

VITAL FACTORS FOR THE RECOVERY OF THE CHURCH LIFE, Week 3

The Factor of the Church Being in the Triune God, the Local Churches Being Expressions of the Body of Christ, and the Believers Practicing the Church Life in the Consciousness of the Body

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 1:1; 2 Thes. 1:1; Matt. 16:18; 18:17; 1 Cor. 1:2; 12:12-27

- 1 Thessalonians 1:1 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians **in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:** Grace to you and peace.
- 2 Thessalonians 1:1 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians **in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:**
- Matthew 16:18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and **upon this rock I will build My church**, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.
- Matthew 18:17 And if he refuses to hear them, **tell it to the church**; and if he refuses to hear the church also, let him be to you just like the Gentile and the tax collector.
- 1 Corinthians 1:2 To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints, with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, who is theirs and ours:
- 1 Corinthians 12:12 For even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the body, being many, are **one body, so also is the Christ**.
- 1 Corinthians 12:13 For also in one Spirit we were **all baptized into one Body**, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and **were all given to drink one Spirit**.
- 1 Corinthians 12:14 For the body is not one member but **many**.
- 1 Corinthians 12:15 If the foot should say, Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body, it is not that because of this it is not of the body.
- 1 Corinthians 12:16 And if the ear should say, Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body, it is not that because of this it is not of the body.
- 1 Corinthians 12:17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were the hearing, where would the smelling be?
- 1 Corinthians 12:18 But now God has placed the members, **each one of them, in the body**, even as He willed.
- 1 Corinthians 12:19 And if all were one member, where would the body be?
- 1 Corinthians 12:20 But now the members are many, **but the body one**.
- 1 Corinthians 12:21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.
- 1 Corinthians 12:22 But much rather the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.
- 1 Corinthians 12:23 And those members of the body which we consider to be less honorable, these we clothe with more abundant honor; and our uncomely members come to have more abundant comeliness,
- 1 Corinthians 12:24 But our comely members have no need. **But God has blended the body together**, giving more abundant honor to the member that lacked,
- 1 Corinthians 12:25 That there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the **same care for one another**.
- 1 Corinthians 12:26 And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it.
- 1 Corinthians 12:27 Now you are the **Body of Christ**, and members individually.

Day 1

- 1 Thessalonians 1:1** Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.
- Ephesians 1:4-5** Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love, Predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,
- Romans 11:36** Because out from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

I. The church is in the Triune God—“the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”—1 Thes. 1:1:

- A. In 1 Thessalonians 1:1 we have the revelation of the tremendous fact that the church is in the unique God and that this God is our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
1. The church is not only of God and of Christ; the church is also in God and in Christ.
 2. It is important for us to see that the church in our locality is of God and in God, of Christ and in Christ.
- B. The church is composed of human beings, but they, the believers, are in the Triune God—v. 1; 2 Thes. 1:1.
- C. The church is a group of human beings who have been born of God the Father with His life and nature and who have been brought into the organic union with Christ:
1. For the church to be in God, God must become our Father, and we must have a life relationship with Him—1 John 3:1a:
 - a. In 1 Thessalonians 1:1 the word Father indicates a relationship in life; in God the Father, we have been born again, regenerated, and now, as His children, we have a life relationship with Him—John 1:12-13.
 - b. The church being in God the Father implies that the church is in God’s purpose, plan, selection, and predestination—Eph. 1:4-5.
 - c. The church in God the Father is the church in the One who is the unique Initiator and Originator—Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6; Matt. 15:13.

Day 2

Romans 6:4 We have been buried therefore with Him through baptism into His death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we might walk in newness of life.

Romans 8:11 And if the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you.

2. To be in the Lord Jesus Christ is to be united with Christ organically in all that He is and has done—1 Thes. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:30:
 - a. In the Lord Jesus Christ we have the termination of everything of the old creation, for to be in Christ is to be in His death, the death that terminates all negative things—Rom. 6:4.
 - b. The title Christ in 1 Thessalonians 1:1 denotes all the riches of resurrection; thus, to be in Christ is to be in resurrection—Rom. 8:10-11.
- D. The church is in the processed Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—the One who has become the life-giving Spirit with the Father and the Son—1 Cor. 15:45b; John 14:17, 23.

First Thessalonians 1:1 says, “Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.” This Epistle and the second were both addressed to the local church in Thessalonica, composed of all the believers in Christ in that city. Such a local church is of the believers and is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This indicates that such a local church is born of God the Father with His life and nature and is united with the Lord Jesus Christ organically in all He is and has done. Hence, it is of men (such as the Thessalonians), yet in God and in the Lord organically. Such an organic union in the divine life and nature is the vital base for the believers to live a holy life for the church life, which is the theme of the two Epistles.

It is a particular characteristic of Paul’s writing to emphasize the organic union of the believers with the Triune God. In fact, the emphasis on the organic union with Christ is an outstanding feature of Paul’s writings. In his Epistles Paul again and again speaks of being in Christ, in the Triune God. Although 1:1 is written in a simple way, it nevertheless includes Paul’s characteristic reference to the organic union. In this verse Paul speaks of the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The preposition “in” here is very important; it indicates that the church is in the Triune God. The church is composed of human beings, but they, the believers, are in the Triune God. On the one hand, the church in Thessalonica was of the Thessalonians; on the other hand, this church was in God the Father. (*Life-Study of 1 Thessalonians, chapter 1*)

Day 3

Matthew 16:18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

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

Romans 16:16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

II. A local church is an **expression of the Body of Christ in a certain locality**— 1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32b, 17; 12:12-13, 20, 27:

- A. The unique Body of Christ is expressed in many local churches in the **divine oneness** as it is with the Triune God and in the divine nature, element, essence, expression, function, and testimony; there are many churches, yet they have **one divine nature, one divine element, one divine essence, one divine expression, one divine function, and one divine testimony** because they are **one Body**—Rev. 1:11; John 17:11, 21, 23.
- B. The church revealed in Matthew 16:18 is the universal church, the unique Body of Christ, whereas the church revealed in 18:17 is the local church, the **expression of the unique Body of Christ in a certain locality**.
- C. The one universal church—the Body of Christ—becomes the many local churches— **local expressions** of the Body of Christ—Rom. 12:4-5; 16:16.
- D. The unique Body of Christ is expressed in many localities as the **local churches**— Eph. 4:4; Rev. 1:4, 11:
 1. The Body of Christ is the **source** of the local churches—Eph. 1:22-23; 2:21-22.
 2. The universal Body is like the father to all the churches, and all the **churches are like the children to the father**—Rom. 12:4-5; 16:4.
- E. Every local church is a part of the unique, universal Body of Christ, a **local expression of this Body**—Eph. 4:4; 1 Cor. 1:2; 12:27:
 1. Universally, all the local churches are one Body, and locally, every local church is a local expression of the universal Body; therefore, a local church is not the Body but only a **part of the Body, an expression of the Body**.
 2. The universal Christ has a part of Himself in every local church; **every local church is a part of Christ**, and all these parts constitute the Body—Eph. 1:23; 2:22.

Day 4

Ephesians 4:4 One Body and one Spirit, even as also you were called in one hope of your calling;

1 Corinthians 12:27 Now you are the Body of Christ, and members individually.

- F. The local ground of the church is basically the **unique oneness of the Body of Christ practiced in the local churches**—4:4; 1 Thes. 1:1:
 1. Both the universal Body of Christ and the local churches are **uniquely one**.
 2. There is one unique Body in the whole universe, and there is **one unique local church in each locality** respectively.
 3. This **unique oneness** is the basic element in the church life—Acts 1:14; 2:46; 1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 1:27; 2:1-2.
- G. The churches in different localities are for the **universal expression of Christ**— Eph. 1:23; Rev. 1:4, 11; 22:16a:
 1. A local church that makes everything local and that expresses only its locality has become a **local sect, a local division**.
 2. All the basic things for the Body are not local—the **Spirit, Christ, God, the Bible, the apostles' teaching, and the apostles' fellowship**.
- H. In our consideration the Body should be **first** and the local churches should be **second**—Matt. 16:18; 18:17; Eph. 4:4, 16; 2:21-22; 1 Cor. 12:12; 1:2:
 1. Local churches are the **procedure** God takes to reach the goal of His economy— the Body of Christ—Rom. 16:1, 4, 16; 12:4-5.
 2. We should consider our local church as a **part of the Body of Christ**—1 Cor. 1:2; 10:16-17; 12:12-13, 20, 27.

God desires to build all these regenerated children of God together as one in Christ. Thus, these dear ones should not be individual, separated, and scattered, but should be **gathered together in their localities to be the local churches**.

We may think that the local churches are the goal of God's economy. However, they are not the goal but the **procedure God takes to reach the goal of His economy**. We should not forget that the local churches are not God's goal. Many of those who have been brought into the recovery love the local church to the uttermost, and they stress the local church very much. However, we should not think that when we enter into the local church life, we reach the goal of God's eternal economy. No, we are still far away from God's goal. Since the time of Brother Nee the local churches have become a very precious item in our Christian life. Some of the saints may be disappointed when they hear that the local churches are not God's goal. Nevertheless, if we are just in the local churches and do not go on, we are far off from God's goal.

We all need to consider this matter. We have the term and we have the doctrine, but practically, we do not have the reality. The purpose of the blending is to usher us all into the reality of the Body of Christ. I treasure the local churches, as you do. But I treasure the local churches because of a purpose. The local churches are the **procedure to bring me into the Body of Christ**. The churches are the Body, but the churches may not have the reality of the Body of Christ. Thus, we need to be in the local churches so that we can be ushered, or brought, into the reality of the Body of Christ. (*Practical Points concerning Blending, chapter 1*)

Day 5

1 Corinthians 12:25-26 That there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same care for one another. And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it.

III. In practicing the church life, we need to have the **consciousness of the Body**—vv. 12-27:

- A. In order to have the Body life, we must be **full of feeling for the Body**, taking the feeling of the Head as our own feeling—Rom. 12:15; 1 Cor. 12:26-27; Acts 9:4-5:
 1. If we as members have the **feeling of the Head in everything and care for the Body**, we will take the Body as the rule in our mind, thoughts, words, and actions—Eph. 4:15-16; Col. 2:19.
 2. We should **deny ourselves and identify ourselves** with the Body (Matt. 16:24; Rom. 12:4-5, 15; 1 Cor. 1:2; 12:12-27); if we do this, the life we live will be the Body life, and the Lord will gain the expression of the Body—Eph. 4:15-16; 1:22-23.
 3. Our **enjoyment** of Christ causes us to become **conscious of the Body of Christ**—Col. 2:16-17, 19.
- B. Whatever we do involves the Body; therefore, whenever we do something, we must have a **proper consideration of the Body**—2 Cor. 8:21; Eph. 4:16:
 1. We should not do anything **without** taking care of the Body—1 Cor. 12:12-27.
 2. We need to consider how the Body would **feel** about what we are doing and how the Body, the recovery, will **react**.
 3. How we behave ourselves depends upon the **degree of our seeing the Body**.
 4. If we are in one accord **only in our local church** and do not care for the other churches, this kind of one accord is a **sect**, a **division**—Acts 1:14; 15:25.
 5. If we **take care** of the Body and are **concerned** for the Body, there will be no problems—Eph. 4:4, 16.

Day 6

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

1 Corinthians 10:16-17 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the fellowship of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the fellowship of the body of Christ? Seeing that there is one bread, we who are many are one Body; for we all partake of the one bread.

- C. Among all the churches that compose the one universal Body of Christ, there is **no organization**, but there is the **fellowship of the Body of Christ**—Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:3; 1 Cor. 1:9; 10:16-17; 11:29:
 1. All the churches on earth are one Body, and within this one Body there is the **circulation of the divine life**—the **fellowship of the Body**—1 John 1:3.
 2. Fellowship is related to **oneness**; the **circulation of the divine life** in the Body brings all the members of the Body into **oneness**—Eph. 4:3-4; Rom. 16:1-23.

3. The local churches should fellowship with all the genuine local churches on the whole earth to [keep the universal fellowship of the Body of Christ](#).
4. Although the administration of the church is local (Acts 14:23), the [fellowship of the church is universal](#) (2:42); there are churches in many cities, but there is [one fellowship](#) in the entire universe.

Since we are the members of the Body of Christ, we should have a [feeling for the Body](#). First, we must take the [feeling of the Head as our own feeling](#). In Philippians 1:8 Paul says, *“I long after you all in the inward parts of Christ Jesus.”* This means that Paul took the inward parts of Christ Jesus as his own inward parts in caring for the church. This also means that he took care of the Body of Christ by taking Christ’s feeling as his own feeling. [Christ’s feeling became his feeling for the Body](#). We all should be like Paul, taking the feeling of the Head as our own feeling. This is most necessary for our living the Body life. Furthermore, we should not only take the feeling of the Head as our feeling but also do so in the principle of caring for the Body. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:25b-26 that *“the members would have the same care for one another. And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it.”* In order for us to have the Body life, we must care for our fellow members and must be full of feeling for the Body.

If we as members have the feeling of the Head in everything and care for the Body, we will take the Body as the rule in our mind, thoughts, words, and actions. We should [deny ourselves](#) and should identify ourselves with the Body. By doing this, there will be no separation or disconnection from the Body. The life that we live will fully be the Body life, and the Lord will [gain the expression of His Body](#). (*The Oneness and the One Accord according to the Lord's Aspiration and the Body Life and Service according to His Pleasure, chapter 3*)