

## Church Outing Post-reading

**Sunday, October 13<sup>th</sup>**

**Rev. 3:1** And to the messenger of the church in Sardis write: These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I know your works, that you have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead.

**2** Become watchful and establish the things which remain, which were about to die; for I have found none of your works completed before My God.

### **A vital group is vital—living and active (1)**

#### HAVING LIVING AND ACTIVE GROUPS TO GAIN OTHERS

We have to make our group meetings so interesting. If our vital group meetings are full of truth, are living, and if we intimately love one another in the group, this will be a big attraction. We must have a living, active vital group. Then we should do our best to bring in the middle-aged ones.

Brother Watchman Nee stressed that the priesthood in the New Testament is universal, so he encouraged all the saints to serve, to be priests. We have not yet had a complete success in this matter. After I came to the United States, the Lord showed us that we need to pray-read His Word and call upon His name. We also began to practice having a time in the meeting for the saints to share after a message was given. This helped to bring the saints into more functioning. But the most prevailing way to bring all the saints into function is for them to enter into the group meetings in a living and active way.

Our groups should not be dormant, lifeless, and cold. If our groups are like this, no one will want to attend them. We have to keep our group meetings so interesting, so living, and so attractive. People need a proper social life, but to be social in a worldly way leads to sin. The church social life in the recovery leads to light, to the deeper and higher truths, and to the divine life. I believe that if we could get our practice exposed to others, they will be attracted. The group meetings that are living, attractive, and full of activities will be used by the Lord to gain others for the increase and building up of the church.

Everyone should bear a burden for the vital groups. Do not despise your burden and your portion. If a new one comes into a group meeting, and all the members of the group meeting speak, he will be surprised and attracted. Our group meetings must be living and active, with all the members in the group speaking.

According to my experience, the most attractive thing is the thorough fellowship. In your vital groups you must always practice the thorough, intimate fellowship. This brings in the mutual care in love. If a new one comes to our group and sees this kind of intimate, open, thorough fellowship and mutual care, he will be inspired. He would say that he has never seen people who are so one and who love, open to, and care for one another so much. He would say, "This is the place where I should be. I have to be among these people." This kind of intimate fellowship and care for one another attracts people, so we have to practice this.

We must do everything we can to strengthen the vital groups. We should spend every drop of our blood, every bit of our strength, and every minute of our time to strengthen the vital groups, making the vital groups so beautiful, so high, and so attractive. This is the only thing we should stress to get people. A number of things can attract people but not so effectively as the vital groups.

*(Fellowship Concerning the Urgent Need of the Vital Groups, Chapter 24, Section 2)*

A proper Christian should be vital. To be vital means to be living and active. Since I am a man, I must believe into Christ. If I am a Christian, I must be in the recovery. If I am in the recovery, I must be vital. If we are not vital, we may be in the church, but we are not among the overcomers. An overcomer is a vital person.

In the seven epistles in Revelation, the Lord condemned the church in Sardis for its deadness. The Lord said that in Sardis nothing was living; everything was dying (3:1-2). It is possible to be attending all the church meetings regularly yet still be dying, not vital. The church in Laodicea was lukewarm. Those who are lukewarm are not active. They do not take any action. To be vital is to overcome both the deadness of Sardis and the lukewarmness of Laodicea. Maybe the entire church where we are is like Sardis, but this does not mean that we need to leave it. We may say that our church is too dead and that we want to have a living church. But on the entire earth there is not one church that is completely living. The church may be dying, but we need to stay in the church to overcome the deadness.

*(The Training and the Practice of the Vital Groups, Chapter 1, Section 7)*

**Monday, October 14<sup>th</sup>**

**Eph. 5:18** And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissoluteness, but be filled in spirit,

**19** Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and psalming with your heart to the Lord,

**Acts 15:36** Now after some days Paul said to Barnabas, Let us return now and visit the brothers in every city in which we announced the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.

### **A vital group is vital—living and active (2)**

#### A VITAL GROUP BEING LIVING AND FULL OF ACTIVITIES

Recently, I felt burdened to use the term *vital groups*. My understanding in using the word *vital* is that a vital group is living and full of activities. You may be a living person, but if you do not know how to take any action, you are not vital. Children from the ages of five to seven are vital because they are not only living but full of activities. Spiritually speaking, we may be living, but we are not vital, because we are not living and full of activities. To be vital is to be living and very active, full of activities. The vital groups are groups that are living and full of activities. If the saints who have the burden to be in the vital groups do not move, do not act, in any kind of meeting, the church is finished.

*(Fellowship Concerning the Urgent Need of the Vital Groups, Chapter 24, Section 1)*

We need to be desperate in our prayer....We need to pray, “Lord, make me vital! Make me living and active! I want to be a factor for the increase of the Lord's recovery.” We also should pray desperately, “Lord, fill me up. Transfuse Yourself as the Spirit into my being, my constitution, and pour Yourself out as the Spirit of power upon me.” In order to be brought into the infilling and the outpouring of the essential and economical Spirit, we need to pray unceasingly (1 Thes. 5:17) by exercising our spirit (1 Tim. 4:7) to redeem the time (Eph. 5:16)....

After we become vital and are grouped together in the vital groups, we need to do something. First, we need to pick up a burden, and then we need to take action to contact people. If we are vital, we will realize that among the churches in Southern California there is a desperate need for the proper increase....If we are vital, the Lord will be able to burden us in a definite and particular way to meet His need today. The Lord has a great need to have the proper increase in the churches in Southern California....Today we need to put away so many things that are occupying and preoccupying our hearts and pick up a burden for the increase of the church. If we are vital, we will have the capacity to be burdened by the Lord. We need to be unloaded, we need to be released, and we need to be vitalized so that we can be burdened by the Lord for two things: the increase of the churches and the building up of the organic Body of Christ. This is the Lord's burden today, and this should be our burden. Nothing should occupy our hearts but what is on the Lord's heart. Today the Lord desires to see the churches in Southern California have the proper increase, and He also desires to see a real building up in the churches as the organic Body of Christ. The Lord will do this through the God-ordained way. Therefore, we need to be burdened and vitalized to take this way absolutely and desperately.

After we pick up such a burden, we need to take definite action to go and contact others, either sinners or Christians. To be vital is not only to be living but also to be burdened and very active for the Lord's interest. Once we are living, we also need to be burdened and we need to take action to contact people. We should make a list of those who are unsaved among our relatives, friends, colleagues, and classmates, and we should begin to pray for them in a desperate way. While we are praying for them, we need to exercise our discernment according to the leading of the Spirit to select two or three from our list for us to work on for their salvation. We should have the loving concern of God's heart for the salvation of sinners, and we should be burdened not just to save souls but to convert sinners into members of the Body of Christ for the carrying out of God's economy. The Lord may lead us not only to contact sinners but also to contact some Christians who are seeking, backslidden, or dormant, and gradually, little by little and step by step, to lead them into the church life. We must believe that there are some people in our

sphere of influence who are being worked on by the sanctifying Spirit to separate them unto the Lord. They need us to pick up a burden and to take definite action to go and contact them.

*(1993 Blending Conference Messages concerning the Lord's Recovery and Our Present Need, Chapter 7, Section 8)*

Tuesday, October 15<sup>th</sup>

**1 Cor. 4:15** For though you have ten thousand guides in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

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

### **A vital group does four things—it begets, nourishes, perfects, and builds (1)**

The term *the God-ordained way* was invented by us, and we saw that this God-ordained way revealed in the Scriptures is of four steps: begetting, feeding, perfecting, and building. We need to beget, to produce, new believers. Then we need to feed them that they may grow. Then we need to perfect them, not by one teacher but through the mutual teaching in the groups. In the groups everyone is a teacher, and every teacher is a student. Through the mutual teaching in the groups the new ones are perfected unto the work of the ministry, as pointed out in Ephesians 4:12. This makes them qualified to prophesy, to speak for the Lord, for the building up of the church. To take the God-ordained way is by these four steps, but how do we carry them out? We found out that the way to carry out these four steps is by the vital groups.

*(Fellowship Concerning the Urgent Need of the Vital Groups, Chapter 24, Section 1)*

#### **FOUR STEPS OF THE NEW WAY— BEGETTING, NOURISHING, TEACHING, BUILDING**

There have been over sixty years of history among us. I was personally involved in the last fifty years, and I am very much aware of the true situation. During the four and a half years that I was in Taipei, the Lord gradually showed me the truth in the Bible. I have made note of these crucial verses in the New Testament according to what I saw. I have told you before that there are four steps that we have to study in the new way. The training center is a laboratory. The first step that we have to study is the preaching of the gospel. The second step is the nourishing of the new believers. The third step is to teach and perfect them so that they may become useful. These three steps are the begetting, the nourishing, and the teaching. There is a fourth step, which is the building.

The words *beget*, *nourish*, and *teach* can all be found in the Bible. For example, Paul says, “I have begotten you through the gospel” (1 Cor. 4:15). He does not say “saved you” but “begotten you.” What you need is the life of God. By dispensing the life of God into you, I beget you. After begetting, there is the nourishing. The Lord said to Peter in John 21, “Do you love Me?...Feed My lambs” (v. 15). Paul also says, “We were gentle in your midst, as a nursing mother would cherish her own children” (1 Thes. 2:7). The most important work of a nursing mother is to nourish the baby. Paul cared for the saints like a nursing mother would care for her own baby. Peter says to the saints in 1 Peter 2:2 that believers should “as newborn babes, long for the guileless milk of the word in order that by it you may grow unto salvation.” When a new one is born, he needs to be nourished. Only then will he grow. The third step is the teaching. Paul says that he was not just a nursing mother to nourish and cherish but a father to entreat, console, and teach. Ephesians 4 says, “He Himself gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as shepherds and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints” (vv. 11-12). Teaching perfects people. In this way not only do the saints grow in Christ, but they also mature in life.

After the saints are perfected, have knowledge in the truth, and have the experience in life, they will spontaneously be able to speak for God, that is, to prophesy. First Corinthians 14 shows us that prophesying is the most excelling gift because it builds up the church. Christianity has taken the easy way. They train special ones to be the pastors to preach and give a sermon every week for edifying the believers. This is a wrong way. There should not be the replacement of many by one. Instead, everyone should be working, because 1 Corinthians 14:31 says, “You can all prophesy one by one.”

The way that Christianity takes is one that avoids the difficult and chooses the easy. It establishes the one but replaces the many. This is wrong. What we see in the Bible is not like this. The Bible exhorts all of us to speak and all of us to prophesy. Although we may not do too well at the beginning, as long as we lay a good foundation, it will be easy later. The old system makes a person lazy, but in the Lord’s recovery everyone has to be diligent to strive and pursue seriously. Everyone has to pray-read, enjoy the

Lord's word, and fellowship with the Lord in His word. There is also the need to allow Christ to grow in us. But this is not all. We have to go and preach the gospel, nourish the newly saved ones, and perfect them in the small group meetings so that they will learn to prophesy in the district meetings.

*(The New Testament Priests of the Gospel, Chapter 8, Section 3)*

Wednesday, October 16<sup>th</sup>

**Eph. 4:12** For the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ,

**1 Cor. 14:4** He who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but he who prophesies builds up the church.

**A vital group does four things—it begets, nourishes, perfects, and builds (2)**

We have to realize that a big and top advantage of the group meetings is that they should make everyone function. Our vital groups have not yet reached that standard of making everyone function according to the God-ordained way with its four steps: to beget, to feed, to perfect by mutual teaching, and to prophesy for the building up of the church.

*(Fellowship Concerning the Urgent Need of the Vital Groups, Chapter 24, Section 1)*

After reconsidering the holy Word, we found out the way in which Christians should serve and meet. This is the God-ordained way, the way ordained by God in the Bible. This way ordained by God has four steps. The first step is to preach the gospel to get sinners saved so that they can become members of Christ. This is the begetting stage to bring forth, to beget, members of Christ. When sinners repent, believe, and are regenerated, they become like newborn babes who need to be nourished by us. This brings us to the second stage, the feeding stage, the nourishing stage. After the feeding stage comes the teaching stage to educate them. The teaching stage takes a long time. Humanly speaking, an education takes six years for elementary school, six years for junior high and high school, and four years for college. Spiritually speaking, we also need to be educated in the divine truths for the Christian life and the church life. This is the teaching stage, which is called the perfecting of the saints in Ephesians 4:12. After a certain period of time, the saints become “graduates” in the church life. The length of time it takes to “graduate” differs with people according to their desire for the Lord, their endeavoring, and their capacity.

After the begetting stage, the nourishing stage, and the teaching stage comes the building stage. After you graduate from a four-year college, you have to do some business. Our business in the church life is to build up the church of Christ, the Body of Christ, by prophesying. This is fully developed and presented in 1 Corinthians 14. The church is not built by one minister, one preacher, speaking all the time. This concept came from Satan to spoil the Body of Christ, to nullify the headship of Christ, and to make the church nothing. The practice of one man speaking and the rest listening does not build up the church, the Body of Christ. Instead, it builds up a hierarchy, a kind of religious system with rank and position. In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul says that we should all desire to prophesy, to speak for the Lord (v. 1). Paul says that we can all prophesy (v. 31). To prophesy in 1 Corinthians 14 means to speak for the Lord and to speak forth Christ. We need the variety from many saints speaking in the meetings. After a new one gets baptized, he can say, “Praise the Lord Jesus! I love Him. He is so good to me.” In a family it is good to hear all the members of different ages speak, from the young children to the grandparents. The church life should be like this.

Thus, we have seen that God's ordained way has four stages: the stages of begetting, feeding, teaching, and building. We must get out of the deadness, lukewarmness, and barrenness. We must get out of the oldness, the staleness. We must get out of the routine, the formality, the silence, and the prayers of the traditional way. We hate deadness, lukewarmness, and barrenness. We are struggling to fight them down. We need a change from the old way to the new way, from the old age to the new age in God's ordained way with four steps: begetting, feeding, teaching, and building. We need a change of generation.

I would like to say again that a vital group is a group of normal Christians. A normal Christian always lives a holy life in the church. He lives in the Body. He does not save people into a denomination but into the church, into the Body. Because many of us were not saved in this way, we were not normal. A normal Christian lives the normal church life and preaches the gospel in a normal way to save people into the church, into the Body....A vital person is one who repents to the uttermost, confesses thoroughly, contacts the Lord God intimately, and fellowships with his fellow Christians closely.

*(The Training and the Practice of the Vital Groups, Chapter 6, Section 2)*

**Thursday, October 17<sup>th</sup>**

**Eph. 4:16** Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.

### **The vital groups are the actuality, practicality, and reality of the Body (1)**

In today's education the goal is not merely to finish elementary school and junior high school and then to graduate from high school. The goal is to study in a university and to earn not only a bachelor's degree but even a master's degree or a Ph.D. After many young people finish high school, they become tired of studying and terminate their education to get a job and make a living. This is just like our church life. To be in the church life may be likened to being in high school. Being satisfied to be merely in the church life, we may say, "Praise the Lord! Hallelujah for the church life! How good it is!" But will this reach the goal for the fulfillment of the Lord's purpose? It will not, just as graduating from high school will not reach the goal of the purpose of today's education. Today in the recovery, we need to go on and on to reach the high peak of God's economy, that is, Mount Zion.

Jerusalem is built on the top of a mountain. Although Jerusalem is good, it is not the peak. In Jerusalem there is a peak, that is, Mount Zion, on which the temple was built. About one thousand years before the building of the temple, God asked Abraham to offer his son Isaac on Mount Moriah, which is another name for Mount Zion (Gen. 22:2; 2 Chron. 3:1). The good situation in the recovery today is just like Jerusalem. However, there is no Zion. In the New Testament the overcomers are likened to Zion. In Revelation 14:1 the one hundred forty-four thousand overcomers are not just in Jerusalem; they are on the peak of Zion. The overcomers, the vital groups, are today's Zion. My burden today is to help you reach the peak of the vital groups, that is, the overcomers' Zion. Although we may have a good church life, among us there is almost no realization, no practicality, no actuality, and no reality of the Body life. This is the need in the recovery today....

The regular procedures of the church work in the Lord's recovery today consist of four steps: begetting, nourishing, teaching (perfecting), and building. Begetting is to have sinners saved and regenerated to become the members of Christ (1 Cor. 4:15b; Matt. 28:19); nourishing is to feed the new believers for their growth in the divine life (1 Thes. 2:7; John 21:15, 17); and teaching is to perfect the saints that they may mature to be built (Matt. 28:20a; Eph. 4:12-16). The steps of begetting, nourishing, and perfecting are all for another higher step, that is, for the building up of the Body of Christ (vv. 12b, 16) in the local churches (Rev. 1:4a, 11). However, we need to ask ourselves, "Where is such a building? Where is the Body of Christ today? Within and among the many local churches, where is the reality of the Body of Christ?" According to my observation, we cannot see the reality of the Body of Christ anywhere today.

You may argue that the church is the Body of Christ. Yes, it is; but to be in the reality of the Body of Christ is not just a matter of setting up local churches with the establishing of elders and the practice of the church life in a particular way. This is merely an arrangement, a work, a service. It is not the reality of the Body of Christ. Even though our preaching of the gospel may be very good, there may not be much reality of the Body of Christ....We should not pay so much attention to the mere establishing of the churches and the arranging of many outward things. These have nothing to do with the reality of the Body of Christ.

This does not mean that we should close the doors of all the local churches. That would make the situation worse. This would be like saying that, since there is no possibility for us to have universities, let us forget about high school, junior high, and elementary school. That would make us primitive and backward.

The highest peak of the Lord's recovery that can really, practically, and actually carry out God's economy is for God to produce not many local churches in a physical way but an organic Body to be His organism. We all have a physical body, but our body actually is not the reality of our being. My body is me, but it is not the reality of my being. Likewise, the churches set up around the globe are a physical



frame, but among the churches there may be no reality of the Body of Christ. If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that this is our situation today. Where is the reality of the Body of Christ?

*(Practical Points Concerning Blending, Chapter 2, Section 3)*

**Friday, October 18<sup>th</sup>**

**Gal. 2:20** I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

**Phil. 1:21** For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

### **The vital groups are the actuality, practicality, and reality of the Body (2)**

Our practice is not merely to have a church life in which everything is according to the Bible, a church life in which we baptize people by immersion, forsake the denominations, practice head covering, and have the Lord's table, absolutely according to the Bible. Some have come into the recovery because of these practices. They appreciate our family life, the church meetings, and the way we train our young people. However, these things should not be the goal of our practice. The goal of our practice should be to live the life of a God-man. This is the goal we should reach.

Our practice is not to live the life of any kind of natural man, good or bad. Our practice is to live the life of a God-man. A God-man is a man who is regenerated and transformed to be one with God, taking God as his life, his person, and his everything. Eventually, this one becomes God in His life and His nature but not in His Godhead. This is a God-man. In the recovery today we should practice to live the life of such a God-man. This life is a life of crucifixion by and in and with resurrection. It is a life in which I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live but He who lives in me (Gal. 2:20). Yet when He lives in me, He lives with me, with the result that I live with Him (John 14:19). He lives with me, and I live with Him. We two live together in the way of mingling, a mingling of God and man.

The highest family life, marriage life, and social life come out of such a life. This life is the life of the church and the life of the Body of Christ. Such a life is the reality of the Body of Christ. Such a life, like that of Jesus Christ in His thirty-three and a half years on the earth, saves us from all negative things, from small things and big things. In our marriage life it saves us from separation and divorce. In the church it saves us from opinion, division, despising, criticizing, and murmuring. In this life there is no criticism, no despising, no partiality, no division, no dissension, no opinion. In such a life we live the life of a God-man. With Him everything is new, everything is heavenly, and everything is divine, divinity mingled with humanity.

Wherever there is division, there is spiritual fornication, idolatry, self-glorification, and self-exaltation. Without self-exaltation there could be no division. Living the life of a God-man saves us from all these negative things. To live such a life is to live Christ (Phil. 1:21), the very model of the God-man life.

Dear saints, this is my burden. We all need to live such a life—the older ones and the young ones, the brothers and the sisters, the elders and the common saints. If we do, we are faithful to what we have heard. Then the Lord will have not a model only by individuals but a model by a group of us. This is the model that the Lord needs to show to today's Christianity, a model of what His church should be.

If we live such a life, surely we will go out to contact people for the preaching of the gospel. A vital group is a group of this kind of people. The vital groups should not be practiced as a formality; they should be groups of people who live such a life. Our living the life of a God-man will save people, edify others, and build up the local churches even to the building up of the Body of Christ.

If we practice what we have heard, spontaneously a model will be built up. This model will be the greatest revival in the history of the church. I believe that this revival will bring the Lord back.

In conclusion, I would encourage you to try faithfully to practice living a God-man's life by contacting Him through calling on His name, pray-reading His living word, praying unceasingly, not quenching the Spirit, and not despising prophesying. May the Lord bless us with Himself as the life-giving Spirit that we may touch Him in the mingled spirit by these life practices.

*(Living a Life according to the High Peak of God's Revelation, Chapter 5, Section 3)*