

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE PRACTICE OF FELLOWSHIP

### THERE BEING ONLY ONE CHURCH

The Bible says that there is only one church. The church which Paul was in is the same church that we are in. The church that we are in is the same church that the apostle John, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and all regenerated persons are in. The church in the Bible is not separated by time, locality, or race. There is only one church, which exists at all times and in all places. There are not two churches. The Bible only recognizes one Body of Christ and never recognizes two, because there is only one Head. Although there are many members in the Bible, the Body is singular. Therefore, all saved persons past and present, here and elsewhere constitute one church and one Body. If this is the case, why are there “churches” in different places? Since Ephesians mentions one Body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God, why does the Bible mention churches also? Is this not a contradiction? Why is it that, on the one hand, there is only one Body, but on the other hand, there are many churches? This shows us that there are different views in the Bible concerning the Body of Christ and the local churches. Strictly speaking, there is only one church, in the same way that there is only one Body of Christ. However, in each locality, there may be as many as three to five thousand believers, or there may be as few as two or three, as described in Matthew 18. As long as there is a group of believers meeting together in a city or a town, that group of believers constitutes the church in that city or town. Therefore, in the original language, the Bible clearly shows us that the church is “the church in such-and-such place.” The word *in* indicates that there is only one church, which is scattered and sojourning in different places. The Bible calls the meeting of those who sojourn and meet together in one place a local church; it serves as a miniature representation of the unique church.

We treasure very much the words in Romans 12 which say, “We who are many are one Body.” “We” includes all the believers. There is only one bread. Therefore, do not think that we have one bread in Wen-teh Lane and another bread in Gordon Lane, and yet another in Peking or Changchun. Materially speaking, in the whole world there can be hundreds and thousands of loaves, but before God there is only one bread, spiritually speaking. However, we cannot participate in only one bread, because we are limited in our flesh by time and space. If it were possible, all the believers in the world would break only one bread. Although brothers can break bread in Changchun, Peking, Hangchow, or Nan-shu-chow, there is only one bread before God. The one bread that we touch on the Lord’s Day evening in Shanghai is the same bread that Brother Luan touched in Hangchow and that Brother Hwang touched in Nan-shu-chow. The bread that is broken in every place and the Body of Christ that it represents is the same bread and same Body of Christ in every place. God has only one church in the world. This one church is scattered *in* all the cities and villages. These scattered churches in the cities and villages are called the churches in those cities or the churches in those villages. For convenience’ sake, we call the churches in all the cities and villages the churches of God. Actually, the churches of God are just the church of God. The Lord charges us to break the bread every Lord’s Day in order to remind us that the churches in the various localities are not independent churches but are joined as one church. This is why we have the symbol of

the one bread. The one bread reminds us that although there are many believers in all places and at all times, and although there are many local churches, we are still one bread.

I do not like to use political figures for illustration, because the subject of politics is too fashionable. But I have to use one today. The Nationalist Party of China respects Mr. Sun Yat-sen to the utmost. All government offices have the picture of Mr. Sun. There may be thousands and tens of thousands of pictures of Mr. Sun, but the person they represent is the same. In the same way, we may be breaking thousands of loaves of bread, but the Body of Christ, which these loaves represent, is just one, and the Lord, whom these loaves represent, is just one. Therefore, the miniature churches in all the places are representations of the whole Body of Christ. When we see a local assembly with fifty people meeting, we should realize immediately that they represent all the believers at all times and in all places. Today in Gordon Lane there are over fifty people meeting. If in Bao-shan there are only seven or eight people meeting, the bread which they break before the Lord at the Lord's table includes Peter, Paul, Martin Luther, Wesley, and others; it also includes you and me. Therefore, whether it be the meeting in Bao-shan, Hangchow, Soo-chia-tsui, or anywhere else, all these meetings represent the Body of Christ. This is why no church can act independently. All the moves must take care of the whole church. While you are sitting in a meeting, you should not see only the brothers and sisters next to you but the whole Body of Christ. What you are doing affects not only the one or two hundred people who are meeting with you; it affects the whole Body of Christ because we only have one Body. Although you are only a member, what you do is what the Body of Christ does. One member can drag down the whole Body.

Most of the Chinese who live in Southeast Asia are from the provinces of Fukien and Kwangtung. Everywhere in Southeast Asia, whether in a village or in a city, one can find Chinese Associations. The number of members in these associations may vary, but if an association receives respect in one place, it means that the whole Chinese race receives respect in that place, and if an association is persecuted in a place, it means that the whole Chinese race is persecuted in that place. Just as these associations represent China in Southeast Asia, we represent the church in our respective localities. Since this is the case, we can see how intimately related the conduct of an individual church is to the conduct of the Body of Christ. We can also see the relationship between the various assemblies. Although you are a miniature church and a small community within a certain boundary, God intends that this miniature church, this small community, express the large-scale church, the large community. Therefore, what we are doing in the small local churches represents and includes all that the Body of Christ does. For this reason, we have to be related to other local churches and the brothers and sisters in the other localities.

### **RECEIVING A PERSON INTO THE BREAD-BREAKING MEETING**

If a brother has been received into the bread-breaking meeting, he is not received into the assembly in Hangchow, Tientsin, or Soo-chow but into the churches of God, the (outward) house of God. When we receive a brother in Hangchow, we are receiving him

on behalf of the churches in Tientsin, Shanghai, Soo-chow, and other places. If we intend to receive a person in Shanghai and think that the brothers in Hangchow and Peking may not receive him, we should not receive him either. We cannot act independently. If you know that the thing you are about to do in your locality will be considered inappropriate in other localities, you must not take care of the views of the few in your locality and do it anyway. If you do it, you are not discerning the Body of Christ. If what we do individually cannot represent the brothers in Shanghai, we should not do it. By the same token, if a matter cannot pass the unanimous approval of the whole church, it is not a move of the Body but an individual move. In the Bible there is only the move of the Body; there is no move of individuals.

If a brother wants to be received into the bread-breaking meeting, we must examine him carefully because we are receiving him not only on behalf of the brothers in Shanghai, but also on behalf of the brothers meeting in Tientsin, Hangchow, Wenchow, and other places. However, when a brother goes to another locality to break bread, the brothers in the locality should not examine him further. All he needs to do is to bring a letter of recommendation with him. The brothers in the other localities should believe what the brothers in Shanghai have done and receive him into the bread-breaking meeting based on the letter of recommendation. We have to be very careful in what we do in order to care for the brothers in the other localities.

## **RECOGNITION OF THE GIFTS**

Furthermore, if the brothers meeting in Soo-chia-tsui in northern Kiangsu recognize a certain person as having a certain gift, whether a pastor, teacher, or evangelist, he should be able to be a pastor, teacher, or evangelist in Shanghai as well. The brothers in Shanghai should recognize the gift of such a person also. A gifted person does not lose his gift by moving from one locality to another locality. Therefore, a local assembly has to recognize the gifts that are recognized by another local assembly. If God has given a person the pastoral gift, he will be recognized as a pastor in northern Kiangsu, and we should also recognize his pastoral gift when he comes into our midst. If Shanghai recognizes a certain person as having the ability to preach the gospel, Peking should recognize the same thing. Although offices may change through change of location, gifts do not change through moving to a different location. Gifts are not local, but offices are local. Therefore, every time an assembly wants to recognize a gift, it has to be careful because not only does that particular assembly have to recognize his gift, but the brothers in other places have to recognize his gift as well. Therefore, we must care not only for ourselves but for the whole church.

## **CO-WORKERS**

Concerning the matter of the co-workers, let me first relate one incident to you. A brother who was working in a certain place wanted to invite another brother to his locality to work. He came and asked me if he should make the invitation. I told him that he did not have to ask me but that he should consider whether or not the brother would be received if he were introduced to the assemblies in Peking, Shanghai, or Nanking. He was afraid that the brother would not be received. Then I told him that if that was the case, he could not receive this brother and invite him to work in his place either. If he

recognized such a one as a co-worker, he would be bringing him into the work of his other co-workers as well. He should not receive a person on behalf of himself or the few who are meeting in his local assembly; he should receive him on behalf of the whole Body of Christ. If men like the apostle Paul were still living on earth, he would be receiving such a person as a co-worker on behalf of Paul, Peter, and others, and he would be adding a worker to them as well. If he did not receive in this way, he would be acting independently. All independent actions have no place in the Body of Christ and must be rejected. Every assembly has to be careful not to have an independent action but learn to follow God, so that the action of any one assembly becomes a joint responsibility of all the assemblies in other places.

### **NO CHANGE THROUGH MOVING TO ANOTHER LOCALITY**

Suppose you have fellowship with a certain brother in Peking. If he comes to Shanghai, he should fellowship with us. It would be wrong if he came to Shanghai and did not fellowship with us. We have a brother by the name of Yu Shin-liang. When he was in Kuling, a few Western brothers often came to meet with him, and they had fellowship one with another. When Brother Yu came to Shanghai, two of these Western brothers also came to Shanghai. They were in Shanghai for a few months, but they never came to break bread with us. When I asked Brother Yu about these brothers, he told me that they had been in Shanghai for a few months. I asked why they would not come to Hardoon Road to break bread with us, and he answered that they did not come because they were too busy. However, they did not come because of other reasons, not because they were busy. This is to act independently; this is not the action of the Body. Since they had fellowship with Brother Yu in Kuling, why would they not fellowship with those who have fellowship with Brother Yu in Shanghai? If they had fellowship with Brother Yu in Kuling, they should be able to fellowship with all those who have fellowship with Brother Yu in Shanghai. They should not just fellowship with Brother Yu and refuse to fellowship with those who have fellowship with Brother Yu. When they fellowship with Brother Yu, they have chosen to fellowship not only with Brother Yu but also with all those who have fellowship with Brother Yu. They should not choose to fellowship only with some brothers in some meetings; they should choose to fellowship with those in all the other meetings who have fellowship with their meeting.

Suppose there is a meeting in Shanghai today. You may come to break bread because you think that this place is better than other places and that you can hear good messages here. As a result, you begin to communicate and fellowship with the brothers who are meeting here. A little while later, you may move to Peking. There you will find brothers who are in fellowship with us also. But their number may be only a handful, and the meetings may be weak. However, in Peking there may be another place with a famous speaker, who is eloquent but who does not fellowship with us. When you arrive in Peking, you may wonder in your heart whether you should meet with the very weak brothers or listen to the famous speaker. If you go to the place with the famous speaker, it is an independent action. When you fellowship with us, you have fellowshiped with all the brothers who have fellowshiped with us, and you cannot choose the place of meeting any longer. This is the principle of fellowship in the Body. You cannot act independently.

Many times, we think that if we could have our choice, we would change our place of meeting all the time. But there is no such thing as this. In the meetings, we have the greatest blessings, but we also bear the greatest responsibilities and have the greatest restrictions. If you go to Peking, you have to break bread at Brother Shu Tsong-jie's place. If you go to Tientsin, you have to break bread at Brother Lee Shun's place. If you go to Chefoo, you have to go to Brother Witness Lee's place. They are assemblies standing on the ground of the church. Do not think that the denominations bind people. Our fellowship binds people even more than the denominations bind people. What others have is an organization according to law. What we have is an organism in the Body. I am afraid that no denominations bind men as much as the principle of the organism of the Body, which we recognize. None of the members in our body can move freely for a day. Even a finger cannot have a day of freedom. The bondage we have is the bondage of the Body. As such, we have no personal freedom. Therefore, brothers, may we truly see the Body of Christ. If we see it, we will not act independently. After we have believed in the Lord, not only are we saved, but we also should act as brothers by standing in the position of a brother. We should not only be Christians, but among the brothers, we should behave as good brothers. Only then are we actually loving the brothers.

## **THE RESPONSIBILITY OF EVERY BROTHER**

In practice, we have to ask: What responsibility should the brothers bear? Every brother should bear the responsibility not only of the local assembly but of the brothers and sisters who are in fellowship with them in the whole of China. Actually, he should care for those in the whole world who have fellowship with them. At present, we can only consider all those who have fellowship with us in China. But to be more scriptural, we should eliminate the thought of China and consider all the believers everywhere in the whole world who have fellowship with us. We share with them the same fellowship with God and His Son. One of our shortages is that we who meet in Shanghai only see the ones meeting in Shanghai, while those meeting in Peking only see the ones meeting in Peking. The greatest lack today is that believers do not have a world view and worldwide love. Many people only see their own sins; they only know that when they believe in the Lord, their sins are forgiven, and they are saved. They do not know what the fellowship among the brothers is. Many only see the brothers in their own localities and do not care for the brothers in all the places. This is not according to God's will.

God saves men in order to gain living stones for the building up of the spiritual house. If there were only individual, isolated stones, there would not be a spiritual house. Our breaking of the bread is a manifestation of the whole Body of Christ. Everyone who breaks bread should be responsible to the whole Body of Christ; he should see that he is responsible to all those who have fellowship with him. Therefore, every time we are about to receive a brother into our bread-breaking meeting, the responsible brothers should show him that the breaking of bread is for the discerning of the Body. It is not only a discerning of the Lord's body but a discerning of the *Body of Christ*. If we do not discern the Body, we are committing sin.



Therefore, all the brothers who are breaking bread should realize the scriptural requirement for breaking bread: (1) A person must be saved, and (2) he must not be one who commits the sins in 1 Corinthians 5. Moreover, he should know the responsibility he bears as a brother who partakes of the bread. He is responsible to the local brothers, and he is responsible to the assemblies in all places. If any brother is not clear about the responsibility he should bear, we should not reject him but allow him to consider, and we should show him the consequences of not bearing this responsibility. He should realize that the breaking of bread is not only for the remembrance of the Lord but also a matter of responsibility to the fellowship of the church. If a brother is clear about all these matters and is willing to take the responsibility, he can be received. Otherwise, we should allow him to consider carefully and think clearly. He should then make the decision by himself whether or not he wants to fellowship with us.

This is not a new invention. It was present two thousand years ago. If a brother wants to go to a certain place, he should first try to find the brothers who are in fellowship with us. Do not move to a place for four or five months without looking for the place to meet and without letting others know where you are. Before you leave your own locality, do not neglect to ask the elders to write a letter of recommendation for you. You have to realize that wherever you meet, you are responsible to that assembly. Your conduct there should be worthy of a brother. You should not act like one who is not a brother. If all of us take care of the mutual fellowship and act according to the Scriptures, our fellowship will become very precious. Our responsibility is to care for the whole Body of Christ, not only for the things related to the local assembly. We should not be like those in the denominations, who are pew members only, who do not care for others, and who do not know anyone else except the pastor. The Presbyterians only know the things related to Presbyterians, while the Methodists only know the things related to Methodists. But we should be different. We should know all things related to all the brothers and sisters who are in fellowship with us; we should know the things related to all the brothers and sisters in the whole world. May God bring us to the position of the church at the beginning. May He show us this matter.

If a brother or a sister has the opportunity to go to another city, he or she should first investigate if there are brothers in that place who are in fellowship with us. If in that place there are two or three places that one can have fellowship with (such as the Brethren assemblies or other independent meetings), and if the choice is up to him, he should choose to fellowship with the brothers who have fellowship with us. This will bring benefit to their meetings and bring benefit to him as well. We admit that the way we take is a lonely way and that the number of those taking this way may not be large. But God will open doors for us so that everywhere we will find some people of the same mind who will meet with us. May God show us what the Bible requires of us.

## **RESPONSIBILITY AMONG THE ASSEMBLIES**

The Bible tells us that a rule that God sets for one assembly is the same rule for another assembly. If the rule in two assemblies is different, there must be something wrong. Either the rule in one place is wrong or the rule in the other place is wrong. Of all the books of the Bible, 1 Corinthians is the clearest in dealing with the affairs concerning the

church. First Corinthians 1:2 tells us that it is written not only to the believers in Corinth, but to *all those in every place* who call on the name of the Lord. In other words, all the churches should take the same way; it should not be different from one church to another. In 1 Corinthians the apostle taught about the sister's head covering. After he finished his teaching, he said, "But if anyone seems to be contentious, we do not have such a custom of being so, neither the *churches of God*" (11:16). The apostle did not allow the action of one local assembly to be different from another assembly. From this, we see that our meeting cannot act independently. Every assembly should care for the other assemblies. Before we do anything, we should consider how our actions will relate to the other assemblies. A sister cannot be free of her head covering in the meeting in Peking while covering her head in the meeting in Shanghai. In the churches of God everything has to be in one accord. In 1 Corinthians 14 it is said that women should not open their mouths in the meetings, "as in *all the churches of the saints*" (v. 33). This shows us that all the churches of the saints should keep the matter of sisters not preaching in the meetings.

However, the meetings in the various churches begin at different times: some begin earlier; others begin later. In addition, the condition of the various churches is also different. Some are clear about the truth of the church, while others are not so clear about the truth of the church. What then should we do? We should learn in a humble way to follow the other assemblies. The apostle said, "And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit" (1 Thes. 1:6). Again he said, "For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus" (1 Thes. 2:14). This verse tells us that the church in Thessalonica were imitators of the churches in Judea. Why did the church in Thessalonica have to imitate the churches in Judea? It was because the gospel was first preached to the Jews. The Judean churches were the more "senior" churches. (I am taking the liberty to use this expression for now. Please note that the Bible never describes the churches in Judea in this way.) No assembly can act independently. Not only should individuals not act independently, but the whole assembly should not act independently.

## **INDEPENDENT ASSEMBLIES**

If anyone wants to set up an assembly in a place and does not want to fellowship or communicate with other assemblies, he is not standing on the ground of the church. None of the churches in the Bible ignored the other churches. In other countries, among all the so-called churches, we have not yet found an assembly that is standing on the same ground of the church as we are. If there are such assemblies and we care only for the churches in China and refuse to communicate with these churches in foreign countries, we are wrong. With God, there is no difference between the churches in China and the churches in other countries. If we only care for the churches in China and cut off the churches in other countries, we are not walking according to God's will. The church of God can be found anywhere in the world. It is a different matter for a person to be unable to find an assembly that is meeting on the ground of the church. But if we try to limit our fellowship only to China, we have lost the ground of the Body.

## WHAT IS A SECT?

I am afraid that some lawless believers will rise up among us, hoping to gain a name for themselves or to assume the authority of an elder. If they do not achieve their goal, they will go to another place like a village or an island and lead some people to salvation. They may eventually preach the gospel successfully in another place and lead many to salvation. They may proceed to help the saved ones to have meetings, break bread, and have elders and deacons. They may do all of these things according to the Bible, yet not fellowship with us. Instead, they will only care for their own meeting and hold tight to their “turf.” They may think that they can ignore us and let each go his own way. Little do they realize, however, that they will become a sect by doing this; they are not an assembly that stands on the ground of the church. As mentioned in the Bible, they are actually a sect because their fellowship is limited to only the one or two hundred people among them. Even if the meetings, the breaking of bread, and the appointment of elders and deacons are all done according to the Scripture, it is still a sect if their fellowship is restricted to only one place. Therefore, in the future, if there is an assembly that has fellowship that is limited to only one locality, not based on the Body of Christ, and not inclusive of all the believers, it is a sect.

Why is Presbyterianism a sect? It is a sect because Presbyterians can fellowship only with the Presbyterians in Nanking, Soochow, England, or America. If a fellowship includes only the Presbyterians in Nanking, Soochow, England, or America and does not include the whole Body of Christ, that fellowship is a sect. Therefore, any fellowship that includes only a few local believers but does not include the whole Body of Christ at all times and in all places is a sect. If some lawless ones among us depart, set up another assembly, and restrict the believers’ fellowship to their meetings alone, they will become a sect.

If the brothers in Chefoo adopt a closed attitude, work diligently, and ask the brothers to do everything according to the Bible, but do not fellowship with others, then sectarianism has to be dealt with all over again in Chefoo because they have become a sect. Every sect has its distinctive marks. If a man takes localism as a mark of distinction, he has become a sect. In considering whether an assembly is a sect or not, it is not enough to see whether its practice is scriptural. The main question does not involve whether or not the practice of an assembly is scriptural but whether the assembly itself is a sect. If it is a sect, we should depart from it. If an assembly is not of the Body of Christ nor for the Body of Christ, it should be forsaken because it is a sect. Therefore, if we want to serve God properly, we must learn how to not disobey God’s commands and how to be restricted by the brothers and sisters. We cannot care for one place alone. All the churches should have the same practice toward certain matters. Yet the standard of our conduct is not according to the approval of the majority but according to the decision of the brothers in oneness. Oneness and one accord are the works of the Holy Spirit, while the consent of the majority emerges from man.

The principle of the Open Brethren is to care only for their own local assemblies, while ignoring the assemblies in other places. If a man is excommunicated from the assembly in Nanking, he can still break bread in the assembly in Shanghai. They even boast that



they never argue with another assembly. If we follow their practice, Shanghai will care only for Shanghai, and Nanking will care only for Nanking. Of course, there will not be any arguments, and everyone will coexist in peace, doing their own work. Actually, the Open Brethren are not free from arguments. If a few have divergent views concerning some doctrines within an assembly, they will split. Perhaps by the following Sunday, they will have already separated into two meetings. One group may rent another place to meet. In some localities, the brothers are divided into several assemblies, and no assembly communicates with another assembly. Yet they still tell others that they do not argue! Those who prefer one kind of practice go to the assembly with that kind of practice, and those who prefer another kind of practice go to another assembly that has their preferred kind of practice. This is no different than the way of the denominations. The only difference is that the denominations are larger sects, while they are smaller sects. However, this is not the way or the teaching of the Bible.

### **ONENESS IN ADMINISTRATION**

If the assembly in Shanghai excommunicates a brother, and the assembly in Nanking receives such a brother, we cannot cut off the assembly in Nanking altogether; we can only negotiate with the assembly in Nanking. A person excommunicated from one local assembly is excommunicated from all the assemblies, and a person received by one assembly is received by all the assemblies. Not only do the assemblies which stand on the ground of the church practice this way; even the denominations practice this way. All those who are excommunicated by the Presbyterians in Shanghai are excommunicated by the Presbyterians in Nanking. If the denominations do this, should not we, who are standing on the ground of the church and expecting the life of the Body of Christ to be expressed, have mutual relationships which are more intimate and more in oneness than those in the denominations?

However, we also have to pay attention to another side of the truth. The administration of the assemblies is completely local. Shanghai cannot overturn or interfere with the decisions of Tsinan, and Tsinan cannot overturn or interfere with the decisions of Shanghai. However, in making decisions, both Shanghai and Tsinan have to consider how their decisions will affect the other assemblies. Therefore, we have to be careful and need to be bound for the sake of the other assemblies. The administration of one assembly cannot be affected by other assemblies. But if this assembly is seeking after God's will in a definite way, it will not act presumptuously, using the excuse that the administration of churches is local; instead, it will consult the other assemblies, hoping to walk scripturally and according to the Lord's desire. All questions relate to whether or not our flesh has been dealt with and whether or not we are spiritual. In this way, we will be able to care for the other assemblies.

Suppose the assembly in Tsinan receives an unsaved person by mistake, and he is recommended to the assembly in Shanghai. On the day we receive the letter of recommendation, he becomes a person in Shanghai and has nothing to do with the administration in Tsinan anymore. From that point on, it is up to the assembly in Shanghai to deal with him or excommunicate him. The assembly in Shanghai does not have to ask the assembly in Tsinan concerning this matter. If the assembly in Shanghai

excommunicates a brother by mistake, and the brother goes to Tsinan, the brothers in Tsinan may realize the mistake, but they cannot receive the brother excommunicated by Shanghai immediately. First, they have to write to Shanghai and check with the assembly in Shanghai. If the assembly in Shanghai does not agree with this matter, the assembly in Tsinan cannot receive that brother. But if the assembly in Shanghai consents, the assembly in Tsinan can receive that brother.

Therefore, it is a question of our flesh being put to the cross. Even between assemblies, this principle applies. If we are wrong, we have to submit to the brothers. But if we care only for our own proposals, the situation will become impossible, and we will become a sect. If a brother thinks that he can never be wrong, he has become a sect already. Therefore, we have to judge the flesh properly and put it to death so that we can live in the Holy Spirit and handle the affairs of the church in a proper way. If the flesh is not judged, and one wants to do one thing while another wants to do another, there will be no way to carry out the affairs of the church. All of us should deal with our self. This is true between persons, and it is also true between assemblies. This is the teaching of the Bible.

## QUESTIONS

*Question:* Suppose a brother has a letter of recommendation from the church in Tsinan, and he comes to meet with the assembly in Shanghai. Later, if he is excommunicated by the assembly in Shanghai, should the brothers in Tsinan be consulted before he is excommunicated?

*Answer:* When the letter of recommendation is received, we should receive this person according to the letter of recommendation. Later, if we find out that this person is not yet saved, we can excommunicate him. Since the brothers in Tsinan are willing to recommend him, their decision must be right; we should believe in the words of the brothers in Tsinan absolutely and receive him initially. But if later we deal with this person and excommunicate him, we do not have to inform the brothers in Tsinan. This is like excommunicating a brother who has always been meeting in the assembly in Shanghai; there is no need to inform the brothers in Tsinan of such a decision. When that person comes to the assembly in Shanghai with a letter of recommendation, he is received by the brothers in Shanghai and is treated like all other brothers in Shanghai. When we accept a letter of recommendation from the brothers in Tsinan, we have accepted the brother, referred to in the letter, as a brother in Shanghai. Thereafter, the assembly in Shanghai has the authority to deal with him.

*Question:* Can we break bread in Kun-shan Garden? If we break bread there, are we acting contrary to the truth of the Bible?

*Answer:* At present, there are three tables in Shanghai. If we are not sure that the table in Hardoon Road is right, we should not come here tomorrow for the bread-breaking meeting. When we break bread at a table, we should acknowledge that it represents the whole Body of Christ. The table at Kun-shan Garden is of a certain group of the Exclusive Brethren. They have a closed attitude and communicate only with those who

fellowship with them; they do not fellowship with everyone who has fellowship with God. Their fellowship includes only so many. Even if you are a very good brother, they will not receive you. You have to cut off your relationship with all other Christians before they will receive you. They are one of the seven or eight groups of Exclusive Brethren, and these seven or eight groups do not even receive one another.

If there are two bread-breaking meetings in one place, we have to distinguish which is the right one. If a meeting is raised up in one place, and another meeting is raised up in the same place, we cannot go to both places. We have to ask if the second meeting is also standing on the ground of the church. If both of them are standing on the ground of the church, they will surely fellowship with one another. This is like the relationship the meeting in Wen-teh Lane has with the meeting in Gordon Lane. Those who have been received by the meeting in Wen-teh Lane are also received by the meeting in Gordon Lane. The reverse is also true because we have only one fellowship. If we do not have the same fellowship, we cannot go to both places even when the form of the meetings in the two places is the same. We must investigate and determine which meeting represents the church and meets on the ground of the one Body. If a meeting is not meeting in this way, it is a sect.

When I was in America, it was right for me to break bread with Dr. and Mrs. Stearn. It would have been wrong if I had broken bread with those whom they would not recognize. The reason for this is that I had broken bread with them in Tsinan already. In a place where there is no assembly yet, we can act freely and set up the bread-breaking meeting. (Of course, we must also establish the oneness with the brothers whom we have fellowship with.) It would be wrong if I went to Hangchow and gathered a few people to set up a table, because there is a table in Hangchow already. Brother Luan would surely tell me that I should not set up another table. If that happened, I would need to confess my mistake. The Brethren say that they cannot receive anyone to their bread-breaking meeting who has not left the denominations. But this makes them another sect. As for us, we can fellowship with all those who are saved in the denominations. Suppose that there were no bread-breaking meeting in Ningpo. If two or three brothers went to Ningpo from Tsinan, they could start the bread-breaking meeting.

*Question:* In Peking, there is a bread-breaking meeting, but the brothers there are quite weak. Can I break bread there and also go to another place to listen to a famous speaker?

*Answer:* It is not absolutely wrong to go to another place to listen to some famous speakers. We do not forbid our people to go to other places to hear other speakers. But we have to make one thing clear: when you go to hear them, there is a limitation to your communication with them. If the goal of their works is not up to the standard of God's goal, their works are not God's work according to the biblical standard. I have said that God's work is not an evangelistic crusade, a society for the promotion of some cause, a Sunday school, or a revival campaign. From the beginning, God's work has been only one thing—the church. His work in every place is the building up of the local church in that place. Everything that comes short of this, that is, everything that endeavors for less than this goal, is not God's work. I am not saying that evangelistic crusades and Bible studies are bad. But if one only does these works and does not come up to the standard

of the local church, he has not come up to the standard of God's goal. In reality, he is lowering the standard of God's goal. God's work in the book of Acts was nothing less than the local church; it never came short of this and never fell short of this goal.

Today, there are those in the church who preach the truth, lead others to salvation, or conduct Bible studies, preachings, or evangelistic meetings. Believers can do all of these things. But we have to lay hold of God's goal; we must come up to the standard of the church. I am afraid that although many works are good, they do not come up to the standard of God's work, which is the church. I believe there are many gifted ones who are not with us. I also believe that if we are more faithful, God will raise up gifted ones among us. If we live in God's light, there will not be the need for us to go to outsiders for messages.

*Question:* Some believers are critical of the truth we hold. They cling tenaciously to their own "Bible study," yet they want to break bread with us and even preach in our bread-breaking meeting. How should we deal with this kind of people?

*Answer:* If there is an exclusive Bible study meeting, it is not being conducted according to the principle of the church. Such a meeting does not come up to the standard of God's work. In other words, it is not God's work but man's imitation of God's work. God's work is always centered around the (local) church. It is good that man establishes Bible studies and evangelistic crusades; these are all blessed by God. But these things are not God's work. God's work has only one goal, which is the church. For example, the China Inland Mission is a mission; it is not a church. It is good for it to send men to the Chinese inland to preach the gospel; God blesses such a work. We probably do not have as much fruit as it has. But its work cannot be considered God's work. We can only say that God is working within its work. We should not ignore the working of God within its work. If we say that there is no working of God in their work, we will offend Him. However, the goal and the purpose of their meetings is not the local churches.

If people such as those you have just described want to come and break bread with us, we should be willing and happy to receive them. Yet we are not receiving their denominations. Although they are in the denominations, we should not reject them for this reason. However, our receiving does not mean that they do not need to leave the denominations. We should not refuse to receive a believer in the denominations; we should merely receive the believer himself. Afterward, we still need to advise him to leave the denominations.

If a man from the denominations is saved, we can receive him into the bread-breaking meeting. *But we cannot receive him to preach.* If anyone is not clear concerning the truth of the church, we can have fellowship with him only in life, but not in the work. Since he still has fellowship with the denominations, we do not know what he would speak if we allowed him to preach. Therefore, with many people, we can only have fellowship in life; we cannot be co-workers with them. This was the principle of the apostle Paul.

Romans 16:17 says, "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 listen to those who are here purposely to criticize us; we should turn away from them.

In the future, when some brothers are raised up from the assembly to serve as elders, they can inform the other brothers as to whom they should turn away from and whom they should not turn away from. The other brothers should then obey the elders.

*Question:* Suppose I go to Sinkiang and suddenly discover a bread-breaking meeting that does not belong to any denomination. Should I start breaking bread with them, or should I first send a cable to Shanghai to get the approval before breaking bread with them?

*Answer:* There is good reason for doing the latter; it means that one respects the opinion of the brothers. At the same time, it shows how seriously you treat the matter. Sometimes, before you go to another place, you can first seek for the consensus of the brothers. The brothers may give you the liberty to join any bread-breaking meeting which is permissible to join. You can then break bread with them. As to the sending of a cable, it can be done if it is for the sake of informing the brothers or for understanding the brothers' mind. But it is unnecessary if it is done as a means of seeking approval. To understand the mind of the brothers is an act of the Body.

*Question:* Suppose I go to Sinkiang and realize that there is a bread-breaking meeting there which is related to the denominations, and I break bread with them. Later, when the assembly in Shanghai finds this out, how should it deal with me? Should I be punished or warned?

*Answer:* This is not just a hypothetical question you may face in Sinkiang; it is a problem we face right here in Shanghai. Let me ask you: For what purpose do you come to break bread here? If this table does not represent the Lord's table, and if you break bread just because others are breaking bread and remember the Lord just because others are remembering the Lord, what good will this bread do you? This does not mean that you can break bread with us only after you have stopped breaking bread with others. The question is how you view our table. If you do not think that this table is the Lord's table, why come to break bread with us? If you have found that this is the Lord's table, why look for another table? If anyone wants to do this, I must tell him that there is no such command in the Bible.

If anyone wants to break bread with us, yet at the same time, partake of the Holy Communion in the denominations, we cannot excommunicate him. But we should deal with this kind of person by exhorting him. If he would not listen to our exhortation, we have to act according to Titus 3:10, "A factious man, after a first and second admonition, refuse." Second Thessalonians 3:6 says, "Now we charge you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother walking disorderly and not according to the things which were handed down to you and which you received from us." We should leave these factious people outside our fellowship and not communicate with them, so that they will feel that they are isolated Christians. Of course, some are not this way intentionally; they behave this way because they lack knowledge. In such a case, it is altogether a different story.

*Question:* Sometimes I live in Shanghai and sometimes in Suchow. When the brothers in Suchow want me to do something for them, they consider me a brother in Suchow. Otherwise, they consider me a brother from Shanghai. Should I be considered as a brother from Shanghai or from Suchow?



*Answer:* Since you return to Suchow every year during the holidays and you feel that you should bear more responsibility for the meeting in Suchow, perhaps it is right for you to be considered as a brother in Suchow. Since you are in Suchow often, the brothers in Shanghai cannot consult with you about things concerning the assembly in Shanghai. I think you should consider yourself as a brother in Suchow. At present, the assembly in Suchow needs some responsible ones very much.

As to whether a brother should belong to this place or that place, we can say only that it depends on how long this brother stays in each place. Whatever place he stays in longer is the place he should belong to. Additionally, there are questions related to the boundary of the assembly. Concerning this last question, we will cover it in the next Monday night meeting.

*Question:* We know that when we receive a person, we have to ask him four questions: (1) Is he saved? (2) Does he have the obvious sins in 1 Corinthians 5? (3) Is he willing to be responsible to the meeting? (4) Is he willing to fellowship with the brothers? If a person is saved and does not have any obvious sins that forbid him from partaking of the bread, yet he does not want to be responsible to the meeting or fellowship with the brothers, and instead wants to control us, what should we do?

*Answer:* Please notice that the first and second points are our conditions for receiving a person to the Lord's table. The third and fourth points are for discerning the Body. If such a person does not discern the Body, he is eating judgment to himself. All who serve as elders in an assembly should be clear about this. Furthermore, there are two aspects to discerning the Body. First, we have to discern that this Body is the Body of the Lord Jesus and that when we break bread, we are eating and drinking for the remembrance of the Lord. Second, we have to discern this Body as the whole Body of Christ. When we gather together on the Lord's Day evening to break bread, we should realize not only that the ones who are breaking bread together are the Body of Christ, but that all those who are redeemed by the precious blood of the Lord are the Body of Christ. If a Japanese comes to our midst and breaks bread with us, we should acknowledge him as our dear brother just like all other brothers. If the British in Tibet start a war with China, and an English brother comes into our midst to break bread with us, we should regard him as our dear brother. We should not care for the distinction that exists between men but only for our relationship in the Body of Christ. If one who does not discern the Body comes to break bread with us, we can ask whether he is willing to discern the Body. Is he willing to be responsible to the church for all his actions? If he is not, we will not reject him from partaking of the bread, because he is saved. However, we have to let him know that if he does not discern the Body, he is eating judgment to himself and that it will be to his loss.

*Question:* Will one die if he eats judgment to himself?

*Answer:* Yes, he may. If a meeting is holy, and if it knows how to exercise God's authority, such things can happen. Why is the breaking of bread so important? When one recognizes the Body of Christ and acknowledges that he is a part of this Body yet does not discern it, he is making a false testimony and putting God to shame. Moreover,

the testimony of the bread is made before angels, demons, and all the principalities and powers. Therefore, if one makes a false testimony, it is a great shame to God. God will bear with ignorant ones. But to those who sin willingly, who acknowledge yet make false testimonies, He will send forth His punishment.

*Question:* In a certain place, one brother has incurred a serious illness. He once committed the sin of reviling. Is his illness a punishment from God?

*Answer:* Yes, it is.

*Question:* If a brother is sick, must he ask the elders to anoint him with oil before he can be healed?

*Answer:* There are a few reasons why believers become sick. Some illnesses are caused by carelessness in the natural realm. Some are caused by attacks from Satan. Some are the result of being detached from the Body of Christ. If a believer is sick because of being detached from the Body of Christ and because he is not holding the Head and standing in the proper position in the Body of Christ, he should first understand how he has become detached before he asks the elders to anoint him with oil. The meaning of anointing with oil is to return to the proper position in the Body of Christ *through the Holy Spirit*. We all know that we are members in the Body of Christ. Just as a member in our body receives the circulation of blood and the life of our body, so the members of the Body of Christ receive the circulation of Christ's life and His blood. This is typified by the ointment which flows from Aaron's head to his whole body. As long as the members are standing in their proper positions, the ointment will flow to them; they will receive the protection of the ointment, and their sickness will be gone. All those who take the proper standing in the Body of Christ are under the anointing of the Head. The ointment is on Christ the Head, but it flows from the Head to us. When we have the ointment, we have health. Where there is ointment, there is life. Believers are sick because they fail and because they have become detached and separated from the Body of Christ. When this happens, the life and ointment of Christ will not be able to flow to them.

The book of James says that if anyone among us is sick, he can ask the elders of the church to anoint him with oil (5:14). It says to ask the elders to do the anointing. The gifted ones are useless because the elders represent the church, the Body of Christ. The anointing of the oil signifies the restoring of the sick believer back to the anointing of the Head. If you can bring a person back to the anointing of the Head, his sickness will be healed.

*Question:* If that is the case, can a person who represents the church go to the sick brother and anoint him? Will this heal the sick brother?

*Answer:* Yes, this can be done. But before the anointing is applied, there must first be the confession of sins and prayers. James says that we have to confess our sins to one another. The reason there is the need for confession is that the mutual relationship in

the Body has been severed. There is the need of confession in order to remove the sin of detachment and return to the original position. If the detachment remains, it is useless even if there is the anointing. Therefore, one must first remove the detachment and thoroughly confess his criticisms of and offenses with the brothers. Before they can anoint others with oil, even the elders have to confess their sins to one another in order to remove any detachments and blockages and return to the proper relationship in the Body of Christ. Only then will the oil of Christ the Head flow onto the members.

*Question:* What kind of oil should we use for the anointing, and where should we apply the oil?

*Answer:* The best kind of oil is olive oil. But if one does not have olive oil, he can use any kind of oil. The oil should be applied to the head.

*Question:* How should one deal with a believer who has disturbed the meeting and been stopped by the elders but does not listen, but who has not committed the sins of 1 Corinthians 5?

*Answer:* We should inform the brothers to stay away from him. The elders are those who are particularly charged to bear spiritual responsibility. If there are such people in a locality, the elders should be responsible to deal with them in their prayers. We have to know that it is a serious thing to deal with a brother in prayer. If a few responsible brothers would deal with such matters in one accord and in a sober way, many tragic, serious, and dangerous things can happen because God will use His appointed authority to judge. This is not a question of being good at prayer or not. When trouble arose in Corinth, Paul rebuked them for not being able to deal with the situation. This is why the elders have to be careful and deal with matters properly. If moral corruption in the flesh is not dealt with, such flesh will be destroyed. This will result in terrible consequences. Therefore, we have to learn to be obedient persons so that our flesh will be morally restrained and so that we will not cause any trouble.

*Question:* What does it mean to meet by standing on the ground of the church? How can we know that our meeting is standing on the ground of the church?

*Answer:* If you go to a new place and find an assembly in which baptism, the breaking of bread, the way of meeting, the place given to woman, and the appointment of elders and deacons are all done according to the Bible and which is the same as we are, you must not rashly join their table and their fellowship. I have to clarify one thing here: Concerning the matter of the breaking of bread and the fellowship, we are, at the same time, very open and very closed. We are open because all of God's children, as long as they are not disqualified from fellowship according to the Scripture, are received by us if they *come*, irrespective of what denominations they come from. We are closed because we cannot *go to others* for fellowship or the breaking of bread, as long as they are not standing on the ground of the church, no matter how scriptural in form their meeting may be.

If you find an assembly which is very scriptural in form and looks the same as we do, you must not presume that everything is the same and that we can join them. There is one very crucial question, which is whether or not the meeting is standing on the ground of the church. Before this question is properly answered, you cannot *go to them* and join them in the breaking of bread. The reason we do not go to the denominations to join them in the bread breaking is that they are not standing on the ground of the church. Their bread cannot represent the whole Body of Christ but merely their own denominations.

What does it mean to be “standing on the ground of the church”? Two things are very crucial.

(1) One must not be a sect. What is the difference between a sect and the church? The church includes all the believers, while a sect only includes a part of all the believers. A sect erects walls within the church and divides itself from the rest of those who belong to the church. A sect is not standing on the ground of the church, because it bears a name which is not shared by the whole church. It emphasizes special truths which the whole church does not necessarily emphasize, and it has a fellowship (with its members) which is not shared by the whole church. In order to stand on the ground of the church, an assembly must not have a name that is different from the general name of the church; it must not have any special truths or special membership.

(2) In order to stand on the ground of the church, one must live out the Body. If you come across a certain group which does not have a name, creed, or membership and which meets and practices other matters according to the Scripture and is the same as we are, you must still ask (even though it is not a sect) whether it is living out the Body life. Not every group that is not a sect is standing on the ground of the church. If a group is not a sect on the negative side, it does not necessarily follow that it knows the Body of Christ and the church of God on the positive side.

You must see whether an assembly can bear the responsibility of being the local church in that locality. If there are small meetings of similar nature in its locality, does this assembly strive to join itself to them to become the local church in that locality? Does it deal with them, teach them, and help them to realize the nature of a local church? Or does it ignore the issue and allow the situation to remain loose, disqualifying any of the meetings from becoming a representation of the local church? If there are independent free preachers in that locality who do not belong to any denominations, does this assembly take the initiative to guide and deal with such ones, so that there will not be isolated workers in that locality? Or does this assembly care only for itself and adopt an attitude of unconcern toward other workers? Is it trying its best to accommodate all of God's children, or is it digging deep ditches and building walls around its own small community? If it does these things, it is not standing on the ground of the church and not trying to bear the responsibility of being the local church in that locality.

In addition, even if an assembly has taken the responsibility of being the local church in that locality, one must still investigate whether it has adopted an attitude of “localism,” in which it cares only for its own locality. Does such an assembly recognize that the

church of God is universal and that it has to fellowship with other local assemblies who are standing on the ground of the church? If it does not want to fellowship with other local assemblies and bear the responsibility of walking in the same footsteps as the others, it is still not standing on the ground of the church. An assembly that stands on the ground of the church should be responsible for representing the members of the Body of Christ in that locality. It should try to fellowship with other members of the Body of Christ in other localities. (For further explanation, see the main text in this chapter.) If an assembly does all these things, it is standing on the ground of the church.

I believe you know that in the Bible there were originally only local churches. Today the (outward) church has degraded and fallen into serious divisions. Since there are so many denominations in one locality, no one meeting can claim to be the local church in that locality anymore. Therefore, we can only say that we are merely an assembly that stands on the ground of the local church; we are not “the local church.” The reason we stand on the ground of the church is that so many of the existing denominational meetings are not standing on the ground of the church in that locality.

*Question:* If a table meeting is willing to receive all of God’s children, can we then say that such a meeting is standing on the ground of the church?

*Answer:* The first thing to settle is the meaning of standing on the ground of the church. We know that to stand on the ground of the church, one must not be a sect. Yet this is the negative aspect only. On the positive side, one must express the life of the Body of Christ. This means that one must not act independently, and *there must be the willingness to move together with all the brothers who are not in the sects*. Of course, we cannot take the same way as the brothers in the sects. Yet, even though the church is in ruins today, there are still those who desire to walk outside the sects and human organizations. We should take the same way together with those who are not in the sects. Only then can we say that we are standing on the ground of the church.

Strictly speaking, the expression “standing on the ground of the church” applies only to today, a time when the church has become degraded. When the church really becomes one, without sects or human organizations, everyone will be standing on the ground of the church and expressing the life of the Body of Christ. But at present, the (outward) church is in ruins, and men have divided themselves into sects and walk according to human ways. Therefore, there is the need for a group of people who will not only be non-sectarian *but* who will also stand on the ground of the church to express the proper life of the Body on behalf of the whole church.

In many places today, there are believers who see the error of the sects but *who do not see* the Body of Christ. They think that as long as there are no sects, nothing could be better. They do not realize that being rid of the sects is only the negative aspect. Although the church has lost its outward oneness, those who have left this disunity must still walk according to the principle of the oneness of the church in everything. Therefore, even when a table is willing to receive all of God’s children, we must still ask if its work, testimony, and fellowship are joined to all those who have left the sects. It must not have the concept that because others have become sects, those who are left behind and do not



want to be in a sect can no longer be one like those in the early days when there were no sects. All those who are not in the sects should express the proper Body life of the church. If anyone thinks that he is not in a sect but does not want to cooperate in work and fellowship with others who are not in a sect but would rather act independently, he is not standing on the ground of the church even though he receives all of God's children. He still does not know what the Body of Christ is. As such, that table is still not the Lord's table, because that bread cannot represent all the believers. Since its work does not include all of God's children, and in particular, those children who are not in the sects, we cannot participate in that bread. God has not excused us from expressing the Body life just because other members have divisions among themselves.

If a denomination is willing to openly receive all of God's children, can we go and fellowship with it? Surely we cannot. If there are brothers who are not in a sect in one place who do not fellowship with those who are not in a sect in another place, they are the same as the denominations and not standing on the ground of the church. In reality, they are another sect, and we cannot go and break bread with them. But this does not mean that we will not receive them when they come to us. It merely means that we cannot go to them.