

Message Four

(Saturday—First Morning Session)

The Elders Being Slaves to the Saints to Take Care of Them in Everything and in Every Way for the Dispensing of Christ into Them

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 5:1-6; 2:25; Heb. 13:17; Exo. 21:1-6; Mark 10:45

- I. To shepherd the flock of God is to watch over the souls of the saints, being one with the Lord as the Shepherd and Overseer of their souls in His care for the welfare of their inner being and in His exercising His oversight of their real person—1 Pet. 5:1-6; 2:25; Heb. 13:17:**
- A. For the sake of the flock, the elders must enjoy the Lord every day as grace and truth so that they may be dispensers of grace and truth—Eph. 3:2; 4:29; 1 Tim. 3:2b; 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:24-26; Titus 1:9.
 - B. For the sake of the flock, the elders need to buy the oil every day (Matt. 25:3-4, 9), to pay the price to gain more of the Spirit, by buying the truth of God's economy (Prov. 23:23), buying gold refined by fire that they may be rich toward God, buying white garments that they may be clothed with Christ by living out Christ, and buying eyesalve as the anointing Spirit to heal their blindness (Rev. 3:18).
 - C. For the sake of the flock, the elders need to be faithful and prudent slaves, taking care of the Lord's possessions and investing their spiritual gift by giving the food of the word of God, the full gospel of God's economy, to the sinners, the believers, and the churches—Rom. 1:1; Matt. 24:45-47; 25:22-23.
- II. The elders should not lord it over God's flock, which is God's possession; the churches are God's possession, allotted to the elders as their portion entrusted to them by God for their care—1 Pet. 5:2-3:**
- A. To lord it over others is to exercise lordship over those who are ruled (Matt. 20:25); among the believers, we are all brothers, and only Christ is our Lord, our Master, and the Lord of the harvest—Matt. 23:8, 10; Luke 10:2.
 - B. Nothing is more unsightly than a person who struggles to be an authority; it is the most ugly thing for a person to try to control others in an outward way.
 - C. Ambition to be an authority or to be a great one is something that belongs to the Gentiles; we should drive this kind of spirit from the church—Mark 10:42-43; Matt. 20:26-27; 23:10-11.
 - D. The elders in the church can only take the leadership (not the lordship) by becoming patterns of the flock, taking the lead to serve and care for the church that the believers may follow—1 Pet. 5:3; 1 Thes. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 4:12; 5:17.
 - E. We should not tell the saints where to live, what to do, or where to go without prayer to honor Christ as the Head and without fellowship to honor Christ as the Body:
 - 1. Without the life of the Head, there is no Body, and without the authority of the Head, there is no oneness of the Body; we must allow the life of the Head to rule us so that the Body can become one—Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:1-4, 15-16.
 - 2. Any decisions that you make by yourself for others are an insult to the Spirit; none of us should ever tell others where they should go; if we do not

pray and have proper fellowship with others, we insult the Lord and usurp His position—cf. 2 Cor. 4:5.

3. Although the Lord has burdened us to go to the campuses, we should not turn this into a movement; everything must be brought into the presence of the Lord, and everyone should pray until he is clear about the Lord's leading—Acts 16:6-10.
 4. Concerning any move you make in the Lord's recovery, you must go directly to the Lord Himself and pray; you must have the assurance that the Lord is sending you—Mark 1:35-38; 2 Cor. 2:12-14; Gal. 2:1-2a.
 5. We also need to check whether the leading we have from the Lord corresponds to the feeling of the Body—Acts 13:1-4a; 21:4, 11.
 6. If the leading ones, after much prayer, are truly burdened about a certain matter, through fellowship they should pass on their burden to the saints and ask the saints to pray; eventually, the saints will receive a personal leading from the Lord, and they may move accordingly; in this way no one will be individualistic or rebellious—cf. 1 John 1:3.
 7. If you move to a place without prayer and fellowship, you will be shaken when tests, afflictions, and persecutions come; if you pray and fellowship, you will have the assurance that the Lord sent you there, and you will never regret your move no matter what the outward situation may be—2 Cor. 2:12-14; cf. 7:5-6.
 8. We all need to pray earnestly that we would be kept in the Spirit and in the unique oneness of the Body; to be in the Spirit and in the unique oneness of the Body is to be kept in the Lord's recovery—Eph. 4:2-4.
- F. We need to be careful about directing or controlling the young saints related to their marriage—Matt. 19:5-6:
1. In the church life all we can do concerning the young saints' marriage is to minister life to them; we must help them to look to the Lord's leading, to learn how to walk in the Spirit, and help them not to indulge in lust or to have their own taste or choice—Gen. 2:21-24; 24:64-67; 49:31.
 2. We should not try to conduct them into a marriage or match them; only the Lord knows who is a good match for another person; we do not know.
 3. We do not control and, even the more, we do not conduct or indicate what brother or sister might be best for them; if we leave this matter to the Lord and pray for the ones concerned, we will save the church much trouble.
 4. On the one hand, we should not interfere with them; on the other hand, we have to help them in morality, in life, in human living, in taking care of the future, in their relationship with their parents, and even in praying and seeking the Lord concerning the one whom they marry not being their choice.

III. All of the elders should be willing to be a slave to the saints; the elders should gird themselves with humility to serve the saints, humbling themselves under the saints—1 Pet. 5:1, 5-6; 2 Cor. 4:5; Matt. 20:26-27:

- A. The slave in Exodus 21:1-6 is a type of Christ, who emptied Himself, took the form of a slave, humbled Himself, and sacrificed Himself to serve God and His people; the Lord came not to be served but to serve—Phil. 2:5-8; Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; Eph. 5:2, 25:

1. Love is the motive and prerequisite for a slave's continued service; the Lord Jesus loved the Father (His Master—John 14:31), the church (His wife—Eph. 5:25), and all the believers (His children—Gal. 2:20b; Eph. 5:2).
 2. All who believe in Christ, belong to Him, and have His serving life should take Him as their pattern—Matt. 20:26-28; Rom. 1:1; Phil. 2:5-8.
 3. We have Christ's life of sacrifice, and His constraining love motivates us to consecrate ourselves to Him to be His slaves, loving God, the church, and God's people—Exo. 21:5; 2 Cor. 5:14; Rom. 1:1; cf. Gal. 6:17.
 4. We need the spirit of a slave, the love of a slave, the obedience of a slave, and the life of a slave; only those who are willing to be slaves can remain permanently in the church life—5:13-16; cf. Phil. 2:17; Judg. 9:13.
 5. A slave should take the position of doing nothing on his own but acting only according to the word of his master and should have his ear open to hear the voice of his master—Exo. 21:6; John 5:30; Psa. 40:6; Isa. 50:4-5; Luke 10:38-42.
- B. We should lay down our human life, our soul-life, for the brothers; the divine life (*zoe*) within us longs to love others and even to die for them—1 John 3:16:
1. Every elder should be a martyr, one who sacrifices his life for Christ; nothing is more noble than living a martyr's life and dying as a martyr for the Lord—1 Pet. 5:1; 4:19; Acts 4:19-20; 8:1; John 21:18-19; Col. 1:24.
 2. To be poor in spirit is to realize that we have nothing, know nothing, and are nothing; to be willing to be nothing is to lose our soul-life and is the real denial of the self on behalf of the brothers for the best enjoyment of Christ as the reality of the kingdom—Matt. 5:3; Gal. 6:3.
 3. We are willing to be nobody and to exalt Christ, who is the only Somebody with the universal preeminence; we like to be nobodies because by being nobodies we are truly one, and Christ is all and in all—Col. 1:18b; 3:10-11.

IV. We need to take care of the saints in everything and in every way for the dispensing of Christ into them:

- A. The elders must minister Christ to meet the need of all kinds of people, contacting and visiting them regularly and inviting them to their home for meals—1 Tim. 5:1-2; 2 Chron. 1:10; Col. 1:28-29; John 12:1-11; cf. Jude 12.
- B. We must contact the saints and minister Christ to them as the sin-dealing life; the life of Christ is a life that deals with sin, a sin-dealing life—Lev. 10:17:
 1. If we are going to minister Christ to a person who has been committing sins, we have to trust in the Lord that we may have the grace with the Spirit to soften his hardened heart—Rom. 2:4; Titus 3:3-4; Heb. 3:13.
 2. We do not need to mention his weakness, fault, or sin, because the life of Christ ministered into him will heal him, killing the germs, destroying the problems, and building up a permanent, lasting oneness of the Spirit.
 3. We have to do our best to recover a fallen saint; even if it would take eight months or a year to get one or two sinful saints recovered, this would be a great thing—Gal. 6:1-2; 1 John 5:16a.
 4. This is to bear away the iniquity and solve the problems of the people of God; furthermore, this kind of ministry by the Spirit and in love will maintain the oneness of the Spirit in the church life—Col. 3:12-15.