

Messages for Building up New Believers

Chapter Six_Joining The Church

Scripture Reading: Eph. 2:19, 22; 1 Cor. 12:13, 27

“The immediate question every believer asks after his conversion concerns joining a church. We have covered the matter of separation from the world. This does not mean, however, that a person only needs to separate himself from the world and then can stop there. On the positive side, he needs also to join the church. (The phrase joining the church is not a proper one; however, we will borrow it for our use for the time being.)”

I. The need to join the church

- A. When a person is saved, he should see that there is an individual aspect as well as a corporate aspect to his Christian life.
 1. God’s Word tells us that when a person is saved, he becomes a member of God’s household; he becomes God’s child—Eph 2:19.
 2. All the saved ones are God’s dwelling place, that is, God’s house—Eph 2:22; 1 Pet 2:5.
 3. Christians are collectively called the Body of Christ; we are members one of another, and together we are the Body of Christ—1 Cor 12:12, 27; Col 4:4; Col 1:18, 24; Eph. 5:29-30.
- B. When a person believes in the Lord, he does not become God’s only begotten son. He is one among God’s millions of sons. He cannot lock himself up and be his Father’s only son. The very nature of the life you have received does not allow this.
- C. We are indeed material for the spiritual dwelling place of God. If we, as building material, are detached from the building, we will be useless.
- D. However, there is something more than being the family and the building. God says that we are one Body... This relationship is an indissoluble one.

II. Which church to join

- A. The differences between the many kinds of churches-The history of the church is very long; it spans over two thousand years, produced many different kinds of churches based on differences in time, place, persons and doctrines.
- B. With so many churches and so much confusion, is there a right way we can take before the Lord? Thank God, there is a way! God’s Word is still with us, and we can read it and find out what God has to say. Thank God that the Bible has shown us which church we should join. God has not left us in the dark.
- C. The Bible is very simple and clear... the boundary of the church is the boundary of the city or the locality.
- D. No matter how big a church is, it cannot extend beyond the boundary of its locality. At the same time, no matter how small a church is, it cannot have anything less than the locality as its unit.
- E. God only recognizes the difference of locality. He does not recognize any other difference. I hope you will receive God’s mercy to see that there is only one church and that the church is local.

III. How to join the church

- A. If a person sees something concerning sin and the blood through God’s mercy and if he has received salvation, forgiveness, and a new life, having been regenerated through resurrection by God, He has put such a one into the church already. He is already in the church. He is already in and there is no need for him to “join.”

B. If this is the case, why are we telling you to join the church? We are merely borrowing an expression that you can understand... The goal is to seek fellowship from fellow members of the church.

Note: This outline is mainly taken from *Chapter six, Messages for Building Up New Believers, Watchman Nee.*

CHAPTER SIX
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The immediate question every believer asks after his conversion concerns joining a church. We have covered the matter of separation from the world. This does not mean, however, that a person only needs to separate himself from the world and then can stop there. On the positive side, he needs also to join the church. (The phrase *joining the church* is not a proper one; however, we will borrow it for our use for the time being.)

I. THE NEED TO JOIN THE CHURCH

Twenty or more years ago, when our testimony first began, six to eight out of ten persons who were saved had no thought of joining a church. This was very strange! They thought that it was good enough to be a Christian by themselves and that there was no need to join a church. You may think this is a very strange thought, but according to our experience, quite a number of people think this way. They want Christ, but they do not want the church. They want to have something to do with Christ, but they do not want to have anything to do with the church. They want to be solitary Christians. Can we pray by ourselves? Yes. Therefore, they say that this is enough! Can we read the Bible by ourselves? Yes. Therefore, they think that this is enough! They think that as long as one can pray and read the Bible by himself, it is good enough. They think that it is troublesome to join with others and that it is good enough as long as one believes in the Lord and fellowships with Him alone. This concept exists in China, and it exists in other countries.

However, we must realize that whether we like it or not, we have no choice but to join the church. When a person is saved, he should see that there is an individual aspect as well as a corporate aspect to his Christian life. On the individual side, he has received the Lord's life, and he can fellowship with the Lord and pray by himself. He can lock himself up in a room and believe in the Lord by himself. However, if he only knows the individual aspect, his testimony will not be complete. In fact, he will not last long and will grow very little. I have never seen a reclusive Christian progress well, none in the past and none at present. During the two thousand years of church history, many people have thought that they could be believers individually. They have thought that they could live like hermits, shutting themselves up on a mountain and caring for nothing except their fellowship with the Lord. But the spiritual lessons that these ones experienced were very shallow; they could not withstand temptation. When the environment was right, they thrived. When the environment became adverse, they could not persevere.

We must realize that there is another side to the Christian life—the corporate side. In the Bible, as far as the corporate aspect is concerned, no one can be a solitary Christian. First of all, God's Word tells us that when a person is saved, he becomes a member of God's household; he becomes God's child. This is the revelation of the Bible. Once a person is born again, he is born into God's family, and he becomes God's child together with many other children of God.

Second, the Bible shows us that all the saved ones are God's dwelling place, that is, God's house. This house is different from the household or family we spoke of earlier. The household refers to the family, while the house refers to the dwelling place.

Third, Christians are collectively called the Body of Christ. We are members one of another, and together we are the Body of Christ.

A. Being Children of God Together with Many Others in God's Family

After a person believes in the Lord, he receives not only an individual life but also a life that is related to many other people. As members of God's family, His dwelling place, and the Body of Christ, we are merely a part of the whole. It is impossible for us to exist alone. If we tried, we would surely miss the fullness and the riches in God. We may be a useful part, but if we are not joined to others, we are like a piece of cloth cut off from the whole or a spare part of a big machine, and we cannot express the light of the fullness of the highest form of life. The fullness of that light exists only in the church.

One cannot live in a family with five brothers and sisters without being related to them. If I am the only child of my father, I do not have to deal with any brothers or sisters in the family, because I have none. But if I have five brothers and sisters in my family, I am no longer my father's only child; I am one of five children. How can I not be related to the other brothers and sisters and remain the only son to my father? How can I lock myself up in a room and tell the others, "Do not bother me. I have nothing to do with you. I am here to be my father's only son"? How can one do that?

When a person believes in the Lord, he does not become God's only begotten son. He is one among God's millions of sons. He cannot lock himself up and be his Father's only son. The very nature of the life you have received does not allow this. In the physical family, you may be an only child without any brother or sister. But since the day you believed in the Lord, you are bound in fellowship to the other brothers and sisters. You cannot escape from this. On that day, you were born into the biggest family in the whole world. No other family is as big as this one. You have millions and millions of brothers and sisters. You cannot belittle them just because there are so many of them. Because you are only one among many, there is the need for you to know them; there is the need for you to fellowship with them and to be related to them. If you have no desire at all to see them, I have doubts about whether or not you are really a brother or a sister. If you are born of God, you will be drawn towards those who are also born of God. If you can shut yourself off from them, I have doubts about whether or not you are a child of God at all.

The concept of being an individual Christian is not a Christian concept at all. This concept does not and should not belong to a Christian. In our own family we should be brothers to all our brothers and sisters to all our sisters. How much more should this be true in the family of God? This relationship flows forth from the life of God and is full of love. It is a strange thing for anyone to have no affection for his own brothers and sisters or to have no desire to communicate with them! We must remember that while we receive God's life to be His children individually, the life we

obtain is also in thousands of other children of God. I am only one among many brothers. The very nature of the life I possess does not allow me to be individualistic. It desires instead to communicate with all the other brothers and sisters.

B. Becoming God's Dwelling Place Together with Other Brothers and Sisters

The Bible also shows us that the church is God's dwelling place. This is spoken of in Ephesians 2. This fact is one of the greatest revelations in the entire New Testament. We should realize that God has a dwelling place on earth. He needs a dwelling place. In the Bible we see the thought of a dwelling place from Moses' tabernacle to Solomon's temple, including the later rebuilding and restoration of the temple. In the church age God is making man His temple. God once dwelt in a big building—Solomon's temple. But today God dwells in the church; the church has now become the dwelling place of God. We have been gathered together to be the dwelling place of God. We as God's many children have been gathered together by the Holy Spirit to be the dwelling place of God. This is covered in 1 Peter 2:5. We are the living stones being built into the spiritual house.

How is the spiritual house built? Solomon's temple was built with dead stones. But today the dwelling place of God is built with living stones. Peter, whose name means "a stone," was a living stone. When all the living stones come together, they become a temple. If they are not together, can one stone be a house by itself? No! If no stone is upon another, it is a mark of desolation; this is not a good sign. No stone being upon another is a result of judgment and desolation. As long as we have a house, we have one stone upon another. Thank God that today we are saved and have believed in the Lord Jesus; we are now stones. What use does a single stone have if it is left alone? But when the stones are put together, they become a house. When they are isolated, they are useless. In fact, they may become stumbling stones instead of living stones.

Today we are like the accessory parts of a car. When all the parts are assembled together, we have a car which can be driven around. We dare not say that those who are living stones will become dead if they become isolated. But we can say that if a stone is not joined to other stones to be God's dwelling place, it will lose its function and spiritual riches. As a living stone, we must be joined to other living stones. Only then can we contain God and only then will God dwell among us.

A hundred years ago an Englishman by the name of Mr. Stoeneg said, "After I was saved, a most wonderful thing happened to me. One day I came to realize that I was building material in the dwelling place of God. This is a most wonderful discovery." The first time I read this, I did not think too much about it. What is so wonderful about being building material in God's dwelling place? But today, as I ponder over it, I appreciate Mr. Stoeneg's word. Once such a feeling is in you, you will realize how wonderful this is.

Thank God! We are indeed material for the spiritual dwelling place of God. If we, as building material, are detached from the building, we will be useless. At the same time, God's dwelling place cannot go on without us as stones. Without us as stones, there will be holes in God's dwelling place, and thieves will get into this building.

Since I am the building material for God's dwelling place, God cannot go on without me.

Brothers, we must see that we are the building material the Holy Spirit is using for the building of God's dwelling place. If you are by yourself, you will lose God's riches. You will not be able to contain God. You must be joined to the brothers and sisters. Only then can you contain God. A wooden bucket which contains and carries water is made out of pieces of wood. If you remove a piece of wood from the bucket, the whole container will no longer hold water. The nature of the individual pieces of wood has not changed, but the riches they contain have changed. Each piece can be soaked with a little water, but it will never hold much water; it will lose all the riches. We are God's house, and as soon as we become isolated we lose all the riches.

Brothers and sisters, you may not see it clearly today. But gradually you will see more and more clearly. As soon as you believe in the Lord, spontaneously there is an inclination within you to contact other children of God. There is a desire within you to look for other materials, other stones. You must go along with this nature. Do not isolate yourself from others through concepts of your own.

C. Becoming the Body of Christ Together with All the Members

Third, we are joined together in the Body of Christ to become one Body. We are the Body of Christ. Ephesians 4:4 says that there is one Body. First Corinthians 12:12 says that there are many members but one Body. These verses show us that it is impossible for a Christian to be individualistic. As a member in God's family, I may be a peculiar person. It may be possible for me not to communicate with all the brothers and sisters. As long as there is no problem between my father and me, I can shut myself in as a solitary child of God. As God's dwelling place, even though I am a living stone, I can be left alone if I do not like to be built with others. Before Peter joined the church, he was a living stone, but he still was an individual one. You may say, "I do not care if this means leaving a hole in the building. Let there be a hole; I want to be an individual Christian." It is possible to do this.

However, there is something more than being the family and the building. God says that we are one Body. Perhaps you are an eye, a hand, or a leg in the body today. An eye is only useful when it is on the head. If it is put in a glass bottle, it is useless. A leg is only useful when it is placed in the body. If it is hung in an upper room, it is useless. Please remember that the body and each member functions in this way. No member can be separated from other members. This relationship is an indissoluble one. One may argue that he can be separated from God's family and from God's dwelling place. But it is impossible for anyone to say that he can be separated from the Body of Christ. Your ear cannot declare independence just because it is unhappy with the other members. Likewise, your hand cannot declare independence just because it is unhappy with the other members. Your leg cannot stand up and say, "I want to be left alone." We have no other choice but to be joined together.

The life we have received does not allow us to be individualistic. The Lord has not given us an independent life. We must emphasize this fact—the Lord has not given us

a life that is independent in itself. The life that we have received is sustained by the life of others. If we had received an independent life, we could live by ourselves. But we have received a dependent life. We have to depend on our brothers and sisters, and they have to depend on us.

Please remember that a member can never stand alone. Once it is alone, it cannot survive. Once it is isolated, it loses all the riches, all the life. If the saints and I are indeed one Body, I can no longer be an individual Christian. By now this should be more than clear. The life I have received demands that I be joined to others.

D. Every Christian Becoming One by Attaching Himself to Other Christians

I hope that you will join yourself to other Christians once you become a believer. Do not remain a loner after you are a Christian for eight or ten years. Once we have become Christians, we have to see that the life we received from God is a dependent life. God has not given us an independent life. We are Christians attached to many other Christians. Among us, no one is detached. All Christians are attached to other Christians.

You have heard of offices that are attached to a company. You have heard of departments that are attached to a ministry. You also have heard of people who are attached to a working unit. In the same way, every Christian is attached to other Christians. Everyone is attached to one another. In the eyes of God, no Christian has the strength to exist alone. I hope that you will be attached to others from the beginning; I hope that you will be a Christian who lives by attaching yourself to many other Christians. Through this attachment, you receive the supply, the building up, the love, and the fellowship.

This is the reason that a Christian has to join the church. (The phrase *joining the church* is a non-biblical expression. However, we borrow this expression for the sake of the new ones' understanding.) We cannot be private Christians. We only can be Christians who join together with all of God's children. We only can be Christians who are attached to other Christians. We should be involved with other people. We should be like the vines of a climbing plant—always attached to other people. As Christians we should attach ourselves to other Christians.

II. WHICH CHURCH TO JOIN

We should join the church. But there are so many churches. Which one should we join? It is true that some have heard the gospel through you; they may have been saved through you. But many sober-minded persons will not automatically accept your church just because you have introduced them to the Lord. They will consider and want to know which church they should join out of the many.

A. The Differences between the Many Kinds of Churches

The history of the church is very long; it spans over two thousand years. Different churches have been raised up at different times. This results in differences based on time. Churches also have been raised up in different places. This results in differences based on geography. Churches also have been raised up through different servants of God. This results in differences based on persons. Here we see three differences based on time, place, and persons. This is not all. Because there are so many doctrines in the Bible, some have set up churches by emphasizing a particular kind of doctrine, while others have set up other churches by emphasizing other doctrines. As a result, different emphases on doctrines have created different churches as well. When a certain need arises in a certain place, certain individuals are raised up to emphasize certain teachings. As a result, a church is produced. The point of emphasis thus becomes the basis for forming churches.

The above factors have led to the formation of the many churches. How many different churches are there in the world today? There are over fifteen hundred different kinds of churches, and these are only the orthodox ones, the ones which are well established. Moreover, this number only reflects the number of different church systems; it does not take into account the various local congregations within each system. If we considered the Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and other well-established groups each as one church, there would be about fifteen hundred such churches. Brothers, when I put myself in your place, I can see why it is not an easy task to choose from among a list of fifteen hundred churches!

With so many churches and so much confusion, is there a right way we can take before the Lord? Thank God, there is a way! God's Word is still with us, and we can read it and find out what God has to say. Thank God that the Bible has shown us which church we should join. God has not left us in the dark.

B. The Reasons for the Many Different Churches

1. Different Places

Let us study in detail the divisions of the church. Some divisions have occurred because of locality. For example, the Anglican Church is actually the Church of England. Anglican means that it came from England; in fact, it is the state church of England. But when it spread from England to America, it became the Episcopal Church or the Church of England in America. When it spread to China, it became the Church of England in China. Furthermore, when the Church of England in America spread to China, it became the Church of England in America in China. The Anglican Church first spread to America and then to China. The result is the Chinese American Anglican Church. What confusion this is!

Consider the example of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church is, in fact, the Church of Rome. We are in Shanghai. What has a Roman church got to do with us here? It is wrong for the Church in Rome to set up churches in other places. This is a confusion of locality. What is the Anglican Church doing in America? What is the American Church doing in China? What is the Roman church doing in Shanghai? What is the Shanghai Church doing in Foochow? Every church that is founded upon a place eventually becomes a confusion.

2. Different Times

This is not all. Many churches are divided according to time. Different churches have been established at different times. Consider what happened in China: The Nestorians first established their churches in the Tang Dynasty during their evangelization of China. The Nestorians were Christians who came to China to preach the gospel during the Tang Dynasty. During the Ming Dynasty the Roman Catholic Church came from the West to set up churches also. The churches set up in the Tang Dynasty could not be united with the churches set up in the Ming Dynasty because they were established at different times. When the Protestants came to China during the Ching Dynasty, they established more churches. Now we have the churches of the Tang Dynasty, the churches of the Ming Dynasty, and the churches of the Ching Dynasty. The Brethren came after the formation of the Republic. Now we have another big group—the Brethren, in addition to the Nestorians, the Roman Catholics, and the Protestants. The Brethren are another group of people; they established another church. Many of these churches came into existence because of the difference in time. Here we see that the church is divided not just according to locality. Even when all the Christians come from the same place, the fact that they are established at different times can also become a factor of division.

3. Different Persons

This is not all. Throughout church history there have also been divisions based on persons. The church set up by John Wesley became the Wesleyan Church. The church set up by Martin Luther became the Lutheran Church. The church became divided through different persons. There is the Wesleyan denomination and the Lutheran denomination. All of these are divided according to people.

4. Emphasis on Different Truths

Some divisions are based on a different emphasis of the truth. Those who emphasize justification by faith are called the “Justification by Faith” Church (i.e., the Lutheran Church). Those who emphasize holiness have become the Holiness Church. Those who emphasize the Holy Spirit are called the Pentecostal Church. Those who emphasize apostolic miracles are called the Apostolic Faith Church. Those who emphasize independence of local congregations are called the Congregational Church. Those who emphasize presbyterian administration and believe in the succession of apostolic authority through the elders are called the Presbyterian Church. Those who believe in the succession of apostolic authority through the bishops are called the Bishop’s Church. They have one bishop for one church. Those who emphasize water immersion have become the Baptist Church. Those who came from Bath are called the Bath Congregation. There are such congregations in Canton. Even among those who believe in justification by faith, those who came from Germany are called the Lutherans, while those who came from Holland are called the Dutch Reformed Church. We can see that all kinds of differences exist among the churches throughout the whole world. Every church has its own history and doctrine. In the midst of such confusion, which way should you take? It is difficult to find a church in a your locality to join.

III. CHURCHES BEING DIFFERENT IN LOCALITY ONLY

Is there a way out for us? Yes! The Bible is very simple and clear concerning the truth of the church; it is not confusing at all. We can see this in a few verses. The opening words of many Epistles, such as the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles and Revelation, show us such expressions as the church in Rome, the church in Jerusalem, the church in Corinth, the church in Philippi, the church in Ephesus, the church in Colossae, and so on. There were many different churches. In Acts there is the church in Antioch, and in Revelation there are seven churches. There is no doubt that there are distinctions between churches in the Bible, but there is one, and only one, kind of distinction. What is this distinction? You can answer this question yourselves because it is very clear.

Some doctrines in the Bible have two sides. It may not be easy deciding which side should be taken. But if there is only one side to a truth and you make a mistake about it, it means that you are very foolish and blind. Some passages in the Bible say that justification is by faith, while other passages say that justification is by works. We have the book of Romans, and we also have the Epistle of James. One can excuse himself for confusion over such a doctrine. But concerning the church, there is only one way. It is inexcusable for anyone to be unclear about it. Corinth is a locality; so are Ephesus, Colossae, Rome, and Philippi. All of these are localities. In other words, the church can be divided only according to locality, nothing else. Is this clear to you? Corinth, Ephesus, and Colossae are cities. Therefore, the boundary of the church is the boundary of the city or the locality.

A. Anything Smaller than a Locality Not Being the Church

No matter how big a church is, it cannot extend beyond the boundary of its locality. At the same time, no matter how small a church is, it cannot have anything less than the locality as its unit. If a church is smaller than a locality, it is not a church. If a church is bigger than a locality, it is not a church. What is smaller than a locality? For example, in the church in Corinth some said, "I am...of Cephas." Others said, "I am of Paul," or "I am...of Apollos," or "I am...of Christ" (1 Cor. 1:12). They divided the church in Corinth into four parts. This is making the church too small. Therefore, Paul told them they were divisive and sectarian. First Corinthians 1 shows that it is wrong for a church to be smaller than a locality. Was Paul good? Yes! Was Apollos good? Yes! Was Peter good? Yes! But it is wrong to divide the church according to these persons. The church is divided according to localities, not according to the apostles. Paul said that to divide the church according to the apostles is divisive, sectarian, and fleshly. Dividing the church this way is to take the way of the denominations.

B. The Boundary of a Church Not Being Bigger than the Locality

It is also wrong for a church to be bigger than the boundary of its locality. Please read your Bible. The Bible speaks of “the churches of Galatia” (1 Cor. 16:1), “the churches of Asia” (v. 19), and “the churches of Judea” (Gal. 1:22). In Judea there were many localities with churches. This is why we refer to them as the churches of Judea. We see this in Acts. In the book of Galatians we see “the churches of Galatia.” In Revelation 1:4 we see “the...churches which are in Asia.” After reading these portions of the Scripture, we should be quite clear about what the Bible says concerning this matter. No church is ever bigger than a locality. Galatia was a province in the Roman Empire; it was not a locality. This is why the Bible does not say, “The *church* of Galatia,” but, “The *churches* of Galatia.” There were several churches in Galatia. This is why the plural word *churches* is used instead of the singular *church*. Therefore, it is wrong for a church to be bigger than its locality.

The Bible does not say, “the *church* in Asia,” but “the seven *churches* which are in Asia”! Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea were all localities in Asia. These seven places did not become one united church. They remained seven churches in Asia. It is wrong for a church to be bigger than its locality. These seven churches did not become one big church. In the same principle, we see “the *churches* of Judea” because at that time Judea was a province of Rome. Originally, it was a nation. Later, it became a province. In the province of Judea there were many localities with churches. They could not be combined together to become one church.

We must see that God ordains to have only “the church in Foochow”; there cannot be an “XXX church in Foochow.” Having this would make the church smaller than its locality. Neither can anyone unite all the churches in the province of Fukien and make them one church. We can only have “the *churches* in Fukien,” not “the *church* in Fukien”; to have such would make the church bigger than its locality.

C. The Church Bearing Only the Name of the Locality

Brothers, we must be clear that the church cannot be named after a person, a doctrine, a system, or the place of its origin. It should be identified only by the name of its locality, not the name of its place of origin. There can only be “the church in Foochow”; there cannot be “the church of Shanghai in Foochow.” You cannot have the Roman Church in Shanghai. The Roman Church has to go back to Rome. If some believers from the church in Rome come to Shanghai, they can be part of the church in Shanghai, but they cannot set up a Roman Church in Shanghai. The place of origin cannot be brought to Shanghai. The Anglican Church should go back to England. The Anglican believers that come to Shanghai should become the believers in the church in Shanghai. They should not bring the Anglican Church to Shanghai. The church can only be local. In His Word, God has ordained that the church should be divided only according to locality, not nationality. There should not be any Chinese Church or Anglican Church. There can only be the church in London and the church in Shanghai. They are only localities. Churches are based on locality, not nationality. There is no such thing as “the Church of Christ in China” in the Bible.

There should not be any distinction of people, nationality, or doctrines. God's Word only allows one kind of distinction— according to locality. Wherever you are, you are a member of the church in that locality. If you want to change your church, you have to change your locality. If I am in Foochow, and I cannot get along with a brother, there is only one way for me to leave the church in Foochow—I have to leave Foochow. God only recognizes the difference of locality. He does not recognize any other difference. I hope you will receive God's mercy to see that there is only one church and that the church is local.