

THE FOUR GREAT PILLARS IN THE LORD'S RECOVERY

(Friday—Second Morning Session)

Message Five

The Second Great Pillar—Life

(2)

The Flow of Life with the Ministry of Life out of and for the Magnificent House of God

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 47:1-12; 2 Cor. 3:6; 1 Cor. 9:11; 3:6, 9; 4:15; 3:2, 12

I. In order to participate in God's ultimate move, we need to experience the flow of life out of the house of God—Ezek. 47:1-12:

- A. God's ultimate move is His move in man to deify man by saturating man with all that He is in His life, nature, element, and essence for the glory, the expression, of God—2 Cor. 3:18; 1 John 3:2.
- B. The water flows out from under the threshold—Ezek. 47:1:
 - 1. In order for the water to flow, there must be a threshold, an opening—cf. Psa. 81:10.
 - 2. If we draw closer to the Lord and have more contact with Him, there will be an opening that will allow the living water to flow out from the church—*Hymns*, #846.
- C. The flow is toward the east—Ezek. 47:1:
 - 1. The river of God flows in the direction of God's glory—cf. Num. 2:3; Ezek. 43:2.
 - 2. If everyone in the church seeks and cares for God's glory, the living water will flow out from the church—John 7:18; 1 Cor. 10:31.
- D. The water flows out from the right side of the house—Ezek. 47:1:
 - 1. In the Bible the right side is the highest position, the first place—cf. Heb. 1:3.
 - 2. The flow of life must have the preeminence within us, becoming the controlling factor in our living and work—Rev. 22:1; Col. 1:18b.
- E. The flowing is by the side of the altar, showing that we need the dealing of the cross and a full consecration to enjoy the flow of life—Ezek. 47:1.
- F. For the increase of the flow of life, we need to be measured by the Lord as the man of bronze—40:3; 47:2-5; Rev. 1:15; cf. John 7:37-39:
 - 1. To measure is to examine, test, judge, and possess—cf. Isa. 6:1-8; cf. Ezek. 42:20.
 - 2. The four measurings of a thousand cubits, which is a complete unit (cf. Psa. 84:10), indicate that as creatures we need to be thoroughly measured by the Lord so that He may take over and thoroughly possess our entire being—Ezek. 47:2-5.
 - 3. The more we allow the Lord to examine, test, and judge us to possess us, the deeper the flow becomes; the depth of the flow depends on how much we have been measured by the Lord—cf. 1 John 1:5, 7.

4. The more we are measured by the Lord, the more we are restricted and limited by the flowing of the grace of life until eventually we are lost in and carried along by the flowing Triune God as a river in which to swim; in one sense we lose all our freedom, but in another sense we are really free—Ezek. 47:4-6.
- G. The river causes everything to live—v. 9a:
 1. Where the river flows, everything shall live and be full of life.
 2. The flow of the river produces trees, fish, and cattle—vv. 7, 9-10, 12.
- H. The river waters the desert and heals the Dead Sea—v. 8:
 1. The river waters the dry, parched land and heals the death waters.
 2. This watering and healing are for the purpose of producing life.
- I. The river is unable to heal the swamps and marshes—v. 11:
 1. A swamp or marsh is a neutral place, a halfway place, a place of compromise and lukewarmness—cf. Rev. 3:15-16.
 2. For the flow of life and for the church life, we need to be absolute.
 3. “If you are in the Lord’s recovery, be in the recovery absolutely, not half-way...The Lord Jesus desires and requires absoluteness...By being absolute we will be in the flow, and the flow will not be a trickle but a river to swim in. Then everything shall live where the river comes” (*Life-study of Ezekiel*, pp. 311-312).

II. Our enjoyment of Christ as the flow of life, the life-giving Spirit, is for us to be sowers, planters, waterers, begetters, feeders, and builders with the ministry of life for the marvelous organic building of God, the magnificent house of God:

- A. A sufficient minister of the new covenant is a person who ministers life to others in order to help them grow in life—2 Cor. 3:6.
- B. A minister of life is a sower who sows spiritual seeds:
 1. In 1 Corinthians 9:11 Paul says to the Corinthians, “We have sown to you the spiritual things”; *the spiritual things* refer to spiritual seeds.
 2. A seed is a container of life, and to sow a spiritual seed is to impart life in, with, and out of our spirit.
 3. The Lord Jesus came as a Sower to sow Himself as the seed of life into the human race—Matt. 13:3, 37.
 4. In the Lord’s recovery we, as ministers of the new covenant, need to be sowers who impart life to grow and produce Christ in others.
- C. A minister of life is a planter who plants Christ into God’s people—1 Cor. 3:6:
 1. The believers, who have been regenerated in Christ with God’s life, are God’s cultivated land, God’s farm, in God’s new creation—v. 9.
 2. In order for us to plant Christ into others, we need the genuine experience of Christ as life in our spirit.
- D. A minister of life is a waterer who waters people with Christ—v. 6:
 1. Once we plant Christ into others, we need to water them with the water of life—Rev. 22:17.
 2. We may liken a waterer in God’s farm to an irrigation system with a reservoir that supplies a farm with water; we should be a divine “irrigation

system” with a reservoir of living water stored within us to water the church as God’s farm.

3. We need to have the genuine experience of Christ as the water of life and a living contact with Him so that we can be a channel of living water, a divine irrigation system, that can supply others with the water of life—John 4:14; 7:37-39.
- E. A minister of life is a begetter, a father, who imparts life to his children, whom he begets—1 Cor. 4:15:
1. To beget is to generate spiritual children, to bring them forth, through the impartation of life.
 2. We need to have the divine “life germ” in order to impart the divine life into others so that they may be begotten as children of God.
- F. A minister of life is a feeder; feeding is a matter of life; it differs from teaching, which is a matter of knowledge:
1. To give milk to drink or food to eat is to feed others—3:2.
 2. What the apostle ministered to the Corinthian believers seemed to be knowledge; actually, it was milk (not yet solid food), and it should have nourished them.
 3. The sound teaching of the apostles ministers the healthy teaching as the supply of life to people, either nourishing them or healing them—1 Tim. 1:10b; 6:3; 2 Tim. 1:13; Titus 1:9.
- G. A minister of life is a builder who builds with gold, silver, and precious stones—1 Cor. 3:12:
1. Gold symbolizes God the Father in His divine nature, silver symbolizes Christ in His redemptive work, and precious stones signify the Spirit in His transforming work (this is versus wood, which signifies the human nature; grass, which signifies man in the flesh; and stubble, which signifies lifelessness).
 2. Song of Songs portrays that in the proper church life, the perfected believers coordinate with the transforming Spirit to perfect Christ’s loving seekers by ministering the Triune God to them for their transformation by the Triune God’s attributes being wrought into them to become their virtues—1:10-11.
 3. This is for the building up of the church as the organic Body of Christ to consummate the New Jerusalem for the accomplishing of God’s eternal economy—1 Cor. 3:12; Rev. 21:18-21.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

A COMPETENT MINISTER OF THE NEW COVENANT

We will go on to see six statuses of a competent minister of the new covenant as revealed in 1 Corinthians: a sower, a planter, a waterer, a begetter, a feeder, and a builder. These six statuses are related to the matter of life, that is, to our experience and enjoyment of Christ as the life-giving Spirit.

A Sower

In 1 Corinthians 9:11 Paul says to the Corinthians, “We have sown to you the spiritual

things.” *The spiritual things* refers to spiritual seeds. A minister of the new covenant, a minister of the new testament, sows spiritual seeds. The first thing a new testament minister does is not to pass on doctrinal teachings but to sow spiritual seeds. A seed is a container of life, and to sow a seed is to impart life. Hence, sowing the spiritual things is a matter of life. According to Matthew 13, the Lord Jesus came as a Sower to sow Himself as the seed of life into the human race (vv. 3, 37). Likewise, in the Lord’s recovery of the church life, we need to realize that we should not merely pass on knowledge or doctrines; instead, we should sow spiritual things. In the Lord’s recovery we as ministers of the new covenant need to be sowers who impart life into others.

To be a sower is much more difficult than to be a teacher. In order to be a teacher, a person simply needs to go to a Bible school where he may be trained to be a good speaker, learning not only biblical doctrines and parables but also how to use one’s voice, tell stories, speak eloquently, and use gestures. However, in order to be a sower, one must have seeds of life that can grow and produce Christ in others. Such spiritual seeds are not mere doctrines or letters; instead, they are something of life in our spirit. They are spiritual things, things that are in, with, and out of our spirit. To acquire teachings is easy, but to obtain these seeds is difficult.

A Planter

In 1 Corinthians 3:6 Paul says, “I planted.” Planting is also a matter of life, for it involves sowing seeds, the containers of life, or placing herbs, plants, or trees in the ground, all of which are living things that grow. Verse 9 tells us that we, the believers in Christ, are “God’s cultivated land,” that is, God’s farm. The believers, who have been regenerated in Christ with God’s life, are God’s cultivated land, a farm in God’s new creation. Corporately, we as the church of God have Christ planted in us. In order for us to plant Christ into others, we need the genuine experience of Christ as life in our spirit. If we grow and produce Christ within us, we will have something of Christ to plant into others. Again, spiritual planting is not a matter of doctrines but of life.

A Waterer

In 3:6 Paul continues, “Apollos watered.” We should not only be planters but also waterers. Once we plant Christ into others, we need to water them with the water of life (Rev. 22:17). Day by day we should water the dear saints, who are plants in God’s farm that need watering. We may liken a waterer in God’s farm to an irrigation system with a reservoir that supplies a farm with water. We should be a divine “irrigation system” with a reservoir of living water stored within us to water the church as God’s farm. We need to have the genuine experience of Christ as the water of life and a living contact with Him. Consequently, we will have a fountain of life bubbling within us constantly (John 4:14), and we will be a channel of living water, a divine irrigation system, that can supply others with the water of life (7:37-39). We need to be waterers, those who are filled with the water of life and who water their fellow believers for their growth in life. If we do not have the sufficient experience of Christ as the living water, it will be difficult for us to water others.

A Begetter

In 1 Corinthians 4:15 Paul says, “In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.” To beget is to generate something, to bring forth something, through the impartation of life. Like the apostle Paul, who begot the Corinthian believers in Christ by imparting the divine life into them, we should be fathers who beget spiritual children by imparting the divine life into others. Begetting, unlike teaching, is a matter of life. We need to have the

divine “life germ” in order to impart the divine life into others so that they may be begotten as children of God.

A Feeder

After begetting spiritual children, we need to feed them with the spiritual milk. Hence, we need to be feeders. In 1 Corinthians 3:2 Paul says, “I gave you milk to drink.” To give others milk to drink is to feed them. Feeding is a matter of life. It differs from teaching, which is a matter of knowledge. Instead of merely instructing others, we need to feed them. This can be illustrated by the difference between a mother feeding her infant with the milk she produces herself and a mother feeding her infant with the milk she buys from a store. We may say that the former is organic and the latter artificial. We should be constantly nourished with Christ as spiritual food so that we may be able to feed others. We need to feed on Christ to produce spiritual milk so that we may be able to feed our spiritual children. This is a genuine experience of Christ as life.

In order to practice the proper church life, we need the genuine experience of life. Many Christians are not able to practice the proper church life because they neglect the experience of life. Paul was not only a father who begot spiritual children but also a mother who fed them. We need to be spiritually strong and healthy so that, like Paul, we may be able to beget spiritual children and adequately produce the spiritual milk to feed them. Those who take the lead in the churches need to be such fathers and mothers. If the elders become fathers who impart life to their spiritual children and mothers who produce the spiritual milk to feed them, we will have a proper family life in the church as the household of God (Eph. 2:19). The unique way to practice the church life as a proper family life is through the genuine experience of life.

A Builder

The new covenant ministers as sowers, planters, waterers, begetters, and feeders should eventually become builders. In 1 Corinthians 3:10-11 Paul speaks of himself as “a wise master builder” who laid the unique foundation, Christ, for others to build upon. Then in verse 12 Paul speaks of building upon the foundation gold, silver, and precious stones. As we carry out the work of sowing, planting, watering, begetting, and feeding, Christ will grow in the believers. This growth of life in the believers will be accompanied by a measure of transformation in them. While the believers grow day by day, they will be transformed (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2). As they grow as plants on God’s farm, they will experience transformation, which produces gold, silver, and precious stones. Consequently, the believers will be not only mature plants, that is, full-grown men in Christ (Rev. 14:4, 15; Col. 1:28), but also gold, silver, and precious stones, precious materials for the building of God’s house (Rev. 21:2-3, 11, 18-22).

If we would be builders who build with gold, silver, and precious stones, we need to be these precious materials. Gold signifies the divine nature of the Father, silver signifies the redemptive work of Christ, and precious stones signify the transforming work of the Spirit. In building the house of God, the builders are not separate from the materials of the building. In order to be builders, we ourselves need to be the transformed materials by being constituted with the Triune God. We should be both the builders and the building material of the house of God. If we ourselves have not been transformed into precious materials, we cannot help others be transformed into such materials. We ourselves first need to be the precious materials and be built into the house of God. Then we will be qualified to build the house of God with other believers as the transformed materials.

The believers as the transformed materials come from the growth in life, and the growth in life comes from the sowing, planting, watering, begetting, and feeding. In this light, what we in

the church life need are not mere teachers or guides but sowers, planters, waterers, begetters, feeders, and builders. In 1 Corinthians 4:15 Paul contrasts guides with fathers, saying, “Though you have ten thousand guides in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers.” Guides give instructions and directions, whereas fathers impart life to those whom they beget. It is easy to have guides, but it is difficult to have fathers. The fact that there are many guides but few fathers indicates that the latter are incomparably more precious than the former. In the Lord’s recovery we need sowers, planters, waterers, begetters, feeders, and builders so that the Lord may gain His organic building, the house of God.

Being a Spiritual Man Who Exercises His Spirit

In the local churches many ministers of the new covenant are carrying out the work of sowing, planting, watering, begetting, feeding, and building. In order for us to be such competent new covenant ministers, we need to receive the seeds of life, the living water, the divine life, and the spiritual milk. The way that we receive these items of life is by being a spiritual man who exercises his spirit. In 1 Corinthians 2:14-15 Paul declares, “A soulish man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he is not able to know them because they are discerned spiritually. But the spiritual man discerns all things.” A soulish man cannot receive the spiritual things, the deep things of God concerning Christ as the believers’ portion (v. 10). Instead, the spiritual things are foolishness to the soulish man. For instance, when spiritual men exercise their spirit to call upon the name of the Lord, the soulish man considers them foolish. It is impossible to receive anything of the Spirit of God by being soulish. A person cannot receive spiritual seeds by exercising his soul—his mind, emotion, and will—apart from exercising his spirit. It is difficult to keep ourselves from being soulish. In particular, it is difficult to stay away from our mind. A soulish man considers himself intelligent and therefore lives in his mind. Such a person can never understand spiritual things, for all the things of the Spirit of God are foolishness to him. Yet in order for us to receive the spiritual seed, water, life, and milk, we need to be in our spirit. We should be afraid of living in our mind, and we should turn from our mind to our spirit. Because the apostles, being spiritual men, forsook their human wisdom and exercised their spirit for the sake of Christ, they were “fools because of Christ” (3:1; 4:10). Likewise, in the church life we should be willing to be “fools” for Christ’s sake by turning from our mind to our spirit and becoming persons in the spirit.

Enjoying the Lord as the Life-giving Spirit

We may receive the things of the Spirit of God, the deep things of God concerning Christ, by becoming spiritual men, men who exercise their spirit. First Corinthians unveils to us many items of the riches of the all-inclusive Christ. Christ is God’s power and God’s wisdom as our righteousness for our past, our sanctification for our present, and our redemption for our future (1:24, 30). We see that He is also the deep things of God (2:10) and the unique foundation of God’s building (3:11). He is our Passover (5:7), the unleavened bread (v. 8), the spiritual food, the spiritual drink, and the spiritual rock (10:3-4). He is the Head (11:3) and the Body (12:12). He is the firstfruits (15:20, 23), the second man (v. 47), and the last Adam (v. 45b). As the firstfruits, the second man, and the last Adam, He is the first, the second, and the last; as such He is everything. Ultimately, He is the life-giving Spirit (v. 45b).

If Christ were not the life-giving Spirit, He could not be power and wisdom to us. Neither could He be our righteousness for our past, our sanctification for our present, and our redemption for our future. If He were not the life-giving Spirit, how could He be the deep things of God to us? How could He be the spiritual rock that not only follows us but also indwells us (2 Cor. 13:5)? All the items of the riches of Christ revealed in 1 Corinthians are

embodied in Christ as the life-giving Spirit. In order for us to experience Christ in all these aspects, Christ had to become the life-giving Spirit so that all the aspects of His riches could be made real, applicable, and prevailing in our experience. Today Christ is not a religion, form, teaching, or ritual; He is the life-giving Spirit. The more we exercise our spirit, the more we will be filled with Christ as the life-giving Spirit.

Not only is Christ the life-giving Spirit, but we are also one spirit with Him. In 1 Corinthians 6:17 Paul declares, “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.” All that Christ is, is in the life-giving Spirit, and we are joined to Him as one spirit, not one heart, one soul, or one mind. Therefore, in order to enjoy all the riches of Christ, we need to exercise our spirit and be persons in the spirit, not persons in the soul. Since we are joined to Christ as one spirit, we may enjoy Him by eating, drinking, and breathing Him (John 6:57; 7:37-39; 20:22). In 1 Corinthians 10:3-4 Paul speaks of Christ as our spiritual food and spiritual drink, saying, “All ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank of a spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ.” In 12:13 Paul says that we “were all given to drink one Spirit.” Now that we are one spirit with Christ, we should exercise our spirit to feed on Him and drink of Him in order to enjoy Him.

Calling on the Name of the Lord to Enjoy Him as the Spirit

We may exercise our spirit to enjoy the Lord by calling on His name. At the beginning of 1 Corinthians, Paul says, “To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints, with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, who is theirs and ours” (v. 2). The Greek word translated “call upon” is *epikaleo*. This word is composed of *epi*, upon, and *kaleo*, call by name; that is, to call out audibly, even loudly (Acts 7:59-60). To call on the name of the Lord is not a matter of praying silently; it is to call on the Lord audibly (Lam. 3:55-56; Isa. 12:2-6). We may call on the name of the Lord by saying, “O Lord Jesus.” If we practice calling out to the Lord audibly and even loudly rather than praying silently or in a low voice, we will be able to testify that this kind of calling makes a great difference in our enjoyment of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 12:3 Paul says, “No one can say, Jesus is Lord! except in the Holy Spirit.” The literal translation of the Greek expression *Jesus is Lord* is “Lord Jesus.” When we say with a proper spirit, “Lord Jesus,” we are in the Holy Spirit. When we open our being to the Lord, exercise our spirit, and say, “Lord Jesus,” we are in our spirit and in the Holy Spirit. It is by calling on the name of the Lord that we eat Him, drink of Him, and breathe Him into us in order to enjoy Him. If all of us who are in the local churches enjoy the Lord in this way, we will become not only sowers, planters, waterers, begetters (fathers), feeders (mothers), and builders but also the precious materials of gold, silver, and precious stones for the building of God’s habitation on earth. Consequently, we will be constituted a marvelous organic building of God, the magnificent house of God. This is the proper church life. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee*, 1970, vol. 1, pp. 577-583)