

Ministry Excerpts:

INTRODUCTION:

If we note what places are mentioned in God's Word in connection with the founding of churches, then we shall be able to determine what the extent of a place must be to justify its being regarded as a unit for the forming of a church. In Scripture...we read of the church in Ephesus, the church in Rome, the church in Jerusalem, the church in Corinth, the church in Philippi, and the church in Iconium. Now what kind of places are Ephesus, Rome, Jerusalem, Corinth, Philippi, and Iconium...? In modern language we should call them cities. That cities were the boundaries of churches in the apostolic days is evident from the fact that on the one hand Paul and Barnabas "appointed elders for them in every church" (Acts 14:23), and on the other hand Paul instructed Titus to "appoint elders in every city" (Titus 1:5). [In the Word of God we see no church that extends beyond the area of a city, nor do we find any church which does not cover the entire area. A city is the scriptural unit of locality. \(CWWN, Vol. 30. Normal Christian Church Life\)](#)

Acts 14:23 says that elders are ordained in every church, but **Titus 1:5** says that elders are ordained in every city. This means that "in every city" is "in every church," and "in every church" is equivalent to "in every city." To ordain elders in every church is not to ordain elders in every home or in any other kind of place, but in every city. Then **Revelation 1:11** says, "What you see write in a scroll and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamos and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." Have you noticed all the *tos* in this verse...? To is repeated seven times. Therefore, to the seven churches is to the seven cities, and to the seven cities is to the seven churches. (CWWL, 1968. Vol. 1. Practical Expression of the Church, ch. 9)

THE CHURCH

The church is God's ultimate goal. God's goal is not just to have many individual believers. His goal is to have a corporate church that can be His house and the Body of His Son. This church is God's expression. The church is both God's household expressing God the Father and the Body of Christ expressing Christ as the One who is the embodiment of the Triune God (Col. 2:9). [What we are going to cover in this chapter is an extract of the divine revelation concerning the church in the New Testament.](#)

THE EKKLESIA

The church is first an [ekklesia](#). This Greek word denotes a called-out congregation. In ancient times when the city called its citizens together for a gathering, that congregation was an ekklesia. The New Testament, beginning with the Lord Jesus in Matthew 16, uses this word to denote the church (v. 18). The church is a congregation called out by God unto Himself. The Brethren prefer to use the word [assembly](#). I believe this is a better word to use, because the word church in English has been very much spoiled. When I was growing up in China, we understood the word church to mean a building with a bell tower. To many of us the church was a building. Today many people think the same. They say that they are going to church, meaning to a building. This concept is absolutely off. We must drop this thought. The church is not a lifeless building but something organic, full of life. The church is an assembly of living persons, not a physical building without life. However, to consider the church as merely a called-out congregation, an assembly, is still superficial. There may be a congregation, an assembly, yet without life. Today there are many large congregations in our society that are without the divine life.

THE HOUSE OF GOD

The church is also the house of God (1 Pet. 2:5). By this we do not mean merely that the church is the dwelling of God. This Greek word *oikos* means not only the house, the dwelling, but also the household. *Oikos* means both the house and also the folks, the family, that make up the household; thus, it may also be translated as “household” (**Eph. 2:19**). God’s dwelling place today on earth is the church, and God, as such a great Father, has a family, which is the church. For our family life we have a house, and inside the house we have the family. To us the house is one thing, and the family another; the house is the building, and the family is the people who live there. God’s house and God’s family, however, are the same. The house is the family, and the family is the house. We as the church are God’s house, God’s dwelling place. At the same time, we are God’s family. Both the house of God and the family of God are one entity, that is, a group of regenerated, called ones, indwelt by God Himself. These called ones, who have been regenerated by God with His life and who are being indwelt by this living God with all that He is, are both God’s dwelling place and His family. This is more than an assembly. This is different from a group or organization of people. [This is something organic—organic in the divine life, organic in the divine nature, and organic in the Triune God.](#)

Some stressed the ekklesia very much, but they did not pay much attention to the [organic](#) aspect of the church. They did not say much about the church as God’s family. We must realize, though, that the church is organic; it is the living house of God. Paul says that the church is the house of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15) and that this house grows (Eph. 2:21). Does your house grow? Our houses do not grow. They depreciate. But God’s house grows! For something to grow, it must be living. Anything without life cannot grow. Anything that grows is organic, with life. Hallelujah, we are growing!

THE BODY OF CHRIST

[God’s house, the family of God, is organic, but in a sense it is not as organic as the Body.](#) The church is the Body of Christ. A group of Christians may be an assembly but may not actually be the house of God, because they do not live in the spirit. They may say that they are the Body of Christ, but actually they may not be, because they are still living in the natural life. As long as we live in our natural life, we are not the Body of Christ. When I was young, I heard of two or three elders who met together to talk about matters in their so-called church. Eventually, one threw his Bible, and another got up and walked out. Was that the Body? That was not the Body but the fallen flesh.

What is the Body? Look at yourself. Your body is the greatest part of your being. Nothing can be your body but you yourself. Dentures are not a part of your body; they are something extra without any life. Our real teeth are joined to our body not by organization but by life. They grow organically in our body. A member of your body is organic; it grows in an organic union with your body. Whatever is not in organic union with your body is foreign to it. In like manner, the Body of Christ is an organism, not an organization. A podium, for example, consists of pieces of wood organized and fitted together. A man’s body, on the other hand, is not organized but organic, full of life.

THE NEW MAN

Ephesians 2:15 says that Christ through the cross abolished *“in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances, that He might create the two in Himself into one new man.”* Then in **Ephesians 4:22-24** we are told to put off the old man and to put on the new man. This new man is the Body of Christ. **To put on the new man means to live a life by the Body.** Before our salvation we were living in the old man, in the old society, but now we are members of Christ, living in His Body. We should put off the old man with the old social life, and we should put on the new man, the church. In this new man there is nothing natural, nothing Jewish, nothing Greek, nothing of social rank; everyone is full of Christ, so Christ is everyone, and Christ is in everyone (Col. 3:10-11). There is nothing but Christ in the new man. Our life is Christ, our living is Christ, our intention is Christ, our ambition is Christ, our will is Christ, our love is Christ, and everything else about us is Christ. He saturates our entire being.

THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

In **Ephesians 5** we have the church as the bride of Christ. Christ gave Himself on the cross not just for you and me individually but for the church. When we think about Christ's death, we usually consider only ourselves individually. Yes, Christ loved us and died on the cross for each one of us, but His death was mainly for the church. Christ also nourishes and cherishes the church (Eph. 5:29). To nourish is to feed. To cherish is to embrace with loving care, full of warmth, like a mother holding her child in her bosom. Christ treats His church in this nourishing and cherishing way. The great mystery spoken of in 5:32 refers to Christ and the church. Chapter 5 refers to love (vv. 2, 25) and light (vv. 8-9, 13). Love is the source of grace, and light is the source of truth. When light shines, there is truth. When love is expressed, there is grace. In chapter 4 as the new man, the church experiences grace and reality, but in chapter 5 the bride that satisfies Christ experiences something deeper and higher, that is, love and light. As the new man, the church fulfills God's purpose. As the bride, the church satisfies Christ's desire. He is the Husband, and the church is His wife, satisfying her Husband's desire.

THE WARRIOR

In chapter 4 the new man fulfills God's purpose. In chapter 5 the bride satisfies Christ's heart's desire. Now in **chapter 6** the church fights against God's enemy as the warrior (vv. 10-17).

ITS UNIVERSAL ASPECT AND LOCAL ASPECT

The universal aspect of the church is mentioned in Matthew 16:18. When Peter recognized that the Lord Jesus was the Christ and the Son of God, the Lord told him that He would build His church on this rock. The church here is universal, comprising all the believers of all times and in all places, including Paul, Peter, and all the saints throughout these twenty centuries (1 Cor. 12:13). **The local aspect** of the church was referred to by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 18:17... In Matthew 18 the Lord Jesus said that if we have any problem that we cannot solve, we should tell it to the church. This refers to the church in a certain locality. It would be hard to tell a problem to the universal church. Today many Christians who love the Lord care only for the universal church. In their concept, as long as they are members of the Body of Christ, that is good enough; but we would ask, practically speaking, where is their church? If we have any problem that needs the church's help to be solved, where shall we go? We must have a local church that we are part of, from which we can get help and to which we may go with our problems.

THE LOCAL CHURCHES

Universally, the church is one. But locally, the churches are many. In Acts 8:1 there is the church in Jerusalem. In Acts 13:1 there is the church in Antioch. Then there are churches mentioned in Acts 14:23 and 15:41; here the word churches is used because there were a number of cities in these regions. In Romans 16:1 there is the church in Cenchrea. There is the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2). In Galatians 1:2 we have the churches of Galatia; there were several because Galatia was a province of the ancient Roman Empire with many cities. In Revelation 1:4 and 11 there are the seven churches in Asia. Asia was also a province. Verse 11 says, *"What you see write in a scroll and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamos and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."* This verse reveals that a local church equals a local city. To write to the church in Ephesus means to write to the city of Ephesus. These are local churches. **A local church is not a term used as a name, but it describes the fact of one church in a locality.** The church does not have a name, just as the moon does not have a name. There is no such thing as an American moon or a Chinese moon. The moon in China is the same moon as in other countries. When it is over China, it is the moon in China. When it is over Britain, it is the moon in Britain. It is the one moon. In like manner, the church is one; it is unique. The church is both local and universal.

The Lampstands

These local churches are lampstands. **A lampstand is the embodiment of the Triune God.** How do we know this? First, the **substance** of the lampstand is **gold, signifying God the Father and the divine nature.** Then, the lampstand has a **shape**; it is not just a lump of gold but has a definite **form.** This **signifies Christ as the very embodiment of God.** Third, the seven lamps are the seven eyes of the Lamb and the seven **Spirits of God** (5:6; 4:5). The seven lamps as the seven Spirits of God are the **expression** of the Triune God. **The Spirit is the expression, the Son is the shape, the form, and the Father is the**

PREACHING THE GOSPEL, PRESENTING THE TRUTH, AND MINISTERING LIFE AS THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS

We must learn the truth, grow in life, and go out to contact people. What we say will depend on our discernment. If the person is not saved, we will preach the gospel. If we find out that he is a Christian, we can present the truth we have learned. Christians greatly appreciate the truth... Then, if possible, we can minister life to him by witnessing, telling him how we have received Christ and how we experience Him as life. A testimony will minister life to people. Do not expect to bring people to the meeting to have an increase for the church. Leave the matter of increase in the Lord's hands. Our testimony is not a great number. **Our testimony** is a group of saints living in the spirit, walking according to the spirit, and being the living expression of Jesus in the family, at school, on the job, and in the church life. **Our burden** is to present the gospel to the unsaved, the truth to the saved, and life to the seeking ones. Leave the church matter to the Lord. Let each person choose for himself according to his discernment. No one can manage today's Christianity. It is too big. We have to realize our smallness. We are to live Christ and walk in the spirit, being the living testimony to Him. In this way we will be a benefit to all those whom we contact. We should not expect to have them come to our meeting. If they would like to come, of course we do not refuse them. I hope that we are all clear about where we stand and how we practice the church life. May the Lord bless us all (CWWL, 1983, Vol. 3, *The Basic Revelation in the Holy Scriptures*, ch. 5. *The Church*)