

Message Ten

The Central and Crucial Point of the Recovery Books of Ezra and Nehemiah— the Proper and Adequate Leadership in the Lord's Recovery

Scripture Reading: Neh. 8:1-10; 13:14, 29-31; Matt. 20:25-28; 23:8-13; Heb. 13:7

I. In God's eternal economy and in the Lord's recovery, leadership depends upon spiritual capacity; the leadership is not official, permanent, organizational, or hierarchical—1 Thes. 1:5; 2:1-14; 5:12-13; Heb. 13:7, 17, 24:

- A. The Lord's concept of leadership is the opposite of the natural concept; among God's people there is actually no leadership in the natural sense—Matt. 20:25-28; 23:8-13:
 - 1. In God's New Testament economy, leadership means slavery; anyone who would be a leader must be willing to be a slave—Mark 10:35-45.
 - 2. A leadership is shaped by the growth in life and is an issue of the need; if there is no need, no leadership can be manifested—1 Pet. 5:1-3.
 - 3. In order to set aside the human concept of leadership, God ordained that the leadership among His people should depend always upon spiritual capacity—Acts 13:2, 9; 14:12; Gal. 2:11-14.
 - 4. There is no organized leadership in the Lord's recovery, and there is no unifying organization; instead, there is one Head who gives orders to all the members directly, and there is one organism, the Body—Eph. 1:22-23.
- B. According to the New Testament, the authority of the apostles is spiritual and is in their ministry of the word—Acts 2:42; 2 Cor. 13:5-6; 1 Thes. 2:13:
 - 1. They have no authority in position to interfere with the church affairs; only the word ministered by them has authority—Col. 4:16; Heb. 13:7.
 - 2. The churches follow the apostles because the apostles have the New Testament teaching—Phil. 2:12; Acts 20:17-36.
 - 3. If a church goes astray or is misled, the apostles have the obligation and responsibility to deal with the situation according to God's word, which has authority—vv. 26-27; 2 Cor. 10:6; 2 Tim. 1:13; 4:2.
 - 4. The leadership is produced, strengthened, and restricted in the apostles' teaching—Titus 1:9.
- C. In the New Testament there is one ministry with one leadership—Acts 1:17, 25; 2 Cor. 4:1:
 - 1. Today's Christianity is divided because there are so many leaderships; because the ministry is one, there should not be more than one leadership.
 - 2. There is one leadership since God, the Lord, and the Spirit are all one; the one leadership is for the keeping of the oneness of the Spirit for the Body of Christ—Eph. 4:3-6.
 - 3. The New Testament shows us God's delegated authority in the leading ones in the ministry, an authority that is for building up—2 Cor. 13:10:
 - a. God's delegated authority was in the teaching of the leading ones—1 Cor. 4:17b-21; 7:17b; 11:2; 16:1; 2 Thes. 3:6, 9, 12, 14.
 - b. Teaching the same thing everywhere in every church was the demonstration of Paul's delegated authority—1 Cor. 4:17b.
- D. The leadership in the New Testament ministry is in the New Testament teaching more than in the leading ones of the New Testament ministry themselves—Acts 2:42; 2 Tim. 3:10.

II. The leadership in the New Testament ministry is the leadership of the controlling vision of God's eternal economy, not the leadership of a controlling person; the apostle Paul declared, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision"—Acts 26:19:

- A. God's eternal economy was unveiled through the apostles, but because the believers lost the proper understanding of it, there is the need for it to be recovered by the Lord; God's eternal economy (Gk. *oikonomia*) is His household administration to dispense Himself in Christ into His chosen people so that He may have a house to express Himself, which house is the church, the Body of Christ—Eph. 3:2, 8-9; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; 3:15; Eph. 1:10; 2:21-22; 1 Pet. 4:10.
- B. *Recovery* means the restoration or return to a normal condition after a damage or a loss has been incurred; *recovery* means to go back to God's original intention and standard as revealed in the Scriptures, which is according to the present advance of His recovery of the contents of God's eternal economy:
 - 1. The Lord's recovery is the recovery of Christ as our center, reality, life, and everything in His full ministry of incarnation, inclusion, and intensification—Col. 1:17b, 18b; Psa. 80:1, 15, 17-19; John 1:14; 1 Cor. 15:45b; Rev. 2:4-5, 7, 17; 3:7-8, 12-13, 17-22; 4:5; 5:6; John 6:57; 14:21, 23; 21:15-17; cf. Jer. 32:39.
 - 2. The Lord's recovery is the recovery of the oneness of the Body of Christ—John 17:11, 21-23; Eph. 4:3-4a; Rev. 1:11.
 - 3. The Lord's recovery is the recovery of the function of all the members of the Body of Christ—Eph. 4:15-16; Rom. 15:16; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; 1 Cor. 14:1, 4b, 12, 26, 31, 39; Jer. 31:33-34 (see footnote 1 on v. 33).
- C. This vision must be renewed in us day by day to be the controlling vision of all our life, work, and activity—1 John 1:7; 1 Pet. 2:9; Isa. 2:5; Psa. 119:105; 36:8-9.
- D. For a person to leave the Lord's recovery means that he has never seen what the Lord's recovery is; if we have not seen a vision of the Lord's recovery, we actually are not in the Lord's recovery—Acts 26:13-19; cf. Gen. 13:14-18.
- E. We in the Lord's recovery must have a clear vision of God's eternal economy and then be governed, controlled, and directed by this vision, for we are here to carry out God's eternal economy in His recovery.
- F. The leadership in the Lord's recovery is the leadership of the God-given vision of God's eternal economy that restricts us, directs us, and controls us so that confusion and division are avoided—Prov. 29:18a.
- G. Read the supplement from *The Vision of the Age*.

III. The central and crucial point of the recovery books of Ezra and Nehemiah is the proper and adequate leadership—Neh. 8:1-10:

- A. In the Lord's recovery we have the leadership of the one controlling vision in the one ministry through those who bring in the vision—Eph. 3:3-5, 9; Col. 1:24-29:
 - 1. Paul said that he and his co-workers were "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1); they were stewards, dispensing the heavenly vision of the mysteries of God to the believers; these mysteries are Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ (Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:4; 5:32); this dispensing service, the stewardship, is the ministry of the apostles (3:2, 8-9).
 - 2. "It is sought in stewards that one be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2); like Paul, we need to be "shown mercy by the Lord to be faithful" (7:25b; 1 Tim. 1:12) so that we may be faithful slaves, who habitually give the household of God spiritual food,

ministering the word of God and Christ as the life supply to the believers in the church (Matt. 24:45-47); we want to be those who are faithful over the Lord's work in this age so that we may participate in the Lord's joy in the next age, with the realization that the Lord's appraisal and reward are not related to the size and quantity of our work but to our faithfulness in using His gift to the fullest extent (25:21-23; cf. Rev. 3:8).

- B. Only under the leadership of faithful persons such as Nehemiah and Ezra could Israel be reconstituted to be the testimony of God, the expression of God on earth, a people absolutely different from the Gentile nations; this is a type of what God wants the church to be today—Neh. 13:14, 29-31; 1 Tim. 3:15.
- C. Nehemiah knew that without Ezra he could not reconstitute the people of God:
 - 1. In reconstituting the nation, Nehemiah realized that he did not know God's Word.
 - 2. Ezra was renowned for his knowledge of the Word of God, and Nehemiah was willing to turn to him for help.
- D. According to the divine principle, the proper representation of the Body is always by those who are matched with others—1 Cor. 1:1; Exo. 4:14b-16:
 - 1. To be alone is to be individualistic, but to be sent forth with another is to be sent according to the principle of the Body—Luke 10:1; Acts 13:1-3; Rom. 12:5; 1 Thes. 1:1.
 - 2. To act individualistically is to violate the principle of the Body.
 - 3. In the Lord's recovery there is an urgent need for the true work of building up the Body; however, this building work can be carried out only by co-workers who have been matched—Phil. 2:19-22.
- E. "The Lord has shown me that He has prepared many brothers who will serve as fellow slaves with me in a blended way. I feel that this is the Lord's sovereign provision for His Body, and the up-to-date way to fulfill His ministry"—Witness Lee, March 24, 1997 (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1994-1997*, vol. 5, "A Letter of Fellowship with Thanks," p. 525).

Supplement from *The Vision of the Age*:

CLOSELY FOLLOWING THE COMPLETED VISION OF THIS AGE

In order for us to serve God today, our vision must extend all the way from the first vision of Adam in Genesis to the ultimate vision of the manifestation of the church, the New Jerusalem. This and this alone is the complete vision. It is not until today that this vision has been fully opened to us.

In the National Palace Museum in Taipei, there is a painting on a long scroll called "The River Scene at Ching-Ming Festival." It describes in detail the culture, life, and way of the Chinese people at the time of the painting. It is not enough to see only the first few portions of that long scroll. One has to go all the way from one end to the other end before he can have a clear picture, or "vision," of the entire spectrum of life in China. In the same way we have our own painting, our "River Scene at Ching-Ming," in our service to God. It begins from Adam's vision of the tree of life in the garden of Eden and extends all the way to the New Jerusalem with the tree of life. The New Jerusalem is the last scene of the vision. After that there is nothing more to be seen.

...We are serving God according to the last scene, which includes all the previous scenes...

Since we have the up-to-date and ultimate vision, we should closely follow after it. We are absolutely not following a man; rather, we are following a vision. It is grossly wrong to say that we are following a certain person. We are following a vision that belongs to the present age. It is God's consummate vision.

The Lord's recovery was brought to us through our dear Brother Nee. Because of this he became a target of attack. In 1934 he was married in Hangchow. Some took this opportunity to stir up a storm. He became very sad, so one day I went to him to comfort him, saying, "Brother Nee, you know that between the two of us, there is no natural relationship. I do not take the way that you are taking or preach what you are preaching out of a natural friendship with you. The two of us are widely separated from each other. I am a northerner, and you are a southerner. Today I am taking the same pathway not because I am following you as a person. I am following the way that you are taking. Brother Nee, I would like you to know that even if one day you do not take this way, I will still take this way." I said this because the storm affected some, and they decided not to take this way anymore. In other words, many people were following a man. When the man seemed to have changed, they turned away. But I told Brother Nee, "Even if one day you do not take this way, I will still take this way. I am not taking this way because of you, and I will not leave this way because of you. I have seen that this is the Lord's way. I have seen the vision."

Fifty-two years have passed. Today I do not regret at all what I have done. During the past fifty-two years I have seen the same story repeat itself again and again. Some people came and left. One scene changed, and another scene came along. Since the beginning of our work in Taiwan, during the past three decades we have witnessed some major crises. Even brothers whom I led to salvation and who went through my own training have left the Lord's recovery. The vision has never changed, but the persons have indeed changed, and those who follow the vision also have changed. I would say a sober word to all of you from the bottom of my heart. By the Lord's mercy I can stand here today to bring you this vision. I hope that you are not following me as a person; I hope that by the Lord's mercy you are following the vision that I have shown you...

I would like to relate to you one fact. It is the Lord's mercy that He has revealed to me the vision. I advise you not to follow me but to follow this vision, which Brother Nee and all the servants of the Lord throughout the ages have left to us and which I have handed to you. This is indeed the vision that extends from the first scene of Adam to the last scene of the New Jerusalem. (pp. 48-50)