

Message Seven

(Lord's Day—First Morning Session)

The Elders' Shepherding One Another, Loving One Another, and Coordinating with One Another to Be a Model of the Body Life

(1)

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:19; 1 Cor. 12:31b; 13:4-8, 13; John 13:1, 14, 34; 1 Pet. 5:5

I. In order to be a model of the Body life, the elders must know the three main principles of living in the Body of Christ:

- A. The first principle of living in the Body of Christ is the relationship between the Head (Christ) and the members; the members must honor and obey the authority of the Head—Col. 2:19; 1:18a.
- B. The second principle of living in the Body of Christ is the relationship between the Body (the church) and the members; the members must live in the divine fellowship to receive the life supply from the Body—1 John 1:3.
- C. The third principle of living in the Body of Christ is the members' service in the Body, which is to supply life to the Body—Matt. 24:45-47; 2 Cor. 3:6.

II. Love is the most excellent way to be an elder and a co-worker; love is not jealous, is not provoked, does not take account of evil, endures all things, never falls away, and is the greatest—1 Cor. 12:31b; 13:4-8, 13:

- A. God is love (1 John 4:8); God does not want us to love with our natural love but with Him as our love; thus, we must keep ourselves in the love of God and be constrained by the love of Christ to lay down our lives on behalf of the brothers (Jude 20-21; 2 Cor. 5:14; 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 John 3:14-16; 4:7-21):
 1. God first loved us in that He infused us with His love and generated within us the love with which we love Him and the brothers—vv. 19-21.
 2. Not loving the brothers is evidence that one is not living by the essence and element of the divine love and is not remaining in the sphere of that love; rather, this one is living in the essence and element of the satanic death and is abiding in its sphere—3:14.
 3. To abide in God is to live a life in which we love others habitually with the love that is God Himself, that He may be expressed in us—4:16.
- B. The elders should follow the pattern of the Lord in John 13 by lowering themselves to serve one another in love, humbling themselves to be a channel of supply to one another and to spiritually wash one another's feet with the water of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), the holy word (Eph. 5:26), and the divine life (John 19:34) for the maintaining of their mutual fellowship in love:
 1. Through our contact with earthly things, we often become dirty; this frustrates our fellowship with the Lord and with one another.
 2. Hence, there is the need of spiritual foot-washing to maintain our fellowship in love; the Lord washed His disciples' feet to show them that He loved them to the uttermost (John 13:1), and He charged them to do the same to one another in love (vv. 14, 34).

3. We must lay aside our virtues, our attributes, our attainments, and our spirituality, humbling ourselves, emptying ourselves, and dethroning ourselves, to minister life to our fellow elders and co-workers, bringing them into intimate contact with the Lord—v. 4; 1 Pet. 5:5; Phil. 2:5-8.
- C. The elders need to love one another, their wives need to love one another, and they need to love one another's children—John 13:34; 1 John 4:10-11, 21; cf. Jude 12a:
1. The elders should pray for one another, have an intimate concern for one another, cherish and nourish one another, and always cover one another, speak well of one another, and never expose one another's failures and defects—2 Cor. 7:2-3; Eph. 1:15-16; Philem. 4.
 2. The elders should never be critical of one another to the other saints; any issues that the elders have in their fellowship should always be kept among themselves and never told to anyone outside of their fellowship.
 3. The elders should shepherd one another by shepherding one another's children; when the parents tried to bring their children to the Lord, His disciples prevented them and rebuked them, but the Lord cherished the parents by laying His hands on their children—Matt. 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16.
 4. There should be no rivalry or competition among the elders; the elders should regard one another higher than themselves, vying to show honor to one another with the Spirit, treasuring the functions of one another, and acting as one person with one mouth in one accord for the shepherding care of all the dear saints—Rom. 12:10; 15:6; Acts 2:14a.
- D. The elders need to beware of ambition, pride, and unforgiven offenses:
1. Whether or not you will be useful in the Lord's hands for the long run and whether or not you will bring in the blessing for a lasting time does not depend on what you can do but on how pure your heart is; to fulfill the obligations of a co-worker or an elder, you need to have a pure heart, purified from any form of subtle ambition in intention, purpose, motive, and action in the Lord's recovery—Matt. 5:8.
 2. Pride means destruction, and pride makes you a top fool; humility saves you from all kinds of destruction and invites God's grace—James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5.
 3. In order to keep a good, excellent, and beautiful order in the church, each of the elders should not regard himself as higher, more experienced, or better than the other elders; to consider that you are superior or that you are the senior one will damage you and hurt others—Phil. 2:2-8.
 4. We should never hunt to be the first in any work for the Lord—3 John 9.
 5. Rivalry in the Lord's work is not only a sign of ambition but also a sign of pride—Luke 17:10; Phil. 1:15; Gal. 5:25-26.
 6. To think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think is another form of pride that annuls the proper order of the Body life—Rom. 12:3.
 7. Wanting to be great and not to be a servant and wanting to be the first and not to be a slave are also a sign of pride—Matt. 20:26-27.
 8. The elders need to forgive one another and seek to be forgiven by one another, letting the peace of Christ arbitrate in their hearts—Col. 3:12-15.

III. The plurality of the elders in Christ's unique Body and the one accord of the co-workers in God's unique work are vital principles of the Body life:

- A. "In Scripture we see that there was always more than one elder...in a local church. It is not God's will that one believer should be singled out from all the others to occupy a place of special prominence, while the others passively submit to his will. If the management of the entire church rests upon one man, how easy it is for him to become self-conceited, esteeming himself above measure and suppressing the other brethren (3 John). God has ordained that several elders together share the work of the church, so that no one individual should be able to run things according to his own pleasure, treating the church as his own special property and leaving the impress of his personality upon all its life and work. To place the responsibility in the hands of several brethren, rather than in the hands of one individual, is God's way of safeguarding His church against the evils that result from the domination of a strong personality. God has purposed that several brothers should unitedly bear responsibility in the church, so that even in controlling its affairs they have to depend one upon the other and submit one to the other. Thus, in an experimental way, they will discover the meaning of bearing the cross, and they will have opportunity to give practical expression to the truth of the Body of Christ. As they honor one another and trust one another to the leading of the Spirit, none taking the place of the Head, but each regarding the others as fellow members, the element of mutuality, which is the distinctive feature of the church, will be preserved" (*The Normal Christian Church Life*, pp. 49-50).
- B. Gideon and his three hundred men are a picture of an overcoming, blended group of co-workers, blended together into one accord to be a barley loaf, signifying the blending of the Body of Christ in resurrection for the defeat of God's enemies and for the benefit of all the people of God—Judg. 6:1-6, 11-35; 7:1-15, 19-25; 8:1-4:
1. God gave Gideon three hundred men and made them one body, who moved and acted together in one accord, signifying the oneness in the Spirit and the living in the Body.
 2. The three hundred men fought the battle and labored, yet the whole congregation chased the enemy and reaped the harvest, signifying that when we overcome, the whole Body is revived—7:22-25; 8:1-4; Col. 1:24; cf. Psa. 128:5.