

## **An Atmosphere that is Conducive to the Building Up**

**(Fellowship from Minoru Chen on December 6, 2020)**

### **Prayer**

*Lord, we pray that we will not only hear these things but do these things. We would not just be a listener of the word but the doers of it, as this is our real shortage. With the knowledge of the truth, Lord, we would be walking in truth. We pray that You will recover us. Strengthen the church life everywhere, with some brothers taking the lead to practice these things. Lord, we earnestly pray for this breakthrough. We pray for this change. We pray for the advance. Do something in this country, Lord.*

### **Christ versus Religion**

Brothers, we missed one another for one Lord's Day because of the Thanksgiving Conference. I hope that conference on the matter of Christ versus culture was blessed and helpful to the saints. When the messages of that book *Christ versus Religion* came out in 1970, they were quite impactful. It was quite an explosive book because most people cared for religion. It raised questions such as: What do you mean by *versus religion*? Are you against religion? The concept among people, including the Christians, was that of a "Christian religion." In the 1600s, 1700s, and 1800s, *religion* was a very good word. When you said, "This is a man of religion", that was a positive thing. They had a lot of respect for religion in the old US colonies in the beginning of this country. I remember that those messages given by Brother Lee were based on the Gospels, the Gospel of Matthew in particular. Upon

hearing those messages, for the first time the scales fell off our eyes, off many saints' eyes, to see that religion is hateful.

Religion is man-made, rather than God-ordained. In Matthew, in the Lord's days in the flesh on the earth, he had to confront Judaism, which is a true religion. There are false religions, but there are true religions. Judaism, the one that Christ confronted day and night, was a true religion. The Judaic religion or Judaism was something that started with God as the source. It began with the Mosaic Law that was given to Israel at Mount Horeb with all the ordinances that were God-inspired. The holy priesthood was given by God and ordained by God, as well as so many ways to live that were associated with religion: the ceremonial laws and the moral laws. All of these eventually formed this Judaic religion.

What was the problem? The problem was that it was only in the beginning that God was in it. When it started, it was about God. It was about worshipping God. It was about living a life that matched God. The tabernacle was a place to meet God – it was called the tent of meeting. The priesthood was there to assist people to worship God. It was all proper and good, but over time, God disappeared. The people still kept all those things, but they became a shell of what it was, like a seed with only the husk yet without the kernel. There was no life. There was no presence of God. So there was nothing there. It degenerated and became integrated into what was simply a human religion.

Over time, they still hail and are proud of these various holy things. They are in the holy land and in that holy city. They have the holy temple, holy Moses. One thing that they are so proud of are the holy angels – nobody else has angels, only they have the angels. They have the holy law and the holy ordinances. Everything is holy. But it had become a set of rituals, a man-made organization without God. The definition of religion is the worship of God without the presence of God. Everything started right. Everything has its source in God. But

even after that source has left and disappeared, the people still kept doing the practices. That is religion.

When Christ came, His main enemy amongst the Jews was religion. When He was crucified, He was crucified by religion, by the high priests, by the chief priests of the synagogue. He was firstly persecuted and tried in the synagogue before they turned Him over to the governor Pontius Pilate. When the Lord died, on the cross was something in three languages. One was Greek, the main language of the Roman Empire. It was the equivalent of English today, representing the culture of the day. Then there was Hebrew which represented religion. Then Latin referred to politics. Three things in combination killed the Savior: the human politics, the human culture, and the human religion. That human religion is simply Judaism. They killed the Lord. Can you believe that a religion out from God killed God? You have to read that book again.

Today, many of our younger saints have little impression of how hateful religion is. And today, we are in times not only of Judaism, which is still there, but also of Catholicism and Protestantism – the so-called Christian religion or Christianity or Christendom. That religion is just as against Christ as Judaism was when the Lord was in their midst. The Christian church has become a Christian religion. This little mustard seed has become a great tree where evil birds lodge. That means the evil spirits and the demons are lodging in this religion, on this religious tree, today. The wonderful fine flour has become puffed up by leaven, by all kinds of teachings that are not divinely inspired and not from the Lord. These teachings are from a pagan direction, from a cultural direction. Greek philosophy invaded the Christian church early on. Even in Paul's days, he had to fight against Gnosticism and other branches of these various Greek philosophies. This huge mixture of the Christian religions is absolutely the enemy of God, of the true church of God.

Brothers, we need to see it so much and we have to hate this thing which God hates. We need to know what we mean when we say that

we are not part of Christianity, that we are not part of the Christian religion. I am afraid that many of us may be a bit blurred in this view. Because of this blur, there is a loss of distinction between religion and the church. Sometimes we even welcome some of the elements of this religion, or we even look for some elements of this religion to try to incorporate into the church life. We have to realize brothers, as those who are bearing some burden in the churches in the Lord's recovery, what we are, who we are, what we are not, and who we are not. There is a famous, classic message by Brother Nee called *What Are We?* You better go and read it again.

Brother Lee, in his early days in this country, had to speak messages on this matter again and again. He needed to lay a solid and strong foundation, to make the church life in the Lord's recovery distinct and separate from Christendom. He talked about how the Lord was constantly pursued, harassed, and harangued by the Pharisees, the chief priests, the scribes, and the lawyers – by all those people representing religion. There were even some newfound religions in those days. For example, there were those people who did not believe in resurrection, and they formed one of the many branches of this Judaic religion. These Judaic branches all aligned with one another when it was time to get rid of Jesus. The Lord had to battle and face that.

Today, brothers, we should remind ourselves we are not part of the Christian religion. Generally speaking, in people's eyes, we are part of Christianity. We are Christians. We are believers. We have the Bible. We pray. We believe in God and in Christ. In that sense we are, but in another sense we are not. We have to be very clear that we are not. To quote Hebrews and Exodus in the Old Testament, the Lord's recovery from day one has been a people that follow Moses to go outside of that camp. That camp is simply the place where God had left His people. God was no longer there with them. He was just with Moses in Moses' tent. Those who are for the Lord have to leave the camp. The camp has degraded. The camp has become something else. It is still God's people, but it has become something else. Outside the

camp and within the veil – that is the main slogan of the book of Hebrews. Today, the Lord's recovery is according to that principle – we are not part of the camp, we are within the veil with the risen and ascended Lord. But this cannot just be a truth or a doctrine. This has to be real among us, our reality. The Lord's recovery must be infused with this reality. Instead of religion, we are being brought back to Christ Himself, as the universal replacement of all these replacements of Christ.

### **Christ versus Culture**

This recent Thanksgiving Conference should help us to see another enemy, which may be a more subtle one than religion, and that is culture. We are going to cover the Crystallization of Job in this coming semi-annual training. I think we will use seven messages to cover Job, four messages to cover the book of Proverbs, and one message to cover Ecclesiastes. In Job, you see a man there who was probably a very rare person. There may not have been another person like him, so much so that God was almost proud of this man. When Satan came and accused Him, God would say to look at this man who was upright, perfect, filled with integrity, feared God, and departed from evil. While God said that, God knew what was really missing there. There was this really cultivated man – what you would call a “man of culture” today. He had attained to the highest perfection, as far as morality, as far as being God-fearing, as far as things to do between God and man and was without reproach in every way. In all those rounds of debate with his three friends, Job was insisting on his integrity and how right he was – this was a man suffering with boils on him still saying that. But at the very end, when all the human debates stopped and Jehovah spoke, light came in and Job said, “I had heard of You... but now my eye has seen You. Therefore I abhor myself.” (Job 42:5-6a) There were 30 chapters where he was absolutely glorifying and dwelling on his cultural attainment and integrity, but he had no light. Those friends brought more darkness, just talking nonsense. In the end, when God showed up, when God appeared, all cultural attainment, high

integrity, and uprightness became – as it says in Isaiah – just filthy rags. They were just a bunch of filthy rags because they were not God.

Brothers, culture is another huge enemy. In the new man, there is no room for culture, whether it is a kind of non-cultural culture that is among the pagan people or the culture of cultured people. There is no culture in the Body of Christ. I hope these messages over this last Thanksgiving help us to some degree to realize this, not that we should cast away culture because we will become a bunch of savages, but that we should have our culture replaced in time by Christ Himself. Christ versus culture. Until Christ replaces our human culture to some degree, we are still not the new man, we are still not God's expression. We are still just a group of good people, good Christians, fine people, gentlemen, who are meeting together, but it is not the church and it is not Christ.

The third enemy that killed the Lord is politics. Although I did not plan to talk about these things for this much today, it just came out. But I think it is still useful. Brothers, we are talking about how to build up the local churches. The local churches, as a testimony of Jesus, must be distinct and separate from all these worldly things. We need to build up the church life everywhere in this kind of a way. The church is really a holy thing. The church is something separate, sanctified, and uncommon on this earth, amidst religion, culture, and politics – especially those three things. This is a place about Christ, where Christ is all and in all. Brothers, we need to build up such a church: Christ-centered, Christ-exalting, Christ-loving, Christ-pursuing, Christ-possessing, Christ-living, and Christ-expressing. We ourselves have to be that way, in order for the saints to be that way. Otherwise, this is not quite the Lord's recovery, maybe it is in name, but not in reality or in expression.

**Bringing Forth an Atmosphere  
that is Conducive to the Building Up**

Today, I would like to talk about something that I feel is very important. To build up a local church, the first thing is not methods or

ways, and surely not formulas and technique. Am I saying that there is no room for principles or for skill? No, absolutely not. In the Old Testament, when Solomon was building up the temple – the temple for which his father David had gathered the materials but was not allowed to build – there was a blueprint, there were a lot of wise workers, skillful tradesmen, artisans of all kinds. It was not a simple project. So there were ways and means. There are drawings, ways to do things. Even when Nehemiah returned to rebuild the city walls in Jerusalem, it was the same thing. It was a construction project. I am not denying that there are ways to do things. But what I want to emphasize this afternoon with you brothers, is the need of a certain atmosphere, a certain condition, a certain spirit, a certain environment, that is conducive to such building work. You may have the drawings. You may have the trades, the subs, and the contractors. You may have all the materials. But if the condition of the people – their heart, their spirit, and their situation – and the atmosphere are not right, this project will be frustrated and even delayed.

Brother Lee said that Nehemiah was the greatest leader in the Bible. Nehemiah went back and started to build those walls from gate to gate. Just read that book again on how he built those walls, how he assigned the people of the various tribes. The enemy – those people who were against these returned Jews – did not want the rebuilding to happen. They tried everything: they sent letters to the Persian king, they threatened them, they tried to negotiate with them and entice them by suggesting that they work together. They did all kinds of things to stop the work or to frustrate the work. Hence, building the church is also a warfare. Brothers, really building up a local church is a battle, a warfare. That was why they had to have one hand with a weapon and another hand with a tool – to fight and build at the same time. As far as the Jews were concerned, they themselves had to be in a certain kind of condition, a certain kind of atmosphere, and a certain kind of spirit amongst themselves, for them to work and to carry on with the work. Today, I want to talk to you about that.

These are things that Brother Lee spoke about in the '50s and '60s in Taiwan and in the '60s in Los Angeles. There is a book called *The Vision of God's Building* given around that time in the '60s. Later in the '70s, after a rebellion, Brother Lee had to recover the churches and I believe he spoke something on this again. Some of these things just impressed me very much regarding this matter of the atmosphere. It is not the way, in a strict sense. It is that atmosphere that has to be present.

Another word that I would use to describe this atmosphere is aroma, the smell, the odor. When I come into a restaurant, I smell a certain aroma. That aroma tells me a lot about the kind of food that will be served and what I am going to enjoy. I can tell, "Hmm, this smells like Italian pasta." "Hmm, this smells Korean to me." There is an aroma there. When you go and visit a family, including your family and mine, there is an atmosphere. When I visit you and come to your house, I do not only see your furniture and how you place things. No, I detect a certain atmosphere of your family. That atmosphere, the way the husband and wife talk, the way you look at each other, the way the children behave – all describe, define, and explains to me what this family is like. Do you see what I am saying? Without saying a word, I can feel a lot about this family.

Brothers, it is the same with a church. When you come to a church, the first thing you notice is not how many saints there are or what meeting hall they are meeting in. No, the first thing you touch in a local church is the distinct smell. There is a distinct atmosphere. When I visit a church, I pay attention to that more than what they are doing. It explains to me a lot of the strengths of this church, the weaknesses of this church, what this church needs. It tells me a whole lot. By the way the elders are with each other, by the way the saints are with one another, by the way they greet one another – the atmosphere just tells me a lot. By the way they coordinate, by the way they serve, in the meetings or outside of the meetings – it tells me a lot. In my experience in building up a local church, it is difficult to build up the church in a smooth, good, and adequate way without a proper, healthy condition. I would venture to say that many of us do not pay



attention to this. Brother Lee did. In fact, he spoke about this to the elders and to the saints.

I would like to mention four things today. Brothers, you have to pay attention to this. These days, I pray very much that the Lord would renew the church life in all these ten cities. I look to the Lord for ten new churches in the United States. We can call it a reset, a renewal, a fresh new season, or a fresh advance. I would like to see new churches. To use the analog, if we push the reset button, everything will be reset to zero. That is very good. Now that we are at ground zero, what should we do? Brothers, I have spoken a lot to you in these months. I talked about preaching the gospel, shepherding the saints, building up the meetings, and building up the services. But all these need to be done in a certain condition and atmosphere. Brothers, it is our job to bring forth this atmosphere. Through our prayer, our ministering to the saints, our contacting the brothers and sisters, our way of handling things, and through our attitude, our words, and our sentiment, we will bring forth among the saints a certain kind of atmosphere in which all these areas of the building of the church can proceed.

### **1. An Atmosphere in the Mingled Spirit**

The first thing that Brother Lee always said is we need a church atmosphere that is in spirit. There is an atmosphere of the saints living in the spirit. This is of course important because the spirit is everything. When I say *spirit*, I mean the mingled spirit, which is our regenerated human spirit indwelt by the Lord Spirit, the pneumatic Christ. We are charged in the New Testament to walk in this spirit, to live by this spirit, to set our mind on this spirit, to exercise this spirit. Without this there is no Christian life to talk about. There is nothing. You know the Chinese words for *zero* and for *spirit* look alike. In fact, they sound exactly the same. That word is *ling*. It means spirit. It also means zero. Brothers, that means it is one or the other. Either we are in the spirit, with reality, with Christ, with all the good things, with the life of God, with resurrection, with all the positive things, with the

divine things, with the bountiful supply, or we are zero and we have nothing.

Today, I am not talking to all the saints generally. I am speaking specifically to some brothers who have a burden to contribute to the building of the Lord in a local church, to bear responsibility, to serve the church. I am speaking to you, brothers. The first atmosphere and condition needed is that we have to be in spirit. We just behave ourselves in the spirit. We walk by the spirit. We set our mind on the spirit. We exercise our spirit. We would be filled in the spirit. We do things in the spirit. This means that we do not do things in our natural man. We do not do things in our flesh, for sure, but we also do not do things with our soul life. We are not a soulish people. We are truly a genuinely spiritual people. Brothers, it is one thing to know this, but it is another to live this way. We need to bring in a culture – if I may use this “bad” word *culture*. I mean a healthy kind of culture that when we are together in the church life, we just care to be in the spirit. We do not contact each other with our soul. We know the separation of soul from spirit. We can discern that. We aspire to a life of walking in the spirit.

At the International Chinese-Speaking Conference in February 1994, Brother Lee released the high peak of the divine revelation. In the summer of that same year, he gave the Life-Studies on the Kings. After the summer training, he met with the co-workers and elders, as he customarily did in those days, and he spoke concerning how to live a life according to that high-peak revelation. He was fully burdened for the high-peak revelation that God became man so that man may become God. Today you can find that speaking in a book called *Living a Life according to the High Peak of God's Revelation*. He said, “I am very afraid that this high peak would become a movement among us.” That “God became man that man may become God” would be a movement or just a slogan. We all know these things. We are God's species. This is truly the high peak. It is a great thing. But he said this, “I am afraid even this will become a movement among us.” Then he spent at least one message, if not two, to talk about bringing in a new

revival and building up a model in the church life. He was burdened about this. Do you know what he spoke about? He spoke about calling on the name of the Lord and about pray-reading the word. He quoted from that passage in 1 Thessalonians 5 that we all know too well. “Always rejoice, unceasingly pray, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (vv. 16-18) I said to him, “Brother Lee, you were in the high peak. We were all up there with you, in God becoming man and man becoming God. Why are you talking about these basic things on calling on the name of the Lord, pray-reading the word, and living by the spirit and in the spirit?” These are what he talked about. Well, the fact of the matter is that all the high-peak truths will not be realized unless we are in the spirit, unless we call on the Lord, pray-read the word, and unless we walk in the spirit and live a life being filled in the spirit. Brothers, we ourselves have to seriously live this way – exercising our spirit all the time to call, to pray, sing, and to pray-read the word. Brother Lee said in that same speaking, “How I wish to see that everywhere I turn in the churches there will be saints in twos or threes practicing calling, pray-reading, and practicing these things.” This was in 1994, not 1964.

My brothers, the truth is high, but when it comes to practice, we need to build up the basic things. Brothers, do we ourselves live in the spirit, or do we still live in our soul, in our mind? Are we a soulish man rather than a spiritual man? We have to live this way. We have to be a pattern to the believers. We have to put these truths into practice by living such a life. When the responsible brothers and the more mature ones live and practice these things, denying ourselves, really letting the spirit be the most dominant part, the strongest part of our being, then the saints will follow. A certain kind of culture will be built up among us.

Brothers, this living needs to start in our marriage life, in our home life, in our personal life. Then it will be expressed in the church life, in the meeting life and in the serving life. If we want to reset the church, we may have to start with calling on the Lord. Have we graduated from calling on the Lord? This is why I am so burdened these days

about prayer, to help the saints to pray. To make the church a house of prayer is not an appendage to the church life. This is the church life. This is where we need to start. When we are coordinating, fellowshiping, and taking care of things with one another, we need to practice to be in the spirit and not come out of our spirit. In fact, we need a strong spirit, a strong mingled spirit. Otherwise, we are just in our mind, in our opinions, in our emotions and feelings – a sign that there is a lack of the spirit. There is no way to build up a church properly when we do not have this spiritual atmosphere. Brothers, I hope I am not too elementary or rudimentary. I do not think so. Calling “Oh, Lord Jesus!” is not too rudimentary.

## **2. An Atmosphere in Love**

The second thing that we need to build up is an atmosphere in love. According to the apostle John and also both Paul and Peter, but especially John – in both his gospel and three epistles he repeated the Lord's commandment to His disciples. In fact, it was a new commandment that the Lord left to His disciples. We all know that commandment was the commandment to love one another. What I'm speaking to you is what I remember from Brother Lee. To build up the church, to build up a local church, we need an atmosphere of mutual love, a condition of love, as the Lord has commanded us to have. It would not be bad for us to re-read chapters 13, 14, and 15 of John. The Lord said by loving one another people will know that you are My disciples. John came back to this again and again in his epistles where he spoke of loving one another. A local church is based on this atmosphere of mutual love. This love must be pure. The word in the New Testament is “unfeigned.” In one place, Paul even said with a fervent or hot love of one another.

When I visit churches and get into things, the churches may be outwardly very orderly, but I don't sense much love there. They may be very orderly, but I don't sense this kind of ardent mutual love that is the agape love, the divine love for one another. So that church strikes me as cold, without much feeling. It's hard to build up a church

when there is coldness, where saints do not care for one another or are not concerned for one another or do not love one another. I have visited churches that are very good in the truth, but I don't have the feeling that there is a lot of love or compassion there.

### **A People-Centered Church Life**

I previously stressed that in the Lord's recovery we need churches that are people-centered. People-centered churches are not meeting-centered, but people-centered. What does this mean? It means that you love people, are interested in people, and are compassionate towards people.

### **The Highest Standard of Morality in the Gospel of Luke**

Recall how the Gospel of Luke, the gospel of the Man-Savior where the Lord as a man, showed us what Brother Lee called the highest standard of morality. This really is God's morality or God's divine attributes lived out in the Man-Savior Jesus. The famous story of the Good Samaritan only appears in the Gospel of Luke. The Lord likened Himself to that Good Samaritan. A man was beaten half-dead. Some priests came by and some Levites, but they didn't care. Finally a Samaritan came by from a kind of mixed-up group of people, and had compassion on this man. The Good Samaritan poured oil and wine on him, put him on a donkey, and brought him to the inn. I also remember the multiple cases in the book of Luke where the Lord healed people. For example, there was a woman that could not stand straight for 18 years, she couldn't stand erect. There was a widow whose son just died and was in his funeral. In many such cases it says that Jesus had compassion. Jesus saw them and had compassion on them. That may be just a tiny little phrase, but it reappears in the gospels.

### **Agape Love**

When we say being people-centered, it means we are interested in people, we love people. First, we love the brothers, the believers, and

then eventually, all men, all human beings. Go read chapter two of the book, *The Character of the Lord's Worker*. The title of that chapter is *A Lover of Man*. Not a lover of Christians, but a lover of men, referring to all men. The Lord says that we should even love our enemies, not just love the brothers. I know none of us have this love naturally, only God has this love. But today we are God-men and this agape love, the highest order of love is in us.

### **Brotherly Love in the Church in Philadelphia**

This is brotherly love spoken about with regard to the church in Philadelphia. This love has been put into us. The church in Philadelphia was the only church praised by God of the seven churches and bears the testimony of brotherly love. I hope that all the churches would be a place where ones can touch this love. When you come among the saints in that church, you touch the element of love there. I'm not talking about hugging and kissing each other, but rather a such a divine sentiment. This is the highest essence of God, love. The Body builds itself up in love. We are holding to truth in love. If love is missing, nothing will happen or come together. Love is the glue. Love is what makes things happen. Brothers, we need to love one another. We need to love one another's families. We need to love all the saints. We need to love one another's children. We need to love the good ones and the not so good ones. We need to love the well-behaved and the naughty ones. We need to love those who are very different from us. We need to love saints from different cultures and backgrounds. Brothers, it's easy to say this, I admit. To really express this love for all requires transformation. Today we are just speaking about the atmosphere of love, this aroma. How about this fragrance, can you smell it? As you visit a family and watch, you just know this family loves one another. Or maybe you visit another family and just say "Whoa, this place is cold." There's no feeling or connection. In this love, brothers, there is a lot of forgiveness, a lot of apologies. This love covers a multitude of sins and brings healing. This love encourages and gives hope. Faith, hope, and love are great virtues, and of these love is the greatest. Brothers forgive me if I sound preachy here, but it is

real. All I can say is Lord, start with me. Open my heart. Cause me to love the brothers, the saints. This love may be expressed in many ways, but the source is still love. The reason we would not let things go is because of the lack of love. Why we would hold on to things against a brother is also because of the lack of love. Why we critical is because of the lack of love. Why we are proud is because of the lack of love. It's not bad sometimes to just take a month just to pray-read First Corinthians 13, the famous chapter on love. Pray-read over verses such as love does not brag, love believes all things, love endures.

I'm talking about an atmosphere, brothers. Among the brothers there should be this atmosphere. Among the serving ones there should be this atmosphere. Among all the saints in the whole church there should be this atmosphere. We go to visit the saints not because it's our job or our assignment. We go because we love one another. There's no ulterior motive in our contact with the saints. When we consider the gospel, we realize that people today are looking for a community of true love. There's no love out there in the world. The church should be such a place of love. Even sometimes we may be taken advantage of because of this. Warm up the church with this love, brothers!

### **3. An Atmosphere in Harmony**

The third thing I want to talk about is an atmosphere in harmony. I do not use the word "oneness." Neither do I use the word "one accord." I use the word "harmony." Matthew 18 speaks of a condition where two are in harmony touching anything. "Harmony" in Greek refers to a symphonic harmony, like a big orchestra all playing to the exact same pitch. Everyone plays their instrument, but there is a harmonizing. Nothing soothes you like music in great harmony. When there is a duet or trio or quartet or quintet in harmony, it just sounds so angelic, it sounds beautiful, so pleasing and soothing.

Brothers, I pray for a church life full of harmony, not just declaring we are one. Of course, we are one with one another. But you may be one yet not harmonized, still not playing the music in a harmonizing manner. Harmony comes from blending, comes from being mingled together; from being tempered together. This harmony does not come about in one day. On day one we have oneness, but harmony comes over time. When you see two brothers coordinating, you see harmony, not just oneness. When you see a church in harmony, there's peace, a sweetness. There is the Lord's absolutely the Lord's presence there, a true blessing. How good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in harmony, in unity. How pleasant! It's like the dew on Mount Hermon. It is like the fresh oil on Aaron's head. Brothers, this is the blessing of life, eternal life forever. This is the highest kind of blessing to a church, to a Christian community. Blessing will come to a people that are in harmony. Brothers, there should be no infighting or backstabbing. There should be no contention or opposition which is unbecoming. To be harmonized this way doesn't mean that we play politics. An intrinsic harmony comes from the working of the cross. It comes from dying to our self, from not insisting on something. Harmony comes from our going along as we appreciate one another's function. Harmony issues from respect for one another's portion. It comes when we consider others better than ourselves. It takes the mind of Christ to be harmonized together. It is something that we need to work on. This is a dear attribute in a local church. If a church is in such harmony, it supplies, in part, the atmosphere that is needed to build up.

Do you remember in First Kings when Solomon built the temple? 1 Kings 6:7 "And the house, when it was being built, was built of finished stone, cut at the quarry, so that neither hammer nor ax nor any iron tool was heard in the house when it was being built." This must be the quietest construction site ever. The temple was a big building with stones and all kinds of things. But there was a quiet in the building. What does that mean? That means there is no noise, no quarreling or complaining. There is no murmuring or disagreement. There is no



debating, just harmony. How sweet. Is this possible? Yes. Through the cross and by the Spirit. It is possible, brothers. Before he died, Brother Lee was quite encouraged with one thing. He said that the brothers around him were the blended brothers, meaning they were really learning to be blended together. That really means they are being harmonized together. Speaking as one of the coworkers I can tell you that this is a process. It is a process even for gifted and useful brothers to stay harmonized in the Lord's ministry. But when that harmony is there, the Lord's blessing comes. Sometimes there is zero harmony among the elders in some of the churches I go to visit. Brothers may meet together and talk and make decisions, but no harmony. I can feel it. I can tell by the attitude, even by the voice level. I recognize that there is a problem on the inside. The Chinese call it some kind of heart disease between two brothers. They tolerate one another, but they are not harmonized with each other; they actually cannot stand each other. How the elders and responsible brothers are in their locality will be transmitted to the saints because that is an atmosphere.

#### **4. The Odor of Sacrifice**

Lastly, the last atmosphere is the odor of sacrifice. Of course, I mean self-sacrifice. Apparently, according to a report that was Brother Lee's last word before he became unconscious – "sacrifice." In his words to the brothers, he said this spirit of self-sacrifice will bring a fragrance to the church life, a fragrance in a coordination, a fragrance in the eldership. This means that we don't claim our rights, but would rather sacrifice our rights and privileges, both of which are legitimate. You don't insist, you don't claim, but you would rather let go. It is not easy to sacrifice for the Lord, for the church, for the saints. When you sacrifice for each other you lay down your soul life for one another. This means you give up your convenience and you give of the needed time and energy. In many cases, you sacrifice even your physical possessions. When there is this spirit of sacrifice the church will be a good place to be with no one claiming anything or hoarding anything.

One of the key exercises to practice being in this spirit of sacrifice is prayer. A church in prayer is a church in the spirit, as simple as that. When brothers pray in the elder's meeting is there silence after one round? There may be talk about this and that, but there is no strength to pray, no interest to pray and no harmony in prayer. That is a weak church with a weak spirit. Brothers, we need to build up the prayer life in our home, in our private life, and in the leadership in the church. Everywhere we can pray by lifting up our holy hands. This prayer will usher us into the Spirit.

Consider these few points brothers. In spirit, in love, in harmony, and in sacrifice. I will guarantee you and promise you that if our church is like this, if we are like this, and the saints are like this, we can truly build up the church. We can preach the gospel and shepherd people, have rich meetings, be faithful in the services, and whatever we do will work because the condition is right. This way is not only taught by Brother Lee, but it is also based on the Scriptures and on our experience over the years. There's no magic. Building up the churches is some not magic or based only on skills. If we satisfy the condition through our exercise over time, we will cultivate this kind of situation in the church. Then many things can be done in a smooth way, in an impactful way, even in a way with morale amongst the saints in the church life. You will have less time arguing or of things being stuck with frustration because you're in the right condition.

### **Questions and Responses**

*Brother, I had a question concerning how to recover backslidden ones, the stumbled ones. After listening to this message, I think my question has been somewhat answered. Do you have any particular fellowship concerning how can we take care of the saints to be recovered back to the church life?*

There are a lot of things to be said about recovering or restoring a brother or sister who has been stumbled or wounded or distracted, or

whatever the case may be. This is a great work. When we talk about shepherding the saints, we are not just talking about those who are in the church life who are going on and need shepherding. We are also definitely talking about restoring and recovering those who are not going on who are backslidden or dormant or have grown cold, those on the periphery. There are many different cases with many reasons, and there is not one simple solution. But I would say definitely, it has to start from a place of love, a heart of love. I would even say that love is the source, the essence. This expression of love can be found in First Corinthians 13. When you love someone, you have hope in this person. It's very easy for us to give up on saints. To give up implies that you feel that there is no hope for this one. Two days ago, a certain sister called me about a certain brother who is now not in the church life and with whom I was very close. She asked me to please pray. I just had to go to the Lord so that I could pray and ask where has my heart has been for this brother. So even before I prayed, I needed to adjust my heart. Even though I found that my heart had not given up entirely, I would say I didn't have this matter as a priority. So eventually even just to pray for this person, I needed to go back to the source, to have faith in the Lord, to have hope for this person. I'm not the Lord and I don't know what will happen, but if I am to be a part of some eventual restoration, I have to have a genuine burden for this person that is borne out of love and not just as a duty or feeling that it's my job.

A good word is compassion. Through compassion, an expression of love, grace and mercy will have a way to flow. To endeavor to restore saints is not easy. Other than through prayer, we need to consider the right time and the right way to reach out to contact a person. We must seek the Lord for this very delicate matter. Although you may think that you know what the problem is, you actually don't. You may think it is this or that and you may have your conclusions drawn already. But actually, you don't know the depth of the person or what this person went through. That is a very important thing to find out which will take time. You need to reach out in the right way with the right spirit at the

right time. You need a lot of patience. Love is patient; love is kind. We need a lot of patience to recover someone. Brother Lee said, if we can recover a person in three years, it is worthwhile. You need to cherish them and then nourish them. You need to take time to find out what their real case is, what the real situation is, and not just trust in your observation and your analysis. Many times, we misdiagnose people's situation. We may go in there and do something, but it might not help; it may even make things worse. I find the best way to help restore someone in this way is one-on-one. Because sometimes there are embarrassing things, private things which can be hard to talk about. But when you gain their trust, when you gain the heart of the person, you will have a way to know more and to help.

*We've been following a lot of your Sunday evening messages. I think one of the items that was mentioned in the past is that there's weaknesses, I suppose in the younger believers, the middle age believers, and the older ones. And I think I remember you saying that for younger ones, it was maybe a problem of being action-seeking. And then for middle aged ones, it was a matter of being recognition-seeking. And then for the older ones, you mentioned, being opinionated. In this evening's message, you mentioned the need for compassion in a loving church. And you also mentioned the story of the Good Samaritan. In a lot of the GTCA cities, there's a lot of need, and there's a lot of things going on with the pandemic. Could you speak a little bit about whether the saints should be encouraged to volunteer locally or reach out to people in our communities in different ways based on some of these deficiencies?*

There's no right or wrong answer to your question. In the church, there are always two sides; one side is the church, and the other side is us as individuals. We are Christians. We are in the church life, but we're still individuals in society, in the community where we live. The church, as a rule, does not engage in something formal in the way of humanitarian work. This is just not our kind of a tradition. However,

as an individual believer, it is a little different. The Lord may move you as a Christian, as a co-citizen to do certain things, to reach out, to care for people in your community, or whatever the case may be. I may involve myself in a humanitarian way as an individual, not as the church. Out of love, one may care for fellow human beings who are needy. I believe the source of that love is still God because God is love and the true compassionate One. But the church may not be involved. When we talk about the pandemic and of people suffering or passing through hard times, we may feel to show compassion toward them as a fellow human being. Caring for them in some way is appropriate. In fact, oftentimes it is through this kind of human touch that the gospel is released and the Lord is ministered. When the Lord came to this earth as a Savior, He preached the gospel and the kingdom. But he did a lot of work among the sick, blind, needy, and hungry. These works were not just to heal them or to better their lives; but became a means of ministering Himself into them or to minister the gospel to them. Hopefully this helps. All I can give you are some principles.