

## CHAPTER ONE

### AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

In order to understand authority in the church, we must first understand what authority is. Otherwise, we will not understand authority in the church.

What is authority? In the whole universe, nothing is harder to understand than authority. Two things are very difficult to explain in the Bible: glory and authority. Many people can understand holiness, righteousness, and patience; they may comprehend these matters a little. But what is God's glory, and what is God's authority? Man cannot understand them and explain them. God's glory is related to God Himself, while God's authority is related to His government. God Himself is glorious, while His government is executed through His authority. God's authority was the principle by which He organized the universe. He rules the universe through authority. (Today, we will only mention the matter of authority in brief. We will wait for another day to discuss the subject in detail.) How did God create the heavens and the earth? He created by His authority. How did God restore this world? He restored by His authority also. On the first day when God created light, He did not gather all of the electricity together and make light; He only gave a command and said, "Let there be light," and there was light. The second day God said, "Let there be the firmament," and there was the firmament. God commanded with His word, and He acted according to His authority. He did not act according to His power or His ways. His word signifies His command, which represents His authority. Can you see that God only exercised His authority? God created the universe with His authority, and He rules the universe with His authority. Both the beginning of the universe and the maintenance of the universe are the result of God's authority.

In the beginning, after the universe was created, God appointed a cherubim as the archangel to rule over everything. God was over everything, and He ruled over the spirit-endowed animals and over all things through the archangel, the cherubim. Sin is lawlessness, and lawlessness is just the overthrowing of God's authority. Lawlessness was the reason the archangel fell and became Satan and also the reason sin entered the universe. The archangel attempted to overturn God's authority because he desired to uplift himself to become equal with God. Sin entered the world because Eve would not submit to Adam. She acted without Adam's command and ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Although the world is filled with sin today, authority is still the principle of God's government. In many things, we can see God's appointed authority. For example, wives should submit to their husbands, servants to their masters, students to their teachers, citizens to the officers, and subordinates to their superiors. All of this is ordained by God. God desires that man submit to authority because the authorities are not only appointed by God, but they also represent God. This is why Romans clearly says that there is no authority except God. Therefore, no Christian student should boycott classes, no Christian worker should strike, no Christian children should dishonor their parents, and no Christian citizen should engage in a revolution. If anyone does these things, he is not

just overturning those he directly opposes, he is overturning God's authority. God created the universe with His authority, and He maintains the universe with His authority. What is sin? It is lawlessness—refusing to submit to authority. "Sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). Both Satan and Adam overturned God's authority; by this both sinned. Whoever does not recognize authority and submit to authority is a lawless one, and he has sinned.

Many believers have never realized such a wonderful thing as authority. Yet if a man wants to be a good believer, he has to know what authority is. Authority represents God. If one traces authority to its ultimate source, he will see that authority is just God. Therefore, a Christian must not only submit to the head of a nation or to all its ministers, but he must submit even to a policeman on the street because the latter has authority. He represents not only the government, but God as well. You cannot despise him just because he earns a few dollars a month. Authority is something that issues from God. The Bible is very strict about this matter. Paul, Peter, and Jude all said that we should not revile those in high position. Therefore, in our conversation, we cannot accuse or criticize the head of our government. It is difficult for a Christian to be an editor of a newspaper because one can hardly avoid criticizing the superiors in political commentary.

The book of Jude records the incident of Michael arguing with the devil over the body of Moses. Michael dared not revile Satan. He would only say, "The Lord rebuke you," because he was once the subordinate of Satan. There was a time when Michael was under his authority. Therefore, Michael only said, "The Lord rebuke you." He would not speak on his own; he only invoked an authority higher than Satan's—God's authority. He knew what authority was. Therefore, he dared not revile Satan himself.

When our Lord was on earth, He was also fully under authority. During His youth, He was under the authority of His parents, and He kept all the ordinances. He was the Creator. Yet He was limited by every one of man's limitations. He told His mother, "Did you not know that I must be in the things of My Father?" (Luke 2:49). If we were there, we would not have gone home with our parents. But the Lord was different; He went back with them. When He began to work, He was under the authority of the government. During His trial, He was still under the authority of the government. He did not revile the government; rather, He allowed it to do whatever it wanted to do to Him. We can see that no one has ever been as submissive to authority as our Lord.

Once when Paul was judged and stood before the court, he willingly submitted to the authority there. When the high priest's accusations became too much, Paul said, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall" (Acts 23:3). When the others rebuked him for reviling God's high priest, Paul became quiet and allowed them to accuse him. According to the Bible, nothing is greater and more important than the matter of authority.

The other side of authority is submission. Therefore, the Bible mentions authority, on the one hand, and submission, on the other hand. The Bible also pays considerable attention to the matter of submission. Submission and authority are related one to the

other. If a man submits, he comes under God's authority. Otherwise, he overturns God's authority.

In the church God has also appointed His authority, and we should submit to this authority. In the world, in the community, and in our homes, we should submit to authority. God has ordained us to do one thing, which is to submit to authority. We have to lay hold of this one point: whoever wants to overturn any authority overturns God. Do not think that we can submit to God and, at the same time, disobey our parents, husbands, superiors, headmasters, principals, or other men with authority. There is no such thing. If we cannot submit to God's appointed authority on earth, we can never submit to God. In the same way, those who cannot submit to authority in the church cannot submit to God.

I am afraid that many brothers and sisters have come to meet with us for different reasons. Some have come for the purpose of practicing mutual love and mutual care. This, of course, is very good. But we have to realize that we are not without authority among us. There is authority among us, and we ought to submit to authority. Christians often think that once they leave the denominations, they can act as they please. They think that we are all the same and that no one can rebuke anyone else. They think that they can be lawless Christians. Actually, we have to realize that if we leave the denominations just because we want to be free from any kind of control or domination, this kind of presumptuous leaving of the denominations is a big mistake. Those who come to meet with us have to know that we are more bound by authority.

There are three reasons that a man leaves a denomination: (1) He is disappointed in the denominations. For example, he may expect to become a pastor. However, when his wish is not fulfilled, he disagrees and leaves. (2) He does not have freedom in the denominations. He feels that he is limited and controlled by men, and he thinks that by leaving the denominations, he can be a free evangelist. He will not have to take a salary and be controlled by men, and he can act according to his own wish. Actually, before God there is no such thing as a free evangelist. Today, we only have the Body life. We are restricted by the church and do not have any freedom of our own. (3) He sees the divisiveness in the denominations and that divisions are of the flesh. *At the same time*, he may see the Body of Christ and realize that everything he does has to be limited by the brothers and that he should learn to be a member in the Body. (Yet many people do not see the Body. They have merely left a big denomination and become a small denomination in themselves. They have not seen that they should be restricted among the brothers and sisters.)

Of the three kinds of people mentioned above, only the third kind is right in God's eyes. God's goal is to have the Body life and to take away all independent movement. God has His authority in the church, and He desires to manifest His authority in the church. Therefore, every member should learn to submit to God's authority and be restricted by the other members. Therefore, on the negative side, every brother should see how wrong denominationalism is, but on the positive side, he should see that there are no independent activities in the Body life.

## **THE AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH**

How should authority in the church be assigned? God has appointed the elders and apostles to be the authority in the church. In each respective church, God establishes elders; among all the churches, God establishes apostles. The authority of apostles is for overseeing all the churches, while the authority of elders is for overseeing each respective local church. In order to manifest His authority in the church, God appoints elders in each of the local churches to represent His authority. Another name for elders is *overseers*, which bears the connotation of authority. The Bible tells us to submit to these ones because they represent authority. All authorities are there to represent God. Therefore, the authority of the elders is for representing and expressing God's authority. It does not matter if an elder is a good representation or a bad one. One should submit to the elders as long as the authority is from God. Whoever does not submit to the authority of the church has lost his standing as a brother.

In the early meetings of a local church, there are no elders. Later, some who bear some resemblance of an elder are gradually manifested. Eldership and overseership are two designated names for the same office. An elder refers to the person, while an overseer refers to the function of such a person. Moreover, in the Bible, elders are always plural in number. There is never just one elder, because it is necessary for the spirits of two to three persons to receive the same leading in order to be assured that what they are doing is right. Individualism is not a scriptural principle, and it easily leads to errors.

## **HOW GOD APPOINTS ELDERS**

How does God appoint elders? In an assembly, there are always a few brothers whose growth is more obvious than the others'. They bear a more excellent testimony than others and are desirous of picking up the work of an elder. They also bear some resemblance of an elder. As a result, the apostles appoint them to be elders to oversee the brothers. The church in Ephesus gives us an example of this. In the beginning, there were only saved believers in Ephesus; no elders were appointed. But after the apostles went there the second time, we see elders there. The first time Paul went out from Antioch, his intention was merely to save some people. But later, he appointed elders in every city (Acts 14:23). Before a meeting is properly established as an assembly, it is still feeble in its walk, and there is the need for others to support it. But after some are able to take up the responsibility of overseership, the apostles appoint them to be elders.

At times, the apostles could not appoint elders personally; they then sent others to do the appointing. Timothy and Titus were this kind of people. According to the direction of the apostle, they went to different cities and appointed elders, who then bore the responsibility of the local churches.

Since the appointment of the elders is for the purpose of representing God's authority, the elders should understand that Christ is the Head and that the church is here to express His heart's desire. The elders should inquire concerning the Lord's desire. Only then will they be able to express Christ's authority in the meetings. Through these ones, God makes the decision to move or stop. Therefore, all the brothers should learn to

submit to these ones. Of course, no one likes to see anyone lording it over him. Although the elders should not lord it over us, we should submit to the God-appointed authority as our part. God has ordained two things in eternity: authority and submission. But many believers do not like to submit to authority. The world is filled with lawlessness today. I am afraid that the mystery of this lawlessness has become manifest in the church. Parents are criticized at will by children, and husbands submit to the authority of their wives. Headmasters and teachers are attacked, opposed, and elected by students, and workers strike at will. Such things are happening frequently. Now is the time that lawless ones will appear as the Bible predicted. If we are not careful, and if we refuse to submit to authority, we are not following Christ but following Antichrist instead. If we cannot submit to authority, how can we expect others to submit to authority? When those who receive a salary from the so-called churches come to rule over us, we cannot submit to them. But if God has placed a certain person in a certain position and has charged us to submit to him, we should submit accordingly. We should obey the ones who watch over our souls as those who will render an account (Heb. 13:17). Therefore, submission to the elders is something that no one can overturn.

## **THE TITLE AND THE APPOINTMENT OF ELDERS AMONG US**

Let us summarize: (1) The elders are the overseers; (2) the eldership is plural in number; and (3) the elders are appointed by the apostles or the ones sent by the apostles. We know that there are no apostles today and that there is no one sent by the apostles. How then can elders be produced? In the course of our discussion in the brothers' meeting, concerning biblical questions among the co-workers, we have agreed on the following judgment, according to the Bible and the teaching of the Holy Spirit: presently, due to the fact that there are no apostles, there is no possibility for official elders to be appointed. We cannot confer on anyone the title of an elder. If the title of an elder is conferred, we would have to ask where are the apostles who appointed these elders? However, we are not saying that no one is doing the work of an elder. Although we do not have the official title of an elder, we can find men in all the places who resemble elders and who are doing the work of an elder. They serve as elders in an unofficial way. How can this group of people be raised up to do the work of an elder? Who appointed them to be "unofficial" elders? They have been appointed by "unofficial" apostles.

Today, it is a fact that we do not have apostles among us. However, there are a group of people who are doing the work of the apostles, such as preaching the gospel and establishing churches. They readily admit that they cannot match the apostles in their holiness, power, victory, and work. They are merely doing a small part of the work of the apostles, perhaps only a thousandth part. Today, God is working through this group of people in the same way that He was working through the apostles in the early days. Formerly, the apostles established churches everywhere. Today, this group of people are establishing churches everywhere. We admit that they are far inferior to the apostles and are not qualified to be called apostles. Yet we cannot deny that they are doing part of the work of the apostles. This group of people are the apostles God uses today in this time of the church's degradation.

God saves sinners and gathers believers through this group of people. They are the most suitable group to lead those who are under their care to respect certain ones in their meetings and consider them as the “elders” among them.

We are merely helping the brothers to submit to these ones. We have to be careful. If we are not careful, we can easily fall into the Catholic system of apostolic succession or the teaching of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which asserts that bishops have apostolic authority. Our judgment is not only according to the scriptural teaching, but this judgment fully matches our experience. For example, Brother Chu is working in Pu-tung and has saved some people there. If he asks Brother Hwang to go there to appoint elders, Brother Hwang would not know whom to appoint because only Brother Chu knows the local situation. He has been continually leading the believers and feeding them. Only he understands the spiritual condition of the local brothers and is concerned about their souls. Only he can lead them to submit to the ones who act as elders among them. At the same time, the rest of the brothers should learn to accept God’s appointed authority.

We cannot refuse submission to authority. We have to ask God to humble us. If we cannot be an “elder,” we should submit to others who are the “elders.” We should learn to be submissive persons. If our flesh has been deeply judged, we will consider submission to be a good thing and an easy matter; we will consider submission to be something sweet. As long as the flesh is not judged, the church will never be proper. If the brothers deal with the flesh properly and are willing to submit, no difficulty will arise. Therefore, those who are doing the work of the apostles should lead the brothers to acknowledge the ones who should be appointed as “elders” and help the brothers submit to these “elders.”

## **THE QUALIFICATIONS OF AN ELDER**

In the Bible, there are clear guidelines concerning the qualifications of the elders. They must be able to rule themselves and manage their own family, and they must know how to deal with outsiders. They must have much assurance concerning God’s truth and must be able to teach it. We will list the qualifications as follows:

(1) Ruling themselves. Why does a person have to rule himself? When a person cannot rule his own temper, he cannot manage the church of God. Subduing one’s own heart and spirit is the most difficult thing to do. If a man cannot submit to the authority of Christ, he cannot make others submit to Christ’s authority. In 1 Timothy and Titus, the words concerning an elder not being one who drinks excessively, or who strikes others, etc., refer to the aspect of the self-control of an elder. In short, an elder must be one who can rule himself.

In addition, an elder must be the husband of one woman. All those who have had concubines cannot be an elder because this means that such a person cannot control himself.

(2) Managing one’s own house. If a man cannot manage his own house, he cannot manage the church. If he cannot manage his own children, how can he manage the brothers? The eldership is a position; it is not a gift. Teachers, shepherds, and evangelists are gifts. But eldership refers to a



person's position in the church. Therefore, such a person must be experienced and capable. His house is his testing ground. If he cannot make his wife and children submit to him at home, and if he cannot be a good husband or a good father, he cannot be a good elder in the church. In dealing with his own wife and children, God puts him to the test to see if he can deal with the brothers and sisters.

At the same time, God also uses our job and the things related to our office, school, and hospital as a test. If a man is efficient at his business, in managing a school, in conducting himself in his office, and in directing his children and servants, he can manage the church well. If a man cannot manage these things, he cannot possibly manage God's church in a proper way.

(3) Having a good public testimony. An elder is a person who represents the church. Sometimes an elder has to represent the assembly to deal with outsiders. If he does not have a good testimony, the whole church will be slandered. When a person has a bad reputation in public testimony it does not necessarily mean that he is bad. However, if a person has a good reputation in public, it surely means that he is somewhat good. Therefore, a good reputation is important, while a bad name does not necessarily mean much. In this world, men primarily say bad things about others; few say good things about others. The Chinese say that those who are in the public eye are "under ten eyes and under ten fingers." Few people say good things about others. Most people tend to destroy the reputations of others. If men can find something good to say about a person and give good marks to him, then he surely must be somewhat good. If a greedy, self-centered, and defiled son of Adam can call a Christian a good man, then the Christian surely must be good.

(4) Having much assurance in the truth of God. Since the work of an elder is related to the church and not to a worldly organization, he needs to have much assurance in God's truth. To do other things, it is not absolutely necessary to have a good reputation or to have much assurance in the truth; one does not need to be apt at teaching the Bible to do other things. Yet an elder must be apt to teach the brothers and sisters. An elder is a doorkeeper of the church. What happens when all the brothers want to preach? The elders must consider who should preach and who should not preach. They should find out who are flippant ones, undesirable ones, and incapable ones. They should be able to render the brothers much encouragement as well as discouragement. If they do not have much assurance in the truth, they will think that all the brothers are equally good and that everyone can preach. In this way, they will be men of no discernment.

At the same time, an elder must be one who can differentiate and judge. He should be able to judge the kind of teachings that should be introduced to the church and the kind of teachings that should be rejected. If the elders do this, the brothers will not become confused in the messages they hear. (For a detailed discussion of the above qualifications of an elder, see 1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1.)

## **THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ELDERS**

(1) The elders are the overseers. The Bible calls the elders the overseers. The work of an overseer is to oversee, which is to observe from above. In particular it means to detect the

dangers that are coming to an assembly and to be aware ahead of time of the dangers that may come to individual brothers or to the whole assembly. Among us, we have many brothers and sisters. It is hard to avoid problems or weaknesses or to be free from sin, discord, dishonesty, failure to repay loans, disgraces, or scandals in dealing with outsiders. When these things happen, the responsible brothers or those who are doing the work of an elder should step forward to deal with such matters. They should not allow the leaven to enter the assembly. These unofficial elders should deal with all these shady matters among the brothers. This is their responsibility. They should come to your house to ask about these matters and deal with them. When they come into your house, you should submit to their decision because their decision is the Lord's decision; their authority is the Lord's authority.

The authority asserted by the Catholic Church is too much. Its failure lies in its outward practice. However, the inward reality of their proposal is correct. The problem is that they only have the outward form without the inward reality. If they had the inward reality, they would be right. They would have the proper authority if they were joined to the source in exercising their authority.

(2) The elders express opinions and make judgments on various matters. Only the elders can express their opinion concerning certain matters. No brother can stand up in the meeting at will to express his opinion concerning what to believe and what not to believe. If any brother does such a thing, he is overturning the authority of the elders. Therefore, only the elders have the authority to judge, utter declarations or announcements that are directed toward the public, and make judgments concerning disputes in truths; this is not the work of ordinary brothers. An ordinary believer can only speak on his own behalf. An elder can speak on behalf of the whole church. This is because he is under the Head and is speaking on behalf of the church. This relates to the order in the church.

(3) The elders manage the matters and meetings related to the sisters. In the Bible, we see only brothers as elders; we do not see sisters as elders. The place God has assigned for the sisters is to be under someone's ruling; they do not have a place in ruling over others. God does not allow women to manage the church. In the Bible, there are deacons and deaconesses, but there are no female elders. This shows that in managing the affairs of the church, God wants the man to be the head of the woman. Therefore, the sisters should learn to submit by the grace of God. If there are some among the sisters who can serve others, they can do the work of this service. But if anything needs to be decided, the decisions should be made by those who are responsible as the elders. For example, if some among the sisters want to be baptized or be received for the bread breaking meeting, the sisters can testify for them, but the final decision rests with the elders. Some sisters may have the gifts and may be respected by other brothers and sisters, but the question of position and authority is more important in the Bible than the question of gift, and the question of God's truth is more important than the question of ability. Suppose the sisters would like to have a sisters' meeting at 4:30 p.m. on Saturday. The sisters can express their opinion and check with the responsible brothers. If the brothers think that this is proper, they will not stop it and will allow the sisters to meet accordingly. If the sisters do this, they are not acting independently but properly and in oneness. This shows that their meetings are not private meetings but meetings of the church.



Why do the sisters have to follow this procedure? The reason is that the sisters tend to be emotional and are easily deceived. The elders are there to protect the sisters. If everything concerning the church is decided by the brothers, the sisters will be protected and preserved in their covered position, and they will avoid many problems.

Every problem that arises is corporate in nature and is not the problem of an individual. The elders have a responsibility to properly oversee the matters related to the sisters. While the sisters are standing on the ground of submission through submission to Christ's authority, the elders should not shun their responsibility through fear of offending the sisters or of arousing suspicion. Of course, there are limits to the authority of the elders. But we must not forget that Barak was before Deborah and became the head covering to Deborah (see Judg. 4:4-7).

(4) The elders should manage the matters related to the church meetings and preaching. The elders should control and forbid errors that may arise in the church. For example, in the meeting, some brothers may stand up to say some improper words. Those who do not have the gift of teaching desire to speak many times; it seems as if they are addicted to preaching. Those who have the gifts, on the other hand, do not like to speak and would rather hide themselves. Therefore, when the elders notice that men who are not suitable to conduct Bible study or to preach are trying to do these things, they should stop them. If some brothers pray, preach, or give announcements in an improper way, the elders should notify them after the meeting, explain their mistakes to them, and forbid them from doing similar things again. If the elders do not do this, these brothers will go on with their behavior. You may think that you should be patient with these ones. But the weaker ones will not be able to stand them. For this reason, you have to take up the responsibility to notify them.

Please understand that there is not a strict organization among us. Even when believers who have not left the denominations request to be received, we receive them. Our door is wide open. Everyone in the denominations who is saved can come and break bread with us. Suppose that some of them purposely try to entice some of our brothers and sisters to join them in their Bible study in their homes, after breaking bread with us, or suppose that they gather some of the brothers and sisters who are meeting with us to listen to their opinionated doctrines. When this happens, the church will be divided through their speaking. Whenever things of this nature occur, any brother or sister should report it to the "elders." We must wait until the responsible brothers announce in the meeting that certain people will have meetings in their homes before we can all go. Otherwise, these kinds of meetings in the homes should not be held. It does not mean that we have no personal liberty. But we should submit to God's authority and control and enjoy the liberty of the limitations of the meetings. Our familiarity with certain persons often brings in leaven through conversations with them, and a sect is formed which endangers the whole lump. Therefore, the brothers have to pay attention to this matter, learn to submit to authority, and not do things that the elders have not endorsed.

(5) The elders make decisions concerning the Lord's Day meeting and write letters of recommendation. Whether the Lord's Day meeting should be held in the morning or in the afternoon is a matter to be decided by the elders. The writing of a letter of recommendation is also not something that every brother can do. Sometimes, you may write a letter recommending a person to the brothers in another locality. However, only letters written by the elders can

represent the church. This shows once again that the elders represent the whole church. They are responsible for overseeing the church and keeping the church from trouble. Therefore, the elders have to learn to serve properly and exercise their authority properly, while the brothers have to learn to submit.

(6) The elders are the patterns. After the elders are appointed and acknowledged, they should be respected by the brothers. At the same time, the elders themselves should take up their responsibility with fear and trembling. They should consider themselves as having no authority. The Bible tells us these two aspects of the truth in a wonderful way. To the brothers and sisters, the elders represent God's authority, and everyone should submit to them. But to the elders themselves, they have no authority. After hearing about the authority of the elders, are we not afraid that the elders may misuse their authority? What would happen if they began to lord it over us? But God tells the elders, "Therefore the elders among you...shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not under compulsion but willingly, according to God...nor as lording it over your allotments but by becoming patterns of the flock" (1 Pet. 5:1-3). The elders do not have any authority in themselves; they only have the authority of God. If you are in Christ, understand God's heart, and are able to tell others about God's heart, you are the true authority. The elders should not lord it over the flock. They should be careful to submit to God's authority and be a pattern to the flock. Only then can they demonstrate their authority to the brothers and sisters. On the one hand, the brothers should submit to Christ's authority, which the elders represent. On the other hand, the elders themselves should realize that they have no authority in themselves and that they are there merely as patterns. (Concerning the authority of the elders, please see the books of 1 Timothy, Titus, and Acts 20.)

(7) Accusations against the elders. The books of Timothy tell us, "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses" (1 Tim. 5:19, KJV). In this matter, we should pay attention to two points. First, there must be a written accusation; words from the mouth do not count because many times words alone are groundless and can easily be denied or changed. Second, there must be two or three witnesses; the testimony of one is not reliable. In the Bible, two or three witnesses constitute the word of testimony. The apostles and those whom they have specifically assigned should be responsible for handling such accusations. I would draw your attention again to the fact that because there are no official apostles today, there are no official elders. There is only a group of people who are doing a part of the work that the apostles did at the beginning. Since they are responsible for appointing elders, they are also responsible for dealing with elders.

## **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AN ELDER AND OTHER ELDERS OF OTHER LOCALITIES**

God's gifts transcend local boundaries, but position is strictly related to the locality. God's gifts, such as the evangelists, shepherds, and teachers, can function anywhere because these gifts are given by God to the whole church (Eph. 4), and they are for all the local assemblies. No worker can rule over any one particular congregation, as pastors do today in the denominations. In the Bible one cannot find such a thing. If you can edify the believers in Shanghai, you can also edify the believers in northern Kiangsu. If you are a teacher, you can teach the Bible in Shanghai and also teach the Bible in northern Kiangsu, Nanking, or Tsinan. You will never lose your ability as

a teacher by moving to another place. If you are an evangelist, you can preach the gospel in Shanghai, and you can preach the gospel in northern Kiangsu, Nanking, or Tientsin. If you cannot preach the gospel in Shanghai, you cannot preach the gospel anywhere else. It is impossible to find a person who cannot work in one place but can work in another place. This is not a question of knowledge. It is absolutely a question of whether or not one is a God-appointed gift. If you have the gift, others will be saved and helped through you, no matter how much knowledge you have. The amount of knowledge you have will not make any difference. What is a gift? A gift is an ability that God gives to the Body of Christ through Christ the Head. This ability does not change. I can illustrate this with an example. Suppose that there is a concrete worker in Shanghai. If he is in Nanking, he is still a concrete worker. Suppose that there is a tailor who is very skillful at sewing. Whether he is in Shanghai or Peking, he can still make a good dress. In the same way, circumstances will not change a gift.

But the same is not true with the eldership. The eldership is absolutely a question of locality. A person who is an elder in Shanghai is not an elder in Nanking. Because of differences in spiritual conditions, backgrounds, circumstances, educational standards, and the habits of different local assemblies, a man can be an elder in Shanghai but may no longer be able to serve as one in northern Kiangsu. A man may be an elder in the village, but not an elder in the city. This is absolutely a matter of locality. The gifts in the Bible are for the whole church, while the elders in the Bible are for the local churches. Therefore, those who have the gifts should not remain in one place all the time; they should instead go to other places and distribute their gifts to others. An elder should take responsibility in his own locality all the time. Consider the illustration of the concrete worker again. Suppose that you are a foreman among numerous concrete workers in Shanghai. If you move to Nanking, you will still be a concrete worker by profession, but you may not be able to be a foreman anymore. Doing concrete work is your ability, and your ability remains with you even after you have moved to Nanking. But the foremanship is a position; when you move to Nanking, your position as a foreman is gone. In the same way, there is a difference between office and gift in the Bible. An office and a position is for a local church, while a gift is not just for a local church. However, the mistake most easily committed is that when an elder in one locality moves to another locality, he asserts his own opinion there as well. This is wrong. Do not think that just because things are done one way in northern Kiangsu, it has to be done the same way in Shanghai. The educational standard and means of communication, etc., in northern Kiangsu may be different from those in Shanghai. You cannot use the same method in different places. However, gifts are different; if you are a gift in northern Kiangsu, you are one in Shanghai also.

## **QUESTIONS**

*Question:* If we announce some unofficial elders among us, those in the denominations will say that we have become a denomination because we have brought in such a matter. How should we answer them?

*Answer:* First, let me ask what you have left behind when you leave the denominations. If you do not know what you have left behind, you will become another denomination. According to my personal understanding, when we leave the denominations, we leave two things behind: (1) We leave the divisive sects, such as the different denominations under the different names, and (2)

the main thing we leave behind is the pastoral system. What is the pastoral system? It brings the intermediary priestly class of Judaism to Christianity. Both Catholicism and Protestantism have done this.

In the so-called Christian countries, Catholics have brought in the Judaistic teachings. In Judaism, there was the priestly class. The priests acted as an intermediary class. If a Jew wanted to see God, he had to pass through the hand of the priests; there was no way for him to go directly to God. The book of Judges records a certain man of Mount Ephraim by the name of Micah who made an ephod and invited a Levite to be the priest in his house (17:1-13). This is a clear example. What is Judaism? It is being kept away from worshipping God in a direct way. Between God and man, there was the need of priests to serve as an intermediary class. The Israelites had to go through the priests before they could see God. The same is true with Catholicism. God is on one side, and man is on the other side. There is no direct fellowship between them, and the priests serve as a medium in the middle. In the Catholic Church, every time there is a mass, the priests are there. Every time there is any preaching, the priests are responsible for it, and every time there is prayer offered, the priests are the ones to do the work. In this way, men are brought back to the situation of the Old Testament.

Protestantism is divided into state churches and private churches. The Anglican Church in England serves as an example of the state churches. In the Anglican Church, there are the clergy and the laity. The bishops, archbishops, and deacons are all called priests, just as they are in Catholicism. This has likewise brought in Judaism. God is on the top, and the people, who are called the laity, are on the bottom. In the middle are the clergy, who call themselves priests. The laity can come to God only through this class of people, who monopolize all spiritual matters.

Among private churches in Protestantism (such as the Episcopal and Methodist), there is also the intermediary class. God is on the top, and the members are on the bottom. In between the two there are pastors. The pastors are the intermediary class, who replace the believers and monopolize all the spiritual matters that belong to the members. For example, administering the Holy Communion, baptism, and preaching are all done by pastors. They do everything for the members and become intermediaries between God and man. From Judaism until today, including all the denominations in Protestantism, God has always been on the top and man has been down on the bottom, with an intermediary class in between. Although the names may have changed, nothing has changed in substance.

Is this what we see in the New Testament? Peter said that we are a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9). In Revelation, John also said that every Christian is a priest (1:6). Therefore, there is no need for any man to be a medium between us and God. In other words, we are all “pastors” and “priests.” Hebrews 10 says that by the blood of Jesus, we have a new and living way to come boldly to the Holy of Holies (vv. 19-20). There is no need of an intermediary like the ones in Judaism, Catholicism, or Protestantism to help us draw near to God. Today we are not like the high priests in the Old Testament, who could go into the Holy of Holies only once a year. Daily, through the blood of the Lord, we can come to God. Every one of us is a priest, and every one can communicate with God boldly all the time. What then is Christianity? What is the new covenant? It is to annul the intermediary class. Every believer can now be directly responsible to God. Never consider the workers among us to be a kind of intermediary class like the ones in the

private churches. There is no such thing. Every one of us can go to God. The workers do not occupy any position in the church; God is directly related to the church. Therefore, leaving the denominations is leaving two things behind: (1) the divisions, and (2) the pastoral system.

One Westerner once asked me why I am against pastors. I told him that I am not against pastors but rather the “pastoral system.” If a man has the gift of a pastor, we cherish it. But whether or not a person has the gift of a pastor, we should not make him a priest and bring in a disguised priestly system. Even if one among us has the pastoral gift, we should not consider him as our priest or mediator.

I am afraid that in leaving the denominations some brothers consider that they are free from every control of man. They may think that since they have left the denominations, they can be lawless and free, doing anything they want. If this is the way you are, I have to call you by another name: you have not left the denominations; you have left the church. You are not freeing yourself from the denominations but from authority. We have left the denominations in order to leave the divisions and pastoral system. The purpose is not that we would become individual, isolated believers. Rather, we have the God-ordained authority with us. Therefore, submitting to man is submitting to God’s authority, and submitting to the brothers is submitting to God’s authority.

The Gospel of Luke records the Lord Jesus as saying, “Did you not know that I must be in the things of My Father?” (2:49). He had to be in the things of the Father but, at the same time, He went back home with His parents. This is the submission of the Lord Jesus. If it were us, we would not have done this. If we had said that we had to be in the things of our Father, we would not have returned with our parents. However, this would only have been a proof of our disobedience. Being in the things of the Father includes being under the authority of the Father, which also includes submitting to God’s authority in the parents. Therefore, when we submit to men, we are submitting to authority. Do not think that by leaving the denominations, we can become free and lawless and that no one can rule over us. If we think this way, we are more evil than the most evil persons in the world, and we become worse than those who have not left the denominations, because those who have not left the denominations are still under man’s authority even though they do not have the God-ordained authority. But we do not even submit to God’s authority. The Bible does not have denominations, but it has elders. We are giving up the denominations, which are not found in the Bible; we are not giving up the elders, which are found in the Bible. Just because the denominations have elders, we should not say that we can give up the scripturally-based eldership because we have left the denominations. There are brothers in the denominations; we cannot say that we are giving up the brothers just because we have given up the denominations.

***Question:*** Are the elders appointed by God?

***Answer:*** Acts 20 clearly says that the Holy Spirit has placed men to be overseers over the flock. Therefore, elders are appointed by God. What the apostles did merely expressed the intention of the Holy Spirit.

*Question:* How should the elders be supported? Is the support for the elders the same as the support for the workers?

*Answer:* There is no difference between the two. In the Bible, there is no such thing as a worker giving up his salary and becoming a special supported class. Although Peter gave up his fishing, Paul remained a tentmaker. There is no difference between a worker with an occupation and a worker without an occupation; there is no distinction of class. If an elder is gifted and is so busy with the affairs of the church that he has no more time to take up an occupation, he should receive double honor from the brothers. If an elder is not that busy, he can hold a job to support himself and also take care of the church affairs. This is true not only with the elders but with the workers as well. Those who are gifted can hold a job, and they can also do their work, as long as their job does not interfere with their work. I also hope that I can do my work while holding a job. I am not saying this because I am poor and have nothing to eat. Living by faith is not something that makes one holier than others. Yet some consider this to be something extraordinary and super-spiritual. The reason Christians pay too much attention to those who live by faith is that the faith of Christians has become degraded. Actually, there is nothing strange about this matter. The very early churches did not consider this to be something strange. Actually, every believer should have faith, and every person who is holding a job should live by faith. I have often thought that those brothers who are engaged in business have a greater faith than I have. If they do not have faith, how can they open a shop, put in capital, and order the merchandise? How do they know if people will buy the merchandise?

In the Bible the elders are brothers, the gifted ones are brothers, and those who do not have any gift are brothers also. Among the brothers, there are only distinctions between gifts and positions; there is no distinction between having and not having a job. Such a distinction in support is a concept brought in from the denominations. Those who hold such a concept have forgotten that Paul was a tentmaker. For this reason, we should completely eradicate this concept from among us. If a pastor in a denomination, on the one hand, serves as a pastor and, on the other hand, holds a job, others will misunderstand him. But among us, we should not have such a concept. This kind of concept is a poison left behind by the pastoral system of the denominations.

The Catholic Church says that after a man is ordained, he becomes holy. He will have an indelible mark on him, and it will distinguish him from other, common people. But Catholicism has forgotten that the apostle Paul continued to hold a job of making tents. We workers can give up our job when we are busy and go back to our jobs when we have time. There is nothing wrong in doing this.

*Question:* Can an evangelist start a school by himself?

*Answer:* Yes, he can. A person can start a business or a school by himself. Paul might have started a business of tentmaking. But he did not involve all the believers in Ephesus in this tentmaking business.

It is wrong for a church to run a school, hospital, or biscuit factory. It is all right for some brothers to join together to start a school, hospital, or biscuit factory. But it is a big mistake if we run a school under the name of the meeting in Hardoon Road. It is not wrong for a few brothers to start a school together.

*Question:* Is it true that in the whole Bible, pastors are mentioned only in Ephesians 4?

*Answer:* Yes, this is true. The word *pastor* or *shepherd* (as related to the church) is mentioned only in Ephesians 4. [Editor's note: This is according to the Chinese Union Version Bible.] Pastoring or shepherding is a gift and is for the building up of the whole church; it is a gift that God has given to the whole church. The elders, on the other hand, are appointed by the apostles for the purpose of managing a local church (known as the so-called congregation in the denominations). Yet the apostles cannot appoint gifts; they have never appointed any prophets, evangelists, or shepherds and teachers, because these are gifts given by God. Suppose I am the owner of a factory. I can appoint foremen and assistant foremen because these are positions. But I cannot appoint anyone to be a concrete worker, because a person may not know how to do concrete work. Therefore, an apostle can only appoint men to offices, that is, to the eldership; he cannot appoint gifts, such as prophets, evangelists, or shepherds and teachers, because the matter of gifts is entirely in God's hand. God appoints them, and God gives these gifts. No one can usurp or fight for them. If you see someone who is good at preaching, and you want to be the same, it cannot be done. This is because 1 Corinthians 12 says that gifts are not appointed by men and are not obtained according to human will; they are distributed to all respectively even as He purposes (v. 11). Pastoring is a gift of the Holy Spirit and is given to the church by God through the Spirit. If we see anyone with the gift of pastoring, we cherish it. But we cannot ordain a man to be a pastor, just as we cannot ordain a man to be a concrete worker. We must not force the pastors to become priests, the intermediary class. If anyone does this, we will surely oppose it. But this does not mean that we are opposed to the pastors or shepherds that are recorded in the Bible. We are opposed to the "pastoral system" that is in the denominations. This is why we have to be careful not to bring the things invented by the denominations into our midst.

*Question:* Can elders be elected by the believers?

*Answer:* No. Elders cannot be elected, because they are appointed by the apostles. Presently, they are appointed by those who are doing the work of the apostles. The Bible never uses the method of election. Only once in Acts is the word *appoint* used; it is used in the appointment of the first seven deacons (6:3). Actually, these deacons were first tested by the apostles and then appointed.

*Question:* There are so many pastors in the denominations. Can it be possible that not one of them is a genuine pastor?

*Answer:* As far as their ordination is concerned, no human-ordained pastor is a pastor. As far as their gifts are concerned, it is possible that among those who are ordained by men, some have the gift of pastoring. No one can become a pastor through human examination, graduation from



seminaries, ordination, or invitation. There has never been such a pastor in history. If he is truly a pastor, he must have received the gift of pastoring from God.

*Question:* How does the pastoral gift build the church?

*Answer:* The word *pastor* has been used only once in Ephesians 4 [according to the Chinese Union Version Bible]. In other passages, the word is translated “shepherd.” The words *pastor* and *shepherd* are the same word in the original language. The meaning of this word is to feed and guard. Those who are given the gift of pastoring should be able to lead and feed the believers. They should be able to lead others to grow step by step, discuss and study the Bible with others, and pray with others.

An evangelist is one who leads others to salvation and brings in men. A teacher is one who can release the truth and make others understand and see the truth in a clear way. A pastor or shepherd is one who leads others to advance; he does not necessarily have to be able to preach, though some are indeed able to preach. The function of the pastors is to feed the believers.

*Question:* Can a woman have the pastoral gift?

*Answer:* Gifts are given without distinction of sex. A woman can also have the pastoral gift. The daughters of Philip had the gift of prophecy.

*Question:* Can sisters testify and preach the gospel to unbelieving men?

*Answer:* The Bible has not clearly said no to this, but neither has the Bible encouraged it. There is no clear pattern in the Bible for us to follow. Personally, I think that if the sisters do anything beyond their covered position, they have gone beyond their limit. The covering that I am speaking of does not refer only to a piece of cloth on the head (which is also an important sign) but to the hidden and submissive position which God has allotted them. Even brothers should have their heads covered before God. The brothers cover their head under Christ. Christ is the head of everyone, while the man is the head of the woman (1 Cor. 11:3). Therefore, a woman has two heads. On the one hand, a woman covers her head in Christ and, on the other hand, she covers her head through the man. The covering on a woman’s head symbolizes her submission under the authority of the brothers and her not acting in an independent way. The sisters can do many good and precious things. But they have to take a few brothers as their covering so that both glory and shame will fall on these brothers. Therefore, it is improper for sisters to go to a place to do some pioneering work alone.

A certain Western magazine once reported the words of a sister: “I used to think that I had to do everything by myself and that I had to charge forward alone. When I became sick and returned to my home country, I discovered that everything I had done was wrong, and I confessed my mistakes to God.” Many people think that since Deborah was raised up from the Israelites, there could be one today. But we have to remember that not every Israelite woman was a Deborah! Moreover, even Deborah took Barak as her head. All genuine women want to do this. All genuine women honor what God has done, and they honor the place and order that God has placed them in. Because I am not a sister, it is somewhat difficult for me to say these words. If I

were a sister, I would be more free to say this. Sisters should always stand in a covered position. This does not mean that sisters should not work. It merely means that God has appointed the brothers to be the protector of the sisters. The ones who assume the headship should be the brothers; all the glory and shame should go to the brothers. This does not mean that the brothers covet the sisters' glory. Rather it means that the brothers protect the sisters and maintain the order God has established.

It is a woman's nature to stand in a non-prominent position. This is why Paul reminded the women that their nature tells them this. If a wife sits in the place of a husband and becomes the husband's head in a family, how can that family stand? It will surely not stand. If a church acts this way, will it still be a church? The virtuous woman recorded in Proverbs labors, works, and hopes that her husband receives the glory in the gate of the city.

The most precious thing is to be submissive to authority. The relationship between a servant and his master, a child and his parents, a wife and her husband, a citizen and his country, and a woman and a man should be one of submission to authority. God pays much attention to the question of authority, while Satan pays much attention to power. If a man only asks if a thing can be done and does not ask if a thing should be done, he has fallen already. Therefore, every sister should stand in the position of submission to God's authority. The question of authority is the greatest and most crucial one. Unfortunately, it has produced little effect on the brothers and sisters.

Therefore, according to the light of the Bible, sisters should not open their mouth in the church meetings. If they want to testify or preach the gospel to individual men or to groups of men, they should do it in a covered position.

*Question:* Can one person possess two gifts?

*Answer:* Yes, he can. Sometimes a person can even possess three gifts.

*Question:* Was Peter the first pastor?

*Answer:* We can say that.

*Question:* Why did we not mention the matter concerning the elders earlier or even later than now? Why do we have to mention it now and stir up misunderstandings that we have become a denomination by having elders?

*Answer:* The question of elders was mentioned two to three years ago. At that time, no one was raised up who resembled an elder. That was merely a transitional period. The Bible says that a novice should not be an elder. There must be a transitional period. Now the time has come, and we can bring up the matter of the elders. If we go on without any elders raised up among us, we will become a lawless body.

*Question:* Among us, we may have men who resemble the elders, but they do not have the official title of an elder. This is like having no official title of apostles at the present time. Is this right?

*Answer:* This is right. If someone asks you what we are and whether or not we are the church in Shanghai, how should you answer? You should say that we are not the church in Shanghai. If someone asks if we are the church on Hardoon Road, you should say no. We should not admit that we are the church in Shanghai, because besides us there are the Shou-jin Chapel, the Mu-re Chapel, the Chin-lin Chapel, etc. There are many saved ones who are not meeting with us. We do not admit that we are the church on Hardoon Road either, because there may be many people who live on Hardoon Road who are not meeting with us. If we call ourselves the church in Shanghai, we have to include all believers in Shanghai. Otherwise, we cannot be considered the church in Shanghai.

They may then ask you what you are if you are not the church. We admit that we are not the church; we are merely those who meet on the ground of the church. I can illustrate the point by an example. The temple in the Old Testament was built in a splendid way. Later, it was burned, and not one stone was left on top of another. Suppose a man in Jerusalem at that time decided to erect a tent on the foundation of the burnt temple. If others were to ask him what this was, he would say that it was not the temple: rather, it was only a tent on the ground of the temple. The same is true with our meeting today. If others ask us what we are, we have to answer that we are not the church; we are not the church in Shanghai. We are a group of brothers and sisters in Shanghai meeting on the ground of the church. We are those who meet according to the principle of the church as revealed in the Bible. We are those who intend to stand on the ground of the church to maintain the ground of the church. The temple is now in ruins and burned, and we are only a tent. All those who have eyes can see the degradation of the church today; outwardly, everything is in ruins. We cannot and dare not call ourselves the church in Shanghai. We only desire to meet on the ground of the church based on the light we have received concerning the church. We are not the church in Shanghai, but we are meeting in a way that maintains and upholds the church in Shanghai. We are standing on the same ground that the church stands on, yet we are not the very church itself. Therefore, even though we are not the temple, we are a miniature of the temple, and we are here to express the life of the temple. This is why the elders and deacons among us are non-official. The reason we have elders and deacons is that, even though we admit that we are a small tent, we are, nevertheless, erected on the ground of the temple. Therefore, we have to do everything according to the pattern of the temple.

At the time of the Babylonians, the temple was destroyed. After Nehemiah and Ezra returned from their exile and rebuilt the temple, the old men who had seen the glory of the first temple knew that the rebuilt temple could not match the first one. But men like Nehemiah and Ezra still offered sacrifices according to the former principle of offerings even though the temple was no longer the same as the first temple.

The temple mentioned in John 2 was not the first temple; it was merely a rebuilt temple. Yet the Lord Jesus drove out the cattle and sheep from that temple and said that it was "My Father's house" (v. 16). The Lord said that because He was standing on the ground

of the temple. Although the temple was no longer the same as the first one, the ground of the temple was the same, and the principles of the temple remained. Although the outward structure may collapse, the ground remains, and upon this ground, there is still the possibility of maintaining the principle of service to God on a small scale.

There were twelve tribes in the nation of Israel. Yet God established Jerusalem as the place He chose to put His name. All the tribes had to come to Jerusalem three times a year to offer sacrifices and worship God. Later when Rehoboam was king, the nation was divided into Judah and Israel. The nation of Judah had two tribes and continued to worship God in Jerusalem. The nation of Israel had ten tribes, and Jeroboam was their king. Nevertheless, they obeyed God's command to go to Jerusalem three times a year to worship Him. However, Jeroboam was afraid that journeying to Jerusalem three times a year would turn the people's heart to the king of Judah, causing them to rebel against him and leave him. Therefore, he set up an altar in Bethel—the place which men considered the best—made a golden calf, and charged the people to worship there instead of going to Jerusalem to worship. At that time, a young prophet rebuked him, prophesied, and gave a sign by putting forth his hand to the altar. When Jeroboam heard the word of the prophet, he put forth his hand and tried to lay hold of the prophet, but his hand dried up, and he could not pull it in again to him (1 Kings 13:3-4). In the end, he had to allow the people to return to Jerusalem. From this we see that *although the people were divided outwardly, the principle of service to God should not be lost*. The human Bethel can never replace God's Jerusalem. The outward law cannot replace God's ordination. No political division can change God's principle. Therefore, no outward destruction, failure, or desolation can ever change God's ordained principles.

When the Israelites divided the land, nine and a half tribes remained on the west side of the Jordan in the land promised by God, while two and a half tribes preferred to dwell on the east side of the Jordan. Under the hand of Joshua, the two and a half tribes finished the division of the land. Then they erected a great altar by the river Jordan. When the whole congregation of Israel heard this, they went up to attack the two and a half tribes because they thought the two and a half tribes were trying "to build an altar...besides the altar of the Lord our God" (Josh. 22:29). Not only is it a sin to turn away from following Jehovah, it is a sin even to offer the burnt offering, meal offering, and peace offering on an altar other than the altar of the Lord. The two and a half tribes answered that they had no intention of erecting another center of worship, and that they were not erecting a new altar but were merely making a testimony. Only the altar before the tabernacle of God is the proper place of worship (Josh. 22). The two and a half tribes represent those who have failed spiritually. But the ones who have failed cannot change the principle of worship that God has ordained. Although, after the separation, Israel was no longer one nation outwardly and no longer the original kingdom of David, all of the Israelites still had to worship in Jerusalem. Therefore, although there is division and failure in Shanghai, although there is division and failure in the churches everywhere, and although there is desolation outwardly, we still have to worship God by standing on the ground of the church. This is a matter of principle. This is also the reason for us to appoint the elders. This is why we have elders among us today, but these elders are not official ones. We do not have elders like those in the denominations.

*Question:* Will God take back the gifts at times?

*Answer:* The gifts are given by God, and God never takes back the gifts. We can have three different attitudes toward God's gifts: (1) we can misuse them, like the Corinthians; (2) we can bury them, like the one in Matthew 25; and (3) God can stop the gifts. Through man's unbelief, some gifts such as the gift of prophecy become no longer available.

*Question:* Can we ask for the gifts?

*Answer:* Yes. First Corinthians 14 clearly says that we should pursue the gifts.

*Question:* What does it mean to misuse the gifts?

*Answer:* God does not take back the gifts. At the time of judgment, God will ask us how we have used our gifts. If a man misuses his gifts, he is using them according to his human way or for his own glory, as the Corinthians did. Yet God does not take back the gifts, because the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29). Suppose a sister preaches the gospel in a meeting, and a man is saved. One may ask that since a sister should not preach to a man, why is she able to lead a man to salvation? I can tell you that this is indeed an exercise of the gift, but it is a misuse of the gift. It is God's gift that is saving men. Sometimes, a gospel preacher goes to a wrong place to preach the gospel and saves a few men. Yet this also is a misuse of the gift. Those who bury their gifts are usually those who have only one talent. The more they consider that their gifts are insignificant, the less they exercise them. The gifts stop because the believers do not have the faith to use them.

*Question:* Can a man know whether or not he has a gift?

*Answer:* Sometimes he can and sometimes he cannot, but others know. In most cases, others know through the fruit of his work. The Corinthians knew in themselves that they had the gifts. Some feel sorry for Moses because he did not know the glory that was shining on his own face. Yet it was fortunate that Moses did not know, for had he known that his face was shining, the shining would have gone away. Therefore, we should allow others to find out if we have the gifts.

*Question:* If misusing or burying the gifts will bring God's judgment, is it better that we do not ask for the gifts lest we fall into judgment?

*Answer:* The more gift a believer has, the more chance there is for him to receive the reward. The more reward a believer has, the more glory he will receive. If a believer has never been dealt with, it is better that he does not ask for gifts lest he fail in the future judgment. But those who know God should ask for more gifts, so that they can use them for the church and not for themselves. I do hope that God will raise up more gifted ones.

*Question:* How do we know that we are misusing the gifts?

*Answer:* In the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, there are three kinds of gifts—five talents, two talents, and one talent. They were given to three slaves, who were told to do business. The gifts are the capital. When the slaves took the gifts to do business, they could make a profit or incur a loss. If they made a profit, their master would not suffer. If they incurred a loss, their master would suffer. Brothers who have the gift of evangelism can surely save people. But if their works are not done according to God's will and if they are doing these for self-glorification, to meet some personal needs, or for the sake of going along with human affections, they will lose their spiritual power and will be left only with the power of their gifts. Today, many of God's servants are leading conferences, reviving men, helping men, and saving men. Among them, some are indeed gifts given by God. You may find out that although they have the gifts, they do not want to stand on the ground that God wants them to stand on. You may be amazed that they can still save, help, and revive men when they themselves are not standing on the ground God wants them to stand on. Actually, this is a misuse of the gifts. They can save and revive men because they have God's gifts. It is God's gifts that are saving men, reviving men, and helping men. This kind of misuse of gifts is very dangerous. Today God does not interfere and does not say anything. But when we go before the judgment seat, He will reckon with us. As in the parable mentioned in Matthew 25, He will reckon with us according to the amount of gifts that He gave us as capital and according to the way we did business in the world with these gifts.

We must never think that, as long as we have a fine and thriving work and others love to listen to us, we are right. We have to beware of misusing our gifts. Many times, it is possible for a believer to preach out of a desire for fame and praise from man. But the conscience knows that this is wrong. Once a brother went to a place to preach the gospel. When he returned, I asked about his work. He told me that he went and came back, and a few persons were saved. Yet he still did not know if it was God's will for him to go. This is to misuse the gift. God has entrusted the gifts in your hand, and He will not reckon with you until the time of the judgment seat. Yet we should consider God to be reckoning with us every day. If we think that He will not reckon with us until many years afterward, we may use our gifts in a careless way.

A gift is a kind of spiritual ability, capacity, power, and knowledge which enables one to work. For example, I may be very good at calligraphy. Whether or not I have a proper fellowship with God, my calligraphy remains good. If I am in God's will, I write good calligraphy; if I am not in God's will, I still write good calligraphy. The same is true with the gifts. When we are in God's will, we can help others when we exercise our gift. When we are not in God's will, we can still help others when we exercise our gift. (Of course, there is a question of whether or not such help indeed has any spiritual value to it.) But we will reckon with the sin of misusing our gifts when we face the judgment seat. This is why we have to be careful that we do not work for glory, praise, men's approval, fame, profit, or to gratify ourselves. If we do, we are misusing the gift.

*Question:* Does every believer have a gift?

*Answer:* Yes. Every believer has at least one talent. There is no slave who does not have any gift. First Corinthians 12 says that to one is given one kind of gift and to another is

given another kind of gift. Therefore, everyone has some gift. Every regenerated person has a gift. But not everyone has the same kind of gift. According to Ephesians 4, there are only five kinds of gifts that build up the whole church. But as to the gifts that are for the growth of a local church, we have those mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. Not every believer has the gifts of Ephesians 4, but they may have one of the gifts mentioned in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12.

*Question:* How can we know that we are not misusing the gifts?

*Answer:* In order not to misuse the gifts, we have to accept the cross of Christ. The cross of Christ, the flesh-severing cross, is the basis of everything. The reason there are problems in all the local assemblies and in the church is that the brothers and sisters are not willing to accept the cross of Christ. Everything that issues from the resurrection of Christ is for the Body of Christ; every problem in the church arises when men try to drag out things that belong in the grave. If we are willing to accept Christ's cross and are willing to allow it to do a deeper work in us, removing our ambitions and grand aspirations, we will not misuse our gifts. For example, yesterday I mentioned the matter of the elders. Who are the ones who are not qualified to be elders? They are those who, upon hearing about the matter related to an elder, expect to be an elder themselves. Who are the ones who are qualified to be elders? They are those who, upon hearing about the matter related to an elder, consider themselves unworthy to be one. Those who aspire to be the authority are not qualified to be the authority; authority can never be placed in their hand. Only those who do not aspire to be the authority are qualified to be the authority.

*Question:* Why does 1 Timothy 3 say that one has to aspire to be an elder?

*Answer:* It is because many people may withdraw. Today there are many people who are like Peter, who refuse to be washed. Both fleshly boasting and fleshly withdrawal are of the flesh and are two sides of one truth. First Timothy 3 says that a novice should not be an overseer lest he become proud and fall into the snare of the devil. The Lord is telling these ones not to aspire to be an elder lest they fall into the devil's snare through their pride. But to those who consider themselves useless, who realize the weakness of their flesh, who consider themselves unworthy, and who are withdrawn, the Lord encourages them by telling them that overseership is a good work and is to be desired. God tells those who volunteer to be elders that they are not worthy and encourages those who are worthy but withdrawn to be elders. May all the brothers see that there are two sides to the flesh; either it boasts of itself or it withdraws. We must never consider the boasting of the flesh as a kind of courage and the withdrawing of the flesh as a kind of humility. When we consider our own virtues, we become proud; when we consider our own weaknesses and failures, we dare not do anything and withdraw. We should not confuse boasting with courage and withdrawal with humility. Actually, real humility is not considering one's own goodness or weakness. This is why someone has said that real humility is not considering oneself. Boldness is being strengthened in the Lord and looking at the Lord only. This is why Ephesians 6 says that we have to be empowered in the Lord. All those who carefully weigh themselves and become confident in themselves are boastful; they are not bold. On the one hand, we must look to the Lord and, on the



other hand, not look to ourselves. In this way, we will be bold as well as humble. This is victory. Many fail because they look at either the powerful side of the flesh or the weak side of the flesh. As a result, they become either a person who boasts in the flesh or a person who withdraws in the flesh. The above discussion touches a principle. This principle can be applied not only to the appointment of the elders and the deacons but to other daily affairs as well.

*Question:* Do the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers in Ephesians 4 refer to people or do they refer to things or titles?

*Answer:* Ephesians 4 refers to people, while 1 Corinthians 12 refers to things. Ephesians 4 says that God gives some apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers; these are five kinds of people. First Corinthians 12 says that God gives some the ability to prophesy or speak in tongues. Paul was a gift given by God to the church; he was an apostle. But Paul also had other gifts, such as prophesying, speaking in tongues, and healing.

To my observation, Brother Chi Yung-tung looks very much like a pastor. Let me take him as an example. God has given a gift to the church in Soo-chia-tsui, which is Chi Yung-tung. The whole church in Soo-chia-tsui should then receive Brother Chi as a gift given to them by God. At the same time, Brother Chi has the pastoral gift. His gift is the gift of a pastor. If anyone asks what gift Paul had, we would answer that he had the gift of an apostle. But if anyone asks what gift God has given to the church, we would answer, "The apostle Paul." All five kinds of people in Ephesians 4 are gifts given by God to the church, and they are for the whole church. First Corinthians 12 mentions the various gifts that God gives to individual believers; the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 are for the local churches. Paul was a gift given by God to the whole church. Ephesians 4 mentions men as gifts given by God to the church for the purpose of building up the whole church. Therefore, the gift which was released through Paul has benefited men of all times and places; his work did not pass away; it remains even until today.

*Question:* How do we deal with lawless brothers in the meetings?

*Answer:* If a man continually disturbs the meeting but does not have obvious sins that deserve excommunication, we should deal with him in a severe way according to the teaching of Romans 16:17. We should mark him and not communicate with him. "Now I exhort you, brothers, to mark those who make divisions and causes of stumbling contrary to the teaching which you have learned, and turn away from them." We should not place the affairs of the church in the hands of these ones. Whatever the church is doing, these ones should be excluded from it.

*Question:* How should one deal with an elder who is involved with some problems?

*Answer:* The eldership in the Bible is plural in number. If one elder is involved with some problems, the other elders should deal with him.

*Question:* If the elders are unofficial, does this mean that we can accuse them only in an unofficial way?

*Answer:* That is right. If one elder is wrong, the other elders can deal with him. This is why the Bible never uses the word *elder* in a singular sense; it is always *elders*, plural. Therefore, this does not present too much of a problem.

## **DEACONS**

Deacons are the serving ones in the Bible. In the church there should not only be responsible ones like the elders, but the church should also have serving ones like the deacons. The church needs men who give proposals and who manage and oversee the brothers, like the elders. The church also needs dedicated serving ones to take care of all the miscellaneous affairs, like the deacons. The ones who make decisions, manage the church, make proposals, oversee, and observe from top to bottom are the elders. The ones who execute the affairs, run errands, take orders, and help others in being directed are the deacons. God needs the elders to be the doorkeepers, and He needs the deacons to work and run errands for the believers. For example, the money of an assembly is kept by the deacons, while the authority to use the money is with the elders. All matters related to the brothers are directed and decided by the elders and announced by the deacons. The elders are the foremen, and the deacons are the workmen. The deacons do not have any proposals of their own; they only work according to the direction of the elders. The deacons are those who help the elders accomplish things. (Concerning the deacons, much is recorded in the books of Timothy and Titus.) I hope that some brothers among us would be raised up to be the deacons, and I hope that some sisters among us would also be raised up to be the deaconesses. The Bible records deaconesses. The deacons and deaconesses are dedicated to the handling and management of affairs.

## **QUESTIONS**

*Question:* Is the selection of the deacons by way of voting?

*Answer:* No. During the early years, there were not many scrolls with which to write everything down. The selection of deacons in the time of the apostles was not by a vote of the majority. The deacons were first approved by the apostles and manifested to be deacons in a most natural way. The scriptural way of selecting the deacons is to allow the deacons to become manifest in a natural way. Those who were qualified to be deacons were selected by the church and acknowledged by the apostles. We should practice the same today.

*Question:* Why was the selection of Matthias by the way of casting lots?

*Answer:* The Holy Spirit had not yet descended, and the disciples did not know which one should fill the place. They selected two and decided which one of the two should fill up the apostleship.

*Question:* Does not Acts 6 say that the disciples appointed seven deacons?

*Answer:* Acts 6 does not say explicitly that these seven were the deacons. It only shows us that they were doing the work of deacons. Therefore, we can only say that they were the deacons by the things they did. When Acts mentions Philip, it says that he was one of the seven; it does not say that he was one of the seven deacons. Therefore, although there are deacons in the Bible, it does not say clearly that the deacons are elected. I think that the matter of selection of the deacons should be treated in the same way as the appointment of the elders, that is, they should be appointed by the apostles and sent by the apostles. We should be careful not to investigate what the Bible has purposely left blank and unexplained.

*Question:* When should elders and deacons be appointed?

*Answer:* The sooner they are appointed, the better.

*Question:* If a local meeting has only three brothers, who should be the elders and deacons?

*Answer:* The only thing that can be done is for these few brothers to function as elders and deacons at the same time. In the whole Bible, only the book of Philippians gives a complete description of the church, which includes the saints, the elders, and the deacons. It tells us that the church is composed of the saints, elders, and deacons: "Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and deacons" (Phil. 1:1).

*Question:* Why does 1 Timothy say that a man must be approved before he can be appointed a deacon?

*Answer:* The deacons are those who are dedicated to handling affairs. The deacons are always the younger ones. They may act in the flesh. Therefore, they must first be tested a few times. They must first be sent to handle affairs a few times, before one can decide if they are qualified to be a deacon.

*Question:* If a few brothers begin to meet in a place, what should they have first, deacons or elders?

*Answer:* They should first have responsible ones and then the bread-breaking meeting. They should first have elders and then deacons. This is the teaching in Acts. Antioch is one example. There should at least be one brother who can take responsibility before the bread-breaking meeting is initiated. Otherwise, the bread-breaking meeting will not be proper. Moreover, from the beginning there should be the teaching of submission to the elders and the teaching of submission one to another when the meeting starts. Otherwise, in a meeting of five people, the five will become five big denominations. When this happens, these five may still remember the Lord at the bread-breaking meeting, but they will not be able to discern the Body; they will not consider themselves the Body of Christ. They will care only for themselves and take only themselves as the

head. Therefore, we should learn to submit to the elders and also learn to submit to one another.