

TAKING THE LEAD AS ELDERS AND RESPONSIBLE ONES

(Saturday—Evening Session)

Message Six

Taking the Lead to Know the Body and to Keep the Principles of the Body

Scripture Reading: Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12, 23-27; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4, 16

I. The elders and responsible ones should take the lead to know the Body— Rom. 12:4-5; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4-6, 16:

- A. All the problems of the church today are due to ignorance concerning the Body of Christ—1:17-23:
 1. The biggest problem is not knowing the Body and not caring for the Body—4:4, 16.
 2. The way we behave ourselves in the church depends upon the degree of our seeing the Body—Acts 22:10; 26:18-19.
- B. We need to know the Body in life—1 John 5:11-12; Col. 3:4; 2:19; Rom. 8:2, 6, 10-11; 12:4-5:
 1. The Body of Christ is formed by Christ as life in us; this life mingles with us to become the Body of Christ—1 John 5:11-12; Col. 3:4; 1:18; 2:19:
 - a. The life in us is not a *member* life—it is a *Body* life.
 - b. We are all one in this life; this oneness in life is the mystical Body of Christ—Eph. 5:30.
 2. Knowing the Body in life is the result of our experience of life and spiritual growth—1 John 2:12-14:
 - a. In order to know the Body and touch the reality of the Body, we must progress in the experience of life and the growth of life—1 Cor. 3:1-2; 14:20.
 - b. Only after we have reached the fourth stage in the spiritual life can we know the mystery of the Body of Christ—Eph. 4:12-13, 15-16.
 - c. In order to know the Body and live in the Body, we need to deal with the flesh, the self, and the natural constitution—Gal. 2:20; 5:24; Matt. 16:24:
 - (1) If we still live according to the flesh and in ourselves and serve in our natural ability, the life of the Body, which is Christ Himself in us, cannot be manifested, and we cannot know the Body.
 - (2) Only when the flesh has been dealt with, the self has been abandoned, and the natural constitution has been broken can we touch the reality of the Body—1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 4:4-6.
 3. Knowing the Body is a dealing with individualism; all those who do not know the Body are individualists—1 Cor. 12:14-22.
 4. The proofs that we know the Body are that we are unable to be individualistic, we can discern those who are not in the Body, and we recognize the authority of Christ the Head revealed in the order of the Body—v. 18.
 5. “We have to help the brothers and sisters to know that the life within the Body, the church, is Christ. This requires some who have a special ministry

to do this work...It is a special work to help the brothers and sisters to know the life in the Body" (*The Elders' Management of the Church*, pp. 223-224).

- C. We need to know the Body in practice—vv. 20, 27; 15:58:
 - 1. A local church is an expression of the Body of Christ in a particular locality—1:2; 10:32b; 12:12-13, 20, 27:
 - a. The one universal church—the Body of Christ—becomes the many local churches—the local expressions of the Body of Christ—Rom. 12:4-5; 16:1.
 - b. The unique Body of Christ is expressed as the local churches—Eph. 4:4; Rev. 1:4, 11.
 - c. Every local church is part of the unique, universal Body of Christ, a local expression of the Body—1 Cor. 1:2; 12:27.
 - 2. If we know the Body in life and in practice, then in our consideration the Body will be first and the local churches will be second—Rom. 12:4-5; 16:1, 4, 16.

II. The elders and the leading ones should take the lead to keep the principles of the Body—12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 4:4-6:

- A. The Body is one—Rom. 12:4-5:
 - 1. The Body can exist and survive only in oneness—Eph. 4:3-4.
 - 2. The oneness of the Body is the oneness of the Divine Trinity—John 17:21, 23.
 - 3. The keeping of the oneness is the primary virtue of our Christian walk—Eph. 4:1-3.
- B. The Body of Christ is Christ; thus, if we would be in the Body, we must be made Christ—1 Cor. 12:12; Col. 3:10-11:
 - 1. The church as the Body of Christ comes out of Christ and is one with Christ—Gen. 2:22-23; Eph. 5:23-32.
 - 2. There is only one thing in a believer that forms a part of the Body of Christ—Christ—Col. 1:18; 2:19; 3:4, 10-11, 15.
 - 3. The Body is the corporate Christ; Christ and the church are one corporate Christ, the Body-Christ—1 Cor. 12:12.
- C. The function of the Body is to express Christ—Eph. 1:22-23:
 - 1. The universally great Christ needs a Body to be His fullness, His expression—vv. 22-23.
 - 2. The purpose of the believers being members one of another in the Body of Christ is that we would live Christ and express Him together—Rom. 12:5.
- D. The work of the cross consummates with the Body and ushers us into the Body—Eph. 2:16:
 - 1. The cross leads us to the Body and operates in the sphere of the Body.
 - 2. The self is the enemy of the Body; only when our self has been utterly dealt with by the cross are we able to touch the life of the Body and come to know the Body—Matt. 16:24-25; Rom. 8:13; 12:4-5.
- E. In the Body only Christ is the Head—Col. 1:18; 2:19; Eph. 1:22; 4:15:
 - 1. For Christ to be the Head means that only He has the authority in the Body—Col. 1:18; 2:19.
 - 2. Whatever we think, feel, and do must be under the authority of the Head.

- F. The divine fellowship is the reality of living in the Body of Christ—1 Cor. 1:9; 12:13, 27:
 - 1. The divine fellowship is the flow of the divine life among and through all the members of the Body; the Body in a practical way is in the fellowship—1 John 1:3; Rev. 22:1.
 - 2. Fellowship tempers us, adjusts us, harmonizes us, and mingles us—1 Cor. 12:24.
- G. We should always consider the Body, care for the Body, honor the Body, and do what is best for the Body—vv. 23-27:
 - 1. Whenever we do something, we must have a proper consideration for the Body and care for how the Body would feel about what we are doing.
 - 2. We should be concerned not for our individual profit but for the Body and the building up of the Body—Eph. 4:16; 1 Cor. 12:23-27.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

KNOWING THE BODY

Why must we wait until the fourth stage to speak of knowing the Body? Because the Body referred to here is the mystical Body of Christ, the Church. This Body is formed by Christ as life in each of us, mingled with us. During the second and third stages of our experience of life, we are still living in our own life; therefore, we cannot know this life which mingles with us to form a Body. Only when our self life has been utterly dealt with and we have the experience of passing through the Jordan and entering into the fourth stage shall we be able to touch the reality of this life of the Body and come to know the Body.

Everyone who is saved is a member of the Body of Christ. Is the life in each one of us, then, a life pertaining to the *members* or to the *Body*? The Bible and our experience prove that though each one of us is a member of Christ, yet the life in each one of us is not a *member* life, but a *Body* life. All the members of our body are sharing one life. Each member shares in common the same life together with all the other members, that is, the life of the entire body. For example, an ear, unless it has been cut off, shares the same blood which flows through the eye, the nose, and the whole body. Similarly, in the Body of Christ, when one member is joined to the Body or having fellowship with the Body, his life is the life of the Body, and the life of the Body is his life. It would not do for him to be separated from the other members, or vice versa, because the life both in him and in the other members is of the same Body; it can neither be distinguished nor separated. It is this life which joins us together to become the Body of Christ; or, to say it more precisely and emphatically, it is this life which mingles with us to become the Body of Christ.

We cannot, however, experience this before the difficulties of the self have been entirely dealt with. If we are still living according to the flesh, in ourselves, and serving the Lord in our natural ability, the life of the Body, which is Christ Himself in us, has no way of being manifested, and there is no way for us to know the Body. The more we live by the flesh, the less we feel the need for the support of the Body. If we live by our self-opinion, we find no need for the sustaining of the church. If we serve with our natural ability, we sense no need for the coordination of the members. Only when our flesh has been dealt with, the self-opinion has been broken, and the natural life has been smashed, shall the life within cause us to realize that we are simply members of the Body and that the life in us cannot be independent. Hence, this life requires us to have fellowship with all other members and be joined to them, and it also brings us into that fellowship and the experience of being joined together. It is at this

time that we begin to know a little concerning the Body and become qualified to engage in spiritual warfare.

On one hand, we say that if we want to fight the spiritual warfare and deal with God's difficulty, we must first deal with our flesh, self, and soul life, thus solving our own difficulties; on the other hand, we say that in order to fight the battle, we must first know the Body, and in order to know the Body and live in the Body, we must first deal with our flesh, self, and soul life. Whether, therefore, we speak from the standpoint of fighting the warfare or knowing the Body, we all must first pass through the preceding three stages—coming out of the flesh, the self, and the soul life—in order to attain to the fourth stage of the experience of life.

Knowing the Body is not a doctrine which by speaking and hearing you may understand. Knowing the Body is the result of many past experiences. Having passed through all these experiences, we come at length to know the Body. When we go to visit a place of fame, we travel a certain distance; at length we arrive at our destination and see the object of our journey. So it is with knowing the Body. If we wish to know the Body and touch the reality of the Body in experience, we must walk a certain distance and climb certain slopes in the spiritual life. We must start from the experience of the clearance of the past and pass through the experiences of dealing with sin, the world, and the conscience, climbing diligently from one stage to the next. We must be severe with ourselves in learning the lessons one by one, especially in dealing with the flesh, the self, and the natural constitution. Only when we have experienced the first three stages of our spiritual life and attained to the fourth stage do we naturally arrive at the place where we can know the mystery of the Body of Christ.

PROOFS THAT WE KNOW THE BODY

Since knowing the Body is such a practical thing, how may we ascertain whether or not one knows the Body as yet? We can prove it in at least three ways.

Being Unable to Be Individualistic

The first proof of knowing the Body is that we cannot be individualistic. In all the seven points we have mentioned—in God's plan, in God's creation, in God's redemption, in Christ, in the Holy Spirit, in life, and in fellowship—all is oneness, inseparable and non-individualistic. If we really know the Body and realize the oneness contained in these seven matters, there can be no individualism. Before one knows the Body, he is an individualist and can be individualistic. His life, his actions, his work, and his service are all individualistic. Outwardly he appears to be one with the brethren, but there is no real coordination nor knitting together. Not until he grows deeper in life and knows the Body to a certain extent does he see that being a Christian is a corporate matter and that he cannot go on without fellowship in the Body, nor can he depart from the coordination of the members. The Body of Christ becomes a practical matter to him. In the church life he can no longer serve alone. In the innermost part of his being, he feels that he needs to be a Christian together with others. Not only in great and important actions and work does he need the brothers and sisters, but even in Bible reading and prayer as well, he cannot do without other members. He cannot work without the coordination of the brothers and sisters, and he cannot live without the support of the church. It is at this stage that he is being knit together spontaneously with all the saints to become one Body, no more to be separated. All those, therefore, who can still be individualistic do not know the Body, and all those with a true knowledge of the Body definitely cannot be individualistic.

Discerning Those Not in the Body

The second proof of our knowing the Body is the ability to discern whether others are in

the Body or not. One who has come to know the Body not only lives in the Body in a very practical way, but also can clearly discern whether or not others are living in the Body.

This discerning ability after one knows the Body is absolutely due to the extent of the deep degree of fellowship he has in the Lord. Our fellowship with the Lord grows in depth in proportion to our experience of life, beginning with the initial stage of our spiritual life and continuing through the fourth stage. The degree of depth of fellowship differs greatly as we progress in the experience of life. When two people in different degrees of fellowship in the Lord come together, the one having the deeper experience can go on with the one who has the shallower experience and have fellowship with him, but that fellowship is limited in proportion to the experience of the latter. Should this fellowship go beyond the limit, it will become rather incongruous and incomprehensible to the latter. The one having deeper experience, therefore, can go on with the one who has the shallower experience, but the shallower one cannot go along with the deeper one. This is a great principle in spiritual fellowship.

It is because of this principle that those who are deep in the Lord recognize those who are shallow, but those who are shallow in the Lord do not discern those who are deep. If we have been brought by the Lord to the fourth stage and are having a deep fellowship in this stage, we can by fellowship know whether others also have been brought to this stage and as yet know the Body. But if we have not reached the fourth stage and do not know the Body, we then have no way of discerning others.

Recognizing Authority

The third proof of our knowing the Body is the recognition of authority. Whether or not one knows the Body depends upon whether or not he recognizes authority. Those who do not recognize authority do not know the Body. Knowing the Body and recognizing authority are inseparable. Recognition of authority is related to what we have mentioned regarding individualism in the first proof. If one recognizes authority, he cannot be an individualist. If one wants to determine whether or not he recognizes authority, he simply needs to determine whether or not he is still able to be an individualist. If he is still able to live as an individualist and feels that he can serve God alone without being coordinated with others, he demonstrates that he does not recognize authority, nor has he come to know the Body. Authority can only be manifested in the Body and in the coordination. If one member is individualistic and isolated, he has no relationship with others as far as authority is concerned. But if we have seen that God wants a Body, and that we, being members of this Body, can never go on alone (for once we are alone we are disjointed), we will learn to recognize authority, keep our position in the Body, and coordinate with all the brothers and sisters.

What is authority? Authority is simply the authority of Christ the Head, which is revealed in the order of the Body... All those who have learned their lessons can recognize the authority of the Head over the Body and can rest in their own order in a very natural and satisfactory manner. This has nothing to do with either humility or pride. Coming under authority is a natural procedure, far removed from forcing oneself to submit. This kind of people recognize authority and know the Body, because recognizing authority is equal to knowing the Body. Therefore, this matter of knowing the Body can also be called knowing the authority.

If we do not know our order in the Body, we demonstrate that in our experience of life we have not reached the fourth stage. If in the first three stages we have passed through various kinds of dealings, being earnest and thorough, especially in dealing with the flesh, the self-opinion, and the natural constitution, then the Holy Spirit within will lead us in a very natural manner to know our respective order in the Body of Christ, causing our life and service to

be full of the flavor of the coordination of the Body. Thus the Body of Christ will gradually become manifest among us.

Therefore, if one has a real knowing of the Body, sooner or later he will demonstrate the three proofs which we have mentioned. First, he can no longer be an individualist. Second, he can tell when others are not in the Body. Third, among brothers and sisters he knows clearly, without any special effort, his own order in the Body—who has authority over him, and over whom he has authority, that is, in whom rests the authority of the Head. These three points are proofs of our knowing the Body. (*The Experience of Life*, pp. 317-318, 326-333)