

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

(Thursday—Evening Session)

Message Three Seeing the Principle of God's Government among His People and Honoring the Headship of Christ in the Fellowship of the Apostles, Elders, and Churches

Scripture Reading: Exo. 3:16; 4:29; 28:30; Acts 14:23; 15:1-31

- Exo 3:16 Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, Jehovah, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, I have surely visited you and seen what is being done to you in Egypt.
- Exo 4:29 And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel.
- Exo 28:30 And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be on Aaron's heart when he goes in before Jehovah, and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel on his heart before Jehovah continually.
- 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 15:1 And certain men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers, Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.
- 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 15:3 They therefore, having been sent forward by the church, passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, telling in detail about the turning of the Gentiles; and they brought great joy to all the brothers.
- 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 15:5 But certain men from the sect of the Pharisees who had believed rose up from among *them*, saying, It is necessary to circumcise them and to charge *them* to keep the law of Moses.
- Acts 15:6 And the apostles and the elders were gathered together to see about this matter.
- Acts 15:7 And when much discussion had taken place, Peter rose up and said to them, Men, brothers, you know that from the early days God chose *from* among you that through my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.
- Acts 15:8 And God, the Knower of hearts, bore witness to them, giving *them* the Holy Spirit even as also to us;
- Acts 15:9 And He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.
- Acts 15:10 Therefore why are you now testing God by placing a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?
- Acts 15:11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus we are saved in the same way also as they are.
- Acts 15:12 And all the multitude became silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul relating all the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.
- Acts 15:13 And when they finished speaking, James answered, saying, Men, brothers, listen to me.
- Acts 15:14 Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles to take out from *them* a people for His name.
- Acts 15:15 And with this the words of the prophets agree, even as it is written,
- Acts 15:16 "After these things I will return, and I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen; and I will rebuild its ruins and erect it again,
- Acts 15:17 So that the remainder of men may seek out the Lord, even all the Gentiles upon whom My name has been called,
- Acts 15:18 Says the Lord, who is making these things known from of old."
- Acts 15:19 Therefore I judge that we do not harass those from the Gentiles who are turning to God,
- Acts 15:20 But that we write to them to abstain from the contaminations of idols and fornication and what is strangled and blood.
- Acts 15:21 For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who proclaim him in the synagogues, he being read every Sabbath.

- Acts 15:22 It then seemed good to the apostles and the elders with the whole church to choose men from among them to send to Antioch together with Paul and Barnabas: Judas, who is called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers,
- 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 15:24 Since we have heard that certain ones who went out from among us have troubled you with *their* words, unsettling your souls, to whom we gave no instruction,
- Acts 15:25 It seemed good to us, having become of one accord, to choose men to send to you together with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,
- Acts 15:26 Men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Acts 15:27 Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will report the same things by word *of mouth*.
- Acts 15:28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things:
- Acts 15:29 To abstain from things that have been sacrificed to idols and blood and things strangled and fornication, from which if you carefully keep yourselves, you will do well. May you be strong.
- Acts 15:30 So when they had been sent away, they went down to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they handed *them* the letter.
- Acts 15:31 And when they read *it*, they rejoiced at the encouragement.

I. We need to see the principle of God’s government among His people—Exo. 3:16; 4:29; 12:21; 28:30; Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21; Deut. 33:8, 10:

- Exo 3:16 Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, Jehovah, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, I have surely visited you and seen what is being done to you in Egypt.
- Exo 4:29 And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel.
- Exo 12:21 Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, Draw out and take lambs according to your families, and slaughter the passover.
- Exo 28:30 And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be on Aaron’s heart when he goes in before Jehovah, and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel on his heart before Jehovah continually.
- Lev 8:8 And he placed the breastplate upon him, and in the breastplate he put the Urim and the Thummim.
- Num 27:21 And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, and he shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before Jehovah. At his word shall they go out and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the children of Israel with him, even the whole assembly.
- Deut 33:8 And concerning Levi he said, May Your Thummim and Urim be with Your faithful man, Whom You tested at Massah, With whom You contended at the waters of Meribah—
- Deut 33:10 They shall show Jacob Your judgments, And Israel Your law; They shall put incense before Your nostrils And whole burnt offerings upon Your altar.

A. In the Old Testament we have a type of the New Testament government; in order to understand God’s administration in the New Testament, we need to understand God’s administration in the Old Testament—Acts 14:23; 1 Pet. 2:9:

- 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.
- 1 Pet 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people acquired for a possession, so that you may tell out the virtues of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;
1. God’s administration is a direct ruling and governing by God Himself; this direct ruling is a theocracy—1 Sam. 8:7.

1 Sam 8:7 And Jehovah said to Samuel, Listen to the voice of the people according to all that they have said to you; for it is not you whom they have rejected, but they have rejected Me from being King over them.
 2. In the Old Testament God’s administration among the children of Israel was neither an autocracy by a dictator nor a democracy of the people; on the contrary, God’s administration was a theocracy, indicating that God Himself came to govern, to rule, to administrate, the people of God directly yet through some agents—Exo. 12:1-3, 21; 28:30; Deut. 33:8, 10:

Exo 12:1 Then Jehovah spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying,

- Exo 12:2 This month will be the beginning of months for you; it shall be the first of the months of the year to you.
- Exo 12:3 Speak to all the assembly of Israel, saying, On the tenth of this month each man shall take a lamb according to his fathers' house, a lamb for a household.
- Exo 12:21 Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, Draw out and take lambs according to your families, and slaughter the passover.
- Exo 28:30 And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be on Aaron's heart when he goes in before Jehovah, and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel on his heart before Jehovah continually.
- Deut 33:8 And concerning Levi he said, May Your Thummim and Urim be with Your faithful man, Whom You tested at Massah, With whom You contended at the waters of Meribah—
- Deut 33:10 They shall show Jacob Your judgments, And Israel Your law; They shall put incense before Your nostrils And whole burnt offerings upon Your altar.
- a. Among the children of Israel, these agents were the priests and the elders working together for God's theocracy—Num. 27:15-21.
- Num 27:15 And Moses spoke to Jehovah, saying,
- Num 27:16 Let Jehovah, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly,
- Num 27:17 Who will go out before them and who will come in before them, and who will lead them out and who will bring them in; so that the assembly of Jehovah will not be like sheep which have no shepherd.
- Num 27:18 And Jehovah said to Moses, Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand upon him;
- Num 27:19 And set him before Eleazar the priest and before the whole assembly, and give him a charge in their sight.
- Num 27:20 And you shall put some of your honor upon him, so that the whole assembly of the children of Israel may obey him.
- Num 27:21 And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, and he shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before Jehovah. At his word shall they go out and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the children of Israel with him, even the whole assembly.
- b. The theocracy among the nation of Israel was a government according to God's constant speaking, as written in the law, or God's instant speaking, as revealed through the breastplate of the high priest by means of the Urim and the Thummim—Exo. 28:30; Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21; Deut. 33:8; 1 Sam. 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Neh. 7:65.
- Exo 28:30 And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be on Aaron's heart when he goes in before Jehovah, and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel on his heart before Jehovah continually.
- Lev 8:8 And he placed the breastplate upon him, and in the breastplate he put the Urim and the Thummim.
- Num 27:21 And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, and he shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before Jehovah. At his word shall they go out and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the children of Israel with him, even the whole assembly.
- Deut 33:8 And concerning Levi he said, May Your Thummim and Urim be with Your faithful man, Whom You tested at Massah, With whom You contended at the waters of Meribah—
- 1 Sam 28:6 And Saul inquired of Jehovah; but Jehovah did not answer him, not by dreams or by the Urim or by the prophets.
- Ezra 2:63 And the governor told them that they should not eat of the most holy things until a priest stood up with Urim and Thummim.
- Neh 7:65 And the governor told them that they should not eat of the most holy things until a priest stood up with Urim and Thummim.

3. In principle, the administration of God was always carried out by the elders according to the divine speaking received through the Urim and the Thum-mim—Exo. 12:1-3, 21; Num. 27:15-21:

Exo 12:1 Then Jehovah spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying,
 Exo 12:2 This month will be the beginning of months for you; it shall be the first of the months of the year to you.
 Exo 12:3 Speak to all the assembly of Israel, saying, On the tenth of this month each man shall take a lamb according to his fathers' house, a lamb for a household.
 Exo 12:21 Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, Draw out and take lambs according to your families, and slaughter the passover.
 Num 27:15 And Moses spoke to Jehovah, saying,
 Num 27:16 Let Jehovah, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly,
 Num 27:17 Who will go out before them and who will come in before them, and who will lead them out and who will bring them in; so that the assembly of Jehovah will not be like sheep which have no shepherd.
 Num 27:18 And Jehovah said to Moses, Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand upon him;
 Num 27:19 And set him before Eleazar the priest and before the whole assembly, and give him a charge in their sight.
 Num 27:20 And you shall put some of your honor upon him, so that the whole assembly of the children of Israel may obey him.
 Num 27:21 And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, and he shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before Jehovah. At his word shall they go out and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the children of Israel with him, even the whole assembly.

- a. After the high priest received the instant speaking from God, he did not directly execute or carry out what God spoke; the high priest passed on the word that he had received to the elders, and the elders became the direct administrators among God's people—Exo. 28:30; Num. 27:15-21.

Exo 28:30 And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be on Aaron's heart when he goes in before Jehovah, and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel on his heart before Jehovah continually.
 Num 27:15 And Moses spoke to Jehovah, saying,
 Num 27:16 Let Jehovah, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly,
 Num 27:17 Who will go out before them and who will come in before them, and who will lead them out and who will bring them in; so that the assembly of Jehovah will not be like sheep which have no shepherd.
 Num 27:18 And Jehovah said to Moses, Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand upon him;
 Num 27:19 And set him before Eleazar the priest and before the whole assembly, and give him a charge in their sight.
 Num 27:20 And you shall put some of your honor upon him, so that the whole assembly of the children of Israel may obey him.
 Num 27:21 And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, and he shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before Jehovah. At his word shall they go out and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the children of Israel with him, even the whole assembly.

- b. Joshua may be considered the leading elder among God's people at his time, and the high priest accompanying him was Eleazar; Eleazar bore the responsibility to go into God's presence to receive His instant speaking, and from him Joshua received the divine speaking to administrate among God's people—v. 21.

Num 27:21 And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, and he shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before Jehovah. At his word shall they go out and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the children of Israel with him, even the whole assembly.

4. God's government is by His instant speaking plus the constant written Word; the instant speaking was either through the priests or the prophets, and this speaking was carried out by the direct administrators.
- B. The principle regarding God's administration in the New Testament is the same as that in the Old Testament; the elders are both the priests receiving the instant word from God and the administrators to administrate what they have received from the Lord—Exo. 19:6; Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10:
- Exo 19:6** And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel.
- 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 20:17** And from Miletus he sent *word* to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.
- 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:
- 1 Pet 2:9** But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people acquired for a possession, so that you may tell out the virtues of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;
- Rev 1:6** And made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be the glory and the might forever and ever. Amen.
- Rev 5:10** And have made them a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign on the earth.
1. In the Old Testament kingdom of God, the constitution was the law, and in the New Testament kingdom of God, the constitution is the teaching of the apostles; the teaching of the apostles replaces the law in the sense of replacing the law in God's administration—Acts 2:42; Titus 1:9.

Acts 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles, in the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Titus 1:9 Holding to the faithful word, which is according to the teaching *of the apostles*, that he may be able both to exhort by the healthy teaching and to convict those who oppose.
 2. The written constitution of the New Testament kingdom of God is the teaching of the apostles, and the direct administrators in this kingdom are the elders—vv. 5, 9.

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:

Titus 1:9 Holding to the faithful word, which is according to the teaching *of the apostles*, that he may be able both to exhort by the healthy teaching and to convict those who oppose.
 3. In the Old Testament the priests are one group, and the elders are another group, but in the New Testament the two groups are one; all the elders are both priests and administrators, who honor the teaching of the apostles as the highest power in the church and who spend much time in the Lord's presence to receive His instant speaking—1 Pet. 2:9; Titus 1:5, 9.

1 Pet 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people acquired for a possession, so that you may tell out the virtues of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

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:

Titus 1:9 Holding to the faithful word, which is according to the teaching *of the apostles*, that he may be able both to exhort by the healthy teaching and to convict those who oppose.

II. We need to honor the headship of Christ in the fellowship of the apostles, elders, and churches—Acts 15:1-31:

- Acts 15:1** And certain men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers, Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

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 15:3 They therefore, having been sent forward by the church, passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, telling in detail about the turning of the Gentiles; and they brought great joy to all the brothers.

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 15:5 But certain men from the sect of the Pharisees who had believed rose up from among *them*, saying, It is necessary to circumcise them and to charge *them* to keep the law of Moses.

Acts 15:6 And the apostles and the elders were gathered together to see about this matter.

Acts 15:7 And when much discussion had taken place, Peter rose up and said to them, Men, brothers, you know that from the early days God chose *from* among you that through my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

Acts 15:8 And God, the Knower of hearts, bore witness to them, giving *them* the Holy Spirit even as also to us;

Acts 15:9 And He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.

Acts 15:10 Therefore why are you now testing God by placing a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

Acts 15:11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus we are saved in the same way also as they are.

Acts 15:12 And all the multitude became silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul relating all the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.

Acts 15:13 And when they finished speaking, James answered, saying, Men, brothers, listen to me.

Acts 15:14 Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles to take out from *them* a people for His name.

Acts 15:15 And with this the words of the prophets agree, even as it is written,

Acts 15:16 "After these things I will return, and I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen; and I will rebuild its ruins and erect it again,

Acts 15:17 So that the remainder of men may seek out the Lord, even all the Gentiles upon whom My name has been called,

Acts 15:18 Says the Lord, who is making these things known from of old."

Acts 15:19 Therefore I judge that we do not harass those from the Gentiles who are turning to God,

Acts 15:20 But that we write to them to abstain from the contaminations of idols and fornication and what is strangled and blood.

Acts 15:21 For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who proclaim him in the synagogues, he being read every Sabbath.

Acts 15:22 It then seemed good to the apostles and the elders with the whole church to choose men from among them to send to Antioch together with Paul and Barnabas: Judas, who is called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers,

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 15:24 Since we have heard that certain ones who went out from among us have troubled you with *their* words, unsettling your souls, to whom we gave no instruction,

Acts 15:25 It seemed good to us, having become of one accord, to choose men to send to you together with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

Acts 15:26 Men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 15:27 Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will report the same things by word *of mouth*.

Acts 15:28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things:

Acts 15:29 To abstain from things that have been sacrificed to idols and blood and things strangled and fornication, from which if you carefully keep yourselves, you will do well. May you be strong.

Acts 15:30 So when they had been sent away, they went down to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they handed *them* the letter.

Acts 15:31 And when they read *it*, they rejoiced at the encouragement.

A. The record in Acts 15 shows us the proper headship and leadership—v. 28:

Acts 15:28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things:

1. All the apostles and elders honored the headship of Christ, with each one conducting

himself not as a leader or head but as a brother; there was no human headship, leadership, or presumption—vv. 7-13.

Acts 15:7 And when much discussion had taken place, Peter rose up and said to them, Men, brothers, you know that from the early days God chose *from* among you that through my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

Acts 15:8 And God, the Knower of hearts, bore witness to them, giving *them* the Holy Spirit even as also to us;

Acts 15:9 And He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.

Acts 15:10 Therefore why are you now testing God by placing a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

Acts 15:11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus we are saved in the same way also as they are.

Acts 15:12 And all the multitude became silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul relating all the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.

Acts 15:13 And when they finished speaking, James answered, saying, Men, brothers, listen to me.

2. Among the saints and the churches, there was only one Head; if we keep this principle and honor the Lord's headship, we can have the assurance that blessing will be transmitted from the Head to the Body—Col. 2:19.

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.

B. Acts 15 reveals some basic principles in God's administration:

1. In the early days among the churches there was no head church; all the churches were equal in the one Body—vv. 2-3, 30-31.

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 15:3 They therefore, having been sent forward by the church, passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, telling in detail about the turning of the Gentiles; and they brought great joy to all the brothers.

Acts 15:30 So when they had been sent away, they went down to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they handed *them* the letter.

Acts 15:31 And when they read *it*, they rejoiced at the encouragement.

2. No church made a decision by itself; in God's administration no single church should presume to make a decision regarding the truth or in other matters affecting the other churches without fellowship—vv. 1-2.

Acts 15:1 And certain men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers, Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

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.

3. Not only the apostles but also the elders represented the churches; both were included because in God's administration the apostles represent the universal church, and the elders represent the local churches—vv. 2, 6.

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 15:6 And the apostles and the elders were gathered together to see about this matter.

4. There was much discussion among the apostles and elders; it is wrong to think that we need to avoid discussion in order to be spiritual—v. 7.

Acts 15:7 And when much discussion had taken place, Peter rose up and said to them, Men, brothers, you know that from the early days God chose *from* among you that through my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

5. The Holy Spirit was presiding over the conference, and the decision was made by this presiding One as the presence of the King—v. 28:

Acts 15:28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things:

a. The decision was apparently made by the apostles and elders, but it was actually made by the Holy Spirit with them; this is the principle of incarnation; we must have the assurance that every decision in the church is made by the Holy Spirit with us—vv. 13-22, 25, 28.

Acts 15:13 And when they finished speaking, James answered, saying, Men, brothers, listen to me.

Acts 15:14 Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles to take out from *them* a people for His name.

Acts 15:15 And with this the words of the prophets agree, even as it is written,

Acts 15:16 "After these things I will return, and I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen; and I will rebuild its ruins and erect it again,

Acts 15:17 So that the remainder of men may seek out the Lord, even all the Gentiles upon whom My name has been called,

Acts 15:18 Says the Lord, who is making these things known from of old."

Acts 15:19 Therefore I judge that we do not harass those from the Gentiles who are turning to God,

Acts 15:20 But that we write to them to abstain from the contaminations of idols and fornication and what is strangled and blood.

Acts 15:21 For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who proclaim him in the synagogues, he being read every Sabbath.

Acts 15:22 It then seemed good to the apostles and the elders with the whole church to choose men from among them to send to Antioch together with Paul and Barnabas: Judas, who is called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers,

Acts 15:25 It seemed good to us, having become of one accord, to choose men to send to you together with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

Acts 15:28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things:

b. We need to discuss, testify concerning the facts, and find the confirmation in the Word, and then the Holy Spirit will guide us to the correct decision; this is the proper way to maintain God's administration while honoring and respecting the unique headship of Christ in the fellowship of the apostles, elders, and churches—v. 28.

Acts 15:28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things:

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE ELDERS AS PRIESTS AND ADMINISTRATORS

Paul, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, made this matter of God's administration in the New Testament very clear. He charged the brothers in Corinth to remove a certain sinful man from the fellowship of the church (5:13), which is also the fellowship of the apostles and of the saints. His desire was that this evil person would be removed from the church, but he would not do it by himself because he was not the direct administrator. Therefore, he charged the ones who were the direct administrators in the church. By the New Testament teaching and example, we can realize that some elders had been established in the church in Corinth. Paul gave such a charge to the brothers, but he did not carry out the administration. The elders were the direct administrators of the church there. The

written constitution of the New Testament kingdom of God is the teaching of the apostles, the complete New Testament, and the direct administrators in this kingdom are the elders.

Furthermore, in the New Testament age, there is still some instant speaking. In the New Testament, we have the reality of the high priest and the priests. In the Old Testament, the priests are one group, and the elders are another group. But in the New Testament, these two groups are one. All the believers in Christ are priests to God (1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6), including the elders. All of the elders are priests, and Christ is the High Priest (Heb. 3:1). Where is Christ? We know that He is seated at the right hand of God in the heavens (Rom. 8:34), but we must see that for God's movement among us on this earth, our High Priest, Christ, is in us (8:10). All of the elders need to declare that Christ, the High Priest, is in them. We have such a High Priest (Heb. 8:1). The elders, who are also the priests, should be the ones who administrate the church in God's government. If there is a problem in the church under the administration of the elders, how shall they solve it? In the Old Testament, it was necessary to study the law to find out what to do to solve the problem. If there is a problem in the church, we have to study our New Testament constitution.

The United States is a good example of a country ruled by its Constitution. The highest power in the United States is neither the President nor the Congress. It is the Constitution. Because of the power of the United States Constitution, President Nixon was forced to resign from office. Eventually, the Constitution is more powerful than the President. We must admit that today the highest power in the church is the teaching of the apostles. If there is a problem in the church, we have to come to the New Testament to see what it says about this particular problem. We should not say we are for or against something until we go to the New Testament constitution to see what it has to say. When any problem arises, we must learn to be silent and go to the written Word of God, the New Testament constitution, without any opinion. We have a complete constitution with many more details than the United States Constitution.

If we cannot find anything in our written constitution directly concerning a certain problem or if we can find something and are not clear how to apply it, we need an instant speaking. The time and the way to carry out the written constitution still needs the Lord's instant speaking. How can we have the Lord's instant speaking? We have to get into the presence of the Lord, stay in His presence, and wait on Him, asking Him to show us what to do. Then we have to read the breastplate with all its letters. The stones on the breastplate with the letters refer to the saints, God's people. We have to read the people of the church. By reading the people of the church in the presence of the Lord, with the Lord, and with His loving capacity typified by the breast, we will receive some instruction as to when and how to carry out what is in the written constitution. This is to receive the instant speaking according to the written teaching of the apostles. Of course, we should not do anything that is against the teaching of the apostles. In the Old Testament, no one was to do anything against the law, but to carry out the law, there was also the need of the instant speaking of God Himself. When we have His instant speaking, we are not speaking our own word. What we speak is not something of democracy or of autocracy, but it is of theocracy since God Himself is speaking instantly according to His written constitution to govern and rule His people.

All of the elders of the church need to realize that they are the real priests. They are the elders and the priests. As an elder, you have the High Priest within you, and you can share in His loving capacity as symbolized by His breast. You love the saints with Christ's love and go into His presence with such a loving capacity, waiting on Him and reading the letters on the stones of the breastplate, that is, reading all the members of the church. By reading the members of the church, taking the members as the letters of a divine typewriter, a word, a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph, and even a chapter will come to you, telling you what to do and how to do it.

We must also remember the principle of the eldership. The elders are always in plurality. Because the elders are in plurality, there is the need of much fellowship. The genuine fellowship must be in the presence of the Lord. If any fellowship among the elders is not in the presence of the Lord,

that is not genuine fellowship. Thus, all the elders should exercise the practice of being in the presence of the Lord in the fellowship. In this kind of fellowship, surely the “Urim” and the “Thummim” in Christ’s loving capacity would speak. Then the elders would know what is on the heart of the Lord concerning His people and what He desires to administrate in their locality for the church there. The elders are both the priests receiving the instant word from God, and the administrators to administrate what they have received from the Lord. The principle in the Old Testament regarding God’s administration is the same in the New Testament. (*Elders’ Training, Book 9: The Eldership and the God ordained Way (1)*, pp. 46-49)

FURTHER FELLOWSHIP CONCERNING PROPER DISCUSSION

We must learn not to hide anything or do anything independently but to open everything for discussion. However, we also must learn to discuss without losing our temper. This is not easy. In the early years of my service in the church, I learned much concerning this point. For the first few years that I served, I did not say much in the way of discussion because I did not have the assurance that I could control my temper. I knew that I should participate in the discussions, but I also realized that I was not qualified, because my temper was not dealt with. I repented to the Lord for not being purified from my temper so that I could be used by Him. I also confessed to the brothers the reason for my silence. Eventually, I learned to discuss without losing my temper.

We should not insist when we are in a discussion with the brothers. To insist is a sign that we are ruled by our temper. Acts 15 records that there was much discussion, but we also know that there was no insisting, because verse 25 says that they became of one accord. To avoid insisting is not easy. As long as we are natural, have a temper, and are in our self, we will insist on our opinion. To discuss in a proper way is quite difficult; it requires many lessons of the cross. If we do not learn these lessons, our discussions will become battles. Nevertheless, we need to have much discussion. We should not excuse our silence by saying that we want to keep the oneness when actually we dare not speak because we are weak in the spirit and not yet free from our temper.

The apostles and elders in Acts 15 had all learned much through many spiritual experiences. Therefore, they were qualified to participate in the discussion, and they did so without losing their temper. Because they discussed without insisting, they were able to accept the final decision even if the decision went against their initial opinion. It is not easy to not be offended when what we say in a discussion is set aside. Nevertheless, we must learn to discuss without losing our temper, insisting, or being offended. In the affairs of government, people often play politics in order to avoid offending others or to save face. However, in Acts 15 there was no offending, no saving of face, and no playing of politics. The brothers were open and genuine.

It is quite difficult to put the normal and proper principles in Acts 15 into practice. In order to perform an operation, a surgeon must be qualified, and he and his instruments must be sterilized, purified; otherwise, he will introduce germs into his patient and make the patient sicker. Similarly, in order to participate in the fellowship of the co-workers and elders, we must be qualified and purified. When we try to put the principles in Acts 15 into practice, we will find that we are not qualified or prepared if we have not learned the lessons of the cross and have not been purified or thoroughly dealt with. Our participation in a discussion will become a problem. If we are offended in a discussion, this indicates that we are in the flesh. If we are not in the flesh, we will not care to save our face or be concerned about whether others respect us. To be overly concerned about politeness is actually to play politics for the sake of the flesh, but the flesh has no place in the meetings of the co-workers and elders. The example of Acts 15 can be practiced only by those who have learned the lessons of the cross. Because the early apostles and elders had adequately learned the lessons of the cross, they were qualified to have such a discussion. They participated in the discussion because they felt that they had something to say, but they did so without insisting or losing their temper. As a result, their discussion ended not in offense but in one accord (v. 25). Therefore, especially among the co-workers and elders

there is the need to learn many lessons of the cross. (*Basic Principles concerning the Eldership*, pp. 34-36)