

THE VISION, PRACTICE, AND BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

(Saturday—First Morning Session)

Message Seven

The Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ

(1)

The Vision of God's Building and the Test of Our Spirituality

Scripture Reading: Matt. 16:18; Gen. 28:10-19; Eph. 2:21-22;
Heb. 13:13-14; 1 Tim. 3:15-16

- I. **The building up of the church is the aim of God's eternal purpose and plan; it is the central point, the ultimate aim, of God's purpose according to all the visions and revelations in the Scriptures—Matt. 16:18; Rev. 21:10-11:**
 - A. Visions in the Scriptures are related to God's building—Gen. 28:10-19; Rev. 21:2.
 - B. There is a principle of first mention in the Bible; that is, the principle of a matter is set forth when it is mentioned for the first time:
 1. The first vision in the Scriptures is a vision of God's building—Gen. 28:10-19.
 2. According to the principle of first mention, the visions in the Bible are therefore related to God's building—Ezek. 1:1; 8:3; 43:1-7.
 - C. The first vision in the Bible is a dream, the central point of which is the house of God, Bethel, built with human beings mingled with the Triune God—Gen. 28:10-19.
 - D. The final vision in the Scriptures—an enlarged vision, a vision in full—is the New Jerusalem—Rev. 21:2—22:5:
 1. The vision at Bethel is the seed of the vision, and the vision of the New Jerusalem is the harvest of the vision.
 2. Between the vision of Bethel and the vision of the New Jerusalem, there are a number of visions in the Bible; these visions are the growth, the enlargement, the recovery, and even the enlargement of the enlargement of the seed of the vision:
 - a. Moses saw a vision of the building of the tabernacle; he saw a genuine vision of the heavenly pattern for God's building—a vision that was the growth of the seed—Exo. 25—31.
 - b. David saw the next major vision, the vision of the temple as the enlargement of the tabernacle—2 Sam. 7:1-16.
 - c. According to Ezekiel 40 through 48, the temple that Ezekiel saw was an enlargement of the temple seen by David.
 - d. Zechariah's vision was related to the recovery of the temple, and Daniel's visions were related to the temple in the end times—Zech. 4:9; Dan. 9:27.

- e. The Epistles show us the vision of the church that the apostles, mainly Peter and Paul, saw in their own time—1 Pet. 2:5; Eph. 2:21-22; 4:16.
 - f. The final vision, the consummate vision, was seen by the apostle John—Rev. 21:2, 10-11.
- E. We need a vision to see God’s building; if we are open to the Lord and seek Him, eventually the vision will be open to us, and we will see it in our spirit, and the building of God will become a vision to us—Eph. 1:17-18; 2:21-22.

II. In order to carry out the vision of the building up of the church as the Body of Christ, there is the need for a remnant to go outside the camp unto Christ—Heb. 13:13-14:

- A. Hebrews 13:13 indicates that the believers are to follow Jesus outside the camp:
- 1. Both in the book of Hebrews and in typology, the camp signifies the organization of religion, which is human and earthly.
 - 2. To go outside the camp means to go outside the human organization of religion.
 - 3. Whereas the camp signifies the human organization, the city signifies the earthly realm; every religion is both a human organization and an earthly realm that keeps God’s people from the New Testament economy—v. 14; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; Eph. 3:9.
 - 4. Any religion—Judaism, Catholicism, or Protestantism—which has rejected the Lord is a camp, a human organization, given up by Him.
 - 5. In principle, Christianity as a religious system comprises a group of religious people, belonging to the Lord in name and honoring the Lord with their mouth but having their hearts set on something other than the Lord—Matt. 15:8-9; 2 Tim. 3:5.
- B. Today God needs a remnant, a small group of overcomers, to take the stand that was lost by the whole church and, seeing a vision of God’s original purpose, go outside the camp unto Christ—Acts 26:19; Phil. 3:4-8; Heb. 13:13; Rev. 2:7:
- 1. Today some are still considering how to identify themselves with all the members of the Body.
 - 2. Those who try to do this will not succeed, for this is not the nature of the present age:
 - a. The age today is a time for some overcomers to listen to the voice of the rejected Lord, the One who is outside the camp—v. 7; Heb. 13:13.
 - b. Instead of trying to “identify” with the ones still in the camp, we should come out of the camp and go unto the Lord to follow Him for His purpose—2 Tim. 1:9; Eph. 3:11; Rom. 8:28.
 - 3. We must not go along with the religious concept and the human thought but go along with the heavenly vision of the building up of the church as the Body of Christ and go outside the camp unto Christ—Prov. 29:18; Eph. 4:16.

III. God’s building is the test of our spirituality—1 Cor. 14:4, 12, 26:

- A. The building is the test of every kind of spirituality—Eph. 2:21-22; 1 Cor. 14:26:
- 1. We ourselves are not the standard by which our spirituality is tested; our spirituality must be tested by God’s building, the Body of Christ.

2. Individualistic spirituality is not the genuine spirituality:
 - a. If someone thinks that he is spiritual, yet he is independent, individualistic, and isolated from the Body, his spirituality is a deception.
 - b. Real and genuine spirituality is for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ—Eph. 3:16-17a; 4:12, 15-16.
 3. In God's concern what matters is not our spirituality but the building; the building of God is our standard and test.
- B. According to the book of Ezekiel, the requirements of the indwelling Christ are according to the house; everyone must be measured and checked according to the measurement of God's house—43:10:
1. Our living, conduct, and service should be examined not merely according to moral regulations and spiritual principles but also according to the house of God, the church as the Body of Christ—1 Tim. 3:15-16.
 2. Our main concern should not be with improving our behavior or becoming spiritual but with fitting into the house—1 Cor. 14:12.
 3. If what we are and what we do cannot match God's building, it amounts to nothing in the sight of God—3:10-15.
 4. Because the Lord cares so much for the church—the house of God and the Body of Christ—we also should care for the church and fashion ourselves according to it—1 Tim. 3:15-16.
 5. If we see this, we will not care merely for teachings from the Bible and about the inner life; instead, we will care absolutely for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ—Eph. 1:22-23; 2:21-22; 4:12, 16.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

**THE VISION OF GOD'S BUILDING
All the Visions in the Scriptures Being
Related to God's Building**

The building up of the church is the aim of God's eternal purpose and plan. It is the central point, the ultimate aim, of God's purpose according to all the visions and revelations in the Scriptures. The first vision mentioned in the Scriptures is Jacob's dream in Genesis 28:10-19. Before that time the God of glory appeared to Abraham (Acts 7:2), but that was not a vision to Abraham. The first vision in the Scriptures was Jacob's dream. The central item of that vision was Bethel, the house of God, built with two kinds of material, stone and the oil poured upon the stone. The stone signifies man, and the oil signifies the very God who comes to us as the Spirit. After Jacob poured the oil upon the stone, he called the name of that place Bethel. The stone with the oil poured upon it became the house of God. This is the mingling of God with man.

The Spirit, who comes to us, is the third person of the Triune God. The Father was far away from us, and the Son was once among us yet not in us. It is the "oil," the person of the Spirit, in whom and by whom the very God comes into us to be one with us, producing Bethel, the house of God. Therefore, the first vision in the Scriptures is a dream, the central point of which is the house of God built with human beings mingled with the Triune God.

Today Christians often talk about heavenly or spiritual visions, but it seems that they are not clear concerning the central visions in the Bible. Visions in the Scriptures are always related to God's building. There is a principle of first mention in the Scriptures; that is, the principle of a matter is set forth when it is mentioned for the first time. The first vision in the Scriptures is a vision of God's building. Accordingly, the visions in the Scriptures are always related to God's building.

The final vision in the Scriptures is the New Jerusalem in the last two chapters of the Bible (Rev. 21—22). This is an enlarged vision, a vision in full. The vision at Bethel is the seed of the vision, and the vision of the New Jerusalem is the harvest of the vision. Between these two ends, there are a number of visions in the Bible. Moses saw a vision of the building of the tabernacle (Exo. 25—31). That was a genuine vision of the heavenly pattern for God's building. As the vision of Bethel was a seed, Moses' vision on Mount Sinai was the growth of the seed. After Moses, the next major vision was that of David, the vision of the temple as the enlargement of the tabernacle (2 Sam. 7:1-16). Following this were the visions of Ezekiel. According to Ezekiel 40 through 48, the temple that Ezekiel saw was a further enlargement of the temple seen by David. Zechariah's vision was related to the recovery of the temple, and Daniel's visions were related to the temple in the end times. The next great vision was that of the apostles, represented mainly by Peter and Paul. The Epistles show us the vision of the church that the apostles saw in their own time. The final vision was seen by John.

It is surprising to hear Christians often speaking about visions, because many do not realize that all the visions are for the building. Some brothers have studied the Scriptures in seminaries and Bible institutes, but they may have never heard of the vision of God's building. If we take away the above visions from the Scriptures, there will be none left. With these visions we have the seed, the growth and enlargement, the recovery, and even the enlargement of the enlargement. In the New Testament visions we have the genuine article, the church, and in Revelation there is the ultimate manifestation of God's building, the New Jerusalem. All these visions are related to one item—the building of God.

Our Need to See the Vision of God's Building

Because this is the age of God's purpose, we need to have not a mere teaching or doctrine but a vision. Beginning in 1939, Brother Watchman Nee spent three years to stress one matter—our need to see the Body, which is the building of God. He stressed that we need a vision of the Body. To hear something about the Body is one thing, but to see the Body is another. We may compare this to hearing about Los Angeles before we actually see it. I heard of Los Angeles many years ago when I was young, but I did not come here until 1958. Now I have a clear view of Los Angeles, especially when I travel by airplane. We need a vision to see God's building, not merely to hear, learn, or know about it. We cannot say exactly how we can see the vision, but as we are seeking the Lord, meeting together, and fellowshiping about this matter again and again, we eventually will see something. Before that time, we may have known about the building of God, but eventually the vision will be open

to us, and we will see it in our spirit. If we are open to the Lord and seek Him, sooner or later the building of God will become a vision to us.

God's desire in the universe is the building. This is His aim and His ultimate goal, and He will obtain it. If we seek Him and His desire, we must go along with Him in this matter. We cannot be satisfied until we see His people built up in a practical way. David was called a man according to God's heart because he had a genuine concern for God's dwelling place. He was occupied by nothing other than the building of the dwelling place of God, not in heaven but on this earth and in his age. Today we also must have a true concern for God's dwelling place on the earth.

Many Christian brothers and sisters are very concerned for lost souls. Whenever I hear this, I am very happy. I too would do whatever I can to further the work of the gospel. However, today the Lord is doing something more, not only to preach the gospel and save lost souls but also to bring the saved ones to be built together. We must have a true concern not only for the lost ones but also for God's building among the saved ones. This is the purpose for which we are here. We do not despise any kind of gospel work. We must do whatever we can to help the gospel work, but we also need to see something further. We need to see the vision of God's purpose with His building. We are not here merely for the gospel or for spirituality. We are here for God's ultimate goal and aim, which is the building up of the church.

The Need for a Remnant to Go outside the Camp unto Christ

Today God needs a remnant, a small group of overcomers, to take the stand that was lost by the whole church. For this reason we need to see a vision and not simply consider the situation according to our natural and religious concept. We need to see something according to God's eternal plan. We may compare the situation today to the smog in Los Angeles. Many days it is difficult to see the mountains through the smog. Under the smog everyone's vision is veiled. We need to be transcendent, to rise above the smoggy air. Then we will see the vision.

Today some are still considering how to identify themselves with all the members of the Body. If they try to do this, they will not succeed. This is not the nature of the present age. The age today is a time for some overcomers to listen to the voice of the rejected Lord, the One who is outside the camp (Heb. 13:13). There is no need to try to "identify" with the ones still in the camp. Rather, come out of the camp and go unto the Lord to follow Him and accomplish His purpose. We could never be more inclusive than the Lord is. The Lord Himself went outside the camp. We must go along not with the religious concept and the human thought but with the heavenly vision. Go outside the camp unto Him.

May the Lord be merciful to us. We need a vision. The Lord can testify that I am grateful to Him for the evangelistic ministry in America today. Thousands of people have been brought to the Lord, yet I am not satisfied only to see that thousands of lost souls are saved. I desire to see even only a small number of them listen to the Lord's voice, go unto Him, and be built up together as a living testimony. These will

be the bride of Christ mentioned in Revelation 19:7-8, the overcomers, not simply the wife of the Lamb in eternity mentioned in 21:2 and 9.

We need to see the vision and not merely have a general concept. Regardless of how people condemn and criticize us, we should disregard their speaking. When the Lord Jesus was on the earth, He was always criticized by the religious people, by those who had the Scriptures in their hands. He was also crucified by those people according to their understanding of the Scriptures. We should not be affected by all the criticisms. We need the vision of God's building. Without a vision, all the things we have spoken here are in vain. Once we have the vision, everything is different; the whole universe is changed. I am limited in my ability to speak these things, but I trust in the Lord according to my prayer that what I have spoken here is not my own word but the revealing Spirit unveiling the vision of God's building. The Holy Spirit will unveil these things to you so that you may see the vision of the building. There is no other vision in the Bible. All the visions in the Bible are for the building, which is the very aim of God's purpose.

THE BUILDING BEING THE TEST OF OUR SPIRITUALITY

Genuine Spirituality Being for God's Building

In addition to seeing the vision of God's building, we also need to see what the building is in practicality. The building is the test of every kind of spirituality. We ourselves are not the standard by which our spirituality is tested for its genuineness. Rather, we must put our spirituality on the doorstep of the building to be tested. You may be very spiritual, but you may be too individualistic. The individualistic spirituality is not the genuine one. The genuine, real spirituality must be for the building. If someone considers that he is spiritual, yet he is independent, individualistic, and isolated from the Body, his spirituality is a deception.

Someone may be very humble, but whether this humility is genuine and spiritual or false and natural can be tested only by the building. There are many humble persons, but they are too independent. They are not related to anyone. They are individualistically humble, humble in an isolated way. We may have nice, good, and humble brothers of this kind among us, and we may all appreciate such persons. However, if we have a vision "from a mountaintop," we can look down and see the actual situation. Let us tear down this kind of natural humility. It is too individualistic and isolated, and it even damages. There is no relatedness with this kind of humility. True and genuine spirituality is for the building. If we can have the building up, then to be proud or humble does not matter. We do not want to be praised by others for our humility yet damage the building with it.

In God's concern, what matters is not our spirituality. Strictly speaking, God is concerned not for spirituality but for the building. Regardless of how good, humble, and spiritual we consider ourselves to be, let us be tested. How much are we in the building? How much are we built up and related with others? God's aim is not to have a group of nice Christians. His aim is to build us up together. He does not want precious stones in a museum for an exhibition. He wants to have a house built up with the precious materials. You may be precious but still not built up with others.

If this is the case, you are good only for an exhibition; you are not good for the building. God made the precious materials for the building, not for an individualistic display.

In a certain place some saints recommended a sister, saying, “She is so spiritual. She is quiet and always so nice to everyone.” In actuality, this sister was nice to everyone, but she was not nice for God’s building. She had been in that city for many years without being related to anyone. She was considered very spiritual, but she was not connected. She was nice in an isolated, individualistically spiritual way that was not for the building up of the Body. We must not appreciate this kind of spirituality. The test of our spirituality is the building. (*The Vision, Practice, and Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ*, pp. 127-134)