

Lesson Thirty-Four

THE PRAYER, PRACTICES, AND ATTITUDE NEEDED

I. In the administration of the church, the elders' meeting is very important:

- A. Regardless of whether a locality has many elders or only three to five, we should learn how to have the elders' meeting properly.
- B. The Lord's leading of the church is entirely through the elders' meeting.

II. What the brothers need the most in the elders' meeting is to be filled with a spirit of prayer:

- A. Based on our experience, what is most lacking in the elders' meeting is prayer; our prayer for the elders' meetings is not adequate.
- B. If a spirit of prayer is lacking, the elders' meeting will become a social group or a club that the elders come to in order to discuss certain matters.
- C. In the elders' meeting the brothers' spirits should be open to the Lord and mingled with the Lord's Spirit; everyone should enter into the Holy of Holies and be filled with God's shining and God's speaking; in this way the elders' meeting will have spiritual value.
- D. If all the elders meet in this way, their flesh, temper, and disposition will have no place; we often lose our temper because we lack prayer.

III. The elders must develop a habit of being prepared for the elders' meeting:

- A. Before the elders' meeting, the elders should prepare and consider what should be done during the meeting; the elders should look ahead and consider the matters that should be brought up not only related to their hall but also to the entire church.
- B. They can prepare a small notebook to record these matters one by one.
- C. If all the elders do this, everyone will use the time adequately to fellowship each matter one by one, to make decisions, and to practically carry out what has been decided in the meeting.

IV. The elders must have a regular elders' meeting:

- A. When the elders come together, they should first pray.
- B. The elders can make a list of items for fellowship so that everyone can speak concerning these matters after praying; there is no need for someone to act as a chairman in the meeting.
- C. The brothers should bring every matter into fellowship before the Lord.
- D. Not a single matter should be neglected; they should not simply ask if everyone agrees, but rather, they should have a thorough fellowship on every matter.
- E. Furthermore, the items that have been fellowshipped should not be announced or implemented in a loose manner; at the elders' meeting the elders should decide on whether the items that have been fellowshipped should be announced, when the announcement should be made, who should make the announcement, and so forth.
- F. There should be a record of the elders' meeting that includes the date, place, agenda items, content of the fellowship, and so forth; for items on which there is unanimous agreement, there should be a record of who will make the announcement, at which meeting the announcement will be made, who will carry out the matter, and so forth.
- G. The elders should have much fellowship before making decisions on matters; decisions that have not gone through fellowship should not be announced in a loose way.
- H. In a normal situation the elders' meeting should be very strong, and the elders should not discuss or decide matters outside the elders' meeting; it is not proper for the elders to administrate the church without a strong elders' meeting, while they discuss and resolve matters in private.

V. There needs to be sufficient fellowship and a process for a proper and thorough discussion of matters in the elders' meeting:

- A. At the elders' meeting we must pay attention to how we put forth a proposal, how we discuss the proposal, how we make a decision, and how we execute a decision.
- B. In order for things to be done in an appropriate manner, the elders must have a proper process for discussion:
 - 1. The word of more than one elder counts, and no elder should always have the final word.
 - 2. There is a need for discussion because without discussion there will be no sense of direction when a decision has to be made.
- C. We must absolutely practice the administration of the church through all the elders:
 - 1. When discussing matters, there should not be only one person who speaks while the others remain silent.
 - 2. If there are nine elders, there should not be one who takes the lead while being supported by the other eight; rather, the nine elders are the same, and each one has the same duty to fulfill.
 - 3. If one of the elders has not spoken, no decision should be made; in order for the decision to be thorough and proper, no decision should be made until everyone speaks.
 - 4. The nine elders should be like nine pillars firmly upholding the church; every elder should be clear about what the church is doing.

VI. We need to see what the attitude of our fellowship and discussion in the elders' meeting should be:

- A. There should be no insisting or forcing:
 - 1. We should not come with a demanding or forceful tone, nor should we give others a sense that our proposal must be carried out.
 - 2. We should have an objective spirit when we bring matters before the brothers; it should not be a problem if the brothers decide to do or to not do something.
- B. We should listen attentively and understand in detail; everyone must fellowship over a matter thoroughly, understanding it seriously and in detail and receiving a burden together.
- C. Everyone should function and fellowship much yet without expressing his opinion:
 - 1. The eldership will suffer loss if some of the elders do not exercise to function; each elder must exercise his portion; we also must not think that those who are younger do not matter and should not say much.
 - 2. Only through thorough fellowship can matters be transparent and be taken care of in a detailed, comprehensive way, because what an individual person knows is very limited.
 - 3. We should not come together to debate or to express opinions but rather to bring up matters and allow everyone to seek the Lord's leading together; this is fellowship.
- D. Everyone should fellowship and speak clearly in the open:
 - 1. Everything should be spoken clearly in the open in the elders' meeting; every sentence should be completed in the meeting; if not, there is no ground for anyone to say anything after the elders' meeting.
 - 2. We must get out of the habit of not speaking openly in the elders' meeting and having private discussions outside the elders' meeting.
- E. We should neither worry too much about what we say nor be suspicious but, rather, state the facts; if we have a feeling, we should speak boldly; our intention should be to

simply state the facts, not to suppress or oppose others, and we should believe that a brother 's speaking is not intended to suppress others.

Lesson Thirty-Five

FIVE CRUCIAL POINTS AND SEVEN MAJOR ITEMS

Scripture Reading: Rom. 8:4, 6b, 14; Gal. 5:25

I. The following crucial points require our attention concerning the elders' meeting:

- A. First, in the elders' meeting we should focus on discussing the leading of the church more than administrative and practical affairs:
 1. If more time is spent on administration rather than on leading, this is a defect and failure in the elders' meeting.
 2. The ideal situation would be to focus only on matters related to leading the church.
 3. In a normal situation two-thirds of the time should be spent on leading, and one-third of the time should be spent on administration.
 4. Once an elders' meeting falls into only a discussion of administrative affairs, that is, matters of right or wrong and yes or no, the energy and strength of the elders will be exhausted, and the active leading of the church will be set aside.
- B. Second, in the elders' meeting we should avoid arguments based on opinion, and we should also avoid the way of "politics":
 1. According to our experience, arguments based on opinion should be avoided in the elders' meeting because opinions, whether right or wrong, good or bad, are of no value.
 2. As soon as there is an argument in an elders' meeting, the nature and function of the elders' meeting are lost, because our spirit is wrong and the Lord's presence is lost.
 3. We should not argue when we discuss something for which there are different views; when we present our views and cannot reach a unanimous agreement, we should be willing to wait; waiting means to bring a matter to the Lord in prayer without the restriction of a deadline.
 4. In the elders' meeting we should absolutely avoid the way of politics; to be political means to handle a situation superficially in order to avoid difficulty; we should not avoid anything, make excuses for anything, or brush aside anything; rather, we should deal with matters as they are.
- C. Third, in the elders' meeting we should follow the Spirit absolutely and be in our spirit to be one with the Lord's heart's desire—Rom. 8:4, 6b, 14; Gal. 5:25:
 1. Every brother who attends the elders' meeting must exercise to know the Spirit, follow the Spirit, and have a sense of the Spirit.
 2. The greatest problem in the elders' meeting is that the attendants may know doctrinally about the Spirit and about exercising the spirit, but, in reality, they do not exercise the spirit.
 3. Whether a matter is brought up in an elders' meeting should not be based merely on facts and reasons; it should be based primarily on the spirit.
 4. Whoever brings up a matter should follow the Spirit, and those who listen, respond, and react also should follow the Spirit; if this is the case, the elders' meeting will be in spirit.
- D. Fourth, in the elders' meeting it is best to not discuss the personal affairs of the saints:
 1. The discussions in the elders' meeting must concern the church as a whole.
 2. It is best to not discuss problems related to someone's family, social status, legal issues, moral and ethical relationships, and so forth; of course, some discussions are unavoidable.
 3. Something may have happened between the brothers and sisters that is of concern to the elders:

- a. The elders must have a mandatory principle of discussing such matters only in the elders' meetings.
- b. Such matters should not be discussed outside the elders' meeting, even between the elders.
- 4. Whatever is discussed in an elders' meeting should not be discussed at home with the elders' families.
- 5. In today's society there is a high regard for the law, and any discussion of problems related to people's personal reputation, family, social status, and so forth may unintentionally infringe upon the law.
- E. Fifth, the elders should not disclose the contents and the decisions made in the elders' meeting:
 - 1. In addition to not discussing negative things, the elders should not disclose the contents and decisions made in the elders' meeting, even if they relate to positive things.
 - 2. After a decision has been made in an elders' meeting, one person should be charged to make the announcement in order to avoid conflicting announcements.
 - 3. When a matter is decided in an elders' meeting, the decision should include when to make the announcement and who should make the announcement.
 - 4. All the brothers and sisters, including the wives of the elders, should wait for the formal announcement.
 - 5. In a normal situation news should not be released randomly; if we talk loosely about a decision that later must be changed, the church will lose the gravity of its standing.

II. We need to pay attention to seven major items of leading in the practice of the church:

- A. First, the leading in a large church, such as the church in Taipei, should be the responsibility of the elders in each hall; if a small church is not divided into halls, the leading should be the leading of all the elders in the church.
- B. Second, the church should promote the small groups and the three primary things related to a small group: retaining existing saints, recovering dormant saints, and promoting the gospel in the homes so that the gospel is preached in every home—Acts 5:42.
- C. Third, the church should preach the gospel in the community.
- D. Fourth, the gospel on the campuses should not be neglected.
- E. Fifth, we need the children's work.
- F. Sixth, we need visitation and shepherding.
- G. Seventh, there should be miscellaneous services, such as ushering, arranging, cleaning, clerical matters, and accounting; this seventh item is not related to the release of the word and spiritual leading, but it must be carried out alongside the foregoing six items.
- H. Of the first six items, the elders' leading in the church, the promotion of the small groups, and the visiting and shepherding are fundamental and indispensable; these three must be our initial focus.

Lesson Thirty-Six

BEARING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE FINANCIAL MATTERS

Scripture Reading: Luke 16:9; Acts 11:29-30; Phil. 4:15-18

I. Before the Lord the elders must learn together how to bear responsibility for the financial matters of the local churches—Acts 11:29-30:

- A. The Bible refers to money as the “mammon of unrighteousness”—Luke 16:9:
 - 1. This indicates that money is intrinsically unrighteous.
 - 2. Nevertheless, our wise God does not tell us to completely ignore material riches in matters related to serving Him; rather, He tells us that we need to consider the matter of material riches.
- B. In the Gospels the Lord Jesus spoke of the unrighteousness associated with material riches, but in the Epistles the Holy Spirit indicates that material things can become a sweet-smelling sacrifice offered to God—Luke 16:9; Phil. 4:15-18:
 - 1. In Philippians 4:15-16 Paul reminded the believers in Philippi that they had sent material supplies to him once and again to meet his needs.
 - 2. Paul received their gifts as a sweet-smelling savor, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God—vv. 17-18.
- C. There are two aspects related to money:
 - 1. First, money belongs to the satanic world and is unrighteous in position and existence.
 - 2. Second, the saints can use this unrighteous money for the Lord’s interest by supplying the Lord’s servants or the work of the gospel so that this money becomes a sweet-smelling sacrifice acceptable to God.
- D. Dealing with financial matters truly requires much wisdom; if there is a shortage of wisdom, there will be opportunities for the enemy to damage and defile our service to the Lord:
 - 1. We must humble ourselves and learn the lesson before the Lord of bearing not only our own burden but also the burden of others.
 - 2. Such a complete service will bring in the Lord’s blessing.

II. There is the need for prayer and faith for financial matters:

- A. We need to pray concerning practical financial matters; these matters test the extent to which we believe in God.
- B. In the matter of finances we must learn a practical lesson:
 - 1. We should not presume at the end of a meeting that we simply have to make an announcement concerning a need because the brothers and sisters in the church will be the source to meet this need.
 - 2. Outwardly, there is nothing seemingly wrong with this, but it must be our intention to learn to look to the Lord.
 - 3. In matters for which we bear responsibility, whether they concern the Lord’s work or the practical needs of the church, we must exercise faith before the Lord.

III. The Lord as the Head is responsible for the church’s financial needs:

- A. The elders need to see that the Lord as the Head bears responsibility for the church’s financial needs; the brothers need to learn to have faith in the Lord’s provision for the service of the church.
- B. The responsible brothers in every locality bear a heavy responsibility to lead the churches onward; they must learn the lesson of viewing matters not from man’s perspective but from God’s perspective.

- C. They must learn to be in His will, to seek Him, and to trust in Him; He will do a wonderful work without our knowing.

IV. We should learn to exercise wisdom and discernment and to plan for unexpected needs; we should not wait until a need arises to take action:

- A. We must look ahead, look to the Lord, and pray to the Lord; we should have a budget for the whole year that covers the monthly expenses; the elders should carefully consider how to lead and move forward:
 1. When there is a need, we should not assess the situation according to the outward environment but should rely on the Lord instead; He will care for us; this is the first aspect.
 2. Next, we should never be muddled in our thinking; neither should we be superstitious or take risks.
- B. We need to widen our perspective for the financial matters of the church and have a long-term budget:
 1. The responsible brothers in each locality who have a commission related to various aspects of the spiritual work (for example, the gospel on the campuses) must be willing to spend time and effort to consider finances and expenses.
 2. The brothers should consider needs that will be coming up in the next month or even in the following two to three months in order to bring them up for discussion at the elders' meeting.
 3. Without such planning, there will be nothing concerning these needs to bring to the elders' meeting, and then there may be a need for last-minute adjustments that are both inconvenient and inappropriate.
- C. In the churches of the Lord's recovery, every penny that is spent must be approved at a meeting of all the elders, and then the resolution should be executed; this is a matter of life; without this, our service will be devoid of life, and it will not be easy to have good results.
- D. If at all possible, matters should be decided at that time in the elders' meeting; furthermore, records should be kept so that matters can be verified later.

V. Money matters touch a person the most and test a person's spirituality the most:

- A. In the elders' meeting, if our proposal is approved, we should not be overly pleased, and if it is not approved, we should not be overly sad.
- B. If we are asked further questions, there is no need for us to complain in our heart, and if we ask questions of others, we should not have the intention of exposing others.
- C. All these thoughts must be rejected; otherwise, we will not be spiritual, and we will not be able to say that we are bearing one testimony as the church.

VI. A principle must be established regarding financial expenditures for the specific services and for the needs of each meeting hall:

- A. If all the members of a family do things according to their own wishes, there will be trouble, no matter how things are done; however, if they decide on a principle and do things according to the principle, matters will be accomplished easily.
- B. This is the principle related to the church: no money should be spent unless it has been approved at a meeting of the entire eldership:
 1. In order for a decision to be made, the proposals must be stated clearly one by one.
 2. Furthermore, all the elders must consider carefully, discern clearly, and verify each matter in detail; if there is anything that is not according to this principle, the matter should not be approved.
- C. Everyone must abide properly by this principle so that there will not be any trouble in the future.

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