

**BEING A PROPER PERSON IN LIFE  
TO CARE FOR THE CHURCH IN GOD’S ADMINISTRATION**

(Thursday—Second Morning Session)

Message Two

**The Producing of the Elders in Life  
to Care for the Church in an Organic Way**

Scripture Reading: Acts 14:23; 20:28; Titus 1:5; John 21:15-17; 1 Thes. 2:7, 11

- Acts 14:23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church and had prayed with fastings, they committed them to the Lord into whom they had believed.
- Acts 20:28 Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood.
- Titus 1:5 For this cause I left you in Crete, that you might set in order the things *which I have begun* that remain and appoint elders in every city, as I directed you:
- John 21:15 Then when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me more than these? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Feed My lambs.
- John 21:16 He said to him again a second time, Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Shepherd My sheep.
- John 21:17 He said to him the third time, Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me? Peter was grieved that He said to him the third time, Do you love Me? And he said to Him, Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You. Jesus said to him, Feed My sheep.
- 1 Thes 2:7 But we were gentle in your midst, as a nursing mother would cherish her own children.
- 1 Thes 2:11 Just as you know how *we were* to each one of you, as a father to his own children, exhorting you and consoling *you* and testifying,

**I. The elders are produced not by appointment but by growth in life—1 Tim. 3:1-7:**

- 1 Tim 3:1 Faithful is the word: If anyone aspires to the overseership, he desires a good work.
- 1 Tim 3:2 The overseer then must be without reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, of a sober mind, orderly, hospitable, apt to teach;
- 1 Tim 3:3 Not an excessive drinker; not a striker, but gentle; not contentious; not fond of money;
- 1 Tim 3:4 One who manages well his own house, having *his* children in subjection with all gravity
- 1 Tim 3:5 (But if one does not know how to manage his own house, how will he care for the church of God?);
- 1 Tim 3:6 Not a new convert, lest being blinded with pride he fall into the judgment *suffered* by the devil.
- 1 Tim 3:7 And he also must have a good testimony from those outside, that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

**A. The children of Israel had elders, but the Old Testament does not tell us how these elders were appointed; likewise, there were elders in the church in Jerusalem, but there is no record of when or how they became elders—Exo. 4:29; Acts 8:1; 15:2, 4, 6.**

- Exo 4:29 And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel.
- Acts 8:1 And Saul approved of his killing. And there occurred in that day a great persecution against the church which was in Jerusalem; and all were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.
- Acts 15:2 And when no little dissension and discussion with them came about through Paul and Barnabas, *the brothers* directed Paul and Barnabas and certain others among them to go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem concerning this question.
- Acts 15:4 And when they arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared the things that God had done with them.
- Acts 15:6 And the apostles and the elders were gathered together to see about this matter.

**B. The New Testament shows us the importance of the elders in God’s administration—Acts 11:29-30; 15:2, 4, 23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18:**

- Acts 11:29 And the disciples, according to how one was prospered, determined, each one of them, to send *things* for dispensing to the brothers dwelling in Judea,
- Acts 11:30 Which also they did, sending *it* to the elders through the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

- Acts 15:2 And when no little dissension and discussion with them came about through Paul and Barnabas, *the brothers* directed Paul and Barnabas and certain others among them to go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem concerning this question.
- Acts 15:4 And when they arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared the things that God had done with them.
- Acts 15:23 Writing *to them and sending* by their hand *the following*: The apostles and the elder brothers, to the brothers throughout Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are of the Gentiles, rejoice.
- Acts 16:4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.
- Acts 20:17 And from Miletus he sent *word* to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.
- Acts 21:18 And on the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.
1. The elders are overseers in the local church—20:28:
 

Acts 20:28 Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood.

    - a. The title *elder* denotes a person of maturity, whereas the title *overseer* denotes the function of an elder—14:23; 20:28.
 

Acts 14:23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church and had prayed with fastings, they committed them to the Lord into whom they had believed.

Acts 20:28 Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood.
    - b. To oversee is to observe the situation, condition, and need for the purpose of taking care of the church with all the saints—1 Tim. 3:1.
 

1 Tim 3:1 Faithful is the word: If anyone aspires to the overseership, he desires a good work.
    - c. The elders should oversee the church altogether according to God's thought, feeling, will, and choice—1 Pet. 5:2.
 

1 Pet 5:2 Shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not under compulsion but willingly, according to God; not by seeking gain through base means but eagerly;
  2. The elders take the lead in the local church, going ahead of the flock to set an example—1 Tim. 5:17.
 

1 Tim 5:17 Let the elders who take the lead well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in word and teaching.
  3. All the elders should be apt to teach the members of the local church—3:2:
 

1 Tim 3:2 The overseer then must be without reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, of a sober mind, orderly, hospitable, apt to teach;

    - a. The elders are the local shepherds, and to be a shepherd is to be a teacher; teaching is the main way to practically shepherd the saints— Acts 20:28.
 

Acts 20:28 Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood.
    - b. The elders should be occupied in teaching the saints concerning the practical matters of the daily Christian life and church life.
  4. The elders bear the burden of shepherding the local church; the church is like a flock, and the elders are the shepherds to shepherd this flock, taking care of the situation of the flock and meeting the needs—v. 28.
 

Acts 20:28 Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood.
  5. The elders take care of the finances in a local church; an elder must be pure in money

matters, especially since the church fund is under the elders' management—11:29-30;  
1 Tim. 3:3.

Acts **11:29** And the disciples, according to how one was prospered, determined, each one of them, to send *things* for dispensing to the brothers dwelling in Judea,

Acts **11:30** Which also they did, sending *it* to the elders through the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

1 Tim **3:3** Not an excessive drinker; not a striker, but gentle; not contentious; not fond of money;

- C. The producing of the elders does not depend mainly on the appointment by the apostles; rather, the producing of the elders is mainly a matter of life—Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5:

Acts **14:23** And when they had appointed elders for them in every church and had prayed with fastings, they committed them to the Lord into whom they had believed.

Titus **1:5** For this cause I left you in Crete, that you might set in order the things *which I have begun* that remain and appoint elders in every city, as I directed you:

1. The elders are produced by what they are in life according to their growth and maturity in life—1 Tim. 3:1-7.

1 Tim **3:1** Faithful is the word: If anyone aspires to the overseership, he desires a good work.

1 Tim **3:2** The overseer then must be without reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, of a sober mind, orderly, hospitable, apt to teach;

1 Tim **3:3** Not an excessive drinker; not a striker, but gentle; not contentious; not fond of money;

1 Tim **3:4** One who manages well his own house, having *his* children in subjection with all gravity

1 Tim **3:5** (But if one does not know how to manage his own house, how will he care for the church of God?);

1 Tim **3:6** Not a new convert, lest being blinded with pride he fall into the judgment *suffered* by the devil.

1 Tim **3:7** And he also must have a good testimony from those outside, that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

2. To appoint elders is simply to point out or indicate to the saints who the elders are in order to avoid confusion or complication; nevertheless, we need to be clear that the elders are produced not by appointment but by life.

3. The strength of the eldership depends on life and teaching; if the elders are rich in life and in teaching, the situation in the churches will be wonderful.

- D. Elders are not transferable—Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5:

Acts **14:23** And when they had appointed elders for them in every church and had prayed with fastings, they committed them to the Lord into whom they had believed.

Titus **1:5** For this cause I left you in Crete, that you might set in order the things *which I have begun* that remain and appoint elders in every city, as I directed you:

1. The elders should be raised up locally from among the saints meeting in a church, and there should be no transfer of elders, because this violates the principle of life—Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5.

Acts **14:23** And when they had appointed elders for them in every church and had prayed with fastings, they committed them to the Lord into whom they had believed.

Titus **1:5** For this cause I left you in Crete, that you might set in order the things *which I have begun* that remain and appoint elders in every city, as I directed you:

2. Transferring elders is dangerous because it opens the door to hierarchy and causes the churches to lose the Lord's blessing—cf. Rom. 15:29; Eph. 1:3.

Rom **15:29** And I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

Eph **1:3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ,

3. Transfers cause a local church to become a man-made organization without the nature of a family—Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15.

Gal **6:10** So then, as we have the opportunity, let us do what is good toward all, but especially toward those of the household of the faith.

Eph 2:19 So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,  
 1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

4. Transferring elders is absolutely against the biblical principle and is useful only for those who want to build up their own kingdom by manipulating the situation in order to gain control over certain local churches.

## II. The church is the organic Body of Christ, and the elders should care for the church in an organic way—John 21:15-17; Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Pet. 5:2:

John 21:15 Then when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me more than these? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Feed My lambs.  
 John 21:16 He said to him again a second time, Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Shepherd My sheep.  
 John 21:17 He said to him the third time, Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me? Peter was grieved that He said to him the third time, Do you love Me? And he said to Him, Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You. Jesus said to him, Feed My sheep.  
 Rom 12:4 For just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function,  
 Rom 12:5 So we who are many are one Body in Christ, and individually members one of another.  
 Rom 12:6 And having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, whether prophecy, *let us prophesy* according to the proportion of faith;  
 Rom 12:7 Or service, *let us be faithful* in that service; or he who teaches, in that teaching;  
 Rom 12:8 Or he who exhorts, in that exhortation; he who gives, in simplicity; he who leads, in diligence; he who shows mercy, in cheerfulness.  
 1 Pet 5:2 Shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not under compulsion but willingly, according to God; not by seeking gain through base means but eagerly;

### A. The eldership is organic, and the elders' care for the church should be altogether organic, not organizational—John 21:15-17:

John 21:15 Then when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me more than these? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Feed My lambs.  
 John 21:16 He said to him again a second time, Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Shepherd My sheep.  
 John 21:17 He said to him the third time, Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me? Peter was grieved that He said to him the third time, Do you love Me? And he said to Him, Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You. Jesus said to him, Feed My sheep.

1. The term *elder* indicates something organic, something of life; an elder is a person who is mature in life—Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5.

Acts 14:23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church and had prayed with fastings, they committed them to the Lord into whom they had believed.  
 Titus 1:5 For this cause I left you in Crete, that you might set in order the things *which I have begun* that remain and appoint elders in every city, as I directed you:

2. The elders should be one with the Lord Jesus to feed, shepherd, nourish, and cherish the church; this is the organic way to care for the church— John 21:15-17; Eph. 5:29:

John 21:15 Then when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me more than these? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Feed My lambs.  
 John 21:16 He said to him again a second time, Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Shepherd My sheep.  
 John 21:17 He said to him the third time, Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me? Peter was grieved that He said to him the third time, Do you love Me? And he said to Him, Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You. Jesus said to him, Feed My sheep.  
 Eph 5:29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ also the church,

- a. The word *shepherd* nearly equals the words *nourish* and *cherish*—1 Pet. 5:2;

Eph. 5:29.

1 Pet 5:2 Shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not under compulsion but willingly, according to God; not by seeking gain through base means but eagerly;

Eph 5:29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ also the church,

b. All the elders should be nourishing mothers and teaching fathers— 1 Thes. 2:7, 11.

1 Thes 2:7 But we were gentle in your midst, as a nursing mother would cherish her own children.

1 Thes 2:11 Just as you know how *we were* to each one of you, as a father to his own children, exhorting you and consoling *you* and testifying,

c. We all need to learn not to control the saints but to nourish and cherish them.

3. To take the lead, to administrate, to function as an elder in the church, is one of the gifts given according to grace; this indicates that the leading of the elders is organic and that it is by life and is not organizational—Rom. 12:4-8.

Rom 12:4 For just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function,

Rom 12:5 So we who are many are one Body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Rom 12:6 And having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, whether prophecy, *let us prophesy* according to the proportion of faith;

Rom 12:7 Or service, *let us be faithful* in that service; or he who teaches, in that teaching;

Rom 12:8 Or he who exhorts, in that exhortation; he who gives, in simplicity; he who leads, in diligence; he who shows mercy, in cheerfulness.

4. If the elders take the lead in an organizational way, this indicates that the church has degraded, for to be in the realm of organization is to be in degradation.

5. If the elders live in the spirit by life to nourish, cherish, and shepherd the church, they are organic; when a church is organic, all the serving ones serve organically—8:4; Gal. 5:16, 25; Eph. 5:29.

Rom 8:4 That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit.

Gal 5:16 But I say, Walk by the Spirit and you shall by no means fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Gal 5:25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Eph 5:29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ also the church,

B. Among the churches there should not be an improper coordination that brings in hierarchical organization and human headship—Rev. 2:6, 15; Col. 4:15-16:

Rev 2:6 But this you have, that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Rev 2:15 In the same way you also have some who hold in like manner the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

Col 4:15 Greet the brothers in Laodicea, as well as Nymphas and the church, which is in his house.

Col 4:16 And when this letter is read among you, cause that it be read in the church of the Laodiceans also, and that you also read the one from Laodicea.

1. Coordination often implies organization and activity; for the churches to have fellowship is normal, but to coordinate in the way of organizing nearby churches is an improper activity—2 Cor. 9:13; 1 Thes. 2:14.

2 Cor 9:13 They, through the approving of this ministry, are glorifying God *based* upon the subjection unto the gospel of Christ that *issues* from your confession, and upon the liberality of the fellowship to them and to all;

- 1 Thes **2:14** For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus, for you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, even as they also from the Jews,
2. Fellowship among the churches and the saints is the healthy flow of life, and it is normal for the elders in nearby churches to come together to fellowship; however, for the elders to coordinate may be a snare that causes the church to fall into organization—1 John 1:7.
- 1 John **1:7** But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin.
3. We may come together for fellowship, but we must avoid hierarchical organization and human headship not only among the churches but also within each local church—Col. 2:19; 4:15-16.
- Col **2:19** And not holding the Head, out from whom all the Body, being richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews, grows with the growth of God.
- Col **4:15** Greet the brothers in Laodicea, as well as Nymphas and the church, which is in his house.
- Col **4:16** And when this letter is read among you, cause that it be read in the church of the Laodiceans also, and that you also read the one from Laodicea.

## Excerpts from the Ministry:

### THE ELDERS BEING PRODUCED BY GROWTH AND MATURITY IN LIFE

We need to consider how the elders are appointed, or the way in which the elders should be produced. The New Testament apparently reveals that the apostles appoint the elders. However, the producing of the elders actually does not depend mainly on the appointment by the apostles. Sometimes what the Bible does not say is as meaningful as what the Bible does say. The Bible does not say how the elders among the children of Israel were produced. Nor does the Bible say how the elders in the church in Jerusalem were produced. This indicates that the producing of the elders does not depend entirely on their appointment.

The producing of the elders depends mainly on the matter of life. In a family there is no need to appoint the father. He is produced not by appointment but by life. It is a spontaneous matter of life that among the persons in a family, one is the father. The term *elder*, which simply means an older person or a person of advanced age, implies one who is produced by the growth and maturity of life. We need to be impressed that the elders are produced not mainly by appointment but by what they are in life according to their growth and maturity.

Although the father in a family does not need to be appointed, the elders do need to be appointed because the situation in the church is not as simple as that of a family. In a family everyone knows who the father is, and there is no argument about it. In principle, the elders are produced by their maturity in life, but even in a small church it may not be immediately clear which ones have the most maturity. Therefore, in order to prevent confusion, a few need to be appointed as elders. To appoint elders is simply to point out or indicate to the saints who the elders are in order to avoid confusion or complication. Nevertheless, we need to be clear that the elders are produced not by appointment but by growth in life.

According to Acts 14, during the same journey on which Paul preached the gospel, he also raised up local churches and appointed elders in each church. Verse 23 says, “When they had appointed elders for them in every church and had prayed with fastings, they committed them to the Lord into whom they had believed.” These churches in which Paul appointed elders had been established within less than one year. Thus, Paul’s practice in his early ministry and during his first trip was to first preach the gospel, second raise up churches, and third appoint elders. Twenty years later his practice in appointing elders seems to have changed. In Titus 1:5 he said, “For this cause I left you in Crete, that

you might set in order the things which I have begun that remain and appoint elders in every city, as I directed you.” Paul did not directly appoint the elders in Crete as he did on his first journey.

On his first journey he appointed the elders as soon as a church was established, but later he may have discovered that this practice was unreliable. Therefore, in his later ministry he did not immediately appoint the elders but instead left the task to his younger co-worker because he saw the need for some consideration concerning the qualifications of the elders. Paul did not mention the specific qualifications of the elders until his later ministry (1 Tim. 3:2-7; Titus 1:6-9). This may indicate that he found that some elders were appointed at the wrong time. In other words, in Paul’s early ministry the appointment of the elders was quick, but in his later ministry the appointment of elders was slow and deliberate. He became very careful about this matter.

We should not decide whether a brother is an elder at an early stage of his growth in life, when he is immature. We must be slow in this matter and wait until the time is right. Otherwise, it is unsafe and may cause trouble. The New Testament reveals that the elders in a local church should not be appointed in a quick way. There is the need of time for thorough consideration so that the qualifications may be manifested. Then the time will be right to make a decision. Farmers wait to reap grain until it is ripe. It would be foolish to reap before the harvest ripens. Similarly, whenever a new local church is raised up as the Lord’s testimony, it is proper and safe to delay appointing the elders until there is a full manifestation of the situation.

### **THE ELDERS BEING RAISED UP LOCALLY**

The migrations in the past few years have allowed a subtle practice to creep in, which we may call the transfer of elders. An elder is like a father in a family, and fathers are not transferred. There is no transfer of elders in the Old Testament. The elders in a tribe of the children of Israel were raised up from within that tribe. If the elders in one tribe were weak, other elders were not transferred in from another tribe. The elders in Judah belonged to the tribe of Judah; they could not transfer to the tribe of Dan to be elders of that tribe.

Elders are not transferable. In a migration we do not transfer anyone. In the past when large groups of saints migrated to establish new local churches, each group was already like a tribe of the children of Israel with elders who went with them. These elders were not transferred to take the lead among a new group of saints. However, because some misunderstood what happened in these migrations, the practice of transferring elders subtly crept in. This is absolutely against the biblical principle and is useful only for those who want to build up their own kingdom by manipulating the situation in order to gain control over certain local churches. Transferring elders is dangerous because it opens the door to hierarchy. The elders should be raised up locally from among the saints meeting in a church. Keeping this principle in life will prevent false ones from maneuvering according to their ambition to build up a hierarchy or personal kingdom. (*Basic Principles concerning the Eldership*, pp. 18-21)

### **THE ORGANIC CARE FOR THE BODY OF CHRIST**

If we want to know how to take care of the church as the organic Body of Christ, we have to consider how we take care of our physical body. Surely we do not take care of our physical body in an organizational way. Let us come back to the New Testament to see what it says concerning the organic care for the Body of Christ. Ephesians 5:29 says, “For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ also the church.” Just as we nourish and cherish our physical body, Christ nourishes and cherishes the church. A person loves his physical body by nourishing and cherishing it.

Some have asked me why I am so healthy at my age and why I have lived so long. The first thing I exercise to do is to eat the proper thing and to eat well. We should not eat roughly or quickly, nor should we eat when we are angry. We have to learn to eat the right thing by the right way. This is what

it means to nourish and cherish our body. We have to nourish and cherish our body in order to live. Every day we nourish our body with at least three meals.

Eating nourishes us, but eating the wrong thing in the wrong way can also kill us. Alexander the Great died when he was thirty-three because of overeating and overdrinking. The proper eating nourishes, but improper eating can gradually kill us. To eat roughly and wrongly is a kind of gradual suicide. Long life, of course, is a gift from the Lord. The length of our life is up to Him, but we still must cooperate with Him. During my life, the Lord allowed me to have certain illnesses. These illnesses taught me a lot. By being ill, I learned how to keep myself healthy. We all have to learn how to nourish the church in a proper way to keep the church healthy. We should not try to govern the church. This is organization. To nourish the church is organic.

To cherish the church is also an organic matter. The word *cherish* is hard to explain. Note 1 of Ephesians 5:29 in the Recovery Version says, "To cherish is to nurture us with tender love and foster us with tender care, outwardly softening us through tender warmth that we may have soothing, comfortable rest inwardly. This is the way Christ cares for the church, His Body." We may illustrate what the word *cherish* means by the relationship between a mother and her little child. When a mother puts the little child in her bosom, she is cherishing the child. She is warming the child up, comforting the child, and making the child happy. Many times the mother will feed the child while the child is in her bosom. That little child in his mother's bosom receives everything. He is given a room, a bed, food, drink, and comfort. The mother also rocks him to make him happy. I believe that all this is included in the word *cherish*. To nourish is to feed, but the mother putting the child in her bosom is not merely feeding. It is the mother affording everything to the child. This is the way that Christ takes care of His Body.

We should take care of the Body in the same way. In our care for the church, there should be no condemnation, rebuking, or criticizing. Instead, there should be nourishing and cherishing. To nourish and to cherish are altogether matters in life. They are organic. To control, to rebuke, to condemn, and to criticize are altogether organizational. I still remember what I shared in 1976 when we were on the life-study of Matthew. When we were covering Matthew 20 and 23, I exhorted the elders not to control the churches. The Lord Jesus told us that we are all brothers on the same level (23:8). He is the unique Lord and Instructor among us (v. 10). Once a brother becomes an elder, he is a slave to the saints in a church, and his wife becomes the wife of a slave. The eldership is not a matter of a position in a hierarchical sense. That is altogether organizational.

In Peter's first Epistle, he spoke to his fellow elders. Peter was an elder in Jerusalem. He charged the elders to shepherd the flock of God (1 Pet. 5:1-2). The word *shepherd* nearly equals the two words *nourish* and *cherish*. A good shepherd always loves the flock, and the flock eventually loves this shepherd. They know each other intimately. To shepherd is not to control. In John 21 the Lord asked Peter, "Do you love Me?" Then He indicated that if Peter loved Him, he would feed His sheep and shepherd His sheep (vv. 15-17). The Lord Jesus spoke this to show how we should take care of the church. We should be those who are one with Him to feed, shepherd, nourish, and cherish the church. This is the organic way to care for the church.

### **THE ELDERSHIP BEING ORGANIC**

The leading ones' care for the church is not an organizational matter. The church is not an organization. The church is God's family, God's household (Eph. 2:19; Gal. 6:10). All the elders should be the teaching fathers and the nourishing mothers (1 Thes. 2:7, 11). This is the way to take care of the church. It is altogether an organic matter, not organizational. The term *elder* also indicates something organic, something of life. An elder is a person who is mature in life.

To see more concerning the organic service in the Body of Christ, let us read 1 Corinthians 12:28: "And God has placed some in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then works of power, then gifts of healing, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues." *Administrations* refers

to the eldership in the church. *Helps* refers to the services of the deacons and deaconesses (1 Tim. 3:8-13). Administrations and helps are listed with apostles, with prophets, with teachers, and with works of power, healing, and tongues. This proves that both the helps by the deacons and the administration by the elders are not organizational. They are from the Spirit.

Now we need to read 1 Corinthians 12:4-7: “But there are distinctions of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are distinctions of ministries, yet the same Lord; and there are distinctions of operations, but the same God, who operates all things in all. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for what is profitable.” The word *distinctions* in these verses can also be translated as *distributions*. These verses are a summary and a governing word of the whole chapter. Of course, they govern verse 28, which lists administrations and helps.

According to our natural thought, the government of the church has nothing to do with the distribution of gifts by the Spirit. But 1 Corinthians 12 tells us clearly that even the service of the deacons as helps and the function of the elders as administrations are distributions of gifts by the Spirit. This has to be something of the Spirit organically, not something of organization. Many years ago, I considered that the administration by the elders was not a gift from the Spirit, but later I received the light to see that it is a gift from the Spirit. Since this is the case, it has to be organic.

The spiritual gifts are of two categories—the miraculous gifts and the gifts of life given according to grace. Romans 12:6 speaks of the gifts of life given according to grace. These gifts are the issue of the development of our spiritual function in the spiritual life. In 1 Corinthians 12:28 Paul puts the gifts of life and the miraculous gifts together. Helps and administrations are gifts of life. Since they are gifts, they are something of the Spirit, and they are organic.

In Romans 12:8 Paul refers to taking the lead as a gift according to grace. This refers to the elders in the church. To lead in the church is to administrate. We may consider that the administration of the church is not of any gift, not of life, or not of the Spirit. We may think that it is altogether a positional, organizational matter. But Romans 12 tells us that to lead, to administrate, to function as an elder in the church, is one of the gifts given according to grace. This indicates that the leading of the elders is organic. It is by life and not organizational. These three words—*eldership*, *administration*, and *lead*—are misunderstood by Christians as something organizational. After much study of the Word, we can see that they are not organizational. They are organic. (*Elders’ Training, Book 9: The Eldership and the God-ordained Way (1)*, pp. 71-73, 75-77)