

The Communal, Mutual, Social, and Relational Church Life

(Fellowship from Minoru Chen on January 24, 2021)

Prayer

Lord, be with us again today. We need a timely word from You. Lord, give a practical and practicable word, so that we can really carry out the building up of the local church life intrinsically and even extrinsically, inwardly and outwardly, spiritually and practically, meeting Your need and meeting the need of all the members. Oh, we just pray. We need Your light. We need Your guidance in every way. We are here to build up Your testimony, build up the saints, build up the church. Amen, Lord.

Introductory Word

Today, I would like to come to a critical matter, perhaps one that we do not often address deliberately and categorically. In reality and in practicality, however, this is a huge thing concerning our church life and, of course, concerning the building up of a local church. I certainly think, based on my own experience and also based on many of my visits and observation of the churches, that this matter has been neglected or has not been stressed or built up. We could be doing a lot of things in the church, such as running the meetings and building up the service groups. But something is amiss, something is somehow missing. The church is not coming together, as we hope it would. What am I talking about? I am talking about the church as a community. Even more than that, the church as a family. Family is a kind of a small community.

The Church as the Lord's Ultimate Goal

The Lord's predestinating and marking us out, the Lord's coming to the earth to die to redeem us, the Lord's resurrecting to regenerate us, sustain us, and grow and mature in us – all of these of God's plan of salvation are for what, brothers? It is all for the church. It is never ultimately for any individual. Of course, we benefit. We receive the divine blessing in an individual way, in a personal way. I said *individual*, using that noun as an adjective. I did not say *individualistic*. There is a difference. But we have to be clear that the ultimate goal of the Lord, the purpose of the Lord, is not just to have a bunch of saved individuals. It is to gain a corporate entity, a corporate expression. It is to gain the church. We were not saved to go to heaven. We were not saved to just be private Christians. We were all saved for the church that God wants according to His eternal purpose and for whom Christ died.

The Corporate Aspect of the Church Life

Brothers, not only is the church the goal. If you study the word, you will find that the church is even the process. Apparently, we were all saved at different times, we were called at different times, different places, and different ways, and we have our different experiences. But look at the people of Israel, the greatest type of the church in the Old Testament. Consider their redemption in Egypt: their exodus, their separation, from the world in Egypt and their deliverance from the tyrant Satan, the god of the world. It was entirely corporate and collective. They did not go out one man at a time, did they? They did not escape Egypt one man at a time. They left together as a nation, as a unit. They were saved together. They were redeemed together. They were even baptized together in the Red Sea. Eventually, after they got to the other side, they were together as a nation, as a people, to serve Jehovah and to be God's testimony on the earth.

You can see this in Ephesians 2:16: we were “reconciled both in one Body to God through the cross, having slain the enmity by it.” In verse 15, Paul was talking about how Christ died and created the Jews and the Gentiles in Himself into one new man. In a footnote in verse 16,

Brother Lee said, “We, the believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, were reconciled not only *for* the Body of Christ but also *in* the Body of Christ. What a revelation here! We were reconciled to God; we were saved in the Body of Christ.” So actually, even our regeneration was in that one great delivery. On the day of the Lord's resurrection, we were saved together. When Christ die, we all died. When Christ resurrected, we were all resurrected and regenerated. I say this to stress that this corporate aspect of the church life, beginning even with our salvation, our redemption, and our reconciliation, is *in* the Body and *for* the Body, the church. So, by definition, the church is entirely a corporate thing, entirely a collective thing.

Lack of the Corporate Aspect of the Church Life

Over time, because of the failure of God's people in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, the Lord has had to call certain ones to overcome. In time, this thought of individual overcoming, of becoming a strong overcomer, which God did do in the Old Testament and in the New, has been taken in a way to stress the individual side of things, the individual life. The inner life line of Christianity very much stresses the private, individual, and personal aspect. It is not that this is wrong; we all need a personal walk with the Lord. We all need to have a closet life with the Lord. We all need to have this vertical fellowship with God. Absolutely. That is not wrong. But I am saying that, over time, “me and God” became the focus. Believers have lost sight that God does not just want “you and Him.” God wants a corporate “you.” God wants the church. God wants a group of people for Himself.

Even in the New Jerusalem, there are still individuals. We will all be there. But the stress is the Spirit and the bride. The stress is on the corporate bride, the holy city that would be mingled with the processed Triune God, who is the Spirit. That union, that marriage, is eventually fully expressed in the New Jerusalem, the eternal and corporate mingling of God and man. Even when God created Adam, He did not create an individual, He created the head of mankind. He is not after just Adam the man, He is after the mankind that Adam represented, that Adam was the head of. He wants mankind for

Himself, for His expression and representation.

To see this is really to see the church. When we came into the recovery and got into the church life, we realized that to just be a personal overcomer, an individual overcomer, a single spiritual man, whether we are giant or not, falls short of what God wants. God wants a Body. God wants the church. So we looked for that. We looked for the church, for a church life, and we found it in the Lord's recovery. Now that we are in the church life, on the one hand, we are together, we practice the church life, we meet together, and we serve and do things. But it is possible that eventually this church life can just be a collection of saints, of people, in a locality or in a neighborhood. It can be just like in Christianity, where they see each other on Sunday morning, where they come in at Christmas or at Easter. You may belong to a church denomination, but actually there is nothing corporate and nothing collective there. People are still living the individual life and doing their own thing. This is possible even in the recovery of the church life.

Metaphors regarding the Collective Aspect of the Church

In the New Testament, all the metaphors or pictures of the church are collective. Let us look at the church as the Body of Christ. There are the individual members. But these members are not alone. They are not separated or detached. They are together, related, joined, blended, and mingled to have a Body. Some people call this “the Body life,” and I like that word.

We were all saved to become brothers of Jesus. We were all saved to be children of God individually. But eventually, we are a brotherhood. We are a sonship. We are not just individual sons of God. This is a sonship – something collective, something corporate – that expresses the Father. This sonship is eventually the family of God the Father on the earth.

The vine tree is another metaphor. In this vine tree, there are many branches. Even the Lord says, “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit... and every branch that bears fruit...” (John 15:2). For sure, there are individual branches. But eventually, it is a tree. It is not just

branches here and there. It is still one tree, which is the organism of the Triune God.

How about the bride? There are many daughters of Jerusalem, but eventually, there is only one Shulamite. There is only one bride. So all the sons become the sonship. And all the daughters, which we all are, become one bride as Christ's increase. "He must increase but I must decrease" (John 3:30). Here John is talking about the bride and the Lord Himself as the Bridegroom. We all know these aspects of the church, but it is good to review them again to see how this corporate aspect is so important to God. It is the goal, and it is surely even the process, the way.

When a member is detached, when a son is by himself, if a daughter is pursuing by herself, if a branch is out there trying to bear fruit by itself, that does not work. That is not how it is supposed to work. In certain instances, you have no choice, so you have to still carry on. But in a normal situation, brothers, we need this church life, this body life, this vine life, this family life, and this bride life.

Four Words to Describe the Corporate Church Life

This afternoon, I would like to use four words to describe the burden that is important in our church life. I mentioned that in the church life we should build. I hope that, in many of these ten cities, you are rebuilding a new church life, a model church life. We would start afresh with some new light, some new understanding, organically leading us to have some new practice.

In the church or in the Body, the most important thing is fellowship. The word *fellowship* means mutual participation, shared enjoyment. We share in something together. We share something in common. We can say it is a kind of communication. The word *fellowship* means a communion. We are here as the church. The thing that keeps this church life together, to make it the real church life, is fellowship. The stronger the fellowship, the richer the fellowship, the more common the fellowship, the more there is this church life, the more there is this Body life. Of course, the thing that we share in common is none other than Christ, the divine life, and even the processed Triune God. It is

this fellowship, like the blood that flows in the body, that brings all of God, all the divine riches, and all of this divine life into all of us, to sustain us, to heal us, to nourish us, to build us up, and so on. The meetings are for this. The services are for this. In the church, almost whatever we do is for this. It is in this fellowship that we grow together. In this fellowship, we function according to the gift that the Lord has given to us. It is in this fellowship that we know order and authority. It is in this fellowship that we receive the supply from the Lord. It is in this fellowship that we are built up with one another.

1. Communal

We have a song that we don't sing much anymore which came out in a conference in 1971 in Los Angeles. This hymn (#1293) states, "O I'm a man, I'm the meaning of the universe." In the fourth stanza of this hymn it says that "The local church is the new and real family life." When it was originally composed it said that the church life is the new and real communal life. That was a word Brother Lee specifically used, "The church life is the communal life." The 1960s were hippie days. There were communes from California to Oregon and these young people tried to practice a collective lifestyle, sharing food, etc. Brother Lee pointed out that the church is the real commune in a sanctified and Biblical sense. This is scriptural because the first church in Jerusalem had all things common (Acts 2:44). This practice didn't last in that kind of way, but it did last for quite a while. There were thousands of saints; some were poor, some were richer, some had food, and some had no food. Eventually they had seven deacons to do nothing but serve and distribute food to the believers. The Bible says they had everything in common. At that time, the experience of their salvation was very fresh and dynamic. They just loved the Lord and they loved one another. They didn't care about their own home possessions. They shared with one another not because there was a communistic government, but because it was the result of God's dynamic salvation, which saved them from themselves and from their possessions. They shared their possessions with one another. Brother Lee once said this was the "heavenly communism," though of course we must be very careful in using that word. He obviously didn't mean

it in the political or worldly sense, but in the communal sense they shared everything in common. I'm certainly not advocating that we today practice that kind of commune in the church life, but I'm talking about the principle, that kind of sharing and that kind of eating together and the food and riches we share. So eventually, there's no one who has more and no one who has less. This is consistent in the New Testament. In 2 Corinthians Paul gathered money to take to Jerusalem and spoke about those in Achaia who were prepared to do this (9:2-5). So that in the Body those who have less will have no lack and those who have more will share. In our church life, it should be common or communal in this kind of a way. This is fellowship. I have something that I share with you, and you have something that you share with me.

2. Mutual

I hope you will have time and go to the New Testament and find all the phrases with the phrase “one another” or “each other.” Every time you find that it implies something mutual. For example, *“love one another”* or *“bearing one another”* or *“members, one of another.”* We have a “one another” church life. It's mutual. It's me to you, and you to me. I love you, and you love me. I bear with you, and you bear with me. The church life is a “one another” life, very mutual. The more mutual it is, the better. The worst thing is if I love you and you don't love me. That is one sided, it's unidirectional, not mutual. There should be a response or an in-kind reaction. Our heart and our feeling or thoughts are all just mutual.

3. Social

There are two other words I would use to describe the corporate nature of our Christian life. These are not scriptural words, but they are practical. We should consider this word above not in a worldly or fleshly way, but as sanctified ones, as God's children, God's family, the church. In our building up the church life, we must pay attention to the social aspect. This just means that a group of people connect as a small society with companionship, as a kind of association. I emphasize again that I don't mean that we associate in the old man

and in the flesh. But in the Lord and in the spirit we are still human beings and human beings were made to socialize. God made man to socialize, God did not make man to be by himself on an island. That's not how God made man. There is a need in every human being to socialize and to belong to a society and to associate.

4. Relational

“Relational” implies a connection. Whether it's a companionship or a kinship, we relate and we connect. These two aspects, the social aspect and the relational aspect, are very important. Brothers, when we talk about the church life we mainly focus on the meetings, on the work or service, or something in the church. I mentioned in one of the earlier fellowships here with the brothers that we must have a turn to focus on people. Meetings are important and services are important, so I'm not denigrating those things. But if we only pay attention to those things, to have good meetings or to have a good service, then we're a bit off. So I suggest that we have a turn to focus on people. The saints, the people, are not for the meetings, rather the meetings are for the people. The Lord said that man was not made for the Sabbath, to keep the Sabbath. When He healed on the Sabbath and the Pharisees wanted to accuse Him, the Lord said the Sabbath was made for man so that he may have rest. He healed man and that was the real Sabbath. Otherwise, this Sabbath that God instituted kills people because it becomes a formality and a ritual and just something to keep. This would be killing and not life giving. The Lord said “I am here. I don't care for that kind of Sabbath. I'm here to heal this person, to give life to this person and to minister to this person. That's the real Sabbath because he gets the rest.

In the same way, brothers, we should not focus on the meeting per se. We have to pay attention to the people in the meetings. There is no meeting without the people. Do you think the Lord really cares for us to just have a good meeting or what we call a good meeting? Or do you think the Lord within us cares that all the saints in that meeting are cherished, nourished, and built up? How about service? Are the different service groups just to accomplish a project to get something

done or is it about the people? Let's say a brother and I serve together. Are we serving together just to get something done or are we in that service to be built up and to support one another and to minister Christ to one another? Even if the job may not be done so well, something of Christ is ministered and we got blended and built up. That should be the focus and not just to build up a church life that is focused on people. Brothers, it's about people. The gospel is not a campaign or a job or even just a commission. The gospel is about people.

Focusing on People

We are here to focus on people, specifically sinners, seekers, and the saints. We must build up the saints in our locality to focus on people. We use the meetings, we have the services, we have all kinds of things we do, but they are not an end in themselves. These are times and occasions that we gather together in order that we can minister the Lord to one another or to new ones. I've been in small group meetings and home meetings where the concentration is not on the people but on the meeting. Twelve people can sit there and do things because they want to keep the meeting going, to keep it from dying or to keep a song going. I sat there and didn't feel anyone was caring for anybody. They're just "doing the meeting" and wanting to have a good small group meeting on Friday night. Brothers, if we forget about that and take care of the people, then I think the "meeting" will take care of itself. What we call the "small group meeting" is just a part of the small group. But instead, we may make the meeting everything thinking that if we don't have a meeting, then we have don't have a small group. Well, during this pandemic, how are you going to do that? It's about people. Whether it's on Zoom or whether it's in person, it's about people. When you feed, when you nourish, when you cherish and care in person or not in person, that group is there.

We need to not only focus on people, but we need to focus on the relations and the connections between people. What is the building up of the Body? Building up is a blending, a relationship, a relatedness. That is to be built up. Whatever we do in the church life, we have to

facilitate the relational aspect of the saints, the social aspect of the saints, the mutual and communal aspect of the church life. And this is corporate and collective. I've talked in the past about a "cold church." I may visit a locality and I just feel coldness. Even though it has a nice hall and everything is in order, I don't feel warmth. I would say it's either that there is no care or not enough care for people or that there is a shortage of mutuality and of saints being related to one another. This is a matter of an atmosphere and something that you can sense and feel.

Mutual Care and Support

Every human being needs care and attention and help. Every human being needs a community and a place where they have mutual support and mutual care. There's a relationship and connection there. There's a "one another" there. The church is the same. Originally, I had planned to spend some time to talk about the twos and threes, the small groups, and the districts. These things are important to the organic structure of the church life. Then I thought about it and realized that you can have the small groups and districts, but possibly still be cold and ineffective. This is because the people are not cared for and there are no intimate and genuine relationships with each other.

Yesterday, I gave a word to some sisters. I came to Romans 16 where there are two words that Paul mentioned, Phoebe, our sister, and Rufus's mother, who is also my mother. These words, "our sister" and "my mother." In the church life today, we need more such sisters like Phoebe, who was a patroness of the saints. There is also a special need for many mothers in the church. Even the Apostle Paul needed a mom. Brother Nee and Brother Lee both promoted this. When you read what they said, you have a feeling that the church is a very sweet and warm place. The church is like a family, very intimate and caring. When a church has this kind of atmosphere, culture, and condition, almost everything is easy.

Some leading brothers are themselves anti-social. I have seen this repeatedly. A brother may come to the meetings, sit in the front row,

do his thing to lead the meeting by calling hymns and giving the announcements. Then he gets into his car and goes home. He discharged his duty quite marvelously, but I'll guarantee this church has no future. I've also seen the opposite. I've seen some brothers who couldn't speak and were not so constituted, but they have a heart for people. They visit the saints and come to the meeting early and go home late. In fact, some of these ones stay around on the Lord's day in the afternoon. After they ate something, they start going out to visit home by home. I'm sure they didn't go to preach a message because they are not good speakers, but let me tell you, when they do this, the church is warmed up. The saints will be shocked that a leading brother would visit them. They may say, "What did I do wrong now? The elders only come when I fail in something." But no, there's nothing wrong; they just connect and reach out to the saints. They take the initiative to practice "heavenly socializing" and "divine relating." In time this warms up the brothers and sisters. Then the saints don't just come into a cold meeting hall. Rather, they see someone who they know and who visited them. They may not know anyone else, but they know that person and they know their children.

Spiritual Companionships

Brothers, it seems that what I'm talking about is very obvious, but in too many places the churches have become just a shell of a church life. It has all the "things" needed in a local church, but you don't feel the heart or care. If those in the lead are like this, then the saints will also be like this. Some may even go elsewhere to look for relationships because they don't have any in the church. Here we may have the high truth and we have so many wonderful things, but saints may not feel there is a community or a family. This may be a very rich place and very high place, but they are not getting what they need as a human being and as a believer. They want fellowship and relationships. The church is our support system. This is the first place that saints can go for care.

Now, we don't have friendships in the worldly sense in the church, but certainly we have spiritual companionships. I just hope that the Lord

would grant us a breakthrough in this. Please do not misunderstand me and think I'm trying to stir up some kind of worldly social things. I'm not doing that. Consider the new ones. They don't know the high peak truths or much truth at all. They don't even know the Bible. They just want a place where they can hang out and where they're comfortable. The church should be a place that is non-judgmental and where people can feel at ease. In time, in that atmosphere, they will be fed and enlightened and brought on to be saved. But I think some of us have lost even that ability to relate with someone in the world humanly. We may say the gospel doesn't work. No, it's not that the gospel doesn't work or that the tracts don't work. Rather, it's that we don't know how to be and how to relate to others. Consider the Lord Jesus. Story after story and parable after parable, the Lord knew how to relate to all kinds of people, from the lowest class to the highest class and from the richest to the poorest. Paul's word is to love one another warmly. The matters concerning how many is best for a district or how many should compose a small group are, in a sense, the easy part. The hard part is really about being people-centered and about the having a relationship-focused church life.

There are even some elders who don't talk to each other, much less to the saints. We are so rich and have so much to in the church and the recovery, but why is it hard for us to keep the saints? Some may look elsewhere for this kind of companionship. Why is it that we cannot draw and keep the new ones and the unbelievers? I think it has to do with the way we carry out the church life in this sense.

Caring and Connecting

When Brother Lee trained us as young coworkers under him, he always stressed the matter of contacting people, visiting people, relating to people, and taking care of people. He rarely talked to us about how to give a message or that sort of thing. Brother Lee once went to Beijing, formerly called Peking. He was sent there by the work to serve that church, that situation. He prayed to the Lord. As the story goes, he got himself a bicycle and rode that bicycle to visit people. First, he did this to care for people. Second, he did this to connect.

Care and connect. Eventually, a revival was brought in. It was not the Pentecostal-type of revival where the Spirit fell down. No, it was through caring and connecting. We should build up the services and the meetings of the church. But if we lose this element of caring and connecting, then we are building up some thing or some form. Is there any echo within you regarding this? I will stop here and maybe you have some questions or some fellowship.

Questions and Responses

I'd like to confirm and concur with you and read a couple points. I think you'll really be touched by what Brother Nee said. "There are two great communities, the community of Adam and the community of Christ. We need to move out of the community of Adam and into the community of Christ. This is our salvation. This is our regeneration, which gives us a new beginning and leads to our life in Christ. We also saw we need to move out of the first community and into the second community (CWWN, Set Two, Vol. 42, Ch 19)."

Also, "God does not intend for people to be alone; He intends for people to be in groups. Although the human race is fallen, communities and societies confirm that there is an inclination and a desire in human nature to have a corporate living. ...Man was created with a desire to live in a community and with the need to communicate with other people. God does not want an individual man. He wants a corporate man (The Meaning of Human Life and a Proper Consecration, Ch. 7)."

Then later on, there's a lot of really great quotes like this. "I hope that the young saints will find three to four spiritual companions among the brothers and sisters in order to pursue the Lord together. On the one hand, we should fear God and respect one another. On the other hand, we should love one another and forsake the natural affection. When we encounter difficulties or problems, we should bear with one another and solve the problems together, then our living will be according to the principle of the Body. The results and the benefits of such a living are unlimited. The breath length, height and depth of Christ, His unlimited fullness will be open to us and will flow

unceasingly into us. Furthermore, we will grow speedily and in a balanced and steady way (Knowing and Experiencing God as Life, Ch. 12)."

"Man needs community and fellowship. We need the shepherding of one another. The elders should not think that they are so experienced that they do not need the young ones to shepherd them. The elders need the shepherding of the young ones (Elders' Training, Book 8, Ch. 3)."

Excellent. We can talk about the "twos and threes" all day. I can give you three messages on that. That's one way to go. The other way is to approach it not as a formula. If we are in this way as the brother just read, then "twos and threes" will have meaning and real utility. The grouping of the saints in an area of the city or a neighborhood will have meaning. They will feel like they are *really* a support system. They will even be *real* brothers and sisters. There will be "mothers" there; there will be "children" there will even be sometimes a "grandmother" there. When people come touch the church, when they touch the saints, they won't come to the Sunday morning meeting, they will touch a family, an extraordinary family, a society, a holy community they have never known where there is love, mutuality, and support.

Whether it's in the twos and threes, a small group, a district, or whatever the case may be, there will be the real corporate expression of Christ. The Lord said, "If you love one another, the world will know that the Father has sent Me." That is brotherly love, the very testimony of Jesus. In the US today, regardless of the administration, deep down people are hungry and looking for this. There is vitriol, animus, division and hatred in society today, politically, and in every other way. The church should be the community or society that people are looking for.

Light and Practice

If in our localities this rings true that we feel like we have fallen short in this matter, that we have somewhat of a cold atmosphere and are

more meeting-centric as opposed to people-centric, what would you say we could do? What would be your fellowship if we want to turn this turn this ship. What are some of the first things to actually do, practically, to make a change in our culture?

Well, of course, I don't have a perfect answer that you're looking for. I'll just give my personal testimony. By disposition I am not that way either. I'm Chinese and tend to be more conservative. We don't hug and do those kinds of things. Also, I was just born more of an introvert. I would be happy on an island by myself. That's my natural disposition. It took the Lord's word from the ministry and the conviction of the Spirit to touch this matter very pointedly. I'm just not a people person by nature. I may not be antisocial, but I am at least somewhat not that social. When I read chapter 2 "A Lover of Man" from *The Character of the Lord's Worker*, it was very difficult for me and at the same time extremely convicting.

What can we do? Well, first of all, to answer your question, I would say, it would be most blessed and only right that those who take the lead and bear some responsibility in the church, to be that kind of person. We have the greatest influence on the saints and on the church. How we lead them as a pattern depends on how we are and how we live. It comes back eventually to us. It was a tremendous ordeal for me to have a breakthrough in the matter. I will spare you the long story, but through the help of the ministry, Brother Lee's speaking, and the Spirits working within me, I began to break. The heart is like this, so cold and so hard and with an expressionless face. It takes a lot sometimes to break a heart to make it soft, to change it to a heart of flesh, to be pleasant, to be relatable, to be approachable, and to be friendly. It's not easy. In a small way, the Lord began to work in me starting from my 20s until today. If you left it to me, I would become my old self again. I have to be reminded of this. The other side is the help I received. There is not just light, but also the leading to practice certain things. For example, I might force myself to not hide in the corner with my plate at a love feast food, but to really be among the saints, to contact this one, contact that one. It is an exercise to ask, "How are you doing? What's your name? Who are

you? Who's your husband? Who's your wife?" This is not a political game. To break out of your shell, to break out of your imprisoned self is very difficult. Some people may go through a kind of epiphany. Others may go through a certain deep tragedy that break them open because otherwise they're so composed, so together that no one can relate to them. Rather, people are scared of them. In terms of how to be unassuming, approachable, down-to-earth, relatable, social in a pleasant way, you must force yourself with the help of the Spirit and the help of the Lord. You have to force yourself, if you really want to take the lead in a proper way.

The Lord has to be merciful to us and we have to cooperate with him to work on ourselves. Sorry to say that word, but to work on ourselves and not excuse ourselves by saying "well, I was just born this way." No. We've got to change, brothers, we've got to change. If the saints are going to have a good church life. If there's a future in the church, we've got to change.

1 Corinthians 13

I was pray-reading First Corinthians 13 about love being the most excellent way. Do you think that chapter about love touches on this communal life of mutuality that you're speaking of?

That's a good question for me. I'll tell you why. It just so happens that a few years ago, the Lord moved me to spend several months on that chapter. If you're like me, I'm scared of that chapter. I'm really scared because I am diametrically opposed to everything in that chapter. If you put me in front of that chapter, it's like a mirror exposing my lack of everything. But the Lord touched me to pray-read it, so I did. I took my time; there's about twelve items concerning love. I just slowly pray-read it. There was some light, some shining, some speaking, and some touching. That love described there is not a thing – it is a person, Christ. We know that. I realized that I don't have that Christ in me. It doesn't mean I don't love people or that I don't love saints. But not like *that*; not even close. So, there was a lot of exposing and conviction. To this day, and this is not false humility, there is a real sincere cry within me, the greatest thing is love! No one can love like

that, except Christ. That's true.

But why did Paul write that? Paul wrote that not merely to tell us who love is. Paul wrote that to tell us that we should and we can love in that way. I have to believe that. So what I can do is to continue to eat that word and be shined on. Also, in many instances, I catch myself not being like that at all and applying the Lord in that instance with someone else. For example, love believes all things or love hopes in all things. That translates to “you don’t give up on anyone.” Even if the person has given up on himself. You don't give up on them up; no matter how naughty, no matter how bad, love doesn't give up. Love, in fact, hopes and believes. That's not something we have; it's only in the divine love, divine life. The Lord then moved me to write a hymn on First Corinthians 13. It's called “Oh, perfect Love.” The hymn recites those things, things that I don't yet have. But let us dwell on them, let us consider those things. I think in time, the word will work, and the Spirit will work in our lives. Even many times, through the “all things” in our situation, the Lord would do certain stripping, the Lord would do certain dealing, not just to make you and me more spiritual, but to actually make us more loving and more caring for others.

There's no shortcut; there's no quick way. But it is something that we need to work on. I think one of the main things is to realize it. When you don't even know that you are that way or you are in denial about it, then there's no way. Even the Lord could not do much. Many times, it takes some other person, someone close to you to point this out to you. Especially for elders, nobody tells you what's “wrong” with you. You need someone that is close to you that will tell you. Will we reject that? Will we resist that? Will we deny that? Or will we receive that and take it to the Lord? Brothers, I really look to the Lord for a new church life in America. Not just changing our way outwardly, but a new atmosphere, a new culture, a new condition. With this and the rich truth that we have, the two things will match. Otherwise, we have these really wonderful truths, but our life, our church life doesn't match that. People will come and see a mismatch.

I hope my word is not condemning you or puts a wet blanket on you.

Actually, I feel that we can now speaking like this and touching these things is the Lord's mercy and grace. Don't think "Oh, this is not spiritual stuff." No, don't say that. This is absolutely a matter of life, and absolutely a matter of the Spirit. We are human vessels. It's about time for the Lord to really get through in us by His transforming Spirit, to change our disposition to the type of disposition that makes us the right kind of brother and vessel that the Lord can flow through. I say again, brothers, it's about caring for people. You will not go wrong. Just care for people. A lot of times, this is not even a matter of giving them a message or a verse or a Bible. It is asking "how are you doing?" You may be the first person to ask them that question. I have a brother whose daughter went to a locality. From the beginning to the end on a Lord's day no one talked to her. She just sat through the meeting and left. She never went back. Why would she?

I also use this word judgmental. Even we are very judgmental by nature. We may look at a person in a critical way who has their head shaved. If the Lord was judgmental, he would not have healed and saved a lot of those people in the Gospels. He received them just as they were, and loved them, had compassion on them, and touched them, including the leper. What compassion, what loving kindness, what heart the Lord had for the people around him. I think if the Lord can help us and bring us through individually and together more and more in this way, then whatever we practice would be effectual. It's not the method brothers, it's the person.