

# ***I Will Build My Church***

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**Stephen Kaung**

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Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New Translation by J. N. Darby.

## GOD'S PURPOSE

*Matthew 16:18—And I also, I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and hades' gates shall not prevail against it.*

*Ephesians 3:9-11—And to enlighten all with the knowledge of what is the administration of the mystery hidden throughout the ages in God, who has created all things, in order that now to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies might be made known through the church the all-various wisdom of God, according to the purpose of the ages, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*Isaiah 14:24, 27—Jehovah of hosts hath sworn saying, Assuredly as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, it shall stand.*

*For Jehovah of hosts hath purposed, and who shall frustrate it? And his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?*

Let's pray:

*Dear Lord, we live in the days where Thy words are few and Thy vision is rare. So we just look to Thee for mercy, that Thou will show mercy to Thy people, that Thou will speak Thy word to us and reveal Thyself to us. Lord, we need Thee. We need to know Thee more than anything else. In these last days, Lord, if we do not have Thy word, if we do not see Thy glory, we will not be able to stand. So we just come to Thee with hearts of hunger and thirst after Thyself. Do fill us with Thyself. Speak to our hearts and bring us to the place where Thou dost want us to be. Lord, we just put this time into Thy hands and look to Thy Spirit to do the work that He is sent for. And it is all for Thy own glory. We ask in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.*

One day I was meditating on Matthew 16:18, and the word *build* caught my attention. So I feel that it is of the Lord that we should consider together this very important word *build*. Our Lord Jesus Himself said, "On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it."

When you hear the word *build*, what impression does it give you? Of course, it cannot be something that is being done without any thought, without any consideration. It is not something that you just do without any purpose, without any idea, and without any use.

The very word *build* is a technical word. It is often used in construction, so it gives you an idea that it is something that is well thought out, well planned, and it is being faithfully done. So the thought came to me that as we think of when the Lord said, "I will build my church," maybe we need to understand what He means by "I will build my church." I really feel that we live in the days, hopefully, that the building of the church is in its final stage. Therefore, we need to understand what the building of the church really means so that we may cooperate, and we may not in any way delay and postpone the work of God. Rather, we may speed up, in a sense, His coming by the grace of God.

This word *build* is first mentioned in Genesis 3:22. God said He took out something from Adam and built the woman. Then He presented her to Adam. This is the first mention of the word *build* in the word of God, and usually you find that when a word is first mentioned, it does give us the basic and most important thoughts about that word. So when you see the word *build* for the first time in the Bible, what does the word tell us? I feel there are at least five things. First, there is purpose because in the same chapter, in

verse 18, God said, “It is not good for man to be alone. I will make him a helpmate, his like.” In other words, you find that idea of *build* coming from God. “It is not good for man to be alone. I will make him a helpmate, his like.” So there is a purpose, and it is to give Adam a helpmate, his like.

Secondly, there is a pattern for the building. Where do you find the pattern for Eve? Strangely, after God said, “It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helpmate, his like,” in the intervening verses you find that God brought all the living creatures to Adam, and Adam named every one of them. Why is it so? I feel, probably, that God led all these animals past Adam to let him see if he could find his helpmate in any one of them. All these animals passed by Adam and he could give them their names to define them, to show them what they really are, but he could not find his like, his helpmate. God already knew what He was going to do, but Adam did not know. So God tried to give Adam the opportunity to see what God already saw. And when Adam could not find his helpmate in any of these living creatures, God showed Adam that the pattern of the woman is found nowhere but in Adam himself. So Adam is the pattern for Eve.

Thirdly, there is preparation. God began to prepare and He put Adam to sleep. Fourthly, there is a process. God took something out of Adam’s side and began to build a woman with that something. Finally, God presented the woman to Adam.

So in this word *build* I feel there are at least these five principles involved—purpose, pattern, preparation, process, and presentation. In the building of the church I believe that these five principles are very clearly demonstrated.

### **GOD WORKS ACCORDING TO PURPOSE**

Now we would like to consider this matter of purpose. Our God is the supreme will in the universe. He never does anything without exercising His will. He does everything according to the good pleasure of His will. Before He does anything, He always has an idea and He always sets a purpose. That is the way God always does things. He is not like man. Sometimes we do things by chance without thinking it over beforehand. Or sometimes we are just pressed by our circumstances, and then we act or react without any preconceived idea. Also, when we do things, we learn by mistakes, and after we have made many mistakes, then probably we hit the right thing. That is the way with human beings, but God is never like that. Before He does anything He has already had a thought, an idea of what He is going to do. Why does He want to do it? There is a purpose behind all His actions. That is the way of God.

Of course, we know that God’s thoughts are higher than our thoughts and God’s ways are higher than our ways. Sometimes He does things and we may wonder why God should do such a thing. We cannot see the idea behind it. We cannot see the end, but God knows the end from the beginning. He knows what He is doing. In Isaiah we find that when God has purposed, He always finishes it. There is no one who can frustrate Him, who can stop Him from accomplishing what He has conceived beforehand.

This matter of the church, the church as we see it in the word of God, is not the thought of man; it is the thought of God. The Bible tells us that even before the ages, that is before the foundation of the world, in eternity past, God purposed a purpose in Christ Jesus (see Ephesians 3:11). It is called a mystery because it is something hidden. It is hidden in God throughout the ages until the fulness of time when God is able to reveal that secret to man.

## **THE PURPOSE OF CREATION**

Our God is love, and because He is love, He wants to express His love. He has only one Son, His only begotten Son. His whole heart is towards His begotten Son. He loves His Son so much that He wants to do something for Him. Even in the creation of the heavens and earth, He did it as an expression of His love towards His Son.

In Revelation 4, when the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures are praising God for His work of creation, they said, "It is for Thy will they are created." The heavens and the earth were created with purpose. There is a will behind the creation of the heavens and the earth. It is not something that just happened. God created them with a definite will. What is that will? We understand that God created the heavens and the earth for the sake of His beloved Son. He wanted to give everything to His Son. He wanted to express His love towards His Son, so He created the heavens and the earth to allow His Son to inherit all things. That is the purpose of creation.

But even after He created the heavens and the earth, He knew that His Son was still not satisfied. His Son could enjoy all things but there was nothing in heaven and in earth in all the things that had been created that could really answer to the very heart of His beloved Son. There was nothing that was really like Him, nothing that could understand Him. There was nothing that could really commune with Him and be united in one with Him, not only to enjoy everything with Him, but bear responsibility together with Him. There was nothing in all the things in the heaven and the earth, and the Father understood. So for this very reason, even before the foundation of the world, God purposed a purpose in His beloved Son to give His Son a helpmate, His like. That is the desire of the Father towards His Son.

So we find that the church, as we know it from the word of God, is the greatest gift of God the Father to His Son. To put it another way, the church is the one gift from the Father that really fully satisfies the heart of His Son. That is what the church is in the eternal purpose of God.

In Ephesians 3, we find that this mystery was hidden throughout the ages. God had already conceived this thought before anything was created, and with this thought behind it, God began to work, to create. He created the heavens and the earth. The heavens and the earth are not the primary purpose; they are secondary. God prepared them, as it were, for the coming of that which will really answer to the heart of His beloved Son. God moves in a mysterious way.

After God created the heavens and the earth, in the first creation there was no man created. The highest creation was the angels, but there was rebellion in the heavens. Lucifer rebelled against God. He wanted the place of God's beloved Son. He was not satisfied with what God had made him, and because of that Lucifer turned himself into the adversary of God, Satan. And from what we can understand today, because of the fall of the angels, the territory that God had given Lucifer to rule for God entered into judgment. That is why we find in the word of God: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." We believe that when God created, it was perfect; it was done. God spoke the word and it was done. God never does anything incomplete. So in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing into all things. It must be perfect because the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork. But unfortunately, in Genesis 1:2 we find that the earth was in emptiness and in ruin, covered with water. Judgment came upon this earth, so we can only understand

that most likely, it was because of the rebellion of that fallen angel. But God never gave up His purpose.

The Spirit of God brooded over the face of the deep. In other words, the love of God, the power of God worked upon this ruined earth and restored it to be habitable. Why did God do such a thing? Why did God restore this ruined earth, our universe to make it habitable? On the sixth day He created man in His own image, after His likeness. When God created the heavens and the earth, He spoke a word and it was done, but in the creation of man there was a council among the godhead: "Let Us make man, let Us create man in Our image, according to Our likeness." Why? Why was man created differently? Why was man created in such a glorious way, even in the image of God? There must be a purpose, a will behind it. Of course, God had already decided that the man He created would be the helpmate of His beloved Son. I believe the reason man was created in God's image and after His likeness is that he would have the capacity to receive even the life of God into himself. And with the life of God coming into him, man would be able to be united with His beloved Son to be His like.

Unfortunately, again we find how our forefather fell in the garden of Eden. Instead of eating the fruit of the tree of life in the center of the garden, man was tempted and ate the forbidden fruit, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Personally, I believe that in the garden of Eden there was no bad tree. It was a garden of pleasure. God made that garden full of fruit trees for the body of man, and in the midst of the garden there was the tree of life. God's purpose in planting that tree in the midst of the garden was to give His own life to man, His eternal life to man, so that man could fulfill the purpose of his being created. But by the side of that tree of life was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and this was not a bad tree. As a matter of fact there is no knowledge in this world that is higher than the knowledge of good and evil—whether it is scientific knowledge, philosophical knowledge, ethical knowledge, or whatever it may be. The knowledge of good and evil, which is ethics, is the highest knowledge in this world. Yet God knows that without the life of God this knowledge will bring us to death instead of to life. That is the reason God forbade man to eat of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil.

God told Adam and Eve: "On the day that you eat thereof, you shall surely die." Sure enough, on the day they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, immediately, they discovered they were naked. Glory departed from them. When they heard the voice of God, they hid themselves. Their conscience convicted them. Instead of doing them good, eating of that tree really brought them into death. Even though, physically, they lived hundreds of years and, soulically speaking, they begot sons and daughters, on the day that they ate their spirits died.

Man has a human spirit. That spirit was to commune with God the Spirit, but following Adam's disobedience, that spirit was dead. It was not annihilated; it was there but it had lost its proper function. It could not communicate with God the Spirit any longer, and that is death. This death began to work in man until his soul and his body, the whole being entered into eternal death. So without the life of God, knowledge is dangerous. Even the best knowledge will only give death instead of life. God's purpose was not frustrated because of that. God did not give up His purpose. No, God continued to work. When His purpose is set, He will see it to the end. And thank God for that!

Throughout human history God has been working steadily towards that purpose, but people did not know it because it was a mystery; it was hidden in God. But that does not mean that because it was hidden, God did not drop some hints here and there because in



God's working throughout time He has that purpose behind it. Somehow it was being leaked out, as it were, but we had no understanding about it.

### **CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH**

For instance, in the type of Adam and Eve, that purpose is already there. God said, "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helpmate." It is God's will to give Adam an Eve, and this Eve had to be his like, exactly like him. Only that which is taken out of him can be united together with him as one. So even in the type in the very beginning of human history, God had already put that thought there. Adam and Eve are types, but the reality is found in Christ and His church. In Ephesians 5, Paul talked about the relationship between the husband and the wife: "Husband, love your wife; wife, submit yourself to the husband." The husband represents Christ and the wife represents the church. Then he said, "The marriage of man and woman is a mystery, and the mystery is great. I am not speaking of man and woman; I am speaking of Christ and His church." So God does drop His hints here and there and everywhere. The whole idea of the church comes from God.

I think this is very important because, today, among God's people we do not see the church as God sees it. Even for us believers, probably in our spiritual pursuit our whole attention is really: How can I be spiritual? It seems as if this is the very aim of our spiritual seeking. Now there is nothing wrong with that. We should grow spiritually because this is related to the building of the church. The church is built with the spiritual life of God's people, and if our life does not grow, the church cannot grow; very true. But this is not God's thought.

Why do we seek for spirituality? There is still that self-centeredness there. We want to be somebody, but God has no idea to make us monuments, standing here and there for people to admire. God's purpose is for the church, a helpmate of His beloved Son.

So we feel that among God's people there is such a lack of appreciation of the church, as if the church is nothing. Oftentimes you hear people say, "My Lord and I. I do not care about anybody else. It is only between my Lord and I." Now in one sense that is very, very good, but in another sense, where are your brothers and sisters? Where is the church? In other words, it is so individualistic. We do not care about the church, as if without the church we can live, but with the church we are in trouble. Many people who are being burned, as it were, by the church, try to live all by themselves, but this is not God's purpose. You are living outside of the purpose of God because God's purpose is to give the church to His beloved Son.

To God, the church is very, very precious. To our Lord Jesus, it is the treasure of His heart. For the sake of the church, He was willing to give up everything. In the parable that our Lord Jesus used in Matthew 13 about a merchant seeking for treasure, it says when he found the treasure, he sold everything in order to get it. Oftentimes, we use this parable to say the treasure is the Lord Jesus and the merchant is the believers—we find our Lord Jesus and for the sake of the Lord Jesus we sell everything in order to gain Him. Now that is very, very beautiful, but I remember brother T. Austin Sparks. Whenever they sang the hymn, "I Found the Pearl of Greatest Price," he always omitted the first verse. He started with the second verse because the first verse says, "I found the pearl," and that is the Lord Jesus. It is unscriptural; so he always began with the second verse.

Here in this parable what our Lord was really saying is that He is the merchant. He alone knows what treasure is, and the treasure is the church, hidden. But He found it, and for its sake He sold everything in order to get it. So the church is very, very precious to

our Lord Jesus. It is God's idea. Think of that! It is something that is conceived even before the foundation of the world. It is something that is behind all the working of God throughout time, something that is the best God could give to His beloved Son. If we see this, can we ignore it? Can we say that the church is nothing? Can we say that the church is the idea of man, that somehow man began to conceive this idea of the church? Of course not! I deeply feel that there is a lack of appreciation of the church among God's people, and the reason why we do not appreciate it is because we do not understand where it comes from. It originates in God Himself. It is God's best gift to His beloved Son. We should be very thankful that in His mercy and grace He should involve us in the church.

### **THE TABERNACLE**

Throughout time God has been working towards His purpose. Even after God called His people out of Egypt and delivered them out of Egypt, He led them to Mount Sinai. There He began to reveal His mind to them. Why did He deliver them out of Egypt? He wanted them to be His peculiar people, His own people, and for that reason He gave them the law. But then in Exodus 25:8, God said, "Build Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among you."

For what purpose were the children of Israel delivered out of Egypt? It was not that they could just enjoy their freedom. When they were in Egypt they were slaves; they had no rights, no freedom. Then God delivered them out of Egypt and set them free; and surely they were set free. Could they do anything they like? Could they be their own masters? Could they demand their rights? That is not the purpose of salvation. God delivered them out to bring them to Himself. God wanted them to be His people. He gave them the law to make them His people. But why did God want to make them His people? He wanted to dwell among them: "Make Me a sanctuary."

So this whole idea of the tabernacle did not come from man. It did not even come from Moses. It came from God Himself. Oh, how God wants to dwell among His people! In order for Him to dwell among His people, they have to be suitable to God. Because God is holy, therefore we need to be holy.

### **THE TEMPLE**

People may say that the idea of the temple seems to have come from David. You remember that after David became king he took Jerusalem and made it the capital of the nation. It was not because of its strategic position, but because it was the place that God chose to put His name. After he took Jerusalem, the next move was to bring the ark into the city of David. God was to be the center of the nation. After that he told Nathan the prophet: "I live in a palace and God's ark is in a tent. I cannot stand it anymore. I want to make Him a permanent house." Of course, Nathan felt this was God's will, so he said to go ahead and do it.

But God told Nathan to tell David: "Throughout these times, I traveled, I wandered with the children of Israel, and after they settled in Canaan, I never said to anyone, 'Build Me a temple.'" But David had the idea of building God a temple—a dwelling place for God. God's heart was deeply touched. Even though He did not allow David to build it, you can see how God appreciated what David thought about it. But did the thought come from David? No. David is a man after God's own heart, and because David had a heart for God, he knew God's heart. In other words, the thought of the temple did not come

from David. But because David knew the heart of God, he knew how God wanted to be permanently settled among His people. Sensing God's heart, he was just expressing what was in God's heart. That really touched the heart of God.

### THE BRIDEGROOM

So, you find that in the Old Testament types, the thought of the church or the tabernacle or the temple did not come from man. It came originally from God Himself.

When our Lord Jesus came to earth, what was His purpose in coming? The Bible says that in the fulness of time He came under the law from a woman in order to deliver us out of the bondage of the law, that we might receive sonship. It is true, when our Lord came to this earth, He came to seek and to save the lost. But what was really in His mind when He came to this world? The gospel of John tells us the hidden things, the secret things of God. The gospel of Luke ends with the commission to go and preach the gospel for the remission of sin, and that is the gospel we have all received. We believe in the Lord Jesus, we believe in the gospel, and we have the remission of our sins. Thank God for that! But that is just the border. What is the real center, the heart of the coming of the Lord Jesus on earth? You can find that only in the gospel according to John. There you will find that our Lord Jesus came upon this earth as a Bridegroom. He came to earth to find His bride, but He could not find her anywhere. All He met were the blind, the deaf, the crippled, the dead, the sinful. He could not find His bride anywhere. And because of this, He had to create His bride. Throughout His days on this earth, He was preaching, healing, doing good, working, and calling disciples to Himself, but never did He mention even the word *church*.

If we say He came for the church, why is it that He did not mention it? Surely if there is something that is very dear to your heart you cannot help but say it over and over and over again. We cannot keep that secret, but our Lord Jesus did not say the word *church* until towards the end of His life. He was rejected by His own people and He retreated to the border of Caesarea-Philippi, a Gentile city. Then, for the first time He uttered that word *church*: "On this rock I will build My church and hades' gates will not prevail against it." Why? It is because at that time He had Calvary in view. At that time He was going to the cross, and there on the cross He would accomplish the work of redemption. And by that work the church could be built. God was not able to reveal the secret that had been hidden in Him before the foundation of the world until that time. Even so, it was still a mystery to the disciples. The disciples could not understand it. When our Lord was on earth, He used the word *church* only twice—once in Matthew 16 and the other in Matthew 18. The disciples could not understand it until His work of redemption was done. He was risen, ascended, and then, by the Holy Spirit He revealed it to the apostles and the prophets.

In Ephesians 3, the apostle Paul said, "You can see how I know the mystery of the Christ. It has been hidden throughout the times, but now it is being revealed to the holy apostles and the prophets." Today, this is an open secret, and being an open secret every one of us who are the Lord's ought to know it.

### THE FATHER REVEALS THE SON

The greatest revelation you will find in the whole Bible is the Father's revelation of His beloved Son. Our Lord Jesus said to His disciples: "Whom do men say that I am?" The disciples replied that some said, "You are John the Baptist come to life." (Most likely it was Herod; his conscience told him that.) Others said, "You are Elijah, that great

prophet, the greatest of the prophets. You are Jeremiah; you weep a lot. You are *the* prophet that Moses mentioned in Deuteronomy.” But our Lord was not satisfied. He said, “Who do *you* say that I am?” And thank God, Simon Peter said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And our Lord said, “Simon, you are blessed because this is not something that flesh and blood can tell you. It is the Father in heaven who has revealed it to you.”

The greatest revelation in the whole universe is the Father revealing the Son. Without the revelation of the Father no one can know the Son. We may have a mental knowledge or a Biblical knowledge, and yet we do not really know the Son until the Father reveals Him in us. It pleases God to reveal His Son in us. That is the greatest revelation. And this revelation is so great that it will continue on to eternity. Do not think that because you know Jesus as your Savior, therefore you know Him, know Him fully. Not at all! We have just begun to know Him. There is so much in Him; He is infinite. The knowledge of the Son is infinite. Today, we are beginning to know Him, and in eternity we will continue to know Him. This is the thrill of being a Christian. There is no end to it. To know Him was the passion of the apostle Paul: “To know Him and the power of His resurrection, to fellowship with His suffering, being conformed to His death, that we may attain at the out-resurrection from among the dead” (see Philippians 3:10-11). It is the greatest revelation; and on the basis of that greatest revelation, the Son reveals the church.

### THE SON REVEALS THE CHURCH

Without the first revelation we cannot have the second revelation. No Christ, no church. You cannot have the church without Christ. You cannot make the church greater than Christ. No Christ, no church. You have to know Him. The more you know Him, the more you know the church. The church is a revelation of the Son to us, a great revelation. Do not think that we can know the church by ourselves. Some say, “I was brought up in the church.” What do you mean by that? Others say, “I go to church every Sunday.” What do you mean by that? Some say, “I left my umbrella in the church.” What do you mean by the church? We do not really know what the church is until it pleases the Son to reveal it to us. So, do not think that because we are brought up in the church, because we have played church all our lives, that we know the church. That is not the church. The church is something so much more glorious. It has its origin, even before time, in God. Do we know that? Do we know how much the church is to God? How much the church is to Christ? He loved the church and gave Himself for it. Do we have the same feeling when we mention the word *church*?

The Lord said, “I will build My church.” The only burden of my heart is that we not think we already know the church. Oh, that we may humble ourselves before Him, acknowledging that because we know so little of Christ, therefore we know so little of the church. We have to acknowledge that without revelation we will not be able to know the Son. Likewise, without revelation we will not be able to know the church. And if we can be brought to this place that we really desire to know it, yet we depend upon the Spirit of God to reveal it to us, then we are in the way of really entering into the reality of the church. So may the Lord help us.

Let us pray:

*Dear heavenly Father, we worship Thee because Thou art doing something so great, so glorious, so precious to Thee and to Thy beloved Son, and even doing it in us. O Lord, we acknowledge that we oftentimes are not conscious of it, and because of this we play church. How little is being built! Oh Lord, have mercy upon us. We come before Thee this day. Our whole desire is, Lord, that we want to know Thee, and we also want to know what is dear to Thy heart. Lord, we want to love Thee and to love that which Thou lovest. We do pray that our lives, for as long as we remain on earth will mean something in the building of Thy church. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.*

## GOD'S PATTERN

*Ephesians 1:11—In him [Christ], in whom we have also obtained an inheritance, being marked out beforehand according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his own will.*

*Hebrews 8:5—(Who serve the representation and shadow of heavenly things, according as Moses was oracularly told when about to make the tabernacle; for See, saith He, that thou make all things according to the pattern which has been shewn to thee in the mountain.)*

*Exodus 25:9—According to all that I shall shew thee, the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the utensils thereof, even so shall ye make it.*

*I Chronicles 28:11-12a, 19—And David gave to Solomon his son the pattern of the porch, and of its houses, and of its treasuries, and of its upper chambers, and of its inner chambers, and of the house of the mercy-seat; and the pattern of all that he had by the Spirit.*

*All this said David, in writing, by Jehovah's hand upon me, instructing as to all the works of the pattern.*

*Colossians 2:6-8—As therefore ye have received the Christ, Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and assured in the faith, even as ye have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. See that there be no one who shall lead you away as a prey through philosophy and vain deceit, according to the teaching of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ.*

Let's have a word of prayer:

*Dear Lord, we want to thank Thee for giving Thy word to us. We know that Thy word is truth and Thy word is life and Spirit. So dear Lord, we ask that Thy Holy Spirit, who alone can interpret Thy word, who alone can translate Thy word in-to Thy Person, will breathe again upon Thy written word and make it living and operative in our lives. Dear Lord, we want to bow before Thy word; we want to give ourselves to the working of Thy Spirit. Thou alone can bring us into the reality of Thy word. And we just cast ourselves upon Thee, trusting, believing that Thou wilt do it. It is all to the praise of Thy glo-ry. We ask in the name of our dear Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

The focus of our attention is on that one word *build*. Our Lord Jesus said, "You are Peter; on this rock I will build My church and hades' gates shall not prevail against it."

The work of our Lord Jesus is to build His church. He said, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work." And what is this work that the Father has been working and the Son continues to work? We believe that it is the work of building His church. So we can see how important this matter of the building of the church is to God the Father and to our Lord Jesus, the Son.

In our days, especially during the last year, as I have traveled around, I have discovered that among God's people there is an increasing interest or concern on this matter of the building of the church. It seems as if everywhere God's people are asking this question: "How can the church be built? Is the church being built?" I believe there is a reason behind it. I believe the Spirit of God is moving among His people, preparing for the return of our Lord Jesus.

Why is it that for so long, twenty centuries, He still has not come? We ask and we pray, "Lord, why do You delay?" God's people are crying everywhere, but it seems as if heaven still retains Him. Why? I think one of the main reasons is because the church is

not yet built. The Bridegroom cannot return if the bride is still not ready. In a way, we think we are waiting for Him, but in a real sense, He is waiting for us. Not until the bride has made herself ready, will the Bridegroom come. So I feel this matter of the building of the church is of such tremendous importance in these very last days. The church has to be built in order for Christ to return and receive the church as His own bride. So do consider this matter of the building of the church as our chief concern during these remaining days of our life

When you think of this matter of *build*, the first mentioning of that word is found in Genesis 2:22. God took something out of the side of Adam and He built it into a woman and then led the woman to the man. In that first mentioning of the word *build* you can discover all the main principles involved in this matter of building. First of all, before you build anything there is a purpose there. Then you find when you build, if you build something of significance you need to have a blueprint, a pattern. And with the pattern you begin to prepare the materials and gather the materials together. Then, there is the process of turning these raw materials into finished forms, into a building. And finally after a building is finished it serves a purpose, so there is presentation.

Yesterday morning we considered the matter of purpose. When you think of the church, it is not a small thing because even before the ages, before there was time, before there was space, before God created the heavens and the earth, already God has purposed a purpose in Christ Jesus. And He purposed that purpose according to the good pleasure of His will. In other words, it just pleases Him to have this purpose, and He purposed this purpose in His Son and for His Son. He loved His Son so much He wanted to express His love towards His Son. Of all the gifts He could give to His Son the best of all, the one that really answers the very heart of His Son, is the church. So actually the origin of the church is far back in eternity past and it is in the very heart of God. If this is the case, immediately we understand how significant, how important, how glorious is the building of the church.

### **BUILT ACCORDING TO PATTERN**

Now we would like to share on the second point, which is *pattern*. If you want to build anything of any significance, you cannot just have an idea and then start to do it. You need to lay down a plan. You need to plan for it, and if you do not have the technical knowledge you will engage an architect. You will tell the architect what you have in mind, what kind of building you want, and what purpose that building will serve. After the architect has heard your thoughts, then with his technical knowledge he will put your thoughts into a blueprint, into a pattern. After the pattern is settled you begin to build. Now if this is the way that man builds, how much more will it be the way that our God will build His church!

Indeed, the Bible tells us that God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts and His ways are higher than our ways. It is like the heaven is far above the earth. When we think about something, when we plan something, our ways are limited by ourselves because we are earthly. But God is in heaven and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts; His ways are much higher than our ways. So in the building of the church, God not only conceives a thought, a purpose, but He also lays down a plan before He does anything. This is what Ephesians 1:11 says: "He works all things according to the counsel of His will." He purposes according to the good pleasure of His will. After He has purposed something, then He lays down a counsel, a plan as to how to carry out that which He has purposed.

So we believe that when God does anything, He always does it according to the plan He has laid down.

When God said, "I will make Adam a helpmate, his like," He was looking for a pattern. That is why He led all those living creatures to Adam. Is it that God only wanted Adam to name those living creatures? There must be something more than that. God led all the living creatures before Adam to let him see whether he could find his helpmate, his like, whether there would be something that would answer fully to his heart's desire. In other words, God used the law of elimination. God already knew what the pattern would be but Adam did not know about it. God wanted Adam to go through the test. It would have been a tragedy if Adam had said, "Well, I will have to take what is there even though it is not the best." What a tragedy that would have been!

God created everything after its own kind. God does not like hybrids. And thank God, instead of Adam just giving in and saying, "Anything will be all right," he could not find his helpmate. So God put Adam to sleep and took something out of Adam. Now in our Bible it is translated *rib*, but in the original it really means *something out of Adam*. God took something out of Adam and with that something God built the woman. In other words, the pattern God used to build the woman was Adam, the man. Because of this, the two are exactly alike and can be united back into one.

In all of God's working, He always works according to a pattern. For instance, when God took the children of Israel out of Egypt, He brought them to Sinai and He told them: "Make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among you." God's original desire in creating man is that He may dwell among men. He wants man to be His house, His home.

In Isaiah 66, God said, "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool, but where is the house that you will build for Me?" In other words, the heavens and the earth are God's office, but where is God's home? Where will He dwell? His desire is to dwell among men. "Make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among you." God is holy. He could not dwell directly, as it were, among the children of Israel. He could only dwell among them through a sanctuary. "Build Me a sanctuary."

### MOSES—THE FAITHFUL SERVANT

We know that Moses learned all the wisdom of Egypt. Egypt at that time was a great nation. It was noted for its architecture. Even today, if you go to Egypt and see the pyramids, they are architectural marvels. Even during those early days, they had the skill, the knowledge to build those tremendous buildings. So Moses was mighty in word and in deeds. He learned all the wisdom of Egypt. In a sense, he was a great architect, a great builder, an empire builder. When God said, "Build Me a tabernacle that I may dwell among you," this would have been a very simple task for Moses.

Probably Moses said, "That's fine, Lord, I will build You one that will really glorify Your name." He would start to lay down the plan, draw the blueprint, and begin to build it. But strangely, God told Moses everything about the building of the tabernacle. He gave Moses a detailed blueprint, the pattern on the mountain. He showed Moses the whole tabernacle, not only the form, and the size, but even the materials, the color, the shape of every utensil, and the way of worshiping in the sanctuary. In other words, God did not leave anything to Moses. He did not allow Moses to plan for it or to put his own ideas into it. This was God's sanctuary. This was a house that God would dwell in and He alone would plan for it. He would not allow Moses to change it. He warned Moses again and again: "Do everything according to the pattern that I show you on the mountain."



We know that Moses was the faithful servant of God. He was faithful in all God's house. In what sense was he faithful? He did everything according to the command of God. He did not, he dared not, and he would not put his own idea into the sanctuary. He would follow exactly every detail of the pattern that God had shown him. That was his faithfulness. And because of this, in Exodus 40, when the tabernacle was built and erected, all the utensils were placed in their place, and then the glory of God filled that place. In other words, God took that place as His sanctuary.

### **DAVID LOVED THE HOUSE OF GOD**

After the children of Israel entered into the Promised Land, for hundreds of years God still lived in a tent. It was not until David, a man after God's own heart, who loved God so much, that there was the thought of building God a permanent temple. God did not allow David to build it because he was a man of war; he had shed too much blood. That temple of God must represent God; it must be a symbol of peace, so God did not allow David to build the temple. But God knew him. He knew his heart and how he loved God and loved the house of God. So God showed the pattern of the temple to David.

David said that God showed him the pattern of the temple by God's Spirit. God's hand was upon him. In other words, God's hand was upon David's hand and guided his hand in drawing the blueprint. It was God who drew the blueprint.

And Solomon, the wisest of all men, built the temple. In what sense was he the wisest of all men? He was the person who asked God for only one thing. Instead of asking for riches, for power, for other things, he asked God for an understanding heart. In other words, he wanted to understand God; he wanted to understand God's will. Because of this, he is considered as the wisest of all men, and his wisdom was expressed in building the temple. He built the temple exactly according to the pattern that God showed to his father David. That is the wisdom of Solomon.

Whenever and wherever God lays His hand upon something to build, He always first has a pattern. Then He will work according to the counsel of His will. He will work exactly according to the pattern until that work is finished. Only then can the finished work be accepted by Him.

So the building of Eve, the building of the tabernacle, and the building of the temple are all types. The Bible says that these are shadows; they are not the eternal reality. But even these shadows had to be so exact to the real image, to reality, that God warned them again and again that everything must be done according to the pattern.

### **IS THE CHURCH A PRODUCT OF HISTORY?**

Now if this is the case with the type, how much more important it is when God is building that eternal reality, the church! But today, does the building of the church have a pattern? Probably in the mind of most people they will think of the church as a product of history. In other words, the church has no pattern.

In the beginning, when the hundred and twenty people in the upper room were baptized in one Spirit, into one body, and then on that same day, three thousand were joined into that body of Christ, they just met together. There was no program, there was no organization; they just came together. They met together and broke bread from house to house. Because there were thousands of people who wanted to meet together and there was no private house big enough, they went to Solomon's porch. In that open place they

sang, they prayed, they preached, and they fellowshiped. There was no plan, nothing. Everything was so primitive.

Gradually, as the result of history, they began to be a little more organized. There were so many people there, even though they were all Jews. They were Hebrew Jews and Hellenistic Jews. In other words, there were Jews among them that were born and reared in the Promised Land, but there were other Jews that were born and reared in the Gentile cities, so the Hellenistic Jews had Greek culture. Yet God brought these Hebrew Jews and Hellenistic Jews together and joined them into one body. But it was not very long before problems came up because those who were in responsibility were all Hebrew Jews. They knew the condition of the brothers and sisters who lived in Jerusalem and in Judea, but in the supply of the widows, they neglected the widows of the Hellenistic Jews because they did not know their real condition. There was murmuring among the Hellenistic Jews, and thank God, God gave the twelve apostles wisdom and they said, "We need to have seven men, full of the Holy Spirit and of good name to take care of the table so that we can devote ourselves to prayer and ministry of the word." So seven persons were chosen to take care of the table. We call them deacons today. Gradually, more developed, and later on you find that even in Jerusalem there were elders. Then you find that the church began to spread and to increase, and gradually more organization had to be brought in.

In the fourth century, when Constantine the Great became emperor, he made Christianity an acceptable religion, and it was fashionable to join the so-called "church." Thousands and thousands flocked into the church. Those of his soldiers who were willing to be baptized would receive money and also garments. So who would not do it? During that time most of the people in the church were unsaved. Their background was all heathen. They still longed for the heathen festivals, and in order to help them, to cater to their desire, all the so-called Christian festivals came into view. The birthday of the sun god has become Christmas today because they say Christ is the Son of righteousness. Very clever.

More and more organization came in, and very soon, instead of ruling as the elders of the local church, the bishops began to rule a diocese. Then there were archbishops, then cardinals, and then popes. The church began to develop and develop until it became a nation, a country, and a country above countries, a world empire. It is a matter of history. Some people who were not happy with that began to branch off and you have all the different denominations, different organizations, different emphasis, different focus. So people say, "The church does not have a pattern. It cannot. It is just the product of history. We cannot go back to the primitive condition of the first century to build the church. We are in the twenty-first century. It is progressive and we have to go on."

#### **IS THE CHURCH PATTERNED AFTER THE WORLD?**

In the mind of many people today, the church is patterned after the world. As the world changes, the church changes. Even in our time, the so-called church is worked according to the principles of the world. To be a pastor of a big church you need to have executive ability because you are ruling an empire. It is more important than having the living word of God. The church is patterned after the world like a great organization, big company, or big corporation. Everything is patterned according to the world. Instead of the world imitating the church, the church is following the way of the world because we think there is no pattern from God. So we have to draw our blueprint in order to build a church. Of course we know that what we have built is the tower of Babel.

## THE TRADITIONS OF THE FATHERS

Now some people say the church has no pattern. It is just to be built according to the ingenuity of man. Man has the wisdom to know how to build the church according to the time and according to the need. So actually there is no pattern, and if you want to find a pattern, then probably you have to go back into tradition. Someone with wisdom or with ability invents something or he lays down some rules, some regulations, some ways, or some techniques as to how to build the church. As time goes on, those who follow will just follow the tradition of the fathers, and in that way the church is built.

### *Judaism*

In Judaism, you find that they followed the traditions of the fathers. In the beginning it was a living faith. When the children of Israel were gathered together at Mount Sinai, God gave His Ten Commandments to them. The Ten Commandments, the living word of God at that time, was a living faith, but as they went on, gradually people began to ask, "What do you mean by keeping the Sabbath?"

God said, "Keep the Sabbath. On the Sabbath you do no work."

"What do you mean by 'doing no work?' What is work?" So through the centuries wise rabbis began to explain what work meant, and their explanation was further explained by the rabbis in the succeeding generations. So word upon word was added until it became a huge tradition and it stifled, it buried the word of God, the commandment of God. So at the time of Christ that is what He said, "You follow the traditions of man and not the commandment of God." It was buried by the mountain of traditions. In the gospels they always complained and murmured and criticized our Lord that He was breaking the Sabbath. Because He healed and He did good things on the Sabbath, they said, "You violated the Sabbath." Because of this, they wanted to get rid of Him. How strong are the traditions of man!

### *The Church*

The church followed the same footsteps of Judaism. In a sense, we find that Christianity is more and more Judaized. In Judaism there are several things that are prominent and absolutely necessary. One is that you need to have a place of worship. The temple in Jerusalem was the place of worship. After Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed and the Jewish people were taken captive into Babylon, thank God He healed their idol worshiping by taking them into a land of idol worship. After they were healed of idol worshiping, then they wanted to worship God but they could not go back to Jerusalem. There was no temple there. So what did they do?

The Jewish people are very, very clever, and I think one of the most ingenious things they invented was the synagogue. It is so clever because if you have ten men of leisure you can organize a synagogue. By leisure it does not mean you have no job. It means you are willing to devote some time for religious purposes. You can organize a synagogue according to what you want. In other words, you can gather some of like-mindedness, with the same ideas, same opinion, maybe the same temperament, or the same trade, and organize a synagogue. In the synagogue you can read the Torah, the five books of Moses, you can read the prophets, you can pray to God, and you can sing the songs. There was much liberty in the synagogue because they allowed people to share and to fellowship. You remember when Paul and Barnabas went to the synagogue, they were asked to speak. There was lots of freedom. The only thing they could not do was sacrifice, and

according to law, without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. So in Judaism you need a place of worship—a temple, a synagogue. Outside of that place, there is no worship.

You also need a set of rules and regulations. You need a form of worship. You worship in a certain way—a ritual, a ceremony. And you need a special class that is trained to worship.

When you look at Christianity today, do you see any difference? That building in the corner of the square is called the place of worship, as if aside from that place you cannot worship. If you want to worship God you must go to that place. This is the place of worship. Every Christian organization must have a creed. There must be a program of worship. And there must be someone or ones who are especially trained to lead the worship. Has not Christianity been Judaized?

I remember when I was a boy, I was raised up in a Methodist church. Even though they had a place of worship, a creed, the discipline, the program, and a pastor, yet the pastors did not wear a special garment with all these things hanging on them at different festivals. But today, what a difference! More and more you find Christianity is Judaized.

How can you have church worship without a choir? Where does the idea of choir come from? Do you find that in the New Testament? It was David who started the choir. There were special people trained to worship. Even today, when you want to worship, you have to have a special group of people leading worship with music. Are we not turning more and more into Judaism? I believe the tradition of man is a tendency of Christianity today. And how strong is that tradition!

#### **NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN**

Thank God, I think it was in the 60's that there was a movement in the world: "We want the New Testament Church. We will build a New Testament Church." In other words, they wanted to find that pattern in the New Testament instead of in the Old Testament. That was a big improvement. So where can you find the pattern of a New Testament Church? Well naturally, you go to the book of Acts to find a pattern because that was the beginning of the church. But unfortunately, what you are looking for is the technological or the technical side of the church, instead of seeing that the church is spiritual. The church is living; it is life; it is heavenly.

Because we are so earthly, so worldly, so natural, even when we go into the New Testament, all we look for is the technical side, the technique. If you want to organize a church, of course you need elders. Without elders, there is no ruling, no authority in the church. And according to the New Testament, the elders should be plural so should there be one person to be *the* elder or the presiding elder? There is no such thing in the Bible. Elders are always plural because Christ is the head of the church. No one person can represent Christ as the Head. Therefore, it needs more than one so that no one will really take the place of Christ as the Head of the church. Christ is still the Head of the church. So you have elders in plural number, at least two.

Then of course, with the elders you need some deacons and deaconesses, and then with the deacons and deaconesses you need the congregation. So I sometimes say that if you have ten persons and you want to organize a church, make two elders, three deacons, and five in the congregation. Then you have the New Testament Church complete. Today, we laugh at it, but in those days it was serious. People really thought they had found the New Testament pattern, but unfortunately, it did not work. Why? I think there

is a basic misunderstanding there or a lack of understanding. We do not really understand the nature of the church.

### **THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH**

What is the nature of the church? The nature of the church is heavenly. It is spiritual. It is of life. You remember when Peter was on that roof. He was hungry, he was praying, and he was given a vision. He saw a sheet coming down from heaven. It was heavenly, but it touched the earth. In the sheet were quadrupeds and creeping things, and God said, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat."

Peter said, "In no wise, Lord; for I have never eaten anything common or unclean."

And God said, "What God has cleansed, let no man say it is unclean." It happened three times because the tradition in Peter was strong, and then it was lifted back up to heaven.

That is what the church is. It is from heaven; it is heavenly in nature, but it touches the earth. It reaches down to all the unclean, and thank God, we are the unclean but cleansed by the precious blood of the Lamb. We are to have fellowship one with another. Do not consider anyone unclean. Whom Christ has received, we receive. But remember, on earth it is just a testimony. It will be received back to heaven. This is what the church is. This is the nature of the church.

We believe there is a pattern of the church because if God had a pattern for shadows, for representations, how much more will He have a pattern in the reality, in the real thing. But where can you find the pattern? Where is the pattern? What is the pattern of the building of the church?

The Lord said, "I will build My church." When He builds the church, on what pattern does He build it? It is really not far from us. It is right before us. When you open the New Testament, you come to the reality because in the fulness of time Christ came. First, you have the four gospels. What are the four gospels? The four gospels give us a picture of Christ seen from four directions. In other words, in the gospels you have the story of our Lord Jesus while He was on earth. He began to speak and to act in this body that He got from the virgin, Mary. In that body, He declared the Father. In that body He accomplished the work of redemption. So in the four gospels you see Christ—a living Person, a heavenly Person, a spiritual Person.

Then you have the book of Acts. Luke said when he wrote the first discourse, the gospel according to Luke, he told us what Christ had begun to do and to teach, but now he is writing a second discourse, the book of Acts. It is the continuation of the speaking and the working of the same Christ but in a different body. In Luke, the Word became flesh, incarnated, full of grace and truth. We see the glory as of the Son, only begotten of the Father. And then after He ascended, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down, and in one Spirit the hundred and twenty were baptized into one body. In other words, Christ ascended to be the Head and He took upon Himself a mystic body, a corporate body, the church. In that body He continues to live, He continues to work, He continues to speak. That is the book of Acts. That is the church.

### **THE CHURCH IS CHRIST**

What is the pattern of the church? The pattern of the church is the living Christ, Christ as revealed in the four gospels. He is the pattern, and the church is built according to Him. So in Colossians 2 we are told not to be misled, thinking that we will work according to man or to the elements of the world, but the church is built according to

Christ. It is not technical; it is living, changing from glory to glory, transforming, conforming to the image of Christ. That is the pattern of the church.

Thank God, in building the church, He has Christ, His beloved Son, as the pattern. Everything is to build according to Him. We have to be built up in Him and rooted in Him. In other words, it will be Christ and nothing else. That is what the church is.

In I Corinthians 12:12 it says, "The body is one but has many members, but even though the members are many, the body is one, so also is *the* Christ."

Oftentimes when you read that verse, if you are very careless it may not be anything to you, but if you are careful when you read that verse, immediately you notice there is something wrong there. The body is one...many members...so also is the church. That is what the church is. But the Holy Spirit says, "So also is *the* Christ." In other words, the church is *the* Christ because it is built exactly according to Christ. There can be no deviation, no departure, no change, no alteration, no mixture, and no foreign elements. Everything in the church is Christ. Therefore the building of the church is a spiritual thing. It is a spiritual work; it is a heavenly work. It is exclusively of life. The more we know the Lord and the more we are transformed, the more the church grows in stature.

In Ephesians 5, it says, "Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. He sanctifies, purifies by the washing of the water with the word, so that the church may be a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle or of any sort, holy and blameless, to be presented to Him as His bride."

When the church is built, what do you see? You see Christ. Everything is Christ. That is why Ephesians 1:23 says that the church is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all and in all. Nothing more, nothing less. Now if this is the pattern, how spiritual, how heavenly, how living is the church!

And God warned again and again: "Build everything according to the pattern on the mount." Oh, how we need to see this! It would deliver us from anything that is merely technical. Today, when you talk about the building of the church, it is all technology. That is the wrong direction. The building of the church is intensely spiritual. That is the reason why we have to be spiritual. The building of the church is intensely heavenly; nothing earthly can be added to it. The building of the church is exclusively the life of Christ in each one of us. His life is the building block; nothing else. And how glorious when the church is built! It is His like. And our Lord said, "This is bone of My bone and flesh of My flesh."

Does that warm your heart? Does it give you that longing that we may not in any way work against God, but by His grace, we may work with Him?

Let us pray:

*Dear heavenly Father, what Thou hast purposed for Thy beloved Son is so glorious that nothing can be the pattern but Thy beloved Son Himself. Oh Lord, do open our inner eyes to see it, that we may not be so foolish as if we are able to build Thy church. Oh Lord, give us an understanding heart that we may see Thee as our pattern. May Thy Holy Spirit work in each one of us according to that pattern and bring us together according to that pattern. Lord, our heart desire is that Thou shall have that church for Thy beloved Son. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.*

## GOD'S PREPARATION

*Exodus 25:1-9—And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me a heave-offering: of every one whose heart prompteth him, ye shall take my heave-offering. And this is the heave-offering that ye shall take of them: gold, and silver, and copper, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and byssus, and goats' hair, and rams' skins dyed red, and badgers' skins, and acacia-wood; oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil, and for the incense of fragrant drugs; onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod, and in the breastplate. And they shall make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I shall shew thee, the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the utensils thereof, even so shall ye make it.*

*I Chronicles 22:14—And behold, in my affliction I have prepared for the house of Jehovah a hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver; and of brass and iron without weight, for it is in abundance; and timber and stone have I prepared; and thou shalt add to it.*

*I Chronicles 29:2-5—And I have prepared according to all my power for the house of my God gold for things of gold, and silver for things of silver, and brass for things of brass, iron for things of iron, and wood for things of wood; onyx stones, and stones to be set, glistening stones, and of divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and white marble in abundance. And moreover, in my affection for the house of my God I have given of my own property of gold and silver, for the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the house of the sanctuary: three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses; gold for things of gold, and silver for things of silver, and for all manner of work by the hands of artificers. And who is willing to offer to Jehovah this day?*

*Matthew 16:18—And I also, I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and hades' gates shall not prevail against it.*

*Romans 12:1-2, 4—I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the compassions of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your intelligent service. And be not conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

*For, as in one body we have many members, but all the members have not the same office; thus we, being many, are one body in Christ, and each one members one of the other.*

Let us have a word of prayer:

*Dear Lord, we want to thank Thee because Thou art doing a great work. We praise and worship Thee because Thou dost say, "I will build My church." And we know that Thou art building even today. Lord, we just pray that Thou wilt show us Thy work, Thou wilt reveal to us Thy work in us and with us. Draw us into Thy great work and enable us to be of use to Thyself. Do deliver us from our own complacency that we may really yield ourselves to Thee and allow Thee to finish the great work that Thou hast been doing through the centuries. And we want to give Thee all the glory. In Thy precious name we pray. Amen.*

The one word that we are considering is taken from Matthew 16:18. Our Lord Jesus said, “You are Peter; on this rock I will build My church and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it.” So the word is *build*. We know that our Lord is building; He is building His own church. And when you think of the word *build*, you will find a few principal ideas. First of all, if you want to build anything of significance, then you need to have an idea, a purpose, something that you conceived in your thought. You want to build something for a particular purpose. It is not something that just comes suddenly and then disappears quickly. *Build* is something with definite purpose.

Then, of course, if you want to build anything of value, you do not try to put things together just at random. You need to have a pattern, a blueprint by which you will build that building. After you have the pattern, then you prepare the materials, you gather the manpower, and you decide how long a time you will be willing to spend to finish that work. And with all the materials and manpower, then you begin to build. There will be a process turning the raw materials into finished vessels or forms. Finally, after you finish the building, it does not just stand there; you present it to someone who will occupy and use it. So these are the five ideas that we are sharing together.

### **GOD’S PURPOSE**

We shared on this matter of purpose. Before the ages, before God created the heavens and the earth, God had already conceived an idea in His heart. The Bible tells us that He purposed according to the good pleasure of His will. It pleases Him to have such an idea, and this idea is purposed in Christ Jesus. It is purposed for His beloved Son. God so loved His Son that He wanted to satisfy the longing, the heart of His beloved Son. So He purposed that purpose. He wanted to build something that would make His Son glad and fully satisfied. And what is the thing that He purposed? The Bible tells us that it is the church.

The church is conceived in the heart of God. He set that purpose for His Son, and the church is purposed to be the bride, the wife of His beloved Son. So the church is not something insignificant. The church is something that is of extreme importance to God Himself and to His beloved Son, and it should be to every one of us.

### **GOD’S PATTERN**

Next, we shared together on this matter of pattern. Does the church have a pattern? If the church is of such significance and so glorious, can it be that God will build the church without any pattern? Even if we are building something, we will not do things just on the spur of the moment. We will not just start to build, not knowing what we are building or how we are going to build it. We will not just do it at the moment; then maybe the next moment we think of something else and we try to add to it. We will never do that. We will have a blueprint and everything will be laid out. All the thoughts, all the ideas, all that you desire to have in the building will be put into blueprints. A pattern is there, and afterwards you will build according to that pattern.

Does the church have a pattern? We mentioned that to many people the church does not seem to have a pattern. They say it is just the product of history. As God’s people go along, they begin to change according to time and according to need. In other words, there is no pattern whatsoever. But actually, you find they will be patterned after the world. In other words, the world influences us, so that gradually, the church is conforming to the world. That is why you find the church becomes an organization, and



that organization begins to develop into a great corporation. It even develops into a nation above nations and that is after the pattern of the world. Instead of allowing the world to imitate the church, the church is imitating and following the trend of the world. But we know that the church of God is not built according to the elements of the world.

Some people think that the church just changes according to the ingenuity of man. Man creates the church, so he can form the church according to his own clever ideas. Again, that is what you find in Christianity.

Some people think the church should find its pattern from the Old Testament. In Judaism you have a definite place of worship; so today, we too have a definite place of worship. We even call it the place of worship. If you want to worship, you need to go to that place. But in the conversation of our Lord Jesus with the Samaritan woman, she said, "You Jews go to Jerusalem to worship and we worship at Mount Gerazim. Now where should we worship?"

Our Lord Jesus said, "The time is coming and now is when people who worship God do not worship in special locations or at special times, but true worshipers worship Him in spirit and in truth."

According to the Old Testament, there is not only a definite place for worship but there is a set of rules, the Ten Commandments, and all the statutes, and the ordinances. You worship by these and you serve God. So today, in any Christian organization you need to have a creed, and everything will be ruled by that creed.

Thirdly, in the Old Testament when they worshiped they had a certain form of worship, a ritual, a ceremony that was fixed and elaborate, and by these they worshiped. And today, we find the same thing in Christianity.

Finally, in Judaism there was the priesthood, a special tribe, a special family trained to do spiritual works, and all the others were just laity, lay people. This is also carried on into Christianity.

Where can we find the pattern for the church? Some people say we can find it in the New Testament. People read the book of Acts and find that when the church was formed, they began to have elders. Of course, you also need deacons and you need a congregation. So they approach the building of the church from a technical viewpoint. But after you have all these things, do you find the church of God? No.

Where can we find the pattern for the church? Thank God, He does give us a perfect pattern. And that perfect pattern is not technical, it is not mechanical, it is not organizational; that pattern is a living Person. In other words, it is Christ Himself. It is the living Christ. He becomes the pattern of the living church. So the church is spiritual; it is heavenly; it is of life. The more we know Christ, the more the church grows and the church is built. He alone is the pattern.

### **PREPARING THE MATERIALS**

Now we would like to share on the third point, which is preparation. Whenever you want to build something of greatness, you need to prepare for it. You need to gather the materials that will be needed for the building of that house, and of course, you also need the manpower, people who are called together to do the task. And you need to assign a certain amount of time to complete that work. If this is the way that man will do a good job, how much more will our God when He is working on something that is so glorious and so eternal!

When God built the heavens and the earth, how did He build? He spoke the word and it was done. Out of nothing, God brought in the heavens and the earth and all the things

in heaven and on earth. He called “not being” into being. He is God. That is the way He built the heavens and the earth.

But strangely, in the matter of building His house, God used a different strategy. Instead of doing all things by Himself, He involved man in that building. Instead of calling nothing into something, God began His work with something already there but unfit for His work. Yet He picked up these unfit materials and turned them into materials suitable for His building. In other words, in the building of the house, He involved man. So far as God is concerned, this involvement gives Him lots of trouble. It would be much easier if He would call nothing into something. We do not know why it pleased God to involve man in the work of building His house. He would work with man; He would work in man. Why? It seems to be beyond our understanding. The only thing we can think of is that it is because of His love. Out of His love, He wanted to do something very special. In spite of the fact that He knows the end from the beginning, He knows what will be involved, He knows hardship will be involved, He knows what cost He will have to pay because He involved man, yet for love’s sake He was willing. So when we think of the building of the house of God, it really humbles us.

### **MATERIALS FOR THE TABERNACLE**

In the Old Testament time, after God had delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt, He brought them to Mount Sinai, and then He declared why He had delivered them. He wanted to make them His own people, a people of His possession. Out of all the nations, He redeemed and delivered this people to be His own possession. He gave them His law, and by keeping the law it would make them, as it were, His own people. On that basis He declared to them that He wanted to dwell among them; He wanted to be with them. “Build Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among you.” This was the purpose of God in delivering this people to Himself.

God wants to dwell among His people. God could easily have sent down from heaven a dwelling place, a sanctuary, but instead of that, God said, “You, My redeemed people, build Me that sanctuary.” So He said, “Tell the children of Israel to offer Me a heave-offering.” (Heave-offering simply means “love offering.”) “Every one whose heart is prompted by the Spirit of God voluntarily, willingly, give Me a love offering of all kinds of material for the building of the sanctuary.”

We know that the children of Israel were slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years. As slaves they owned nothing. They did not even own their own bodies. They had no rights of any kind, nothing. But when God appeared to Moses and said, “You go and deliver My people out of Egypt, and when you come out, let everyone ask their Egyptian neighbors for gold, silver, and clothing.”

In the beginning Pharaoh was not willing to let them go. Then he said, “Let the men go but the women and children remain in Egypt.”

But Moses said, “No, all must go.”

“All right, you go, but all your cattle and all the animals remain here.”

Moses said, “No; we have to bring them out because we do not know what God will require of us for sacrifice.” So when the children of Israel were delivered from Egypt, the entire population was delivered—every member of the family, the old and the young, the men and the women, all the people were delivered. But more than that, God permitted the children of Israel to ask of their neighbors, even the Egyptians living in the Hebrew homes, for gold, and silver, and clothing. And the Bible says that when they did it, they spoiled the Egyptians.

At that time, Egypt was the greatest nation in the world. It was rich. When the children of Israel came out, they spoiled the Egyptians. Think of that! All the riches of Egypt became theirs. In one sense, our God is righteous. The Egyptians made the Hebrews work without wages for hundreds of years, so God said that these would be their wages. But more than that, all these were given to them abundantly by God Himself. They owned nothing. Even their bodies did not belong to them. Everything was redeemed by God. Everything was given by God. So when they came out of Egypt, they were the richest people in the world. Think of that! That is only a type.

When you come to the reality, when you come to us, this is the very way that God has redeemed us. Not only are we redeemed but all connected with us are redeemed into the fulness of Christ. That is how we came out. Then God said, "Give Me a love offering out of what I have given you—if you are willing. In case you are not willing you can keep it, but that will be your disaster." Whoever's heart is prompted by love, by God, by the love of God, by the Spirit, offer a heave-offering to the Lord. This will be the material for the building of the tabernacle.

### **THE ENEMY ROBS THE GOLD**

But the enemy of God, Satan, knew it too. So you find that when Moses went to the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments, the two tablets, the children of Israel on the plain said, "We do not know what happened to Moses. Make us a god to lead us." And Aaron said, "Give me all the gold rings on your ears." So he melted the gold and he molded it into a golden calf. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said, "This is god; this is our god." And immediately, Aaron said, "Let us proclaim a feast unto Jehovah."

When Moses came down from the mount, he saw what was going on. He smashed the two tablets of law. In other words, before the law reached them they already had broken it. Then he melted the golden calf and made it into fine bits, poured it on the river and made the children of Israel drink it. In other words, they drank their own sin. Before God could get to the gold, the enemy got it first.

Isn't it true with us today? We who are redeemed of the Lord do not belong to ourselves; everything belongs to God. And yet, whatever God has given us, instead of our offering it to God as a love offering for the building of His house, of His church, the enemy comes in, tempts us, and takes away that which belonged to God. As we look back, I believe every one of us will realize how we have wasted what God has so graciously given to us for His purpose on something that is against God. When we are enlightened by the Spirit of God, I believe every one of us will look back and realize how much that belongs to God in us has been wasted on something against Him.

But thank God, He is gracious. With the pleading of Moses, God forgave them. And thank God, He did not change His mind. Thank God, He had given them so much that there was still gold and silver and plenty of abundant things for the building of the tabernacle. Finally, after Moses pleaded with God and came down, God said, "Let the people whose hearts are touched and prompted offer a heave-offering." God gave them a second chance. And when you read from chapter 35 on, you will find how they came and offered and offered and offered until they had to be stopped. That is the grace of God. And that ought to be our condition, our situation. Are we like that? We have wasted so much of what God has entrusted to us for His purpose on many other things. When God by His mercy gives us another chance, what will be our response? Can we withhold from Him?

### MATERIALS FOR THE TEMPLE

The same thing happened in the building of the temple. We mentioned that David had the heart to build God a permanent temple because he knew the heart of God. He was not allowed to do it because he was a man of war; he had shed too much blood. The house of God represents peace, and it would be a misrepresentation if he built it. Still, God not only gave him the pattern of the temple, but hear what David said in I Chronicles 22: "In my affliction I have prepared materials for the building of God's house." What does he mean by "in my affliction"? Probably, he refers to the many wars that he had to fight. And the Bible says that whenever he fought a war and he overcame, he separated the spoil for God. In his affliction he prepared thousands of talents of gold and silver, iron, copper, and other materials for the building of God's house.

Then again, in I Chronicles 29, David said, "I have prepared for the house of God with all my power. Whatever is within my power I have prepared the material for it." In the third verse he said, "In my affection for the house of God...." He loved the house of God and out of his affection, over and above all that he had prepared, out of his own he offered the best gold, the most refined silver, everything of the best to God. Then he called the people and said, "Offer as God moves you." And how the leaders and the people came and offered willingly! And because they could offer willingly they were glad. As David praised God he said, "Everything is Yours, but You have made us a willing people to willingly give for the building of the temple." So that is how the materials for the building of the temple were prepared.

The building of the tabernacle and the temple are just types. They are temporary. They are shadows. They came and they went. What is the reality? The real thing that our Lord is building is His church. It is permanent; it is forever, eternal. Now, where does the material come from? For this we have to go back to the very beginning.

### MATERIALS FOR THE CHURCH

We remember when God said to Adam: "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make him a helpmate, his like." With that idea in mind for Adam, God began to work. Where could He find the material for the woman? He could not find it in a gorilla. He could not find it in any animal. The only material He could get must come from Adam. So the Bible tells us that God put Adam to sleep and God opened his side. That was the first surgery upon man, but it was a painless surgery. Why was it painless? There was no sin in the world. God opened his side and took out something. In the original it was not a rib; it was *something* of Adam being taken out of Adam. God used that something out of Adam and built it into the woman. This is a type.

When we come to the reality, where can our Lord find the material for the building of the church? Two thousand years ago He came to this world as a Bridegroom seeking for His bride. But out of the countless number of people, even among the chosen people, He could not find His bride. And because of this God had to do some surgery. Our Lord Jesus came to die. He came to go to the cross. Why must He go to the cross? When He shared with His disciples that He must go and He would be killed, immediately Peter took hold of Him, shook Him up, and said, "Lord, never! You do not need that. You can have the world without the cross." Our Lord turned around and said, "Satan, get behind Me because you are mindful of man not of God. If anyone wants to come after Me, let him take up his cross and follow Me."

## **THE CROSS**

Our Lord Jesus came to die. He died on the cross between two criminals. And when the soldiers came to make sure they were dead, they broke the legs of the two robbers because they were still alive. Breaking their legs speeded them to death. But when they came to the Lord, He was already dead—"a Man of sorrows acquainted with grief." So the soldiers thrust a spear into His side to make sure that He was dead.

The death of our Lord Jesus on the cross was the most painful death, not only physically, but also mentally and spiritually. Even our Lord cried out: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" In other words, our Lord Jesus tasted the very taste of eternal death, separation from the Father. It was a most painful death because there was sin in the world. The Bible says that when the spear went into His side, blood and water came out. That was the last drop of the blood from His heart. We are told that when the heart is broken, the blood begins to disintegrate, so it came out as blood and water.

John was there and he saw it. In John 19:34-35, he said, "I saw it; I witnessed it. Blood and water came out, and my witness is true." Why did he emphasize this so strongly? It is because here God put Christ to death. The Father crushed Him and out of His side, He took something—blood for the remission of our sin, water which is His life poured out for us. This is the material for the building of the church.

## **UNFIT MATERIAL**

No man in the world is fit to be material for the house of God. When God created man in His image, according to His likeness, He had that thought in view. He wanted man to be that material. If only they would eat the tree of life instead of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But unfortunately, man rejected God's life and would rather have knowledge in himself. Man declared independence against God. They wanted to be gods themselves, totally unfit for the building of the house. Nicodemus, the best of man, came to the Lord thinking that he was not far from the kingdom of God. He needed some more teaching, some more instruction, some more knowledge, but our Lord said, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The Samaritan woman, sinful, having five husbands and a sixth one, was not fit for the building of the house. No one in the world, naturally, is fit to be material for God.

You remember when our Lord was rejected by His people, He retreated to the border of Caesarea-Philippi. There He asked His disciples: "Who do men say that I am?" He was not satisfied with the answer. So He said, "Who do you say I, the Son of Man, am?"

And Simon Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Our Lord Jesus said, "Simon, son of Jonah, you are blessed because this is not something that flesh and blood can tell you. It is My Father in heaven who has revealed the Son to you." And the Lord said, "I also say to you, you are Peter and on this rock I will build My church."

## **PETER, A LIVING STONE**

Simon, the natural man, the man of the earth, the man of sin, of the flesh, was totally unfit to be material for the building of the church. God had to do something in this man to change him. So when he recognized that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, by the Father's revelation of the Son, in that confession something happened to that person. "Simon, you are blessed. Now you are Peter, a stone, a living stone, heavenly, spiritual, eternal life."

The Lord said, “You are Peter; now you are to be the material for the building of the church. As Simon, you are totally unfit, but now God has done something in you. It is a new creation now; a new life is given to you. You have become a living stone now, and now I can take you and build you into My church.”

Do we really see this? God did something more than calling something out of nothing. God does something even more, taking something that is completely ruined, something that is totally unfit, that is opposite to everything that God wants, and yet God does something in that person. He puts something new in him. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. A new life is put into him. He becomes Peter, a stone, and that is the material for the house of God.

### **MANY LIVING STONES**

Our Lord Himself is the Rock, the massive Rock, and we who believe in Him are all Peters, small stones, but having the same life. So Peter understood it very well. You remember in I Peter 2, he said that our Lord Jesus is a living stone. But as we come to Him we all become living stones being built up together into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. That is the material for the building of the house.

Our Lord creates His own material for the building of the house. Anything that is of the old creation is unfit. Everything must come from that new creation. Throughout the centuries, He has been calling a people out of every nation, every tribe, every tongue, every people, and He gathers them together and builds them together into the living church of God.

In the preparation work of the building of the church, our Lord prepares the material—you and me. Thank God for that! We should be cast away like the clay that the potter puts on the machine that breaks in his hand. Does he just cast it off? No, he takes it and makes a new vessel out of it. That is what has happened to us. We are castaways, but now God in His mercy takes us up, remakes us, and gives us a new life. That new life in us becomes the material for the building of the church. But when you have the material and you do not have the workmen, the material just lies there and cannot become a building.

### **THE WORKERS**

Where are the workers? Now in one sense, no one can build the church except God. In Matthew 16 the Lord said, “I will build My church.” Hebrews 11:10 says that God is the builder of New Jerusalem, the city with foundations. Psalm 127:1 says, “Unless Jehovah build the house, in vain the builders labor.”

In one sense, the building of the church is exclusively the work of God Himself. We are not fit because this is a creative work, and God is the Creator, so it is beyond us. But in another sense, when He is building the house, He builds in us and with us and out of us. So in I Corinthians 3 the apostle Paul said, “I am a wise master builder,” but strictly speaking he was a wise foreman. He laid the foundations, and all who believe in the Lord Jesus—the Corinthian believers and all of us—are working in this building.

How do we work? The building of the church is not given to a few of God’s people. It is true that for the building of the church the ascended Lord gave to the church some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers. He gave them for the equipping of the saints, for the perfecting of the saints so the saints will begin to function and work in this building up of the body of Christ in love (see Ephesians 4).

Everyone is involved. It is the universal priesthood of believers. All believers are servants of the Lord. All believers are working in this work.

### **GOLD, SILVER, AND PRECIOUS STONES**

How do we work? We can work with gold, silver, and precious stones, or we can work with wood, straw, and stubble. What does it mean? In building with gold, silver, and precious stone, gold represents the nature of God. God's nature is like gold: indestructible, incorruptible, glorious. That is why in the Bible when the glory of the Lord appeared as in Ezekiel, and he saw the vision of the glory of the Lord, he saw Somebody like gold, radiant gold. It is the nature of God. Silver is used for redemption, the redemption of our Lord Jesus. Precious stone is the work of the Holy Spirit. With patience, with pressure, with darkness, with heat, precious stones are formed.

When we work with the gold, silver, and precious stones, it simply means that we allow God to work the gold, silver, and precious stone in us. Outwardly, we are building with gold, silver, and precious stone. Actually, it is God Himself who is working in us, turning us into gold and silver and precious stone. So it is God working. All we do is allow Him to work, cooperating with Him, yielding to Him, so that His divine nature and character may be built up in us. All the goodness of His redemption will be formed in us. And the Holy Spirit works in our lives with pressure, with darkness, with heat, with a long period of time, transforming us, changing us from glory to glory as by the Lord the Spirit. Working is actually allowing Him to work in us with these things. And these are fit for the house of God because they come from God.

### **WOOD, STRAW, AND STUBBLE**

If we work with wood, grass, stubble, and straw, what will happen? Wood represents man, our natural man; like wood, it is corruptible. Straw represents the work of man because you remember that the Egyptians made the Israelites make bricks with mud and straw; it is the work of man. Stubble is the glory of man. If we refuse to cooperate with God, allowing the Spirit of God to work in our lives, taking away from us all that is wood, grass, and straw and rebuild in us what is of God, what is of Christ, what is of the Holy Spirit, then they will exist at the judgment seat of Christ when fire will test them. But today, after we believe in the Lord Jesus, if we are still living our natural life, doing work according to our natural strength and seeking man's glory instead of God's glory, outwardly, we may make a big building with wood, straw, and grass—very cheap. Everybody will see it and say what a big building it is, but when fire appears it is fit for fire. But thank God, the foundation can never be burned.

Gold, silver, and precious stones are costly. It costs you something. It costs you everything. Are you willing? He calls us to work with Him, as if we are working, but actually it is He who works in us. Thank God for that.

Finally, what is the time that He has apportioned for the building of the church? When the tabernacle was built, it was built in less than a year. When the temple was built, it was built in seven years, but how long does it take in the building of the church? When our Lord was on earth, He said, "I will build My church." The building begins at Pentecost and He is still building His church. What a magnificent building it is! How glorious it must be! And He involves even us. You are deeply involved in the building of the church, whether you know it or not, because He has called you. How much are you really involved in that building? How much are you building that will be burned, will be a

waste of your lifetime? And how much that is built in by the grace of God is fit for the dwelling of God Himself? Oh, it is so glorious, but it is very serious. You cannot play the church. May God build His church.

Shall we pray:

*Dear Lord, we want to thank Thee because Thou dost say, "On this rock I will build My church." We praise and worship Thee because Thou hast changed us, given us a new life, and with that life You gave to us You build Your church. We pray that we may not be so negligent as to think that we can hold on to what Thou hast given to us for our own sake. But Lord, Thou hast every right to claim all of us but Thou wilt not. Thou would rather beseech us by the mercy of God to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. This is our reasonable service. O Lord, we pray that Thou wilt take us in Thy own hand, mold and fashion us, work in us until we are built into that wonderful building, the house of God. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.*



## GOD'S PROCESS AND PRESENTATION

*Matthew 16:18, 21-25—And I also, I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and hades' gates shall not prevail against it.*

*From that time Jesus began to shew to his disciples that he must go away to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised. And Peter taking him to him began to rebuke him, saying, God be favourable to thee, Lord; this shall in no wise be unto thee. But turning round, he said to Peter, Get away behind me, Satan; thou art an offence to me, for thy mind is not on the things that are of God, but on the things that are of men. Then Jesus said to his disciples, If any one desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever shall desire to save his life [that is his soul] shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it.*

*Ephesians 5:25-27—Husbands, love your own wives, even as the Christ also loved the church, and has delivered himself up for it, in order that he might sanctify it, purifying it by the washing of water by the word, that he might present the church to himself glorious, having no spot, or wrinkle, or any of such things; but that it might be holy and blameless.*

Shall we pray:

*Dear Lord, as we gather together here this morning, we want to thank Thee for being so faithful to us during these few days. And Lord, as we come to the last session of this conference, we continue to wait upon Thee, knowing that Thou art the same yesterday, today, and forever. We pray, Lord, that Thy glory may fill this place, that we may see Thee and worship Thee. Dear Lord, we pray that whatever needs to be done in us, do it this morning, that Thou wilt be satisfied. We commit ourselves and this time into Thy hands. Speak, Lord, Thy servants heareth. In Thy precious name. Amen.*

We have been considering together on the word of our Lord when He said, "You are Peter, a stone. On this rock I will build My church and hades' gates will not prevail against it." We believe this is the one work that our Lord has been doing all these centuries and generations. When He came to this earth, He came for that very purpose: "I will build My church." After He ascended up to heaven, He poured down the Holy Spirit upon the hundred and twenty, and in this mystic body He continued to build His church. Today, we are looking forward to the completion of that marvelous work. Thank God, we are involved in it. So that is the reason why it is so important that we understand what He means by building the church.

### GOD'S PURPOSE

Before God created the heavens and the earth, God purposed a purpose in Christ Jesus. Out of His love for His beloved Son, He wanted to give the best to His Son, something that would answer to His Son's very heart. Heaven and earth could not satisfy His beloved Son, so God conceived this marvelous idea of the church. He would have a people—called out, gathered together, and in union with His beloved Son as His helpmate, His like. The church is not something that just happened; the church was conceived in God's heart for His Son, even before the ages. So you can see how marvelous, how wonderful, how magnificent, how glorious is that purpose!

Oftentimes, we are more need-oriented than purpose-oriented. In other words, we think mostly of our needs and how our needs will be met. Even God seems to exist for that reason. We need Him because He is the One who can satisfy our needs. Thank God, He does. He saves us; He forgives our sins; He gives us new life; He gives us assurance of eternity. But if we are need-oriented, we are self-centered. In other words, we are the center. Even God has to be around us, for us. What is important is that we be purpose-oriented, and if we are purpose-oriented, then we will discover we are God-centered. In other words, everything is centered upon God's purpose, upon His will, upon His good pleasure, and we are here for Him. We are here to satisfy His heart. So if we are growing up in the Lord, we have to shift away from being self-centered, need-oriented, and into being Christ-centered and purpose-oriented. When you see the purpose of God, it will really deliver you out of yourself. It will enable you to surrender yourself to the Lord that His purpose may be fulfilled. And how much better, how much more excellent, more glorious will be such a life!

### **GOD'S PATTERN**

After God purposed that purpose, He laid down a plan according to the counsel of His will. And God's plan is always the best; it is perfect. He laid down the pattern for the house, and because that house is to be the helpmate of His beloved Son, it has to be His like, exactly like Him. That is why the pattern of the church is nothing else but Christ Himself. The living Christ is the pattern of the living church. The church is built according to Christ. It is not built according to the teaching of man. It is not built according to the elements of the world. It is to be built according to Christ. So whatever is not of Christ cannot be built into the church. No matter how good it may seem to us, it will be totally rejected because only Christ is the pattern of the church.

### **GOD'S PREPARATION**

After the pattern was set, then God began to gather materials for the house. When God created man He had that purpose, idea in mind. That is why He created man in His own image. With that image, we have the ability to receive God's life into us, and with that life in us, there will be the material for the building of the church. Unfortunately, our forefathers declared independence against God. They ate the forbidden fruit. They wanted to be gods themselves. They wanted the knowledge of good and evil so they could be independent of God instead of eating the tree of life and depending upon God. For that reason, the material that God had in mind for the building of the church was completely ruined. It was no longer fit as material for the building of the church.

Probably, as you read the four gospels you will wonder why there were so many blind, so many deaf, so many crippled, so many sinners, at that time. When our Lord came to this earth, it is as if He met nothing but these kind of people all the time. He had to do wonders in healing them, in saving them, in transforming them. It is because He could not find any material for the building of the house; not until out of His side came forth blood and water. In other words, by His death His blood was shed for the remission of our sins, and the water, His life, was poured forth to us that we might have life and have life eternal. So we know that the material for the building of the house of God is none other than that which comes out of His side. What is of Him can be built into the church, and it can go back to Him and be joined in one with Him. That is why our Lord said, "You are Peter." When Simon confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, he received

revelation from the Father, and he was transformed from Simon to Peter. Or to put it another way: a new element, a new creation came into his life, and because he is Peter the Lord said, "I will build My church."

Peter understood this because in I Peter 2 he said that Christ is the living stone, rejected by man but precious to God. And as we come to Christ, we all become living stones, being built up together into a spiritual house. We are a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

So we do thank the Lord that we who were outcasts, totally unfit for the building of the church, today, by His redemptive work we are materials for the building of the house. We are not only the materials but we are also called to work together with Him. "Working together with Him" simply means that we allow Him to work Himself into us, and by that, the building will be built. Now if we build with gold, silver, and precious stones, that which comes from Him, they will remain and will be built in. But if we work with wood, straw, and hay, these will be destroyed; they will not go into the building. Even though we are saved, yet we are barely saved. So it is very important that we build with gold, silver, and precious stones.

The material for the building of the tabernacle and the temple came from God's people. What God had given to them first, they willingly offered to God out of their love for Him. They offered up heave-offerings out of their love for God, and by these love offerings the temple and the tabernacle were built.

There are so many who have been saved through the twenty centuries, even though in comparison with the world they are but a little flock. But when you think of the fact that from the first century to our twenty-first century, numberless people have been saved by the grace of God, we wonder why the building work is so slow, that so little is being built. I think there is one reason. Just because you are saved does not mean that automatically you are involved in this building work. There is one thing that is absolutely needed, and that is Romans 12:1.

### **CONSECRATION**

We all know that the book of Romans, from chapters 1 to 11, shows us the manifold mercies of God in Christ Jesus toward us. By the blood of the Lamb and by His cross, He delivered us and set us free from sin and death. His Spirit came into us, enabling us to grow in grace and in truth. He chose us even before the foundation of the world, and He enabled us to exercise our will to accept Jesus as our Savior. Thank God, the mercies of God are so tremendous. We are the products of His mercy.

After we have received such mercy, how should we respond? The Bible says, "I beseech you by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice." In other words, God is asking us for a heave-offering; God is asking us for a love offering. The love of God is to constrain us in such a way that we acknowledge we cannot live for ourselves. We have to live for the One who lived and died for us. We will surrender ourselves. All that God has redeemed—this body, the whole being—out of gratefulness we will yield ourselves to Him. We will give up our rights, as it were. We will hand ourselves completely over to Him and say, "Lord, do whatever is needed for Thy glory."

Unfortunately, we find that after we are saved, after we have received such mercy, we still hold onto ourselves. What God has given us, we consume for our own sake. We withhold it from the rightful owner. Thank God, He never forces us to do anything even though He has every right to demand that we live for Him, for His purpose, and not for ourselves any longer. He could demand it on the right of redemption, but our God would

rather beseech us, constrain us by His love. If His love should touch your heart, give yourself to Him; give your body a living sacrifice.

Why does He ask for the body? It is because our life is lived through the body, but it does not mean only the body. The body means the whole being, all that the Lord has redeemed. We give ourselves back to Him out of love. It is not like the children of Israel who only gave a little out of their abundance. Today, in spiritual reality God does not ask for something from you. He asks for your all. Unless you give Him all, He will not accept it.

There is that famous word by F. B. Meyer. When he tried to yield himself completely to God, he held back a little key to a little room in his life and would not give it to the Lord. He bargained with the Lord: "Allow me to keep this little key for that little room for myself and I will serve You with double effort." And he said, "The Lord said, 'No. If I am not the Lord of all, I am not Lord at all.'"

Our Lord is so glorious; you cannot bribe Him with less than all. He demands all because He gave us all. When F. B. Meyer saw the Lord turning away from him, in his desperation he cried out: "Make me willing to be willing." And the Lord turned back and took all the keys of his life, which included that little key. And God began to deal with him, cleaning up every room, until the Lord was able to use him.

Unless we present our bodies a living sacrifice, unless we put ourselves on the altar for the remainder of our lives, and allow Him to examine us, cut us into pieces, clean us, and purify us by His holy fire burning us into ashes, the church cannot be built. That is the reason why after twenty centuries the building is still unfinished.

Oh, brothers and sisters, may the love of God constrain us. Don't hold back from Him. Our body belongs to Him. It should be for Him. Consecration does not mean that you are to be a preacher or a Bible woman; consecration is for every brother and sister. It does not mean you are to work for Him. No; it means that you allow Him to work in you. He is to transform you from raw material into a finished product.

In II Corinthians 4, we are told that we have a treasure in the earthen vessel. We are earthen vessels, but thank God, He is willing to put a treasure in us. Christ, the beloved Son of God, is the treasure. "This is My beloved Son in whom is My delight." He is the treasure of God's heart, and He put that treasure in you and in me. We are earthen vessels, opaque, common, nothing, but something of tremendous value is put in us. But in order for the radiancy of that treasure to shine forth, the earthen vessels have to be cracked and broken. There is something in every one of us that can be used for the building of the church, but that something is being hidden in earthen vessels. The earthen vessels have to be broken so that the radiancy of the treasure may shine forth. That is why, today, we need the working of the cross in our lives.

### **RAW MATERIALS**

After the failure of the children of Israel at Mount Sinai, thank God, they repented. So when the second call came to them, they brought heave-offerings for the building of the tabernacle. Oh, how they responded! They came willingly, offering until they had to be stopped. So the raw materials were all there, but raw materials are raw materials. You cannot just pile all these raw materials one upon another and say, "Now we have a house." It will be a pile of ruins. It will be of no use, serve no purpose. These materials have to be worked on. There must be lots of cutting. All the cloth and linen had to be cut according to measure and sewed together. Lots of knitting had to be done. And lots of

cutting and smoothing had to be done on the wood. There was lots of work that had to be done.

We can use the golden lampstand as an illustration because the golden lampstand in the New Testament represents the church. A solid lump of gold, a talent of gold was to be turned into an exquisite, beautiful lampstand with seven branches. How did they do it? Did they melt the gold and put it into a mold so it would come out a golden lampstand? If you do that, you can produce in mass production. But there was only one lampstand. How did they make that lampstand? The Bible says they beat that talent of gold into a beautiful lampstand. How much beating that gold must have suffered!

It was the same in the building of the temple. The cedar trees on the mountain of Lebanon had to be cut and floated by sea to Joppa, the seaport. Then they were transported into Jerusalem. The massive stones had to be cut in the quarries and transported to Mount Moriah. Today, we know that those stones actually were cut in the quarry underneath Mount Moriah. And the Bible says they were cut according to measure; every stone was set for a certain place in the temple. The shape of each stone was according to the pattern of the temple. So it had to be measured and cut and smoothed to the exact point. How much work must have been done on those stones! Yet the Bible says that when they built the temple there was no sound of iron or of hammer because all these stones had been measured, cut, and even numbered according to pattern in the quarry. And when they were transported to Mount Moriah for the building, they just fit in one with another perfectly.

Now if in the building of the tabernacle and the building of the temple so much work had to be done to transform the raw materials into furniture, into the building, how much more must be done in the building of the church! The temple and the tabernacle are just shadows. The church, the body of Christ is the reality. The temple and the tabernacle are physical buildings, but the church is a spiritual building. However, the principles of working are the same. Can you imagine that we who are saved, being the raw materials, can just be piled together casually without any deeper work being done in our lives, and come out the house of God?

Who has the wisdom to turn these raw materials into a building? In the case of the tabernacle, God called Bezaleel and Aholiab, men filled with the Spirit, who were given wisdom and understanding by God to know how to make all these things. Also, the men and women, wise-hearted and willing-hearted, offered themselves to do the work of cutting, knitting, sewing. It was the same thing you find in the building of the temple. It took wisdom, and Solomon, the symbol of wisdom, turned all those raw materials into that wonderful temple.

### **THE PROCESSOR**

We are the material for the building of the house of God, and thank God, there is material, but it is raw. Who has the wisdom of turning us, raw materials, into the house of God? None but the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of wisdom and knowledge. Even after God put His own life into us, it was not enough; He also put His Spirit in us. The Holy Spirit, the third Person of God, came and dwelt in each one of us, and He will never leave us. We may grieve Him; we may quench Him; we may rebel against Him; but we cannot drive Him away because He has a mission to fulfill. He dwells in us to do that work of turning these raw materials into the finished product.

Take Peter for an example. He was Simon before— earthly, worldly, of the flesh; but when he confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, God turned him into

Peter, a stone. A new element came into his life and this Peter-element is the building material for the house. But it is still a rough stone. It is a treasure in an earthen vessel. So immediately after Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, and the Lord said, "You are blessed," do you know what happened? The Lord began to reveal the secret of the building process. He told His disciples that He would go to Jerusalem, He would be killed, but on the third day He would be raised from the dead. Why? Without the cross He cannot be the Christ. This is the secret. But when Peter heard about that, the Bible says that he laid hold of Christ, and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Never! Do not do that! You do not need it. You can be Christ without the cross."

Thank God, our Lord Jesus turned around and said, "Get behind Me, Satan." This is Satan because "you are not mindful of God; you are mindful of man."

### **EXCHANGING SIMON FOR PETER**

The Lord began to tell His disciples: "If anyone wants to follow Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. If you desire to save your soul-life, you will lose it. If you are willing to lose your soul-life for My sake, you will gain it to eternity."

The principle of the cross is necessary. It was not only necessary for our Lord Jesus, it is absolutely necessary for all of us. When Peter held the Lord and said, "Don't do it," it came from Satan. In a strict sense, Satan has no ground in the new creation, but he has every ground in the old creation. In other words, Satan had no ground in Peter but he still had his ground in Simon, who is called Peter. The earthen vessel was still there. There is still the flesh in us, and the flesh and Satan are allies. It had to depart from the Lord. The Lord had to deal with Peter. All the Simon in him had to be denied, had to be rejected, had to go to the cross, and be put to death. If you love your soul-life you lose it. If you love yourself you lose it. If you are willing to lose your self-life for the sake of the gospel, you gain it to eternity because it is built into the house of God, into the church.

What is discipleship? Why is it that after God saved Peter, He called him to come and follow Him? It is because there is much work in the process of building. The raw material is there but it is not suitable for the building. It has to be turned into a finished product. And what a work has to be done!

In the three years or so of following the Lord, we find that our Lord dealt with Peter again and again and again. He was outspoken and he gave the Lord opportunity to deal with him. (Don't be too clever so that the Lord will not have a chance to deal with you.) And how the Lord seems to deal with Peter so much! Peter said, "I love You. All the other disciples may fall away but I will follow You even unto death." How courageous! How heroic! But that was Simon in him.

Do you know what our Lord said? He said, "Simon, Simon." He did not say, "Peter, Peter." He said, "Simon, Simon, Satan wants to sift you in the sieve as wheat." It is because he has ground in Simon. But the Lord said, "I have prayed for you; when you are restored, strengthen your brethren."

Oh, brothers and sisters, there is so much Simon in us, mixed with Peter, and by the Spirit of God the Lord has to put us into environments where we are surrounded, beaten, cut, knit. That is painful to the flesh, but it will transform raw materials to a fixed form according to pattern. Unless we deny ourselves and follow the Lord, unless we take up our cross and follow Him, we cannot be His disciples.

That tells us why we have to go through so much in our daily lives. You know, I have an idea: "Lord, the moment You save me, take me to Yourself." Wouldn't that be marvelous? We would not need to worry that we might fall. We would not need to

struggle, trying to do the will of God. We would be delivered from denying Him. Why did the Lord leave us on earth? If He loves us, why not take us immediately? Ah, the Lord knows better. His ways are higher than our ways. He is working patiently in us. He will not give us up.

Oftentimes, I thought: "I am useless, finished," but He still hopes in me. He will not give up. Love will not let me go. It is painful to the flesh. Dying is painful. We have to bear in our body the dying of Jesus that we may bear the life of Jesus in our body. It is absolutely necessary.

### **LIVING STONES FIT TOGETHER**

May we understand that He is transforming us, turning us raw materials into vessels, honorable vessels, in the house of God. There is much beating, much cutting, much knitting, much smoothing, but it is absolutely necessary. In every one of us there is so much rubbish, so much of the flesh, so much that is earthly, of the world, that gives ground to Satan. The Lord has to purify us. Not only does the cross have to work in us individually, but we are not to stand alone. We are to be knit together, built together. And this being built together is organic; it is united; it is becoming one. It is not just a pile of stones. And how much more work needs to be done that we may be fit for one another!

Again, use Peter as an example. Peter complained about his brother Andrew. He came to the Lord and said, "If my brother sins against me and I forgive him seven times, will that be enough?" When Peter came to the Lord and asked Him that question, he was hoping that the Lord would say, "Wonderful!" Yet the Lord said, "I do not say seven times; I say seventy times seven."

Think of that! What kind of person was Simon Peter? He was impulsive, talkative without thinking, rough. What kind of person was Andrew? He was a very careful person in details. Among five thousand men he could see a little boy with five loaves and two fishes. He was a loving man. How he loved his brother! After he met the Messiah, immediately he led his brother to Christ. Peter thought his brother sinned against him seven times, but I wonder who was really sinning against the other? I think probably it was Peter who sinned against Andrew and yet he thought it was Andrew who sinned against him.

Afterwards, the Spirit of God put Peter together with John. My, what kind of person was John? John was meditative, deep thinking. Everything was going on inside. He was outwardly shy, as it were, but once it accumulated inside it began to burst into thunder. He was a mystic, imaginative, and quiet—worse than Andrew to be put together with Peter. But you find they fit exactly. Peter needed John, and John needed Peter. Who restored Peter after he denied Christ? Peter went out weeping, thinking that he was finished. He would not come back by himself. It was John who went out to seek him and bring him to John's house.

And John needed Peter too. When the news came about the Lord being risen, that He was no longer in the tomb, that the body was lost, you remember Peter and John ran together to the tomb. And John, being younger, ran faster. When he came to the tomb, he peeped in and saw the burial cloth, but he did not go in. He was not that courageous and impulsive, but Peter just rushed in. Then John followed. So they needed each other, and it became a perfect match. These two stones fit together. How much work the Spirit of God had worked in both of them!

That is what we are. Naturally speaking, we do not fit with one another. Oftentimes, our strong points stick out and that is what makes us unfit to fit with one another. They

have to be smoothed. Even in the exercising of spiritual gifts given by God, all these gifts have to be coordinated to work together. Otherwise, gifts will be problems. When Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost the eleven stood with him. Think of these things! How much more work the Spirit of God has to do patiently in every one of us!

When you find yourself unable to live with your brothers and sisters, when you find yourself unable to serve together with your brothers and sisters, do not blame your brothers and sisters. Blame yourself. There is something in you that needs to be dealt with, to go to the cross. God does not want us to be independent. God wants us to be dependent upon one another, as we are dependent upon Christ.

Thank God, He is working. Do not think that the Holy Spirit is sleeping. He is working in you and in me, and in us together. He is working. These are signs of His active working. Do not shrink back. When He works in your life, do you say, "It is too much; leave me alone"? When you are with your brothers and sisters, if you say, "I cannot stand anymore. I have to move out," you lose the opportunity. Learn to yield to the Spirit of God. That is why consecration is so basic. And gradually, patiently, the church is being built in love. So that is the process. We are still in the process, but thank God, one day it will be finished.

### **A GLORIOUS CHURCH**

The Bible says in Ephesians 5, "Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her." But it does not stop there. It says, "He is sanctifying it, purifying it by the washing of the water with the word, so that it may be a glorious church without spot, without wrinkle, or any of such sort, holy and blameless, to be presented to Him as His bride."

Our Lord gave Himself for the church and He continues in love, sanctifying it, setting it apart, holy for God, purifying it, taking away all the earthly things, the worldly things, the natural things, so it becomes pure gold. He makes it without spot, without wrinkle. Spots are the spots of flesh; wrinkles are a sign of age, of being old, decayed. All things have become new and all things are of God, holy and blameless, a glorious church.

### **PRESENTED TO THE LORD**

How does He do it? He purifies the church by the water with the word. In this particular verse the water represents His life in us. His life in us and His word outside of us work together by the Spirit of God to purify us that we may be the finished product that He is looking for, a glorious church.

You know, when the tabernacle was finished and erected, when all the vessels and furniture were placed in order, the glory of the Lord descended. The cloud of God filled the house (see Exodus 40). It was presented to God. This was God's house. It was built for that purpose. So when it was erected, the glory of God filled that house. God took possession of it. God said, "This is My dwelling place."

When the temple was finished and dedicated, because everything was built according to pattern, fire came from above and consumed the burnt offerings. The cloud, the Shekinah glory of God filled the temple, and even the priests could not serve. They had to retreat, bow, and worship.

Oh, this is the desire of my heart. I am hoping one day the glory of God will so fill His church that all services stop and everybody worships. This happened in the nineteenth century when many believers, who were persecuted, fled to Moravia to the territory of Count Zinzendorf. They were together, persecuted by the Christian world. They loved the



Lord and yet they could not get along with one another; they held on to their traditions. God worked through Zinzendorf until, one day, when they had the Lord's Table, the love feast, the Spirit of God came upon them and they were all melted into one. They embraced one another, confessing, shedding tears.

Oh, brothers and sisters, all my life I have been longing to see that day. This is what the church should be because everything is built according to pattern, to Christ, so He will come and take possession of it. Glorious! We look forward to that day when the glorious church as a wife has made herself ready and is given that white linen—pure, shining—the marriage garment of the bride.

One day, brother T. Austin Sparks asked brother Watchman Nee which prophecy in the whole Bible was the most difficult to fulfill. And our dear brother Watchman said, "Ephesians 5."

Indeed, when we look around, it seems that day is retreating farther and farther away. When will the glorious church appear? With our human eyes it seems impossible, but God is the God of the impossible. What He purposed He will fulfill. If you have the eyes of faith, you can see that through the centuries God has been working. He has been apprehending a people out of every century, every generation, everywhere in the world. You find God's hand was upon some, a remnant maybe, a few, but God is working, using them as the materials suitable for the building of the church. Even in our times, if you have the eyes of faith you can still see here and there, everywhere in the world God has His hidden ones. They are not known by man but known by God. What is popular in Christianity is not it; what is unknown, despised, is known by God. When Elijah complained that he was the only one, God said, "Wait a minute; I have seven thousand whose knees have not bowed to Baal."

Brothers and sisters, thank God, He is working, and I believe the day is approaching nearer and nearer. Hopefully, if God wills, in our lifetime, because we are faithful, He may find all the materials He needs that are willing to let Him work them into that glorious church. When we see that glorious church, we see the glory of the Lord. We see the beauty of Christ, and that is God's heart.

Shall we pray:

*Dear Lord, we do thank Thee that Thou art ever faithful, ever loving, ever working. We praise and thank Thee that Thou canst never fail. Thou art accomplishing that glorious church to be presented to Thyself as Thy bride. Oh Lord, make us willing to be willing, allowing us to be in Thy hands, freely worked upon by Thee. We pray that we may be a ready people for Thyself. We pray, Lord, that Thou wilt use us, even us, to speed up the finishing, putting the finishing touch to the building of the church. Lord, we look forward to that day when we shall see Thee face to face, Thy glory reflected in the church. May Thy heart be satisfied. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.*