

Message Eight

(Lord's Day—Second Morning Session)

**The Elders' Shepherding One Another, Loving One Another,
and Coordinating with One Another to Be a Model of the Body Life
(2)**

Scripture Reading: Acts 1:14; Ezek. 1:5-14; Judg. 5:15-16, 31

IV. The distinction between the work of the apostles and the work of the elders is a vital principle of the Body life:

- A. In God's plan He purposed that apostles should be responsible for the work in *different* places, while elders were to bear responsibility in *one* place; the characteristic of an apostle is *going*; the characteristic of an elder is *staying*—Acts 13:1-4; 16:1-4; Phil. 2:19-24.
- B. Brothers such as Peter and John were elders as well as apostles (1 Pet. 5:1; 2 John 1; 3 John 1) because they were responsible not only for the work in different places but also for the church in *their own* place.
- C. Only such apostles as are not traveling *much* could be elders of the church in their own locality (see *The Normal Christian Church Life*, pp. 41-46).

V. In order to be a model of the Body life, the elders, the overseers, should meet every week for prayer and fellowship to care for the flock of God—Acts 20:28; cf. 15:6, 22:

- A. This meeting is the watchtower of the whole church; we should learn to bear the breastplate every day, and then we will learn to discover something among God's people every day—Exo. 28:15-30:
 - 1. If the church has a problem and the elders need to see how the church should go on, they should go to God with much prayer; they need to pray themselves into God, and they need to pray God into themselves.
 - 2. In the presence of the Lord through prayer, they can read the letters on the stones of the breastplate, which is to read all the members of the church.
 - 3. By reading the members of the church, taking the members as the letters of a divine typewriter, God's speaking will come to the elders, telling them what to do and how to do it—cf. Acts 1:14; 6:4; 13:1-4.
- B. If this meeting is strong and solemn before God, all the other meetings will be spontaneously uplifted; this meeting is the center of everything.
- C. No one can go home and tell his wife anything that takes place in the meeting of the overseers; in this meeting we cannot speak lightly, we cannot leak out information, and we should not have unnecessary words—Prov. 11:13; 20:18-19.
- D. Unless all agree that certain matters can be made public, they should not be told to others.
- E. We need to continue working until one day all the brothers and sisters respect the meeting of the overseers; they will know that this day or this half a day is the time the responsible brothers go before God to take care of things.

VI. In order to be a model of the Body life, the elders must be the model and example of coordination; the elders must be coordinated, because no person is capable in everything:

- A. The elders are the source of harmony in the church; if the elders are in harmony, it is impossible for the brothers and sisters not to be in harmony; disharmony in the church is fully caused by the elders—Acts 1:14.
- B. When the elders are together in coordination, they are a miniature of the Body of Christ; the Lord's work is a work of the Body and by the Body for the building up of the Body; therefore, coordination is desperately needed by denying the self, taking up the cross, and losing the soul-life—Matt. 16:18-26:
 - 1. The real coordination means that your portion is here, my portion is here, and everyone else's portion is here.
 - 2. We may come together without much blending because everyone stays in themselves; they are afraid to offend others and make mistakes, so they keep quiet; this is the manner of man according to the flesh.
 - 3. To be blended means that you are touched by others and that you are touching others, but you should touch others in a blending way (through the cross and by the Spirit to dispense Christ into one another for the sake of the Body).
 - 4. Without fellowship and coordination, no one elder should speak and act independently, for to do so would annul the fact that the elders are plural in number.
 - 5. The administration in the church is neither a democracy nor an autocracy; God's presence as resurrection is the authority—Num. 17:1-8.
- C. In their fellowship with one another, the elders need to be restricted in the divine life and by the Spirit in their speaking—John 6:63; Acts 6:10:
 - 1. Those who cover others' sins, defects, and shortcomings enjoy gain and receive blessing, but uncovering brings in a curse—Prov. 10:12; James 5:19-20; Gen. 9:21-27.
 - 2. The elders need to realize that in their shepherding, they have to cover others' sins and not take account of others' evil—1 Cor. 13:4-7.
 - 3. Love covers all things, not only the good things but also the bad things; whoever uncovers the defects, shortcomings, and sins of the members of the church is disqualified from the eldership—cf. Matt. 24:49.
 - 4. The elders should not speak reviling words (to revile is to rebuke or criticize harshly or abusively; to assail with abusive language); those who take in reviling words bear the same responsibility as those who speak reviling words; in order for the church to maintain the oneness, the brothers and sisters must withstand reviling words—1 Cor. 6:10; cf. Num. 6:6; Lev. 5:3.
 - 5. The consciousness of sin comes from knowing God; in the same way, the consciousness of reviling words comes from the knowledge of the Body; reviling words are opposed to the testimony of the Body—1 Cor. 1:10.
 - 6. God will never entrust authority to those who by nature like to criticize others—cf. Eph. 4:29-32.

7. The elders, on the one hand, should have a clear sight over the people with much discernment, and on the other hand, they should be blind spiritually—Isa. 11:1-4a.

VII. Ezekiel 1 presents a beautiful picture of the coordination we need in the church life for God's expression, move, and administration—vv. 5-14:

- A. Each of the living creatures faces one direction (respectively facing north, south, east, and west), and two of their wings spread out and touch the adjacent creatures' wings, forming a square—vv. 9-12.
- B. No matter in which direction the living creatures are moving, there is no need for any of them to turn; one simply goes straight forward; one returns, moving backward; and the other sides move sideways.
- C. In the church service we all need to learn not only how to walk straight forward but also how to walk backward and sideways:
 1. In coordination there is no freedom or convenience; coordination keeps us from making turns—cf. Eph. 3:18.
 2. Before doing anything, we need to stop to fellowship and coordinate with those who serve with us.
 3. Fellowship blends us, mingles us, adjusts us, tempers us, harmonizes us, limits us, protects us, supplies us, and blesses us; the Body is in the fellowship—cf. 4:4; 2 Cor. 13:14.
- D. If brothers with different functions do not know to coordinate, they will compete and even strive against each other, which could result in division—cf. Phil. 1:17; 2:2; Gal. 5:25-26:
 1. When a brother who is burdened for the gospel is functioning, moving straight forward, the brother who is burdened for shepherding should learn to walk backward; the other saints should follow these two, walking sideways.
 2. To walk backward and sideways is to say Amen to another's ministry, function, and burden—Rom. 12:4; cf. 1 Cor. 14:29-31.
 3. If we care only for our particular service and do not have these four kinds of walk, eventually we will become a problem in the church—cf. 3 John 9.
 4. The one who is walking straight forward has a prime responsibility of following the Spirit—Ezek. 1:12; cf. Acts 16:6-10.
- E. We should apply this matter of coordination not only in a particular local church but also among the churches; this means that we are followers of the churches—1 Thes. 2:14.
- F. The result of the coordination of the living creatures is that they become burning coals and burning torches; the more we coordinate together, the more we burn one another—Ezek. 1:13.
- G. Through our coordination together in our fellowship with our precious Lord and the excellent saints, we should aspire to be the overcomers, having great resolutions in heart (making a firm decision to give our lives for the Lord's consummate recovery) and great searchings of heart (devising a great plan for the Lord's ultimate move in His recovery)—Judg. 5:15-16, 31; Dan. 11:32.