

CONCERNING TURMOILS

Some saints are troubled when turmoils happen. They feel that if the local churches are part of God's move today and under His blessing, such things should not occur. This view, however, does not match the Bible, which records turmoil after turmoil among God's people. The book of Numbers is filled with records of turmoils among God's people as they journeyed with Him (chs. 11—14; chs. 16—17; 20:1-13, 23-29; 21:4-9; 25:1-18). More problems arose in Ezra 9 and 10 and Nehemiah 5 and 13 among those who returned from Babylon. The churches in the New Testament passed through many such tests, fifty-one of which are analyzed in Chapter 5 of *Elders' Training, Book 10: The Eldership and the God-ordained Way (2)*. As God's people we should expect to encounter turmoils as we seek to follow the Lord, and we should know what conditions foster turmoils, why God allows them, and how we can pass through them and be preserved in our Christian life and church life.

Conditions that Foster Turmoils

Turmoils among God's people are instigated by God's enemy, Satan, to damage God's work, which ultimately is to build up the Body of Christ. Brother Lee's ministry is full of insights into how this transpires. His fellowship on these points is well worth our study and can be found in the following portions among many others:

- Chapters 1 and 2 of *Elders' Training, Book 1: The Ministry of the New Testament*;
- Chapter 1 of *Elders' Training, Book 10: The Eldership and the God-ordained Way (2)*; and
- *The Problems Causing the Turmoils in the Church Life*.

(For more a more complete list, see <https://www.afaithfulword.org/statements/excerpts intro/>.)

Three factors that foster the development of turmoils are particularly pertinent today:

- Being short of vision concerning God's economy, particularly related to the Body of Christ;
- Caring for right and wrong according to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil rather than caring for life and oneness according to the tree of life; and
- Not recognizing God's speaking and the leadership of God's speaking through those who take the lead in the ministry that brings God's word to His people.

The Lord's recovery is not simply the recovery of certain doctrines or practices; it is the recovery of the practice of the genuine oneness of the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 4:4). This oneness is rooted in the very being of the Triune God. Just as the Father and the Son mutually indwell one another (John 14:10), we dwell in the Triune God and He dwells in us (v. 20; 17:21; 1 John 4:15). This mutual indwelling is the oneness of the Body. Satan's aim in fomenting turmoils is to damage this oneness, thereby causing division in the Body. If our seeing of the Body of Christ is deficient, we will be at risk of being carried away by Satan's subtlety.

God Himself is life (John 5:26; 14:6; Rom. 8:2). This life is embodied in Christ (John 1:4; 1 John 5:11-12) and is imparted into the believers by Christ as the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:6). This life, which is the eternal life, is the critical factor of our oneness with the Triune God and with one another as members of the Body of Christ. For this reason, Satan seeks to bring the church into death (Matt. 16:18b) by corrupting the believers' thoughts from the simplicity and purity toward Christ (2 Cor. 11:3), turning them, as he did Eve, from the tree of life to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:1-6). Those who are drawn into the realm of right and wrong become Satan's prey.

Satan particularly tries to damage the relationship between the churches and those who take the lead in the ministry. As the church journeys through this world, it needs leadership. On the one hand, Christ is the personal Head to every member in the Body (1 Cor. 11:3a), but on the other hand, the biblical record is clear that leadership in the church is exercised through the apostles' teaching brought to God's people by faithful ministers (Acts 2:42; Titus 1:9; 1 Tim. 4:6). It is through the gifted members that the saints are perfected and the Body receives the rich supply for its building up (Eph. 4:11-12, 16). Thus, Satan seeks to undermine and

even sever the saints from those who carry out the New Testament ministry according to the apostles' teaching (2 Tim. 1:15), resulting in the church's decline and potential ruin (Rev. 2:4-5). Once the believers turn from life and from the supply of life through the Lord's servants, degradation and division inevitably follow.

Why God Allows Turmoils

There are at least two reasons why God allows turmoils among His people. First, turmoils manifest the approvedness of those who are not sectarian or divisive. In 1 Corinthians, a book dealing with disorder and division in the church, Paul wrote, "For there must even be parties among you, that those who are approved may become manifest among you" (11:19). Second, God uses turmoils to purify His people. As Brother Lee pointed out, God purified the children of Israel through all the rebellions recorded in Numbers:

A rebellion always brings about some sifting among God's people. This sifting can be considered as a kind of purification exercised by the Lord's sovereignty to purify His collective people. Furthermore, the occurring of a rebellion also renders some purification to the faithful ones in their intention, their motive, their purpose, their aims, and other matters. (*The Present Turmoil in the Lord's Recovery and the Direction of the Lord's Move Today*, 15)

How to Be Preserved

To be preserved in the midst of a turmoil, we must intensify our exercise in the three areas the enemy attacks—keeping the oneness, caring for life, and maintaining a proper relationship with the Lord's ministry. To keep the oneness, the most important thing is to see the Body:

If we see the Body, we will not be able to make any trouble in the recovery. We will not be concerned about who is wrong or who is right. Actually, if we make trouble, we are automatically wrong... Turmoil after turmoil has transpired because of our not knowing the Body. The only remedy that can cure us of this kind of illness is the seeing of the Body. (*The Problems Causing the Turmoils in the Church Life*, 28)

If we see the Body, we will realize that the Body is absolutely a matter of life, so we will care for life, not right and wrong, by coming to the Lord repeatedly in prayer. In 1978 Brother Lee commented, "I believe that the Lord sovereignly allowed the recent turmoil in the churches in order to give us a negative background that will help us to see what life is" (*Basic Principles Concerning the Eldership*, 88). Caring for life will preserve us in a time of turmoil. Thus, in 1993 he told us, "Whenever there has been a turmoil, we have learned to be simple by staying with the tree of life and staying away from anything related to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (*The Problems Causing the Turmoils in the Church Life*, 8). In a time of turmoil among the New Testament churches, the apostle Paul charged his young co-worker Timothy to "lay hold on the eternal life" (1 Tim. 6:12). To take care of life is to take care of the sense of life (Rom. 8:6), which is actually the feeling of the indwelling God Himself in Christ as the Spirit in our regenerated spirit (vv. 9-11).

Finally, in times of turmoil, it is vital to maintain a proper relationship with those faithful ministers who bring to God's people the fullness of what is unveiled in the apostles' teaching and who minister the rich supply of life for their growth. The apostles' teaching keeps us in the central lane of God's economy, which is to build up the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:12). The rich supply, along with the functioning in the measure of each member, is what carries out that building through the growth in life (v. 16). As the degradation of the early church intensified, Paul encouraged Timothy to "not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord nor of me His prisoner" (2 Tim. 1:7-8), and he urged Timothy to "continue in the things which you have learned and have been assured of, knowing from which ones you have learned them" (3:14). Those who turned away from Paul suffered great loss, eventually putting them at risk of losing the Lord's testimony altogether (1:15; Rev. 2:5). By knowing the Body, caring for life, and maintaining a proper relationship with the Lord's ministry we can be preserved by the Lord in the midst of turmoil.