

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

(Saturday—First Morning Session)

Message Seven

The Oneness of the Body of Christ

Scripture Reading: John 17:21-22; Eph. 4:1-6; Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 12:15-22; 2 Cor. 10:13-15

- I. **Because it is difficult for us to understand the oneness unfolded in the Scriptures, the Lord Jesus prayed in John 17 about the oneness instead of speaking about it as the continuation of His discourse to His disciples:**
 - A. The Father and the Son are one (vv. 11, 21), and this oneness implies, or includes, the Spirit.
 - B. The Lord used the plural pronouns *We* (v. 11) and *Us* (v. 21) to signify the Triune God.
 - C. The Triune God is one, and that oneness is a model of the oneness of the Body of Christ.
 - D. The oneness of the Body of Christ is the enlarged oneness of the Divine Trinity—v. 21.
 - E. The base of our oneness is the oneness for which the Lord prayed:
 1. This oneness is in the Father's name by the eternal life—vv. 2, 6, 11.
 2. This oneness is in the Triune God through sanctification by the holy word—vv. 14-21.
 3. This oneness is in the divine glory for the expression of the Triune God—vv. 22-24.
 - F. The Lord prayed to the Father for the oneness among all His believers that it may merge with the genuine oneness of the Divine Trinity—vv. 21-23.
- II. **We need to see the uniqueness of the Body of Christ—there is one Body in the universe—Eph. 4:1-6; 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 5:23-25; 2:15; Col. 3:11; 1 Cor. 12:12.**
- III. **The practice of the oneness is the one accord; the one accord is the master key to every blessing in the New Testament—Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25; Rom. 15:6.**
- IV. **Five phrases in Ephesians 4:1-3 give us a practical way to keep the oneness of the Spirit (the oneness of the Body of Christ), which is to practice the one accord: *lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, bearing one another in love, and the uniting bond of peace*; these five items are a test to us in the practice of the church life; by this test we can see whether or not we are practically in the church life:**
 - A. We should not set up a high standard for others, but in lowliness we should love the weaker ones:
 1. As long as we take something other than Christ Himself as our standard,

- we do not have lowliness; if we put forth a high standard, we are not lowly in our mind and attitude.
2. Regardless of how good, heavenly, or spiritual something is, as long as it is something other than Christ Himself, it will cause division.
 3. The weaker ones, the younger ones, and the backsliders need more love in the Lord; to love them will solve most of their problems; otherwise, we will set up a high standard out of pride and not lowliness.
- B. We must sacrifice ourselves to be meek in our attitude—Num. 12:3; Matt. 5:5:
1. The Greek word for *meekness* implies mildness, gentleness, and unselfishness.
 2. Meekness is a matter of an unselfish attitude that is mild and gentle, never argues for oneself, and never makes an excuse for oneself—2 Chron. 1:10; Col. 2:2-3; Phil. 4:5.
 3. In order to be meek, we must sacrifice ourselves, regardless of how we are treated; in the church life we must not have a harsh, hard, or cruel attitude.
 4. In order to have the proper attitude, we must not be selfish; unselfishness produces meekness, mildness, and gentleness.
 5. In many local churches the problems come mostly from wrong, careless, cold, and harsh attitudes; Satan always uses careless attitudes to attack the church—Eph. 6:16.
 6. In order to have the church life, we need to learn that it is very fine, not rough; according to the type, the church is a corporate meal offering, a cake, made of fine flour—Lev. 2:1-5; 1 Cor. 10:17.
- C. To be long-suffering is to endure mistreatment; to be long-suffering is mainly related to our spoken word:
1. A brother may wrong us, but for the Lord's glory and for the sake of the church life, we should not speak a word about it; to utter, express, and talk about everything that happens to us requires no long-suffering or patience.
 2. If we see the leading brothers quarreling, we may immediately go and relate this to another brother; but if we have learned the lesson, for the Lord's glory and for the sake of His church, we will not say a word.
 3. If we learn to keep our words in such a proper way, we will realize the true meaning of the word *suffering* in the church life.
 4. Immediately after a message is given, we may begin to criticize the speaker, but if we have learned the lesson, we will say nothing negative about the ministry, despite what we feel about it, for the sake of the practice of the church life; our mouths will be under the control of the Holy Spirit.
 5. Our speech and our conversation damage the church more than anything else; once a story is secondhand, it begins to change, and eventually it can become a great exaggeration; this is always the case with rumors.
 6. In order to learn the lesson of long-suffering, we need to experience the suffering of restricting our mouth and stopping our tongue; we may see and hear many things, but we should not speak a word without the anointing and leading of the Holy Spirit so that the church life will be kept from damage.
- D. In order to bear one another in love, we need to fight against suspicion and fear in the church life:

1. Instead of suspicion and fear, we should have only love; love should prevail in the church life; love is the most excellent way for us to be anything or do anything in the church life—12:31b.
 2. To have suspicion toward a brother means that our love is gone; then after suspicion, fear will follow; 1 John 4:18 says, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.”
 3. It is always a temptation to know others’ attitude toward us, how they consider us, and what is being said about us; in order to realize the church life, we must reject this temptation—cf. Eccl. 7:21-22.
- E. We need to be diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace:
1. If we have peace only with God and not with all the brothers, we have lost the church life; the church life is tested by the peace we have, not only vertically with God but also horizontally with all the brothers.
 2. We should not be over-related or under-related to anyone; the uniting bond of peace is the balanced relatedness in the church.
- V. **If we hold Christ as the Head (acknowledging that only He is the Head and coming absolutely under His authority), we cannot have different interpretations of Scripture—1 Tim. 1:3-4; Col. 2:19:**
- A. Differences arise when someone is not holding the Head, because He cannot possibly say one thing to one member and something else to another.
 - B. Christ is the unique authority in the Body; the place of all the members is to hold the Head and to acknowledge Him as the unique and supreme authority in all things.
- VI. **We should always consider the Body, care for the Body, honor the Body, and do what is best for the Body—1 Cor. 12:12-27.**
- VII. **“When Brother Nee taught about the Body, he said that with whatever we do, we have to consider how the churches would feel about it” (*The Problems Causing the Turmoils in the Church Life*, pp. 28-29).**
- VIII. **In the Body there can be no independence or individualism, for we are members, and members cannot live in detachment from the Body—v. 27; Rom. 12:5; Eph. 5:30:**
- A. Wherever there is Body-revelation, there is Body-consciousness, and wherever there is Body-consciousness, individualistic thought and action are ruled out.
 - B. What I do not know, another member of the Body will know; what I cannot see, another member of the Body will see; what I cannot do, another member of the Body will do—1 Cor. 12:17-22.
 - C. If we refuse the help of our fellow members, we are refusing the help of Christ; sooner or later all individualistic Christians will dry up—v. 12.
- IX. **As members of the Body, we must allow ourselves to be limited by the other members, not going beyond our measure:**
- A. God has placed all the members in the Body, even as He willed—v. 18:
 1. The Head sets us in our special place in the Body and points us to our special function—Rom. 12:4; 1 Cor. 12:15-17.

2. Each one of us members has our own place in the Body of Christ; it is assigned by God and should be accepted by us.
 3. Since such an assignment is according to God's will, every member is necessary; every member has a definite place, a definite assignment, and a particular portion with which he serves the Body of Christ—vv. 18-22.
 4. Each member has his own characteristics and his own capability; these characteristics constitute the place, position, or ministry of each member—Rom. 12:4-8.
- B. A basic requirement for the growth and development of the Body is that we recognize our measure and do not go beyond it—Eph. 4:7, 16:
1. When we go beyond our measure, we interfere with the order of the Body.
 2. To think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, without a sober mind, is to annul the proper order of the Body life—Rom. 12:3.
- C. Like Paul, we should move and act according to how much God has measured to us in the Body of Christ, staying within the limits of God's ruling, God's measuring—2 Cor. 10:13-15; Eph. 4:16; 2 Tim. 4:5.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

**FIVE PRACTICAL MATTERS
FOR THE PRACTICE OF THE CHURCH LIFE**

Five phrases in Ephesians 4:1-3 give us the practical way to keep the oneness: *lowliness*, *meeekness*, *long-suffering*, *bearing one another in love*, and *the uniting bond of peace*. We should not quickly think that we know what all these terms mean. We may know the meaning of these phrases from the dictionary, but we may not know their reality. We can know mainly from our experience what these matters are. According to my experience and learning in the past, these five items are a test to us in the practice of the church life. By this test we can see whether or not we are practically in the church life.

**Not Setting Up a High Standard,
but in Lowliness Loving the Weaker Ones**

First, we should never set up a high standard for others. To not set up a standard is the real practice of lowliness. Because by the Lord's sovereignty I was born and raised in organized, formal, and fundamental Christianity, I have contacted many different schools, sects, and denominations. Although some are good, it is difficult to find any that do not raise up a high standard. Some claim the cross as their standard, and others say that holiness, the inner life, or spirituality is their standard. I met a small group of persons who even claimed that their standard is the fullness of Christ. Even the fullness of Christ can be a high standard that we set up. As long as we take something other than Christ as our standard, we do not have lowliness. If we put forth a high standard, we are not lowly in our mind and attitude.

Neither the subjective experience of the cross, the resurrection life of Christ, the gift of speaking in tongues, healing, or mission work is our standard. To have a mission work is not wrong. Likewise, to speak in tongues, to have healing, to preach the cross, to have the resurrection life, and to practice holiness are not wrong. What is wrong is to make these a standard. Regardless of how good, heavenly, or spiritual something is, as long as it is something other than Christ Himself, it will cause division. That is why today there is a "holiness" church, for example. Even if a group does not denominate itself based on a standard, in principle it is still a division. We should not even claim that Christ is our standard in a divisive way.

Claiming a spiritual standard has caused much damage in the past among all the Christians. The more spiritual Christians are, the more they kill others spiritually, because once someone becomes spiritual to a certain extent, he sets up that spirituality as a standard for others. In this way, his spirituality becomes a killing to others. Those who set up a standard often say that certain persons do not come up to their standard. This is a killing. Regardless of what kind of person one is, we should treat him or her as we treat everyone else. Many times it is easy for us to treat spiritual people in a good way, but it is not easy to treat weak ones, young ones, and wandering ones properly. This kind of different treatment damages the church life. In the church and among Christians we need to treat everyone in the same way, regardless of his or her spirituality.

Whether or not someone is spiritual and whether or not he loves the Lord much, we must treat him as we do others. By the Lord's mercy we should treat those who do not love the Lord even better than we treat those who do. If there is a backslider and a spiritual leader before us, whom will we love more? This puts us on the test. We probably would love the spiritual person more, but this is not right. We all should love the backslider more. The other brother is spiritual already, so he does not need our love and care as much. The poor backslider, however, certainly needs our care. If we love him, he may no longer be a backslider. He will be brought back by our love. Many times it is simply our cold attitude that makes someone more of a backslider. He may not come back to the church simply because he cannot bear the cold faces. The weaker ones, the younger ones, and the backsliders need more love. From my past experience I have learned that in the church we should not overly appreciate the spiritual ones. Rather, to love the weaker ones, the fleshly and soulish ones, and the ones with problems will solve most of their problems. Otherwise, we will set up a high standard out of pride and not lowliness.

If we do not set up a standard, we will have true lowliness. We will be lowly minded, not highly minded. We will love the weaker ones, the younger ones, and the backsliding ones because the Lord loves them. According to the four Gospels, when the Lord was on this earth, He showed more love to the sinners and tax collectors than He did to the good ones. This was true lowliness and humility. To have real humility is to set up no standard among us. This is the practical way to have the church life. The church life is very spiritual, but there are also many backsliders in the church. The church is a family, not a college. In a college almost everyone is in the same age bracket, from about eighteen to twenty-three, but in a family there are also younger ones, weaker ones, and even babyish ones. The family life is a picture of the church. Twenty years ago I stressed our standard of spirituality more than I do today. Today I can stand before you and say that in the church we should never set up a high spiritual standard for others. Rather, we must love everyone, even the worst ones. This is to practice genuine lowliness.

Sacrificing Ourselves to Be Meek in Our Attitude

Verse 2 next mentions meekness. To not have a high standard is a test of our motive concerning lowliness. Our motive must be to love everyone in lowliness regardless of a standard. Meekness, however, is a matter of attitude. Our attitude must be one of meekness. The Greek word for *meekness* implies mildness, gentleness, and unselfishness. Our attitude in the church must be mild and meek. Therefore, we have no excuse; we all need to be broken. If we are selfish, we can never be genuinely meek. Rather, our meekness will be false. Only unselfish people have genuine meekness. In order to be meek, we must sacrifice ourselves. The more we sacrifice ourselves, the meeker we will be. If someone takes our Bible and does not return it, for example, it will be difficult to be meek in our attitude toward him. However,

if we have a sacrificing spirit, we will be willing to sacrifice a Bible for our brother. We will say, "Never mind. Praise the Lord! Please use it." This is to be meek in our attitude.

In this chapter I am not expounding Ephesians 4:1-3 in the way of mere Bible teaching. Rather, I am speaking according to my experience. If two brothers sit next to each other, one may be careless and kick the other one. Similarly, if two sisters sit together on a small bench, one may take up too much room, and the other will struggle to get back her half of the bench. These are tests in small matters, but they involve a big principle. We must be willing to sacrifice ourselves regardless of how we are treated. If we are willing to sacrifice and be unselfish, we will be mild and meek. Only selfish people are hard and harsh.

Our attitude comes out of what we are. If we are selfish, we will have a hard, harsh attitude. If we are unselfish, we will always be mild, meek, and gentle in a genuine way, not in a false way. In the church life we need this attitude, not a harsh, hard, or cruel attitude. Once in a certain restaurant a waiter spilled a cup of soup on my back. If I had loved my jacket, I would have said harshly, "What are you doing?" Instead, by the Lord's mercy I was able to be meek. I told the ones with me, "Be at peace. Do not be bothered." Unselfishness produces meekness, mildness, and gentleness. In order to have the proper attitude, we must not be selfish.

We must learn to have the proper attitude. We should not claim that our heart is sincere and our motive is right. That is not good enough. Only the Lord knows our motive. We are not the Lord; we are human, and we cannot see someone's motive. We can only see his face and attitude. It is not possible to speak harshly to a brother while claiming to have a good heart and motive. Therefore, in order to keep the proper church life, we must all learn to be adjusted in our attitude. In this matter we need true brokenness.

In many local churches the problems come mostly from wrong, careless, cold, and harsh attitudes. To have a right attitude is not a small matter. Satan, the subtle one, will utilize even a little carelessness in the way one brother greets another. He will fire a flaming dart into the brother's mind (6:16), and when the brother is in bed that night, he will have troubled thoughts about the other brother's attitude. This will create a certain amount of trouble. The next day that brother will be harsh to the other one, causing the other brother to have a further reaction. Eventually, the one careless greeting will cause a chain reaction; there will be a schism between the two brothers, and many misunderstandings will result. I am not speaking this in a speculative way. I have seen problems in the past due simply to this kind of reaction, which was due to nothing less than a little carelessness.

In order to have the church life, we need to learn that it is something very fine, not rough. According to the type, the church is a cake made of fine flour (Lev. 2:1-5; 1 Cor. 10:17). Anything coarse or rough does not fit the church life. I do not mean that we need to be nice in a worldly or religious way. Rather, we must have a fine expression toward the brothers and the sisters, behaving and conducting ourselves in a fine way. Our attitude is the most important item. If we will trust in the Lord for a proper attitude, we will be saved, delivered, and kept away from many misunderstandings. Almost all the misunderstandings come out of careless attitudes. Satan always utilizes careless attitudes to attack the church. This is why we must be careful with others, not for their sake only but even more because of the subtle one. The subtle one is here among us, so we need to be careful. We must not have carelessness in our attitude that can be taken advantage of and used for an attack by the enemy.

Meekness is a matter of an unselfish attitude that is mild and gentle, never argues for oneself, and never makes an excuse for oneself. Again I say, I am not presenting Ephesians 4:1-3 according to mere Bible teaching. I am speaking something from my past experience concerning the practicality of the church life. I suffered much due to carelessness in my

attitude in the early years of my ministry, although the Lord can testify that my motive was pure. My motive was good, but people could not see my motive; they could see only my attitude. Therefore, we must be careful in our attitude and always be meek, mild, gentle, nice, and without excuses. Otherwise, we will have a wrong attitude, and this wrong attitude will be an advantage taken by the enemy in order to attack us. This is not a small matter. It is very serious.

Having Long-suffering by Being Restricted in Our Speaking

Ephesians 4:2 also speaks of long-suffering. According to my experience, long-suffering is related to our spoken word. In the church we must be careful concerning our speech and conversation. To keep from speaking something according to our particular desire is a real suffering. If we can bear this suffering, we can bear any suffering. A brother may wrong us, but for the Lord's glory and for the sake of the church life, we should not speak a word about it. This is the exercise of long-suffering mentioned in verse 2. If we have not learned this lesson, then whenever something happens to us, we will talk about it. If a brother wrongs us, we will tell our spouse immediately, and then we will use the telephone to tell the story to someone else. Since we are not able to bear our suffering, telling people about it puts us at ease. To utter, express, and talk about everything that happens to us requires no long-suffering or patience.

If we see the leading brothers quarreling, we may immediately go to relate this to another brother. To do this may make us feel very light and at ease, and the more we talk in this way, the more we enjoy it. However, if we have learned the lesson, for the Lord's glory and for the sake of His church we will not say a word. Instead, we will go to the Lord with tears. If our dear wife comes in and asks why we are weeping, we will simply say, "It is nothing to concern you. Praise the Lord, Hallelujah!" To say, "It is nothing" is not a lie, because in fact it is nothing to concern her. There is no need to say something to others. Rather, we should have long-suffering. If we learn to keep our words in such a proper way, we will realize the true meaning of the word *suffering* in the church life.

On the contrary, though, we often do not suffer because we prefer to speak. We like to talk about whatever we see and whatever happens. There is no burden or yoke to bear in this improper practice. Immediately after a message is given, we may begin to criticize the speaker, saying, "That was a poor message. His language was broken, his accent was not right, his utterance was not very impressive, and I disagree with his emphasis." The more someone talks in this way, the more comfortable he may feel. Again, if we have learned the lesson, we will say nothing negative about the ministry, despite what we feel about it, for the sake of the practice of the church life. Our mouths will be under the control of the Holy Spirit. If when we return home, our children ask what the speaker said, we will be careful with our words. If we practice this, we will suffer in a proper way.

Our speech and conversation damage the church more than anything else. Some like to speak in person, and others like to write letters. It seems that there is no need to pay Western Union for a telegram. If something happens to the ministry here, within a few days many churches overseas will already know about it. We have many "correspondents" and "mailmen" who work without pay to deliver the news. If something happens on the Lord's Day, the next morning a "church mailman" will come to tell you about it. This is not a rebuke. Rather, it is my observation for more than thirty years. Word after word is passed on by telephone calls, letters, and personal contact. This builds up nothing but instead damages the church.

If we consider our past, we will realize how much we have been involved in this practice of passing on stories, unconsciously creating rumors. Once a story is secondhand, it begins to change, and eventually it can become a great exaggeration. This is always the case with rumors. In order to learn the lesson of long-suffering, we need to experience the suffering of restricting our mouth and stopping our tongue. We may see and hear many things, but we should not speak a word without the anointing and leading of the Holy Spirit. We must not let the enemy use our tongue for his purpose. Regardless of what happens to us, even if a brother wrongs us, we should not say a word. If we have learned the lesson of long-suffering, we will not enjoy our improper speaking. Instead, we will suffer by saying nothing. This is the proper meaning of long-suffering in verse 2.

We have been practicing the church life in Los Angeles already for three years. If we consider the past, though, we will see how much damage comes from speaking too freely. Through our carelessness in speaking we have caused much trouble. We have caused others to suffer, and we ourselves also have suffered. Eventually, I made the decision to have long-suffering instead of another kind of suffering. Either way we will have suffering. If we do not suffer through long-suffering, we will suffer in a negative way by our speaking. It is better to choose long-suffering. Then we will be saved from the wrong kind of suffering, and the church life will be kept from damage. No one taught us this lesson in the way of Bible teaching, but by the Lord's mercy we have learned this from our experience.

Bearing One Another in Love to Avoid All Fear and Suspicion

Verse 2 ends with "bearing one another in love." In order to bear one another in love, we need to fight against suspicion and fear in the church life. Instead of these two things, we should have only love. To have suspicion toward a brother means that our love is gone. Then after suspicion, fear will follow. If two brothers are suspicious of each other, they will be like spies to one another. This will produce a mutual fear between them. In order to realize the practical church life, we all must rise up to fight the battle against suspicion. If there is no suspicion, there will be no fear of one another.

We must give no ground to suspicion and fear. We love our brothers; we do not fear them. First John 4:18 says, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." We are not in a political circle, where even the leaders are suspicious of one another. We should never be suspicious of one another, and we should not try to spy on one another. If certain brothers say something about us, let them do it. We should not try to find out what they are saying. We should not go to a brother and say, "Please tell me what they were talking about." If we do this, we are acting as politicians, not brothers. Rather, we should leave this matter to the sovereign hand of the Lord. We can tell Him, "Lord, if it is Your will that I should know, and if it is for Your glory and the good of the church life, You will let me know through some channel." There is no need for us to ask what someone said. Because we have no suspicion of the brothers, we have no fear of them either. Therefore, there is no need to spy.

Sometimes when certain brothers have come to tell me something, I realize what they are doing, so I say, "Brothers, please say no more. Do not go on." It is always a temptation to know others' attitude toward us, how they consider us, and what they have said about us. In order to realize the church life, we must reject this temptation. We must have no suspicion. We believe in the Lord and consider that all the brothers are good. Therefore, there is no need to know too much. Regardless of how others consider us and talk about us, we are in the hand of the Lord. If we practice in this way, the door will be closed to the enemy.

If, on the contrary, someone is suspicious, this will cause a reaction, and this reaction will

cause a chain reaction. Then in the church we will have not love but only suspicion and fear. We will have a church full of “policemen.” We will become not a police state but a “police church.” On many occasions we have suffered much because of this. A brother might report, “I saw three brothers talking in their house until midnight,” or he may inquire, “Why didn’t we see that brother in the Lord’s table meeting?” This kind of speaking is the underground work of a spy. This damages the church. It does not build up; instead, it kills and tears down. If we truly intend to have the church life, we must learn the lesson to be careful in our speaking.

**Keeping the Oneness of the Spirit
in the Uniting Bond of Peace**

Ephesians 4:3 says, “Being diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace.” If we have peace only with God and not with all the brothers, we have lost the church life. The church life is tested by the peace we have, not only vertically with God but also horizontally with all the brothers. We need this kind of peace. We should not be over-related or under-related to anyone. The uniting bond of peace is the balanced relatedness in the church. (*The Vision, Practice, and Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ*, pp. 161-170)