

DAILY READING

WEEK 12 THE TRUTH AND PRACTICE OF THE CHURCH

WEEK 12 — DAY 1

Scripture Reading

Eph 1:22,23 The church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

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

THE CHURCH NOT BEING A PHYSICAL BUILDING FOR WORSHIP

The characteristic of the church in the beginning was her simplicity. The church today, having been altered, is no longer so simple. According to the principle of simplicity, when the early church was raised up, she did not have many of the things that we see in Christianity today, not even a physical place for worship, such as a cathedral—something so greatly valued today. The believers met at times in public squares, sometimes in the portico of Solomon, and at other times in their homes. Basically, there were no chapels or cathedrals. The concept of building physical places for worship did not exist until the degradation of the church under Roman Catholicism. The Roman Catholic Church brought the heathen customs and practices, including idolatry, into Christianity. Those who are knowledgeable about architecture all agree that the best buildings and structures in Europe are the cathedrals. It is reported that St. Peter's Cathedral in the Vatican was built at a cost of 90,000,000 pounds sterling, which is equivalent to several times that in dollars. This shows how highly regarded the cathedrals are in degraded Christianity.

The temple in the Old Testament was a physical building, and the temples or shrines of the Gentile idols were also physical structures. The holy temple was considered the best building structure among the Jews. The former temple was torn down, and it took forty-six years for the latter one to be built. Likewise, in China the best architecture in every place is also seen in the temples or shrines. However, when the church was first raised up, the worship of God was “neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem” but “in spirit” (John 4:21, 23). God cares only for our spirit. Thus, the Bible tells us that, individually, our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. This means that God dwells in us (1 Cor. 6:19; Eph. 2:22). Corporately, the church is God's house, God's dwelling place. This means that God dwells in the church (1 Tim. 3:15). Therefore, the church is not a physical building for religious worship.

THE CHURCH BEING NOT A PHYSICAL BUILDING BUT A SPIRITUAL BUILDING

The church is really simple. She is so simple that it seems she has nothing with respect to rules or regulations. Today, however, it seems that we cannot break the bread or worship the Lord unless we have a piano and a table. Please remember that this is a degraded and deformed situation. Someone may say that in the Catholic Church the cathedrals are imposing, the sacred songs are solemn, and the bishops are awe-inspiring. It has never occurred to him that these are items in a deformed situation. In contrast, there was nothing attractive outside

or inside of the meeting hall of the church in Shanghai, yet every time there was a meeting, the hall was full. One time, two overseas Chinese attended a meeting there and were greatly astonished. One of them said, “I saw many places of worship in America, but they were never filled. I never imagined that when I came back to my homeland I could see people packed into such an unattractive place.” It was marvelous to him but not to us because the early church was the same way—considering the physical things as nonessential.

As children of God, we must realize that all physical things will eventually be destroyed. We should build only the things that are spiritual. Degraded Christianity always likes to show people a grand piano, a beautiful pulpit, and an exquisite façade. We should not be like this. The church does not necessarily receive more of God's blessings by having a splendid building. Rather, when the church has the presence of God with His life, power, and strength, this is really God's blessing. Sometimes the believers have a desire to meet outdoors, but some are concerned about not having a podium or a piano. Actually, in the beginning the church did not have these things. Physical things are not essential because what we are building is not something physical but something spiritual for people to be strengthened from within. This is God's intention.

THERE BEING NO HIERARCHY IN THE CHURCH

Furthermore, in the early church there was no hierarchy. Yet today in many Christian organizations there is a class called the clergy. Is this according to the Bible? You can serve God, and I also can serve God. We all can serve God. Is there any difference between your service and my service to God? We may have different functions and points of emphasis, but essentially your service and mine should not be different. If we all intend to attain God's original goal, every one of us should serve God (1 Pet. 2:9).

In the early church, every believer was a serving one. Before they were saved, they lived for mammon, but from the day they were saved, they were separated from the world by the Lord. They still had their occupations, but their occupations were only for their livelihood. Their primary occupation was to serve God. We must be like the early believers if we intend to serve God. Our job should become our secondary occupation, merely for us to make a living. We no longer live on the earth to make a living for ourselves but to serve God. The early apostles and disciples all lived this way. (*The Pursuit of a Christian*, ch. 4)