

# THE CRUCIAL POINTS OF THE MAJOR ITEMS OF THE LORD'S RECOVERY TODAY

(Friday—Evening Session)

Message Six

## The Recovery of the Church

Scripture Reading: Matt. 16:18; 18:17; Eph. 1:22-23; 3:9-11; 4:16; Rom. 14:17

**I. When we speak of the recovery of the church, we mean that something was there originally, that it became lost, damaged, or misunderstood, and that now there is the need to bring that thing back to its original state—Matt. 16:18:**

- A. Because the church has become degraded through the many centuries of its history, it needs to be recovered according to God's original intention—Eph. 1:4-5, 11, 22-23; 2:15; 3:9-11.
- B. Concerning the church, our vision should be governed not by the present situation nor by traditional practice but by God's original intention and standard as revealed in the Scriptures—v. 21; 5:23-27, 29, 32.
- C. The church is the heart's desire of God—3:9-11; 5:25:
  - 1. The church is the church of God, chosen and predestinated by God the Father, redeemed by God the Son, and sealed by God the Spirit—1 Cor. 10:32; Eph. 1:3-14.
  - 2. The church is the house of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth, for His manifestation in the flesh—1 Tim. 3:15-16.
  - 3. The church is the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all, for His expression—Eph. 1:22-23.
  - 4. The church is the wife of Christ, His counterpart—5:23-27.
  - 5. The church is the new man—2:15.
  - 6. The church exists universally as the unique universal church, but it is expressed locally as many local churches—1:22-23; Rev. 1:4a, 11.

**II. The recovery of the church is typified by the return of the children of Israel from their captivity—Ezra 1:3-11:**

- A. As typified by the latter part of the history of the children of Israel, the recovery is from Babylon—the capturing and divisive ground; the recovery of the church involves a return from the capturing and divisive ground signified by Babylon—v. 11; Rev. 17:5.
- B. The recovery of the children of Israel was not only from Babylon but also back to Jerusalem, the God-ordained unique ground; Jerusalem was the place the Lord had chosen—Deut. 12:5.
- C. Those who went back to Jerusalem from Babylon brought with them all the vessels of the temple of God, which had been captured to Babylon; these vessels, which were of silver and gold, signify the experiences of Christ and the riches of Christ—Ezra 1:5-11.

- D. The recovery of the church is typified also by the rebuilding of the temple of God, the house of God, in Jerusalem after the return of God's people from Babylon; thus, the recovery is a matter not only of going back to Jerusalem with the vessels of the temple of God but also of rebuilding the temple of God—v. 3.
- E. The recovery of the church is typified by the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem—Neh. 2:11, 17.

**III. The recovery of the church is revealed in the New Testament even though the word *recovery* is not used:**

- A. We need to be recovered from the factions—the sects and denominations—Titus 3:10.
- B. The recovery of the church requires that we cleanse ourselves from the vessels unto dishonor in the great house—the apostate Christendom—2 Tim. 2:20-21.
- C. We should not contact those who do not abide in the teaching of Christ—the teaching concerning Christ's deity and incarnation by divine conception—2 John 9-11.
- D. We need to obey the Lord's word to come out of religious Babylon the Great—Rev. 18:4.

**IV. We need to see what it means for the church to be recovered:**

- A. For the recovery of the church, we need to be recovered from the divisive and apostate ground with its deviations from the truths concerning the person of the Triune God and the person and work of Christ:
  - 1. We must reject the heresies of modalism and tritheism and hold to the pure revelation of the Triune God according to the Word of God; the truth concerning the person of the Triune God is twofold—the aspect of the one and the aspect of the three—for the unique God is triune, three-one—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14.
  - 2. We need to be recovered from all heretical teachings regarding the person of Christ and confess that Jesus Christ, God manifested in the flesh, is the complete God, the perfect man, and, as the all-inclusive One, the reality of every positive thing—1 John 4:2-3, 14-15; Col. 1:15-19; 2:17.
- B. For the recovery of the church, we need to be brought back to the unique and pure ground of the oneness of the Body of Christ with its truths:
  - 1. We need to be brought back to the truth concerning the New Testament faith and God's economy—Jude 3; 2 Pet. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:3-4.
  - 2. We need to be brought back to the truth concerning the person and work of Christ—John 1:1, 14, 18; 1 Tim. 3:15-16; 1:15; 1 Cor. 15:1-4.
  - 3. The recovery of the church requires that we be recovered to the truth concerning the person and dispensing of the Triune God—Matt. 28:19; John 16:13-14; 2 Cor. 13:14.
  - 4. The recovery of the church involves the recovery of the church as the Body of Christ, the corporate Christ:
    - a. The Body of Christ is an organism constituted of all the believers, who have been regenerated and have God's life, for the expression of the Head—Eph. 1:22-23.
    - b. The Body of Christ is actually the corporate Christ—1 Cor. 12:12.

5. The truth concerning the universal and local aspects of the church also needs to be recovered:
  - a. In the universal aspect the church is uniquely one—Matt. 16:18.
  - b. In its local aspect the church is expressed in many localities as many local churches—18:17; 1 Cor. 1:2.
- C. In the recovery of the church, we are building up the Body of Christ, the temple of God, the house of God—Eph. 4:16:
  1. This was typified by the rebuilding of the temple under the leadership of Ezra.
  2. Today we are rebuilding the church as God’s temple—2:21-22; 1 Cor. 3:9, 16-17.
  3. All the damage that the enemy does to the church gives the Lord the opportunity to enlarge His Body in resurrection—John 2:19-21.
- D. The recovery of the church involves the establishing of the kingdom life; the reality of the church life is the kingdom—Rom. 12:5; 14:17:
  1. Romans 14:17 reveals that the kingdom of God is the living of the church; the kingdom is today’s church life.
  2. The kingdom of God as the living of the church is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit—v. 17.
  3. To have such a living is to establish the kingdom life as typified in the book of Nehemiah by the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem.
  4. In the recovery of the church, we are building up the church as God’s house and God’s city.

**Excerpts from the Ministry:**

**THE RECOVERY OF THE CHURCH BACK TO THE UNIQUE AND PURE GROUND  
OF THE BODY OF CHRIST WITH ITS TRUTHS**

**The Church, the Body of Christ, the Corporate Christ**

Ephesians 1:22-23 speaks of “the church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.” The Body of Christ is an organism constituted of all the believers, who have been regenerated and have God’s life, for the expression of the Head. The Body is the fullness of the Head, and the fullness is the expression of the Head.

Because the church is the Body of Christ and Christ is the Head of the church (Col. 1:18), the church and Christ are one Body, the mysterious, universal great man, having the same life and nature and sharing the same position and authority. Just as Christ is far above all and sits in the heavenlies (Eph. 1:20-21), so also the church sits together with Him in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6). Just as Christ has received all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18), so also the church participates in His authority (Luke 10:19). Today the life of the church is hidden with Christ in God, and in the future the church will be manifested with Christ in glory (Col. 3:3-4). What Christ is, what Christ has, where Christ is, and what Christ does are what the church is, what the church has, where the church is, and what the church does. Christ is the life and content of the church, and the church is the organism and expression of Christ. The church receives everything from Christ, and everything of Christ is expressed through the church. The two, Christ and the church, are thus mingled and joined as one, with Christ being the inward content, and the church, the outward expression.

Ephesians 1:23 reveals that the Body of Christ is “the fullness of the One who fills all in all.” Grammatically *the fullness* is in apposition to *His Body*. This indicates that the Body is the fullness and that the fullness is the Body. This fullness is the expression of the One, the universal Christ, who fills all in all.

In Ephesians 1:23 the “all in all” which Christ fills is something universal. Christ is unlimited (3:18); He is the breadth and length and height and depth, the very dimensions of the universe. Christ thus fills all in all, and we, the church, by enjoying His riches, eventually become His fullness. The church as the Body of Christ is His fullness as His expression.

The Body of Christ is actually the corporate Christ. “As the body is one and has many members, but all the members of the body being many are one body, so also is Christ” (1 Cor. 12:12). In this verse Christ is not the individual Christ but the corporate Christ, the Body-Christ. In Greek *Christ* here is “the Christ,” referring to the corporate Christ, composed of Christ Himself as the Head and the church as His Body with all the believers as its members. All the believers of Christ are organically united with Him and constituted of His life and element to be His Body, an organism, to express Him. Hence, He is not only the Head but also the Body. As our physical body has many members, yet is one, so is this Christ.

### **The Universal and Local Aspects of the Church**

The truth concerning the universal and local aspects of the church also needs to be recovered. In a very real sense, these matters have been lost, even annulled. Therefore, we need to be recovered to the truth concerning these two aspects of the church.

In the universal aspect the church is uniquely one. This aspect of the church is revealed by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 16:18, where He says, “On this rock I will build My church.” What is revealed here is the universal church for the unique testimony of the Lord in the universe.

In 16:18 the Lord says that He will build His church upon “this rock,” which refers not only to Christ Himself but also to the revelation of Christ. The building up of the universal church is altogether on the clear revelation concerning Christ, the Son of the living God. This revelation is the crucial factor, the very center, of the building up of the universal church.

In Matthew 18:17 the Lord Jesus reveals the local church. The church mentioned in this verse must be a local church because it is a place where we can go. We cannot bring a problem to the universal church, only to the local church.

In the local aspect the church is expressed in many localities as many local churches. The one universal church expressed in many places on earth becomes the many local churches. The expression of the church in a locality is the local church in that particular locality. Without the local churches there would be no practicality and actuality of the universal church. The universal church is realized in the local churches.

In 1 Corinthians 1:2, where Paul addresses “the church of God which is in Corinth,” we have both the universal and the local aspects of the church. The church is of God, for it is constituted of the element of God. But the church which is of God is also local. Therefore, we have here both the universal aspect and the local aspect of the church. The universal aspect refers to the constitution, nature, and content of the church, whereas the local aspect refers to the expression and practicality of the church. If we have only the local aspect but not the aspect of the church being of God, we shall have only an outward formality, not the inward reality. But if we have only the universal aspect but not the local aspect of the church in a particular locality, we shall have the reality but not the practicality. On the one hand, the church is constituted of God; on the other hand, the church is expressed in a particular locality. The universal church is expressed and practiced in particular localities.

## **To Build the Body of Christ, the Temple of God, the House of God**

In the recovery of the church, we are building the Body of Christ, the temple of God, the house of God. This was typified by the rebuilding of the temple under the leadership of Ezra in Old Testament times. Today we are rebuilding the church life as God's temple, the Body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-16 has much to say about the building up of the Body of Christ. Verse 12 says, "For the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ." In this verse *unto* means "for the purpose of, for, with a view to." The many gifted persons in verse 11 have only one ministry, that of ministering Christ for the building up of the Body of Christ, the church. This is the unique ministry in the New Testament economy (2 Cor. 4:1; 1 Tim. 1:12). Furthermore, according to the grammatical construction of Ephesians 4:12, "the building up of the Body of Christ" is "the work of ministry." Whatever the gifted persons in verse 11 do as the work of ministry must be for the building up of the Body of Christ.

The four special gifts in verse 11—the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the shepherd-teachers—do not build the Body of Christ directly. Instead, these special gifts perfect the saints that they may build the Body of Christ directly. First, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherd-teachers perfect, equip, the saints. This means that they build up the saints. Then the perfected saints become the building members to build the Body of Christ directly. From this we see that the Body is not built directly by the special gifts but by all the members of the Body. If we realize this, we shall avoid the great heresy of the clergy-laity system. In the church there is no clergy or laity. On the contrary, in the church every member of the Body functions to build up the Body of Christ directly.

In Ephesians 4:13 Paul goes on to say, "Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The oneness of the Spirit in Ephesians 4:3 is the oneness of the divine life in reality, whereas the oneness in verse 13 is the oneness of our living in practicality. We already have the oneness of the divine life in reality. We only need to keep it. However, we need to go on until we arrive at the oneness of our living in practicality. This aspect of oneness is of two things: the faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God. The faith here refers not to our act of believing but to the things we believe in, such as the divine person and the redemptive work of Christ for our salvation. The full knowledge of the Son of God is the realization of the revelation concerning the Son of God for our experience. The more we grow in life, the more we shall cleave to the faith and to the realization of Christ, and the more we shall drop all the minor and meaner doctrinal concepts which cause divisions. Then we shall arrive at, or attain to, the practical oneness; that is to say, we shall arrive at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. A full-grown man is a mature man. Such maturity in life is needed for the practical oneness.

The fullness of Christ is the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:23), which has the stature with the measure. To arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ is also a necessity for the practical oneness. Hence, from the oneness of reality to the oneness of practicality we need to proceed onward until we arrive at the three things mentioned in this verse.

The fullness of Christ is simply the expression of Christ. As Christ's fullness, the Body is Christ's expression. Christ's fullness, the Body, has a stature, and with this stature there is a certain measure. Hence, 4:13 speaks of the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

To arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ is to arrive at the full

building up of the Body of Christ. It is to arrive at the full completion of the building up of the Body.

In verses 14 and 15 Paul says, "That we may be no longer babes tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching in the sleight of men, in craftiness with a view to a system of error; but holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ." *Babes* refers to those believers who are young in Christ, lacking maturity in life (1 Cor. 3:1). To be no longer babes we need to grow up into Christ. This is to have Christ increase in us in all things until we attain to a full-grown man.

The word *Head* in Ephesians 4:15 indicates that our growth in life with Christ should be the growth of the members in the Body under the Head. This means that our growth must be in the Body. In order to grow into the Head, we must surely be in the Body.

In verse 16 Paul continues, "Out from whom all the Body, fitted and knit together through every joint of the supply, according to the operation in measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love." Our growth in life is to grow into the Head, Christ, but our function in the Body is to function out from Him. First, we grow up into the Head. Then we have something which is out from the Head.

In this verse *every joint of the supply* refers to the four special gifts mentioned in verse 11. The article before the Greek word translated "supply" is emphatic. It indicates that the supply should be a particular supply, the supply of Christ. The apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherd-teachers have *the* supply, the particular supply. Nevertheless, the Body is built up "according to the operation in measure of each one part." *Each one part* refers to every member of the Body. Although the special gifts have *the* supply, the Body is not built up directly by the four special gifts. The Body is built up directly by all the members of the Body.

The building up of the Body of Christ is a matter of constitution. The Body is an organic entity constituted of the element of the processed Triune God. It is through such a constitution that we become the Body of Christ. Therefore, what the Body of Christ needs is not organization but a unique constitution, a constitution which consists of the divine element being dispensed into us and wrought into us. The more the processed Triune God is dispensed into us, the more the divine element becomes our constituent to make us the one Body.

John 2:19-21 reveals that the Body of Christ is the temple. "Jesus answered and said to them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then the Jews said, It took forty-six years to build this temple, and you will raise it up in three days? But He spoke of the temple of His body." Satan's ultimate aim is to destroy the house of God. This is seen in his destroying the body of Jesus on the cross. But what the enemy destroyed the Lord raised up in three days. This means that in His resurrection life the Lord built up what was destroyed by the enemy. From this we see that the enemy may damage and destroy the church, which is the house of God, but the Lord will build it up in resurrection and by resurrection. After the enemy has caused damage, the Lord, in resurrection, will rear up a building on a much larger scale.

When the Lord Jesus was in the flesh, His body was the tabernacle and temple of God, both of which are God's dwelling place. Because Satan realized that the physical body of Jesus was God's dwelling place on earth, he did his best to destroy that body, and he did destroy it on the cross through the Jews. After Satan destroyed the Lord's physical body on the cross, His body was put into a tomb and rested there. When the Lord Jesus arose, He Himself raised up His dead and buried body. Whereas the body of Jesus that was destroyed on the cross was small and weak, the Body of Christ in resurrection is vast and powerful. This means that after the Lord's resurrection, His Body, that is, the temple, was reared up on a much larger scale. The body the enemy destroyed by crucifixion was merely the body of

Jesus. What was raised up by the Lord in resurrection was not only His own body, but everyone who was joined to Him by faith (1 Pet. 1:3; Eph. 2:6). From the day of His physical resurrection, the Lord Jesus has been enlarging His Body in resurrection life. What an immense Body Christ has today in His resurrection. Although it was once possible to measure the size of the physical body of Jesus, it is impossible to measure the immensity of the Body of Christ. The Lord continues to build His Body in resurrection, and Satan keeps on helping this.

The house of God is still increasing in resurrection with the Body of Christ (1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:5; 1 Cor. 3:9; Eph. 2:21-22). Today we are still within the “three days,” because the Lord is still working for the building of His Body under the process of resurrection. A great part of the Lord’s Body has been raised, but there are still some members of His Body who have not yet been raised. Therefore, the Lord’s Body is still in the process of resurrection.

All the damage that the enemy does to the church simply gives the Lord the opportunity to enlarge His Body in resurrection. Satan can never defeat the Lord Jesus. The gates of Hades can never prevail against the builded church (Matt. 16:18). The church is still going on and is still growing. Although the enemy may try his best to tear it down, we shall see the victory. We shall see that not only the Lord Jesus Himself is prevailing but that the church, His Body, the temple, also is prevailing.

Concerning the church as the temple of God, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 17, “Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys the temple of God, God shall destroy him; for the temple of God is holy, which you are.” In verse 16 *a temple of God* refers to the believers collectively in a certain locality, whereas *the temple of God* in verse 17 refers to all the believers universally. The unique spiritual temple of God in the universe has its expressions in many localities on earth. Each expression is a temple of God in that locality.

God’s building (1 Cor. 3:9) is the sanctuary of the holy God, the temple in which the Spirit of God dwells. We, the builders of such a holy temple, should realize this so that we may be careful to build not with the worthless materials of wood, grass, and stubble but with the precious materials of gold, silver, and precious stones (vv. 10-12), which correspond to God’s nature and economy.

A verse that clearly speaks of the house of God is 1 Timothy 3:15. Here Paul says, “If I delay, that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.” As God’s dwelling place, the church is both God’s house and His household, His family. In the Old Testament the temple and God’s people were two separate things, but in the fulfillment in the New Testament the dwelling place and the family are one.

First Timothy 3:15 and 16 reveal that the church as the house of God is also the manifestation of God in the flesh—the mystery of godliness. God is manifested in the church, the Body of Christ and the house of the living God, as the enlarged, corporate expression in the flesh. This means that the church becomes the continuation of Christ’s manifestation of God in the flesh. This is the great mystery of godliness: Christ lived out of the church, the house of the living God, as the manifestation of God in the flesh. Therefore, the church as the house of God is the continuation, the enlargement, the increase, and the expansion of God manifested in the flesh. In the church God is manifested in the flesh in a wider way according to the New Testament principle of incarnation. (*The Conclusion of the New Testament*, pp. 2487-2495)