formal or fixed. Because the moment something becomes fixed, it immediately becomes unspiritual. Yet I hope you can still maintain this principle about caring for others' needs. If as the funds arrive in a certain region, you decide to retain at most only a part of it—say, perhaps one third or one fifth—and send the larger portion to other places, I think that would be excellent. By so doing, God can easily maintain the supplies in His Church.

Recall again how when the children of Israel failed to give, the Levites suffered hunger. The problem the Levites encountered was solely created by the unfaithfulness of the children of Israel. They would have had no hardship had the Israelites stood on the Lord's side (see Neh. 13.10). We must therefore learn to send funds abroad that we may help to take care of the Work elsewhere. And on our side, we will naturally trust God to maintain His Work in our own region. And the benefit to be derived by generally following such a principle will be that those places which have much will not have too much and those places which have little will not be lacking.

With respect to the need of the local responsible brothers and not just the need of co-workers, you ought to have some appropriate arrangement. It will avoid a great inconvenience and embarrassment if a percentage were agreed upon for the need of each. Otherwise, how will you feel in distributing the money yourself? For in being a responsible brother, it will be highly inconvenient for you to take any funds for yourself. Your Christian sensitivity will not allow you to do this. Consequently, you who are responsible brothers must devise suitable arrangements to save one another from any such embarrassment.

### ***Two Persons in Charge of Money***

One other thing needs to be considered. I think it is best to have two persons in charge of money in a region. The principle of the Bible is always “two.” Barnabas and Paul were sent by the church at Antioch to Jerusalem to deliver the relief. And later on, we find that there was always at least two in every other such situation.

#### ***(2) Accounts Must Be Open***

*Question:* Some local assemblies give a public report on church accounts, some do not. What is the principle which should govern this?

*Answer:* I think the accounts of a local assembly should be made public. As to the Work, the co-workers in a region should know the income and expenditure of the Work accounts.

#### ***(3) Current Expenditure First, Apostles Next***

*Question:* Is it necessary to have separate slots in the offering box for local use and for the Work since many believers do not know how to give?

*Answer:* Even if the givers do not distinguish their gifts, you should divide them. In a local assembly, the first item to take care of is current expenses such as electricity, water, rent, and so forth; the second item is the poor among the saints; and the responsible brothers and workers must be listed as the third item. This is a basic principle. The church at Jerusalem gave first to the poor among the saints, not first to the co-workers. Do not make the mistake of putting the apostles first. It should be the poor among the saints first, the widows first, the orphans first. These people need to be helped first,

and then the apostles. And it is obvious in the case of Jerusalem that distribution was done according to each one's need.

It is also in accordance with spiritual principle for the local church to always send money out, but let money be sent in as well. The local assembly may retain a third, a fifth, a tenth, or whatever. But the less you keep the better, and then send the rest to other places.

When money is available, distribute it according to need according to the agreed upon percentage. If there are special personal needs, you must look to God in a special way. This matter of money is a very difficult task. Nevertheless, I believe you will be close to scriptural teaching if you follow the principles we have just enunciated.

#### ***(4) Concerning Distribution of Personal Trusts***

*Question:* Someone entrusts me as a worker with funds to distribute. What should I do?

*Answer:* If there is not a list giving distribution by percentage, I will not take anything for myself if I myself am entrusted with the distribution. For if I take anything from the fund for myself, I will not appear to be faithful. No matter how clean one's conscience is, he will not feel peaceful. Conscience will never yield to reasoning. If I am to distribute the funds and I take but one dollar of it, my conscience will not be at peace. If, however, money is definitely designated for *me*, I can use it as I wish. But if it is for me to distribute, I will distribute all of it to *other* people—with none kept back for myself. And in case there is already a percentage list worked out in the region, I can distribute the funds accordingly without my having any misgiving. In short, *without* such a list, every penny goes out to others; *with* such a list, oneself may be included with a clear conscience.

### ***(5) Sending Circular Letter about Building Meeting Place***

*Question:* Formerly, several localities sent out circular letters to notify others of their intention to build a meeting place. Is this a good practice?

*Answer:* It is not a very good one. It is all right for individuals to pass on such news because this will be less formal. I am afraid of formalizing such information.

### ***(6) Regarding Double Honor towards Responsible Brothers***

*Question:* We know it is right for the responsible brothers to receive double honor. But it is difficult to make this known. Would it be advisable for an apostle to mention this matter when he visits various localities?

*Answer:* This arrangement is applicable only to a Work center, not to a local assembly where there is no such center.

### ***Timothy Should Speak***

Concerning the distribution of funds in a local assembly, in his letter to Timothy Paul explicitly charged the latter to pass on his instructions to various local assemblies. As a worker visits different localities, he should gather the saints in each place and instruct them to give double honor to the elders. This was to be Timothy's responsibility; it was not to be the responsibility of the elders. For Paul charged Timothy, saying: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor" (1 Tim. 5.17). When workers like a Timothy go to local assemblies and discover that some elders spend so much of their time in the church that their personal income suffers, they should instruct the local brethren to show double honor to these elders in the matter of finance.

### ***(7) Deacons Should Bear More Responsibility***

*Question:* Why, in your priority as to the distribution of church funds, are the elders mentioned as the third item?

*Answer:* Without a doubt, the distribution of church funds according to Scripture was in the hands of the elders. But the actual *use* of church funds was not in the hands of the elders but in the hands of the deacons. In other words, the use of church funds in the Jerusalem assembly was not in the hands of the twelve apostles but in the hands of the seven deacons. For in due time, we know, the apostles would no longer be serving the tables, which meant that they themselves would not be using the money for that purpose any more. The principle of distribution—that is to say, how the funds are going to be distributed—was probably still left in the hands of the apostles. Yet the actual *use* of it was indeed in the hands of the deacons. Therefore, it is true that in the practical arrangement of distribution, the deacons and not the elders will know the needs of the poor among the saints as well as the needs of current expenditures. In other words, *using* the money will be the work of the deacons and not the work of the elders. The deacons will take care of local expenses and relief to the poor.

And hence, in the matter of supply of finance to the elders, the deacons should bear even more responsibility. (This is just my personal opinion.) For it is embarrassing for the elders to decide on such a matter themselves. It is well for the church to take good care of the responsible brothers. The church needs to know its responsibility.

Here the flesh must be cast aside. When the brothers and sisters give, no personal relationship should exist. When the funds are managed, only the command of God counts. There ought not to be any personal feeling whatsoever. As the money is given to God, it must be distributed according to God's way. The first consideration,

therefore, is to “owe no man anything” (Rom. 13.8), and hence all current expenses must be paid. Second, the poor among the saints must be taken care of next. And third, the needs of the responsible brothers must also be met.

The responsible brothers cannot take anything themselves; accordingly, the deacons should say, Let us give them double honor. For remember that the deacons represent the church in serving, and giving honor is not something which one does to oneself; it is given to him only by others. The deacons can therefore represent the church in this matter of showing honor. They cannot make any decision on *other* items, but in *this* regard they may.

I think this matter should be in the hands of the deacons. If the whole church must assemble to decide on this issue, it will become Laodicean in character. Consequently, it is best to entrust this matter to the deacons.

In our past history, church money was in the hands of the elders. Now, though, it should be transferred into the hands of the deacons. The elders make the decisions on the distribution of funds, but the deacons undertake the actual distribution. In other words, the deacons should be the treasurers.

## Let Us Talk

### ***(1) CONCERNING ELDERS HAVING CHILDREN WHO BELIEVE***

*Question:* The Bible mentions elders as having children who believe (Titus 1.6). Today there are several elders in the church whose children have not yet believed in the Lord. The children are young, in their early teens. They have been coming to hear the gospel, but they are not yet clearly saved. What should be done in such a situation?

*Answer:* I think this matter of believing children is to be stressed especially in connection with the phrase, “ruleth well his own house” (1 Tim. 3.4). If the children are small, this should not be a problem. But if the children are so disobedient, even to the extent of being defiant towards faith, then this is a sure indication that the brother is not fit to rule the church. He may be able to be an apostle, but he is not able to be an elder. When the children are young, and are not rebellious or opposing the faith but still come to hear God’s word, this should not pose a problem with respect to the question asked. Naturally, when they are so young, it is difficult to tell if they have truly believed or not. As they grow older, however, they should receive the Lord as their Savior. Hence I think the emphasis here should be more on “ruling his own home well” rather than on Titus 1.6.

### ***(2) AS ASSEMBLY GROWS AND ORIGINAL ELDERS ARE UNABLE TO BEAR RESPONSIBILITY: WHAT TO BE DONE***

*Question:* In the past, when an assembly began, some brothers seemed to be able to take responsibility. But later on as more were added to the local church, the spiritual condition of these brothers

became such that they did not appear to be able to take responsibility as before. What should be done in this kind of situation?

*Answer:* Judging from the arrangement which God makes in the church, I believe that as better men are raised up in the local assembly, we must learn to let them take responsibility and allow ourselves to step back into the position of listening.

Paul wrote this: “We have no such custom, neither the churches of God” (1 Cor. 11.16). Now we do not wish to keep man’s tradition, yet we would like to follow godly custom. A godly thing done in one assembly may quite naturally be taken up by other assemblies. And if so, it will be very beautiful. In the early days of any assembly being developed, you might become responsible. Later, however, when other brothers come in, it would be well for you to learn to prefer the others who may be more mature: “Brothers, why not come and take responsibility? I am willing to be one who listens.” Such a stance would not at all be passive. Yes, some people do stop doing everything when they cease bearing responsibility. But you should be able to add: “I will be glad to help. But you take the responsibility, because you are ahead of me.” If various assemblies end up practicing this in the same way, you may think that a custom has developed in the Church. Well, if it is a godly practice, why not? When younger brothers encounter more mature brothers coming in or developing in a local assembly, they should be able to invite the latter into responsibility. God’s children ought to learn to recognize higher authority as soon as they touch it.

When a few brothers are together talking, naturally there will be one taking the lead and the others following. For in everything, whether large or small, God establishes an order. This is especially true in the local church. If some brother is taking responsibility and another brother comes in, the first one ought naturally to know who is ahead of him. It will be disastrous if you do not recognize authority. You should introduce the latecomer to the brethren, and

you yourself should gradually stand aside. If such a custom is practiced in the local assemblies, how gracious that will appear. For that is the church of God. Hence he who has the authority of God should obviously stand at the front.

*Question:* Suppose a brother does not recognize more spiritual maturity in another, then what?

*Answer:* I think sometimes the brother who works in the region should take a little more responsibility. In objectively judging a local situation, he is more likely to be in a position to see who should be responsible and who should not. It is evident in 3 John that there was a man who held a different view than John. John saw one way, and this man saw another: “Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not” (3 John 9). The saints there were not clear about Diotrephes, for they thought he really had the authority. Actually, he loved to have the first place. He himself did not receive the brethren, and he forbade others to receive them. So John wrote: “If I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he doeth” (v.10a). From this we can infer that, according to custom, whether or not a person can bear responsibility in a local assembly should be the responsibility of the trustworthy worker of the Lord.

### ***(3) PETER AND PHILIP MOVING INDEPENDENTLY?***

*Question:* Philip went to Samaria alone and Peter went to Caesarea alone. Would they be considered as having made independent moves?

*Answer:* I think we need to be careful about this term “independent move.” A brother may stay with several other brothers continuously and yet he can be guilty of taking independent moves. Not making an independent move does not necessarily mean you must eat with somebody else or travel with someone else. If a person

has never seen the body of Christ, he will still be moving independently in any case. Even though he may move together with other people, such a person will be moving alone because he has neither learned how to submit to authority nor how to fellowship. Hence Philip may go out by himself, yet he was not reckoned as having made an independent move; whereas many others may indeed go out with other brethren, but they will be viewed as being highly independent.

Independent moves are to be judged by two basic principles: first, is the person under authority? Second, is he in fellowship? If he is neither under authority nor in fellowship, he may be with fifty people, yet he will be moving independently.

### *Touching Authority*

Concerning this subject of authority, it is a most amazing thing in the Church that when a few workers of God or a few believers are together, they will just naturally touch authority. God always does things in order. Even with two persons, God sets up one to represent authority.

### *Name Order*

You will notice that the names listed in the Bible always follow an order. And whenever the order is later changed, there will be a special reason for it. In the Old Testament period, for instance, God had obviously set up Moses as an authority. And so, the Bible always mentioned Moses and Aaron in that order. You will not see the order reversed to read Aaron and Moses. When they were together, one represented authority while the other represented submission. Even when the Lord sent out His disciples or apostles two by two, all the people mentioned by name followed an order, one being ahead of the

other. If this be true with two persons, how much more true it will be with a greater number of people.

### ***Trusting in the Presence of the Holy Spirit***

Whenever God's children are together, there will be a lining up. Not a lining up according to the flesh but a lining up because you see the brother before you. Whenever the Lord is working, there is a mouthpiece. Accordingly, let us believe in God's presence. Let us declare: "I believe in the presence of the Lord, I trust in the presence of the Holy Spirit." With the presence of God's Spirit, the next step will naturally follow by our acknowledging: "I believe the Lord has a mouthpiece here."

### ***Not Submitting to a Perfect Man***

Do you realize why the authority of God cannot be established among His children? It is because the children of God are always criticizing and demanding perfection: "I only admire a person who is a perfect man! And since this man has never existed before, is not in view now, and will never come to be in the future, I will not submit. I want to submit to a perfect man; and since this man is not present, I cannot submit." But God does not give authority to a perfect man; He only gives authority to that person who goes forward, to that one who goes ahead of you. This is a basic principle to be found in the Bible. God gives authority to the brother who is ahead of another.

Hence it is quite natural for God's children to line up in such fashion when they are together. This is not a matter of organization. This is not done by electing a captain. This is something natural. Let us therefore learn to be submissive. Wherever we are, in whatever circumstances, we have our submission.

As long as a person stands on such a ground as this, he will not commit any independent moves. But for that one who is not subject to authority, he will act independently even if he should be with *many* people. What is individualism? It means that a person cannot submit to authority. For once anyone submits to authority, his individualism vanishes.

### ***Choose Not to Whom to Submit***

I hope the brethren will see this to be not a matter of accepting one or more authorities; it is simply a problem of accepting authority in the first place.

Let me illustrate this point. I once employed two servants, one *in advance* of the other. On the very first day when they arrived at my house, I told them that they came to be *servants*, and that therefore the one basic condition was for them to listen. No matter how clever they were, they must do what they were told to do. I especially told the latecomer that he must also listen to the first servant. It turned out that this latecomer was really good in listening to *me*, but he would not listen to the *first* servant. Do you think this servant was being obedient to authority? I do not think so, for he always sought opportunity to accuse the first one of being wrong.

What is obeying authority? Let me say that it is certainly not in choosing whom to obey. If you choose whom you will obey, you do not know what authority is. The one who knows authority will recognize it wherever he goes. As soon as he meets authority, he knows to whom to submit. And if he cannot submit, it is proof that he never knew authority. He will be obeying man and not obeying authority. At most he is fearful of but one person, whom he will obey when he meets him. Authority is not a matter of location, nor of many locations, for there is authority everywhere. He who knows authority knows it wherever he goes.

When a person is under authority, he can readily see that individualism cannot exist. On the contrary, if he stands on individualism, he has no way to submit to authority. I believe this is a very important principle for us to grasp hold of. For the Christian, it is not a matter of *who*, it is a matter of *where* authority is.

### ***Seek Fellowship***

A person who seeks for fellowship will also know that individualism cannot exist. An individualist always maintains his spiritual life before God by himself. He keeps what he personally sees, and he does his individual work. He is always alone. It is hard for him to seek for fellowship. Actually, this is a problem we have in our midst. People cannot seek fellowship. They always do things by themselves. Although in words they may say they cannot do without other brethren and cannot live without the church, in practice, they *can* and *do* live without either the church or fellowship. This proves they are still individualists. If you see someone who has accepted the concept of the fellowship of the body and yet he can still live his spiritual life and carry on his work for the Lord without fellowship, then you will know he has not been broken before God and that he is therefore totally immersed in individualism—for fellowship and individualism are opposites. Today it is not what you may say about fellowship but whether or not fellowship is *life* to you, whether or not you can live and live without fellowship. If one day God can bring you to such a place of not being able to live without it, then I feel that this could be a big step.

### ***Not a Failure in Faithfulness and Faith***

Many when they come to an impasse think this is due to their failure in faith or in faithfulness. They do not see it is because of their failure in fellowship. For their past education teaches them of faith and faithfulness and of direct obedience to God. So that

whenever they cannot get through a crisis, they naturally blame it on their weakness in faith or faithfulness. Now, of course, there is some truth to this. But they fail to see that there is another factor called fellowship in the Bible. And if they fail in fellowship, they can easily find themselves in such predicaments.

The Lord must often let a Christian wander through faith, faithfulness, and obedience until he finds out for himself that however he may believe, be faithful and obedient, he still can not get through. At that juncture, he may perhaps begin to see that he cannot get through as a single member. Though his union with Christ is basic and elementary, he still needs the union with the body in order to get through. Perhaps at this time he begins to realize his need of help from other Christians. Nevertheless, many Christians have yet to be brought to this road, because they are still traveling on the path of individualism.

Let me tell you, though, that the day God's children are brought to this dead end it will be a great revelation. Prior to that day, even such a big thing like faith does not help. Now faith is not a small thing. Let us not despise it in any way. Faithfulness is also a big thing, and so is obedience. But the day will come when these big things which we think we had will fail to get us through. Then our eyes will be opened to see that fellowship too is a mighty big thing. That without fellowship, we cannot get through. Only those people who have walked on this road can forsake the principle of individualism. Merely hearing the teachings on fellowship and on the body of Christ will not deliver anyone from individualism. He may keep right on believing in fellowship and still live quite individualistically.

### ***Peter Sought Fellowship under Authority***

I believe when Peter went to Caesarea, he did not act according to the principle of individualism. For when he started out from Joppa, he took some local brothers with him. He was a man who always was

under authority and who was seeking fellowship continually. That was why he returned to Jerusalem to report to the brethren there. Although the work was done, he still sought fellowship as usual.

### ***Philip Met the Holy Spirit***

When Philip went to Samaria, he was under authority; otherwise the Holy Spirit would not have called him into the desert. Whoever is met by the Holy Spirit is on the road of God's choice because everything in the Church is ordered and governed by the Holy Spirit. Christ is the Head of the Church and the movement of the Head is through the Holy Spirit. We see that the Spirit led Philip to the desert; therefore he was under authority.

### ***Not a Question of Number of People***

Hence individualism is not a question which is to be judged by the number of people involved. It is judged by whether or not one is under authority, whether or not one seeks the fellowship of the body. Today some brother may go out with several people each time, but he may still be individualistic. Let us learn to serve God on the ground of the body. We are a total failure if five people are still five persons, or ten still remain ten individuals. That cannot be fellowship. Fellowship has nothing to do with how many are in the room, how many sit by your side, or how many go out with you. Even though the Scriptures do advocate the principle of two by two so that there may be someone to fellowship with when crises arise, nevertheless, we need to understand that it is not because there are many that there is fellowship, or that if there are few, there is no fellowship.

The basic need today is for God's children to know these two principal lessons: they must recognize and submit to authority, and they must treasure the fellowship of the saints. We seek fellowship

with the brethren in life so that we may receive strength to go on. And once we learn these two lessons, we shall be delivered from individualism. But without these two lessons, individualism will undoubtedly prevail.

### ***Basic Principle: Two or More***

According to the biblical principle, the sending out is usually with two or more people together. Paul in his latter days usually traveled with more than two people. Yet we must grant the occasional exception. If a person lives under authority and is in fellowship, an occasional exception will not hurt the principle.

It is not sufficient, however, merely to have more people. Unless we are one, and though we may go out together, we are still individuals. We need to see that it is the body which goes out, and then there will be no individualism. Otherwise, one person will be one individualism expressed, ten persons will be ten individualisms. The more the people, the more individualists we will simply have. It is either personal individualism or multiple individualism. That is not the body of Christ.

We must learn to know what the body of Christ is. It is a union in life and is to be under authority. This authority will be manifested wherever God's children are together. If each learns to stand in his proper place, then there will be no difficulty. And in such circumstance, there is no place for false humility or self-defense. Everyone learns to accept the opinion of the other people with whom he is associated, and learns to submit to authority. This is the straight path.

### ***(4) APPOINTMENT OF ELDERS AND APPOINTMENT OF APOSTLES AS ELDERS***

*Question:* According to what Paul's First Letter to Timothy says, elders must be appointed by somebody else, such as by a Paul, a Timothy, or a Titus. Did James appoint Peter and John to be elders at Jerusalem? Or in time of need, did they appoint themselves?

*Answer:* I believe elders need to be appointed. When the workers are at the various localities, they can appoint elders. However, we ought to pay special attention to the words of Paul spoken to the elders from Ephesus. This is different from the church where the Work center is, though the principle remains the same. "The Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of the Lord" (Acts 20.28 mg.). So that whenever the workers appoint elders, they must seek earnestly with prayer until they have the assurance that those whom they appointed are the very same ones established by the Holy Spirit. If not, a serious problem will develop. If the Holy Spirit has set apart one person, but you appoint a different person, the difficulty you give to the church will be enormous!

Let no one appoint elders carelessly. Paul dared to say that "the Holy Spirit has made you elders." He did not say, "I have made you elders." Let us do this with fear and trembling. Realizing what a tremendous responsibility it is, we cannot use our mind and judge people by ourselves. We must consider carefully before God and pray much. We need to find out whom the Holy Spirit has made elders. Otherwise, the appointment is not only useless but sooner or later great difficulty will arise.

The position of Peter and John in Jerusalem is fairly clear. They were apostles, and because elders were to be appointed by apostles, so Peter the apostle appointed Peter the elder, and John the apostle appointed John the elder. Since this responsibility had to be in the hands of the Jerusalem apostles, and since there arose a definite need in the locality, more than likely all among the apostles there felt that these two from among their number—or even more—should also bear local responsibility. And thus these two apostles became elders

at Jerusalem. Later on, after James the brother of John was martyred, another James (most likely the half-brother of Jesus) came into the circle of local leadership. And this James probably became the leading brother in the church at Jerusalem.

### ***(5) MAJOR FACTOR IN SENDING IS FELLOWSHIP***

*Question:* When Peter and John went to Samaria, the Bible tells us that the apostles who were in Jerusalem sent them out (Acts 8.14). When Barnabas and Paul went out, the Bible notes that the prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch sent them out (Acts 13.3). Can you explain this in terms of authority?

*Answer:* In the sending out of workers, there is obviously fellowship involved. One *dare not say* there is authority involved, but at least one can say there is fellowship involved.

### ***Concerning Peter and John\****

There were twelve apostles at Jerusalem. When the news from Samaria came to their attention (Acts 8.14), the apostles realized that the Samaritan believers had not yet received the Holy Spirit. Philip only accomplished a part of the Work. So those in Jerusalem ultimately felt that Peter and John should go to Samaria. It could very well have been that the Twelve, or perhaps even others, were waiting together in prayer, and that Peter and John felt they should go—which feeling the other brothers present confirmed. And then they were sent to Samaria. Can we not see a very beautiful picture here? Although I dare not say the question of authority was totally absent, I nevertheless feel that authority was not very evident, whereas the

---

\*For concerning Barnabas and Saul, see sub-head below entitled, “Holy Spirit Spoke through Prophets.”—*Translator*

principle of fellowship must have loomed very large in the situation. It was more a matter of fellowship than of authority.

### ***Paul and Silas***

The same was true with Paul and Silas (Acts 17.1-12). When they were at Thessalonica, they encountered danger. The brethren there sent them off to Berea. Most likely when the brethren in Thessalonica met for prayer—in Jason’s house or in other houses there—to seek the Lord’s mind about the way ahead, they felt Paul and Silas could not stay on if it would only create more trouble. Hence they sent the two off to Berea. Again, the flavor of fellowship, rather than authority, was predominant.

We have mentioned before how Paul often sent Timothy out into the Work. There must have been fellowship more than authority when the way was not too clear. Paul would not say that he sent Timothy out by his own authority; most likely he simply communicated the Lord’s heart-desire to Timothy so that the latter might walk better in the will of God. Oftentimes, therefore, it is not preeminently a question of authority but is more than likely a question of fellowship.

In the case of Paul’s leaving Thessalonica, perhaps it was the decision of the brethren, perhaps it was Paul’s own decision. Whichever decision this might have been, it was in the context of fellowship. The brethren were all together with the two of them, knowing that Paul and Silas were obviously in danger since the Jews wanted to seize them. What then should be done? The brethren felt it was better for them to go forward to another place. So, they went forward to Berea. They as it were left after consultation with the brethren. True, the record says that the brethren sent them to Berea, but it was only after fellowship in the Lord. And what was the result? The result was excellent, in that the Bereans were nobler than the Thessalonians because they were willing to search the Scriptures

daily to see if those things which Paul preached to them were so! And many of them believed (vv.11-12).

I will not dogmatically say here that there was no authority involved, yet the principal factor was unquestionably one of fellowship. Furthermore, it could very well be that there was actually no authority involved in this case. From this instance, we may conclude that on many occasions when Paul sent people out—and even though he was a senior brother—he nonetheless did it in the context of fellowship. So that in the coordination of God’s Work, the two fundamental principles present will be authority and fellowship. And when both principles are at work, one can obtain the highest guidance and witness the most perfect coordination.

### ***Holy Spirit Spoke through Prophets***

*Question:* Concerning the sending forth in Acts 13 (“the Holy Spirit said”), was it a case of fellowship or was it something else?

*Answer:* At the time of the early apostles, the word of the Holy Spirit probably came forth through the mouth of the prophets. The Holy Spirit would speak through some prophets among them, saying, for example, “Separate out Barnabas and Saul for the Work to which I have called them.” And this most likely came not through the mouth of just one person but was confirmed as being of the Holy Spirit through the witness of *two* or *three* persons.

### ***(6) HOLY SPIRIT MENTIONS ONLY TWO CENTERS IN ACTS***

*Question:* Within ten years, there seemed to have already been two beginnings in the book of Acts—that is to say, two Work centers: one in Jerusalem and one in Antioch. Was there any other new start?

*Answer:* True, the Bible indicates that in one ten-year period there were only two such beginnings with respect to the Work. Please note, however, that Paul's Letter to the Philippians mentions that "most of the brethren in the Lord . . . are more abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear" (Phil. 1.14). Although admittedly some of them preached Christ out of envy and strife, they were plainly not in Jerusalem nor in Antioch when they all went forth. They were obviously another group, another beginning. We may thus deduce from this that at that time there must have been several new starts taking place.

I believe the record given in Acts was written from the same perspective as was the record in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 of the seven letters sent to the seven local churches. In the province of Asia there were many local assemblies, but only seven were chosen by the Holy Spirit to receive letters. Colosse, for example, was also in Asia even as Ephesus was, yet the latter church was mentioned but the former was left out. Possibly the spiritual condition of the church at Colosse was better than that of Ephesus, since the latter, we are told, had fallen from its first love (Rev. 2.4); and consequently, for the sake of proper instruction, the Lord selected Ephesus. The particular seven churches were so chosen in order that by means of history an appropriate teaching might be given.

I likewise believe that the history recorded in Acts was for the purpose of teaching too. And hence Luke's narrative skipped over many things. Yet in so doing it does give us a clear understanding as to Peter's relationship with Jerusalem and Paul's relationship with Antioch. There must have been many other new starts, there *must* have been many other new Work centers established. History tells us, for example, that some of the apostles went to Africa. According to Church tradition, Thomas even went to India. So that understandably the gospel was spread all over the world. We cannot say that in the period covered by the book of Acts there were only two centers. We can only say that the Holy Spirit saw fit to mention but two of them

to serve His teaching purposes. Similarly, the Holy Spirit caused to be mentioned only Adam, Eve, Abel and Cain. Does this meager record mean to imply that there were only these four persons in the world at that time? Hardly. Let us see that what is useful for teaching has been recorded in the Scriptures, but that what is not useful for teaching has been omitted.