

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

(Saturday—Second Morning Session)

Message Eight

The Local Ground of the Church

Scripture Reading: Matt. 16:18; 18:17; Acts 8:1; 13:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; Rev. 1:11

- I. The ground of the church is the key to knowing the church in today's chaotic situation; in order to know the church, we must recognize the ground of the church—Matt. 16:18; 18:17.**
- II. We need to know the difference between the ground of the church and the foundation of the church—1 Cor. 1:2; 3:10:**
 - A. The foundation is the lowest part of a building; the ground is the base, the site, where the building is placed.
 - B. Since the church is the dwelling place of God, the building of God, it needs not only a foundation but also a ground, a site; this site is the locality in which the church is established—1:2; Rev. 1:11.
- III. The ground is much more important to a local church than its condition—1 Cor. 1:2, 11-13:**
 - A. Condition is relative and may change, but the ground is absolute and cannot be altered.
 - B. The assessment of a church should never be based on its spiritual condition but on its ground.
 - C. Whether a church is proper, or genuine, does not depend on the condition of the church but on the ground of the church.
- IV. The local ground of the church is basically the unique oneness of the Body of Christ practiced in the local churches—Eph. 4:4; 1 Cor. 1:2; 12:27:**
 - A. Both the universal Body of Christ and the local churches are uniquely one.
 - B. The Body is universal, and this universal Body has only one expression in a city; thus, there should be only one church in a city—Rev. 1:11; Acts 8:1; 13:1.
 - C. There is one unique Body of Christ in the universe, and there is one unique local church in each locality; this unique oneness is the basic element of the church life:
 1. The organic Body is undivided and indivisible; this unique Body is expressed in many local churches in the divine oneness as it is with the Triune God and in the divine nature, element, essence, expression, function, and testimony—Rev. 1:11; John 17:11, 21, 23.
 2. There are many local churches, yet they all have one divine nature, one divine element, one divine essence, one divine expression, one divine function, and one divine testimony because they are one Body—Rev. 1:11-12, 20.
- V. According to the divine revelation in the New Testament, the church ground is constituted of three crucial elements:**

- A. The first element of the constitution of the church ground is the unique oneness of the universal Body of Christ, which is called “the oneness of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:3)—the oneness for which the Lord prayed in John 17:
 - 1. Since the oneness of the Body of Christ is the oneness of the Spirit, the oneness practiced in a local church must be in the move of the Spirit and under the government of the Spirit.
 - 2. The church ground on which a local church is built must be constituted with and prevail in the oneness executed by the Spirit.
- B. The second element of the church ground is the unique ground of the locality in which a local church is established and exists—Rev. 1:11; Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5:
 - 1. In the New Testament the proper ground of oneness ordained by God is the unique ground of one church for one locality—Rev. 1:11.
 - 2. The New Testament presents a clear picture that all the local churches—as the expression of the universal church, the universal Body of Christ—are located in their respective cities—Acts 8:1; 13:1; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; Rev. 1:4, 11:
 - a. The churches are established in different cities by taking a city as the boundary and ground of each local church.
 - b. The sphere and limit of a local church must be exactly the same as that of the city in which it is located—v. 11; Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5.
 - 3. The church is constituted of the universal God, but it exists on earth in many localities; in nature the church is universal in God, but in practice the church is local in a definite place, such as “the church of God which is in Corinth”—1 Cor. 1:2.
- C. The third element of the church ground is the reality of the Spirit of oneness, that is, the reality of the Spirit, who is the living reality of the Divine Trinity—1 John 5:6; John 16:13:
 - 1. It is by this Spirit that the oneness of the Body of Christ becomes real and living.
 - 2. It is by this Spirit that the ground of locality is applied in life and not in legality.
 - 3. It is by this Spirit that the genuine ground of the church is linked with the Triune God—Eph. 4:3-6.

VI. We need to see that the ground of the church, the genuine ground of oneness, is intrinsically related to life—Psa. 133:1, 3; 36:8-9:

- A. The eternal life of God is commanded by God as a blessing to those who dwell together in oneness in the church life—John 3:16; Eph. 4:18; Psa. 133:1, 3.
- B. Life is the essence of oneness; without life, there can be no oneness—John 10:10b, 16b.
- C. The oneness in God’s economy, the great oneness revealed in entirety in the Scriptures, can be preserved only by life.
- D. The only way that oneness can be maintained is by life, in life, and with life—Rom. 8:2, 6, 10-11; 12:4-5; 15:6.

VII. In the Lord's recovery, we take the lead to stand on the unique ground of the church, the genuine ground of oneness—Matt. 16:18; 18:17:

- A. First Corinthians 1:2 speaks of the church at Corinth—this shows the locality of Corinth for the existence, expression, and practice of the church; such a locality becomes the local ground of the local churches on which they are built respectively; thus, the church in Corinth was built on the ground of the city of Corinth.
- B. The practice of the church life in the early days was the practice of having one church for one city, one city with only one church; in no city was there more than one church—Acts 8:1; 13:1; Rev. 1:11:
 - 1. This is the local church with the city, not the street or area, as the unit.
 - 2. The jurisdiction of a local church should cover the whole city in which the church is located; it should not be greater or lesser than the boundary of the city.
 - 3. All the believers within that boundary should constitute the one unique local church within that city.
- C. We need to realize that the church today must be in oneness and must be built on the ground of oneness—Eph. 4:3; 1 Cor. 1:2:
 - 1. The genuine oneness is the ground of the church.
 - 2. May the Lord grant us more light concerning this precious oneness.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE DEFINITION OF THE CHURCH GROUND

Not the Foundation but the Site

The word *ground* that we use in reference to the church ground does not carry the denotation of a foundation, like the foundation of a building; it bears the denotation of a site, like the site on which the foundation of a building is laid.

The Three Crucial Elements of the Church Ground

According to the divine revelation of the New Testament, the church ground is constituted of three crucial elements, as follows:

The Unique Oneness of the Universal Body of Christ

The first element of the constitution of the church ground is the unique oneness of the universal Body of Christ, which is called “the oneness of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:3). This is the oneness that the Lord prayed for in John 17. It is a oneness of the mingling of the processed Triune God with all the believers in Christ. This oneness is in the name of the Father (John 17:6, 11), denoting the Father’s person, in which is the Father’s life. This oneness is even in the Triune God through sanctification by His holy word as the truth (vv. 14-21). This oneness is ultimately in the divine glory for the expression of the Triune God (vv. 22-24). Such a oneness was imparted into the spirit of all the believers in Christ, in their regeneration by the Spirit of life with Christ as the divine life; this oneness has become the basic element of the church ground.

The Unique Ground of Locality of a Local Church

The second element of the church ground is the unique ground of the locality in which

a local church is established and exists. The New Testament presents us a clear picture that all the local churches—as the expression of the universal church, the universal Body of Christ—are located in their respective cities. Hence, we see the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), the church in Antioch (13:1), the church in Cenchrea (Rom. 16:1), the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2), and the seven churches in Asia in seven respective cities (Rev. 1:4, 11). Every city as the boundary in which a church exists is the local ground of that church. Such a unique ground of locality preserves the church from being divided by many different matters as different grounds in the way that divisive denominations such as the Baptists, the Presbyterians, the Lutherans, the Methodists, and the Episcopalians are divided.

The Reality of the Spirit of Oneness

The third element of the church ground is the reality of the Spirit of oneness, expressing the unique oneness of the universal Body of Christ on the unique ground of locality of a local church. Briefly, the third element of the church ground is the reality of the Spirit, who is the living reality of the Divine Trinity (1 John 5:6; John 16:13). It is by this Spirit that the oneness of the Body of Christ becomes real and living. It is also through this Spirit that the ground of locality is applied in life and not in legality. And it is by this Spirit that the genuine ground of the church is linked with the Triune God (Eph. 4:3-6).

THE GENUINE GROUND OF THE CHURCH KEEPING THE GENUINE ONENESS OF THE CHURCH IN PRACTICALITY

The above-defined ground of the church keeps, in practicality, the genuine oneness of the church both locally and universally (v. 3), without any division. This is the only way to avoid today's situation of division and confusion among the members of Christ.

THE BASE OF THE GENUINE FELLOWSHIP OF THE BELIEVERS

The above-defined ground of the church is also the base of the genuine and proper fellowship of all the believers, which is called “the fellowship of the apostles” in the divine revelation (Acts 2:42), a fellowship that is with the Triune God and with all the members of Christ (1 John 1:1-3). This is the unique fellowship of the Body of Christ locally and universally. Because of the many divisive grounds of today's Christianity, the fellowship among the members of Christ also is divided into many divisive fellowships. The way to be saved out of all these divisive fellowships is to take and keep the unique, genuine, and proper ground of the church. This is not a matter of doctrine and regulation; it is a spiritual fact and a practical necessity. (*A Brief Presentation of the Lord's Recovery*, pp. 28-30)

THE UNIQUE GROUND OF THE LOCAL CHURCHES OF GOD

First, we want to see the unique ground of the local churches of God (1 Cor. 1:1-2, 9, 10-13; 3:3-4).

The Church of God

First Corinthians 1:2a speaks of the church of God. The church has to be of God. It should not be of anything else. This refers to the content of the church in its essence. Every substantial matter has its source. Then it has its element. Intrinsically within the element, there is the essence. The content of the church essentially is God Himself.

The Church at Corinth

First Corinthians 1:2b speaks of the church at Corinth. This shows the locality of Corinth for the existence, expression, and practice of the church; such a locality becomes the local ground of the local churches on which they are built respectively (Acts 8:1; 13:1; Rev. 1:11).

For its existence, expression, and practice, the church surely needs a place, and that place according to the New Testament is a locality. The church in Corinth was built in Corinth. The church in Athens is built on the ground of the city of Athens. The church in New York is built on the ground of the city of New York. Thus, the locality spontaneously becomes the church ground.

Brother Watchman Nee pointed out that God was very wise in His way of building up the church on the local ground. There are a great number of God's chosen people. Everywhere around the globe there are believers in Christ, and they should not be scattered but gathered together to be a church. If there were not the proper limitation of the ground, there would be no limitation to the setting up of churches. Today in Southern California there is a church called the Taiwan Gospel Church. These believers have used Taiwan as their ground. I was raised in China in the city of Chefoo, and in Chefoo there was the Church of England. People set up churches too easily. Today it is easier to establish a church than it is to set up a restaurant. All the denominations have divisive grounds, including the Southern Baptists, the Presbyterians, and the Lutherans.

If we believers keep the pattern set up by God in the Bible to have one church in one city, we can keep the oneness. Any believer who comes to a city has to be in the church in that city. If I go to Tokyo, I should join the church in Tokyo. If I go to London, I should go to the church in London. If I go to Dallas, I have to meet with the church in Dallas. Then spontaneously there will be no division. The Bible set up a pattern of how the believers should meet. The first gathering of the Christians was in Jerusalem, and Acts 8:1 calls that gathering the church in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a large city, but there was only one church in that city. Although there is one church in a city, the church does not necessarily need to meet in one place. But we must keep in mind that the city in which we are should be the unique local ground of the church.

The Called Saints

Those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints, are the constituents as the framework of the church (1 Cor. 1:2c). The Triune God is the contents of the church, with the Spirit as the essence, the Lord as the element, and the Father as the source. The church's framework is the genuine believers, the real saints, the sanctified ones in Christ Jesus. The church must be of God, on its local ground, and with the saints as the constituents.

With All Those Who Call upon the Name of the Lord

First Corinthians was written to the saints in Corinth with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place—the recipients of this Epistle in every place other than the saints in Corinth (v. 2d). Even today we are the recipients of this book. This Epistle was written to the church in Corinth, the composition of the saints in that city, but it has been and will be read by people in thousands of places throughout the generations.

Christ Being “Theirs and Ours”

Christ being “theirs and ours” means that Christ is the portion of the local saints in Corinth and of all the saints in whatever place, who participate in the fellowship (enjoyment) of Christ, into which all the believers have been called by the faithful God (vv. 2e, 9). The same Christ is the portion not only for one local church but also for all the churches on the earth. He is the common portion allotted to us by God. Every local church has a portion of Christ. Also, we have been called by the faithful God into the fellowship of Christ. As

called saints, Christ is our portion, and we have been called into the enjoyment, the fellowship, of Christ as the center.

Divisions among the Saints Being Condemned by the Apostle

Divisions among the saints are condemned by the apostle as the deputy authority of Christ the Head (vv. 10-13). Paul wrote to the church in Corinth because he heard that there were divisions among them. Some said that they were of Paul, others that they were of Apollos, others that they were of Cephas, and still others that they were of Christ. They were divided into four groups, but Paul asked them, "Is Christ divided?" It was as if Paul were asking, "How many Christs do you have? Do you have a Christ for Cephas, for Apollos, for Paul, and even for Christ? Regardless of Cephas, of Apollos, of Paul, and of Christ, what you have is only one Christ. The fellowship you all are in is the fellowship of one unique Christ. Christ is not divided." Divisions among the saints were condemned by the apostle as Christ's deputy authority. (*The Divine and Mystical Realm*, pp. 80-83)

ONENESS PRESERVED BY LIFE

Genesis 2:8 says, "Jehovah God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there He put the man whom He had formed." A garden is a place of life. After God created man, He put him in a place that was full of life. In the midst of this place, the garden in Eden, there was a tree called the tree of life. Not only was the garden a place of life, but at the center of this place there was the tree of life. The fact that the Creator put man in such an environment indicates that God was presenting Himself to man as the source of life and also as the supply of life.

Man, however, did not partake of the tree of life. Instead, he ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge and, as a result, was eventually divided into nations. At Babel the man created by God for His purpose was divided into nations. This was the result of his having been seduced by Satan to eat of the tree of knowledge. Babel was the issue, the consequence, of the eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. This indicates that we should beware of anything that is not of life, for any such thing will result in division, Babel.

As we will see, there is a progression downward from Babel to Babylon and from Babylon to the great Babylon. Toward the beginning of the Old Testament, we have Babel, but toward the end, we have Babylon. Furthermore, toward the end of the New Testament, we have the great Babylon. Babel, Babylon, and the great Babylon all come from the source of the tree of knowledge. This means that the issue of partaking of the tree of knowledge is division.

Life, on the contrary, is the essence of oneness. The oneness in God's economy, the great oneness revealed in entirety in the Scriptures, can be preserved only by life. Without life, there can be no oneness.

Man's body illustrates this. Although there are many members in the body, all the members are one because they all share one life, the life of the body. Hence, the oneness of our physical body is its life. However, when a corpse is buried, it eventually decomposes because it does not have life. When life is removed from the physical body, the members of the body become detached. This illustrates the fact that the essence of the oneness of man's physical body is his physical life. If there is no life, there is no oneness.

In a very real sense, today's Christianity is not the Body; it is a corpse. The dry bones in Ezekiel 37 not only are an illustration of the situation of the children of Israel but may also be used as an illustration of the situation of Christians today. In this portion of the Word, the Lord caused Ezekiel to see a vision of a valley full of dry bones, bones that represent "the

whole house of Israel” (v. 11). Originally, the children of Israel were a living body. But after they had been divided and scattered, they became dry bones, each detached from the others. Because the life had gone out of the bones, the essence of oneness was lost, and the bones were detached. In a negative way this reveals that life is the essence of oneness.

The one corporate man created by God was destined to produce a great number of descendants. How could these descendants remain one? By education? By some kind of power? By organization? The only way that oneness can be maintained is by life, in life, and with life. If Adam had eaten of the tree of life, all his descendants, even though they number in the millions, would have been kept in oneness. But because Adam partook of the tree of knowledge, the essence of division was injected into him, and his descendants were divided. The essence of Babel that is manifested in Genesis 11 was put into man in Genesis 3. This indicates that divisiveness and divisions are the issue of taking into our being something other than life. This element is the factor, source, and essence of division. The essence of oneness, on the contrary, is life. Only life can keep us in oneness. (*The Genuine Ground of Oneness*, pp. 20-21)