

SECRETS OF SURVIVAL IN THE SERVING LIFE

By Titus Chu

MESSAGE TWO: THREE PILLARS FOR OUR SURVIVAL

I have been in the church life for many years. I have seen that many saints for some reason, after being healthy in the church life for a number of years, seem to die spiritually. From one angle, they may still be good brothers and sisters in the church life, but from another angle, they seem paralyzed and have lost their function and usefulness.

This series of messages will bring us to First Timothy. The opening verses of this book are, “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, to Timothy, genuine child in faith: grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.” In these two simple verses are mentioned the four basic elements of the church life. If you lack the proper experience of any one of these four, not only do you greatly imperil your ability to grow, you are even on the verge of spiritual death. What are the four crucial matters? First, the apostle. Second, God our Savior. Third, Christ our hope. Fourth, the genuine life relationship with the saints. These items may not impress you, but they form the foundation for your survival in the church life. Yet in spite of this, very few saints are healthy in all four.

A PROPER RELATIONSHIP WITH THE APOSTLES

Versus Caring for Our Own Work

Firstly, how many realize how crucial is the matter of being properly related to the apostles? In our practice of the church life we often exhibit the “localness syndrome,” meaning we

unconsciously care for our local church, that is, the church we are in, beyond what is healthy. One day some of you may be taking the lead in a church. As leading ones you must learn to lead the church into a proper relationship with the apostles. As you exercise in the leadership you will confront the temptation of developing something that is only for your “burden” rather than something which relates your locality to the apostle and his work.

It is important to notice that First and Second Timothy, which tell us how a church should go on and how the saints can be proper in the church life, begin with the mention of the apostle, not God. In other words, God’s thought is that your relationship to the Lord is seemingly not as crucial as your relationship to His apostles. If you desire to survive, if you desire to be healthy, if you desire to go on, the most crucial thing is your relationship to the apostles. The first item is the apostles. Our relationship with God is not easy for others to substantiate. Anyone can say, “I am proper with God,” but only God knows if this is so. Our relationship with the apostles, however, has no way but to be practical.

***Being improper With the Apostles
A Major Reason Why A Church May Be Unhealthy***

Some local churches develop an unhealthy situation either because they do not properly relate themselves to the apostles, or because they are selective with the apostles. An elder may think, “I just care to develop my church. Every local church is autonomous. I am responsible to the Lord alone.” This kind of thinking will hurt you to the uttermost. By thinking in this line you deny the universal Body of Christ.

The Lord has no burden to possess any particular local church. The reason the Lord blesses your local church is so that He may produce His universal Body. If you ignore the universal Body, all the so-called blessings to your local church are of no effect. They are not real because they only increase your church's individuality; they do not bring your church further into the Body life.

*The Danger of Becoming Sectarian
by Caring for Your Own Work*

About ten years ago I passed through a certain region. At that time there were not many churches there, but there was a co-worker laboring among them. After I arrived at my destination I told some leading ones that if not handled properly, those churches under that co-worker would become a sect. We know that Christianity is sectarian, but we have to realize that local churches can also be sectarian. Some churches have become sects just by having the concept "we are for our region" or "we are for our local church." This is missing the aim of what God is after. God is after His universal Body. God blesses me with a view to my local church, and God blesses my local church with a view to the Universal Church, the Body of Christ. God only has one Body in this universe. The spiritual blessings Paul enjoyed, Peter enjoyed and all the spiritual fathers enjoyed are the same blessings we enjoy, and all these blessings are only for preparing the Bride of Christ. One local church alone is not this Bride: all the local churches are together this one Bride.

Not long ago I was again sent to that place which I had indicated may become a sect, because it had become one. That co-worker produced 20 or 30 churches with thousands of saints who felt they had become the unique source of blessing for the rest of the Lord's recovery. They, however, only saw the work in their region rather than the universal Body.

Sometimes we say, “the churches in the Midwest.” Be very careful; don’t cause this to become an issue. Never say the Lord is after the Midwest. The Lord only cares for His universal Church. If we want to go on in the Lord’s recovery as a church or a region, we must realize that our relationship with the apostles is most crucial.

Versus Caring For Our Own Ministry

Secondly, not only are leaders apt to develop their locality or region without fellowship with the apostles, but some also may desire to develop their own individual ministry, also ignoring the apostles. An improper relationship with the apostle comes about mainly because of these two reasons. First, we may only care for our locale, ignoring the universal Body. Second, we may care for developing our own ministry.

The Elder Must Maintain A Healthy Relatedness

Let me ask you, do you have a problem with Brother Lee or his co-workers in the Lord’s recovery? Probably not, since you are still relatively young. After one becomes an elder, however, the temptation to develop what is in your hands comes. An elder has to lead the church to be properly related with the close-by churches and other churches in the region. Then, he must be proper with the co-workers in that region. Furthermore, he must be proper with Brother Lee. Every one of these requirements can bother an elder. Certainly no pastor in Christianity has to deal with such an arrangement! Suppose Toronto decides to hold a conference just as he is trying to raise up a meeting in his locality. If he pays no attention to Toronto, his relationship with them is in trouble. If he does go, his meeting will suffer. Secondly, after Toronto’s conference, Titus calls and tells him that he is coming this weekend. Afterwards he begins to develop something; there is some increase in the meetings. He is encouraged and feels the Lord has opened a door.

Then he receives a letter announcing Brother Lee's training. Before and after those ten days people are driving all over, visiting the churches and are gone for at least a month. What is he to do? Finally, after the training has been reviewed, he begins to exercise a little of his burden again. Then a letter comes announcing a conference in Cleveland. Does he encourage the saints to go or not?

***We Are For the Body of Christ,
Not Our Local Church***

This first point in First Timothy, to be properly related to the apostles, is the most difficult lesson to learn. We all love to be independent, and elders love to handle things for their church's profit. The more they handle things, the more they are "blessed," and the more they are interrupted or have to travel around, the more the church life gets messed up. The difference is that when the church life is a mess, you are healthy, and when you are able to do what you think you need to do, you don't know where you are. Yes, you may get a big congregation, but this congregation will have no vision. If I had been able to stay a little longer with the brothers in Cleveland, perhaps this church might have had more increase. As a worker, however, I must care for the needs of other churches. It is hard, but the needs of the churches are more crucial than any increase Cleveland might have gained. The Lord mentions the apostle from the start to remind us, "You are not for you, nor are you for your local church. You are for the universal Body." We must be so proper with the apostles for our growth and exercise in the church life.

The Second Reason Why a Church May be Unhealthy: Being Selective With the Apostles

Another temptation is to become selective with the apostles. Some may say, “we are following this apostle, we are not following that one.” Isn’t that what they said in Corinth? In Corinth, an apostle was seen as someone from whom you could gain sympathy for your cause or someone who could take your side on an issue. This has also happened in the Lord’s recovery, so don’t take it lightly. Even recently I told a brother that what he was doing was divisive. He would call me when a certain co-worker would not agree with him. If my reply did not satisfy him, he would call another co-worker. He used the co-workers in this way. He didn’t realize that we all labor with the same goal in view and that we all walk in the same steps. To learn to be proper with the apostles is one of the hardest things in your spiritual life; it is more difficult than learning to be proper with God or proper with Christ, for to be related to the apostles is too practical.

Two Consequences of Not Being Proper With the Apostles

If you have problems with the apostles, the Lord may withhold His blessing. Even if you were to gain some increase out of your ability, those who follow you will not be able to go on in a healthy way.

There are thousands of saints in the region I mentioned. If at that time you were to go and fellowship with them, you would have a sorrowful sensation. Very few knew spiritual things in the real sense. The whole problem came about because of a co-worker brainwashed the saints under his care to develop a work.

By the Lord’s mercy there are four or five co-workers in this so-called Midwest region of the country. I am thankful that none seeks to impress others with how crucial of the Midwest is. We labor in this area because the Lord has located us here. We did not choose, we just labor. We should only give you the feeling that you should be for the Lord’s recovery.

I know of many who refused to be properly related to other apostles. They refused because they knew once they became properly related to the apostles, their kingdom would be gone. One brother even cut the saints off while utilizing Brother Lee's writings. They read life-studies, but nothing came out of it, because they were not properly related to Brother Lee. They were seeking to develop their region. If you were to go to their meetings, you would have the deep and pitiful sense, for nearly not one has spiritual understanding.

Our Exercise is Protected And Confirmed When We Are Properly Related To the Apostles

To be only for your locality is very serious. To be cut off from the fellowship of the apostles is also very serious. I have always paid the price to spend time with Brother Lee whenever possible. I called him recently before he went to the Far East and he squeezed me into his schedule. It may have only been a few hours, yet such fellowship is a protection for me, my laboring, and my serving. It enables me to have a proper exercise, and because of it I am able to exercise with confidence, knowing the Lord's way. I am fearful of cutting myself off from the apostles, particularly Brother Lee.

There is the temptation to use Brother Lee's material to cut yourself off from the other apostles. You can claim you are following the ministry, and say that others are just interfering. Your first temptation as an elder is "I have my church" and the second is "I must develop my ministry." You can know you have fallen into one of these traps when you begin to distance yourself from the apostles, for you feel that when the apostles step in, your work is threatened.

Don't think that it is easy to travel among the churches. When you travel, you confront the peculiarities of all the elders. Not one is a bad brother. The problem is that it is too easy to care for our own church or our own ministry. We make the church in which we serve something special.

I have seen some brothers cut themselves off from those who raised them up for the sake of exercising their “burden.” Not many gifted brothers are able to escape this temptation. Eventually this is why some churches struggle for years: their relationship with the apostles is not healthy.

As soon as a brother begins to care for his own ministry, he begins to die spiritually. Brother Lee has told us that when he was young that he did not have his own messages. He only spoke what Brother Nee preached. He didn’t care for his own ministry. This should also be our aspiration - to speak what Brother Lee has spoken.

When Brother Nee was excommunicated in China, only two and a half stood with him. There were six hundred churches in China at that time. Of course, there were a lot of young saints who didn’t know what was going on. But the leaders rebelled against Brother Nee. Brother Lee took the lead to restore the churches’ relationship with Brother Nee. Sister Wong was another one closely working with Brother Lee who also stood with Watchman Nee’s ministry. The “half” was Doctor Yu, who chose not to have any voice in the matter. Today nearly all recognize Watchman Nee was a great servant of the Lord, yet at that time only two and a half stood with him.

Why do I tell you these things? They indicate that it is not easy to be proper with the apostles. Why? Firstly, there is a desire to develop one’s own church and work. Secondly, there is the desire to develop one’s own ministry. When either of these is in view, you cannot be proper with the apostles. If you have neither one of these things in view, you can be free and open with the apostles.

My realization is that all I have, I have learned. I have nothing to fear if Brother Lee were to ask me to retire. The churches are not mine. Everything I have, I have received. I have nothing to boast of. My speaking is out of Brother Lee’s riches.

To be proper with the apostles is only possible if you are pure. The apostles are a big test to all those who love the Lord and who are manifest in the church life.

The Danger of Rationalizing and Legalizing an Improper Relationship with the Apostles

When you are young, no one bothers you and you love everybody. As you grow older, you may seek to develop your own place. And, because you are older, you don't feel that you should be regulated. Then, if and when you perceive any so-called shortcomings in the apostles, you feel justified to legalize your improper relationship with the apostles. This is dangerous. You reason that you are not bound to follow an "imperfect" apostle, but actually your real motive is a hidden desire to have your own work or ministry. In the thirty-some years I have been in the recovery, I have never allowed any question mark to come up towards Brother Lee or the other co-workers. We should learn from Brother Yu, who answered the Communists when they urged him to admit that Brother Nee had a weakness that any such thing was not his business, for it was between the Lord and His servant. This is crucial to see. Do not try to justify your improper relationship. An apostle is an apostle. If he is perfect, he is an apostle. If he seemingly, according to you, is not perfect, he is still an apostle. The real situation is that you desire your own work or ministry. And as this is the case you cannot last long, for you are not pure. The Lord will have to come in to purge you or judge you, depending upon how you go through it.

GOD OUR SAVIOR

The second item in First Timothy is "God our Savior," indicating that the second matter for our healthiness in the church life is our relationship with the God who is saving you into His purpose. This is God's desire and even His command, therefore we do it. This becomes another trial to us and it is the second "pillar" for our survival in the serving life.

To live for God is easy, but to live for God's purpose is not. To be proper with God is a matter of fellowship, but to be proper with His purpose is a matter of our stand, which is more difficult. Up until this training, it has been somewhat easy for you to be proper with God. But when this training came along, which has something to do with God's economy, and you felt to respond to God's command was something more difficult. Some brothers were unable to receive the Lord's leading. This was not because they do not love God, nor does it mean not being in this training means you are improper with God, but to take a step to be one with God in His economy seems difficult.

However, to give up a few months for this training is a small thing when compared to your entire life. You may feel that you have paid a price, but you don't know what a price is yet. When there is a migration coming, see if you can go. When there is a need, see if you are willing to jump in. When there is a demand for you to give up something for the testimony's sake, see if you are able to do so. The churches are filled with good brothers who are not that useful. They have been in the church many years and love the Lord, yet when the Lord comes to take them a little higher for His purpose there is some hesitation. This may just mean hesitation to you, but to God it means they have lost some of their usefulness.

God Saves Us Out Of Our Refusal into His Purpose

If a good brother is merely one who loves the Lord and the church and who makes the meetings, then there is no need for God to be our continual Savior. When do you need God the Savior? It is when God is asking you not to just love the church life, but to take a stand with Him for His purpose. At that time there is refusal. Maybe there are good and logical reasons, but by that very refusal you miss the opportunity to gain Christ. However, to refuse is common, so we need God to be our Savior. He saves us inwardly by strengthening us and He saves us outwardly through His arrangement. In this way He is saving us into His purpose.

I know a brother who Brother Lee felt should serve full-time. Others felt the same. But he didn't want to be full-time. He had a good job with the government. One day, however, he got into an argument with his boss and resigned. Then he decided to be full-time. God saved him, but the process was not so glorious. Rather than being able to say, "Praise the Lord, He called me and I followed Him," he could only say, "I lost my job and had nothing to do so I became full-time." Yet he was saved.

God's Saving Power Can Only Be Exercised to the Point We Allow

The Lord is merciful. He strengthens us inwardly and governs things outwardly to save us to be one with His purpose. But His saving power can only save us to the extent that we allow. God will not use coercion to save us nor will He persist if we are determined to resist His arrangement. Suppose that you do not want to serve the Lord full-time even though He is leading you to do so. Although you lose your job, you get another one. Then how can God save you? He cannot continually cause you to lose all the jobs you ever obtain. God will then be forced to give you what is the second best. We need to realize that once we are no longer in His best will for us, we have lost some of our usefulness to Him.

To survive properly in the church life is to attain to what portion God has arranged for you. Does this mean that once you turn God down that you are through? No. I may be enjoying the sixth or seventh best He had for me, but by His mercy He is still saving me and won't give me up. I don't know, however, what the Lord could have done or would be doing with me if I were now in the highest that the Lord had for me.

The danger is that you may continue to go downward until one day you are just a good brother. I appreciate the good brothers, but while you are so young, you should take heed to this word. God's economy and purpose is a continual test to us. In this matter it is comforting to realize that God is our Savior. Without

Him saving us into His purpose, none of us would make it. However, we must choose to be saved by Him. The more we select His best, the more we get His best. The more you reject His best, the lower become God's options for you.

God's will and economy are the second great trial to those who love the Lord. Learn to pay the price for God's highest, and you will survive well. Learn to have God's purpose in view, not your purpose. Then you will be able to survive and grow into your measure and function rather than ending up merely a "good brother" in the church life.

CHRIST JESUS OUR HOPE

The Preparation of the Bride and the Accumulation of Christ Within Us

The third thing we must pay attention to in First Timothy is Christ Jesus our hope. This means that our entire life must be a life of accumulating the riches of Christ. Our hope is not in something superstitious or miraculous. We should not think, "Today everything is terrible, but on that day everything will be wonderful." If that were the case, God would have no need to wait.

The Bible tells us that the Bride has to make herself ready. Therefore, when you consider hope, you have to realize that this hope actually has to do with our preparation as the Bride of Christ, and the preparation is just the accumulation of Christ within us.

Not Allowing the Accumulation to Become Dusty

After a training such as this, you cannot deny that Christ has been added to you. He cannot decrease in us, but what we have gained of Christ can become "dusty" in our experience. When that happens, the freshness of Christ as our hope disappears; it becomes as if it is not there.

“Dust” comes in when our hope changes from Christ to something else. The more the dust comes in, the more your accumulation of Christ loses its function. Eventually you become as if you had not accumulated any riches of Christ! Thus, we should only care for the Lord’s coming. Our whole being should be geared to the Lord’s coming so that we are keeping whatever is being put into us fresh. How glorious you are in the day of transfiguration will be determined by how much of Christ you have accumulated in this age. That becomes your hope.

In First Corinthians 15 Paul tells us not all will shine with the same glory. This hope is very practical. Day by day we must accumulate Christ.

Therefore we must avoid dust, and we must always be “dusting off” the dust that is always coming in. The Lord may shine and reveal something clearly, causing you declare, “I will give my life to it!” Afterwards, however, the dust of your considerations and reasonings begin to settle in. What the Lord has spoken to you can eventually thus become buried. I am afraid that even the Christ you have gained in these months of labor become “dusted over” in the past few weeks we have been apart. We must guard with purity what the Lord has deposited in us for our accumulation. Whoever desires to survive must learn this lesson. We will cover the fourth pillar in First Timothy, the genuine life relationship, in the coming messages. This matter is also crucial for our survival. Anytime you are without the life relationship with the saints in the church life, your service to the Lord is meaningless. May the Lord have mercy on us that we may be those who are able to develop unto the measure God has ordained for us.

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