

## **A Tremendously Vital Matter**

(Witness Lee, *The Vision of God's Building*, 1964)

"All gifts and all gifted persons are for the building up of the Body; they are not for any work in itself. The practice of today's Christianity is absolutely different in principle. Wherever there is a gifted person, a spiritual "giant" with a certain gift, that person will begin a work. He will build up a certain Christian organization or ministry, and possibly call it some worthy name. We are not opposing anyone, but we are against the wrong principles which damage the Body life. The Apostle Paul did not form any Christian organization; he did not set up any kind of work. For possibly thirty years, he just established local churches. And, he did not keep any work in his own hands. In reading the New Testament we can only find the churches which were built up by him.

"At the time the Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation he was greatly experienced and matured. Of the twelve apostles he was the only one remaining. Yet he did not build up anything as his work, his ministry. Consider the local churches in Asia to whom he wrote: most of them were exceedingly weak; yet those churches were the lampstands, not the ministry of the Apostle John. John's ministry was far more spiritual than the condition of those churches; yet he did not set up his ministry as a lampstand. In fact, he did not set up his ministry as anything. All he did was to further the building up of those local churches as the lampstands. Oh, we all must learn this! We must be aware of the dangerous tendency for any local church to become a work, kept in the hand of some gifted person. If such is the case, that is a real degradation. However much the Lord may use a gifted person, however great his ministry may be, the local church must not become his work. God's intention is not to build up the ministry of any person, but to build up His church. This is not a small matter.

"In the New Testament there are the titles, the "church of God" (Acts 20:28), the "church of Christ" (Rom. 16:16), and the "church of the saints" (1 Cor. 14:33); 1Thess. 1:1). There is never any "church of the apostles. The church belongs to God, to Christ, to the saints, not to any apostle.

"The greater our gift is, the greater is the danger that we will take over the church and keep it in our hands. This will greatly damage the church life. We must learn not only how to minister in the local church, but also how to keep our hands off the church. This is not easy. The local church is not our personal enterprise. The local church is the property of the local saints, not some worker's business. Some gifted persons put a local church in their pocket. Oh, this is a real problem!

"All the local saints must realize that the local church is their church. If the local saints are not clear concerning this, they will allow a gifted person to take the local churches into his own hands and treat it as his personal property. Then the entire church life will be finished. The local churches

belong to the local saints. The gifted persons are just the means to perfect the saints to function; they are only the instruments used by the Lord to build up the churches.

“Consider the situation in Christianity today. Look at the situation even from the time of the Reformation: four or five hundred years have passed, and it is still basically the same. Whenever a gifted person is raised up, a certain kind of work is established. I establish my work, you establish your work, he establishes his work. Then the church is gone. This is the source of all the divisions. However, if one gifted brother comes to build a local church, and a second gifted brother comes to build up the same church, there will be no division. All the work must be for the church, not for the workers. The ministry should be for the church; the church should never be for the ministry. We must be exceedingly clear concerning this principle. We must drop all wrong practices. A gifted brother should keep his hands off the local church. Although a gifted brother may sometimes not speak openly in a way of ministry, yet he still may quietly maneuver behind the scenes. Any such maneuvering damages the church. All gifts and gifted persons must be entirely for the local church. This is a tremendously vital matter.”