

THE FOUR GREAT PILLARS IN THE LORD'S RECOVERY

(Friday—Evening Session)

Message Six

The Third Great Pillar—the Church

(1)

The Church as the Kingdom of God

Scripture Reading: Eph. 2:19; 1 Thes. 2:12; Col. 1:13; John 3:3, 5; Rom. 14:17; Matt. 6:10

I. Ephesians 2:19 reveals that the church is the kingdom of God:

- A. The term *fellow citizens* indicates the kingdom of God—v. 19.
- B. In Ephesians 2:19 Paul's main concept is that of citizenship in God's kingdom.
- C. All the believers, both Jewish and Gentile, are citizens of God's kingdom, which is a sphere wherein God exercises His authority—John 3:5; Rev. 1:6, 9:
 - 1. Citizenship in God's kingdom involves rights and responsibilities, two things that always go together.
 - 2. We enjoy the rights of the kingdom, and we bear the responsibilities of the kingdom—22:14; Luke 14:15-24; 19:11-27; Matt. 24:14; 28:18-19.

II. God has called us to enter into His kingdom; the kingdom of God is the realm for us to worship God and enjoy God under the divine rule—1 Thes. 2:12:

- A. The kingdom of God is a divine sphere for God to work out His plan; it is a realm where God can exercise His authority to accomplish what He intends—Matt. 6:10.
- B. The New Testament preaches the gospel in the way of the kingdom; the gospel is for the kingdom, and the gospel is proclaimed so that rebellious sinners might be saved, qualified, and equipped to enter into the kingdom—Mark 1:14-15; Matt. 4:17; Acts 8:12.

III. The Bible first presents the kingdom and thereafter presents the church; the presence of the kingdom produces the church—Matt. 4:23; 16:18-19:

- A. The life of God is the kingdom of God; the divine life is the kingdom, and this life produces the church—John 3:3, 5; Matt. 7:14, 21; 19:17, 29; 25:46:
 - 1. The kingdom is the realm of life for life to move, rule, and govern so that life may accomplish its purpose, and this realm of life is the kingdom.
 - 2. The gospel brings in the divine life, and this life has its realm, which is the kingdom; the divine life with its realm produces the church—2 Tim. 1:10.
 - 3. The gospel of the kingdom brings forth the church because the kingdom is the life itself, and the church is the issue of life—Matt. 4:23; Acts 8:12.
- B. The kingdom is the reality of the church; therefore, apart from the kingdom life, we cannot live the church life—Matt. 5:3; 16:18-19; Rev. 1:4-6, 9:
 - 1. The reality of the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 5—7) is the content of the church life; without the reality of the kingdom, the church is empty.

2. Since the kingdom life issues in the church life, as we live corporately in the kingdom life, we spontaneously live the church life—Rom. 14:17.
- C. Without the kingdom as the reality of the church, the church cannot be built up—Matt. 16:18-19:
1. The church is brought into being through the authority of the kingdom.
 2. The keys of the kingdom are given to make the building of the church possible—v. 19; 18:18; cf. John 20:23.
 3. When the kingdom of the heavens is able to assert its authority over a company of believers, those believers can be built up into the church—Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:15-16.
- IV. The Father delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love—Col. 1:13:**
- A. Through regeneration we have been transferred into the delightful kingdom of the Son of God’s love—a realm where we are ruled in love with life—v. 13.
- B. When we live by the Son as our life in resurrection, we are living in His kingdom, enjoying Him in the Father’s love; here we have the church life—3:4; John 6:57.
- C. Although the kingdom of the Son of the Father’s love comprises the present age, the coming age, and the eternal age, the emphasis in Colossians 1:13 is on the kingdom of the Son of the Father’s love in this age, the age of the church:
1. Because the Father delights in His Son, the kingdom of the Son of the Father’s love is a pleasant realm, a matter of delight—Matt. 3:17; 17:5.
 2. The church life today is the kingdom of the Son of the Father’s love, which is as delightful to God the Father as the Son of God is.
- V. The kingdom of God today is a realm of the divine species, in which are all the divine things—John 3:3, 5:**
- A. To enter into the divine realm, the realm of the divine species, we need to be born of God to have the life and nature of God, thereby becoming God-men in the kingdom of God—1:12-13.
- B. We were regenerated of God to become the species of God and enter into the kingdom of God; now we are God-men in the kingdom of God as a realm of the divine species—3:3, 5.
- VI. The genuine church is the kingdom of God in this age; today, the believers live the kingdom life in the church—Matt. 16:18-19; 18:17-18; 13:44-46; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; Eph. 2:19; Col. 4:11; Rev. 1:4-6:**
- A. Each time the Lord Jesus spoke of the church, He mentioned it in relation to the kingdom; this indicates how intimately the kingdom and the church are related—Matt. 16:18-19; 18:17-18:
1. Romans 14:17 proves that the church in this age is the kingdom of God.
 2. *The kingdom of God* in 1 Corinthians 4:20 refers to the church life (v. 17), implying that in the sense of authority, the church in this age is the kingdom of God.
 3. What Paul and his fellow workers were doing in the gospel work for the establishing of the churches was for the kingdom of God—Col. 4:11.

4. The word *kingdom* in Revelation 1:6 reveals that where the church is, there the kingdom of God is; the church represents the kingdom.
- B. Although the church today is God's kingdom, we are in the kingdom in reality only when we live, walk, and have our being in the spirit, not in our natural man—Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:16, 25.
- C. When the authority of God's kingdom is allowed to operate in us, righteousness, peace, and joy will characterize our daily life—Rom. 14:17.
- D. As those who are under the dispensing of the Divine Trinity, we need to live a kingdom life in the church, growing and developing in the divine life until we reach maturity—2 Cor. 13:14; Mark 4:26-29:
 1. After we have entered into the kingdom of God through regeneration, we need to go on to have a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by experiencing the full development of the divine life as revealed in 2 Peter 1:5-11.
 2. As a result of the growth and development of the divine life to maturity and of living in the reality of the kingdom in the church life today, we will inherit the kingdom of God—1 Cor. 15:50; Gal. 5:21.

VII. The church brings in the kingdom; the work of the church of God is to bring in the kingdom of God—Matt. 6:10; 12:22-29; Rev. 11:15; 12:10:

- A. All the work of the church is governed by the principle of the kingdom of God.
- B. The church is responsible for bringing heaven's will down to earth and for carrying it out on earth—Matt. 6:10; 7:21; 12:50.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Ephesians 2:19 says, "You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God." The term "fellow citizens" indicates the kingdom of God. All the believers, both Jewish and Gentile, are citizens of God's kingdom, which is a sphere wherein God exercises His authority. As long as anyone is a believer, he is a citizen of the kingdom of God. This citizenship involves rights and responsibilities, two things that always go together. We enjoy the rights of the kingdom, and we bear the responsibilities of the kingdom.

In 2:19 Paul covers two aspects of the church: the kingdom, indicated by the term "fellow citizens," and the family of God, indicated by the phrase "the household of God." God's house is a matter of life and enjoyment; all believers were born of God into His household to enjoy His riches. God's kingdom is a matter of rights and responsibilities; all believers who were born into the house of God have the civil rights of and their responsibility in the kingdom of God. Therefore, in 2:19 two profound matters are covered: the kingdom of God with its rights and responsibilities and the house of God with its enjoyment of the Father's life and riches.

Ephesians 2:19 speaks of the saints, the household of God, and the kingdom of God. The saints are individuals, but the household of God is corporate and results in the kingdom of God. If there were no household, there could be no kingdom. First, we are saints, individuals. Then, corporately, we are the house of God resulting in the kingdom of God.

It is significant that in verse 19 Paul refers to the kingdom of God before the household of God. Paul's thought here concerns our former status as strangers and sojourners. Strangers and sojourners are related to a kingdom, not to a household. Those who are aliens in this

country are not aliens in relation to a family but in relation to the nation. Because strangers and sojourners are aliens to kingdoms, not to families, Paul mentions the kingdom first. In this verse Paul's main concept is that of citizenship in God's kingdom. The kingdom, however, is composed of families. For this reason, Paul also mentions the household of God, that is, the family of God.

Ephesians 2:19 affords us the basis for saying that the church today is God's kingdom. The citizens mentioned here are related to a kingdom, a nation, not to a family. A family is composed of members, not of citizens. On the one hand, we are members of God's household; on the other hand, we are citizens of God's nation, of God's kingdom.

Although the church today is God's kingdom, we are in the kingdom in reality only when we live and walk in spirit. Whenever we behave according to the old man or live in the flesh or the self, we, in a practical way, are out of God's kingdom. This means that when we are in the flesh, we are in the old realm of the fallen human nature, which has been fully usurped by Satan to form his kingdom. Therefore, a genuine Christian, if he lives in the flesh instead of in the spirit, may live in a practical way not in the kingdom of God but in the kingdom of Satan. Only when we live, walk, behave, and have our being altogether in our spirit, not in our natural man, are we in the kingdom of God and, in reality, are the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God, like the house of God, is a corporate person. The church as the house of God is a corporate person because this house is the family of God, the household of God. The kingdom is likewise a corporate person because it is also a corporate entity. Whether we are living in the church as the house of God or as the kingdom of God depends on whether we are living as members or as citizens. To live as members of the house of God is a matter of enjoyment, but to live in the kingdom of God is a matter of bearing responsibility and of being regulated. We are members of our Father's household, and we are citizens of our God's kingdom.

Being the Reality of the Church

The kingdom of God is the reality of the church. According to the New Testament, the church is intimately related to the kingdom. In Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus declared, "On this rock I will build My church," and in verse 19 He went on to speak of the kingdom of the heavens. The words "the kingdom of the heavens" in verse 19 are interchangeably used for the word "church" in verse 18. This is a strong proof that the genuine church is the kingdom of the heavens in this age.

Without the kingdom as the reality of the church, the church cannot be built up. For the building up of the church, we need the kingdom as the reality of the church. Although the kingdom is the reality of the church, we cannot say that the church is the reality of the kingdom. We can say only that the kingdom is the reality of the church.

Being the Living of the Church

The kingdom of God is the living of the church. A verse that strongly proves this is Romans 14:17. "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." According to some Bible teachers, the kingdom has not yet come. They claim that now is the dispensation of the church, and the next dispensation will be that of the kingdom. But in 14:17 Paul does not say that the kingdom of God *shall be*; he uses the present tense and says that the kingdom of God *is*. According to the context of Romans 14, which speaks of receiving the believers, the kingdom is today's church life. The reality of the church life is the kingdom. Romans 12 speaks of the Body life and Romans 14, of the kingdom life. This indicates that, in Romans, the kingdom life is the reality of the Body life.

In a sense, it is correct to say that the present age is the church age and that the coming age will be the kingdom age. However, in another sense, the kingdom of God is here today, for the kingdom is the reality of the church and the living of the church. Hence, the church is the kingdom. Since the church is the kingdom today, it is not correct to say that the kingdom has been suspended altogether until the coming age. Romans 14:17 proves definitely that the kingdom is the living of the church today.

Furthermore, in Acts, which is concerned with the church, there is frequent mention of the kingdom (8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). In Acts the believers preached the kingdom of God as the gospel (8:12). The gospel is even called the gospel of the kingdom. Therefore, it is not correct to say that the kingdom is altogether separate from today's church life.

According to the revelation in the New Testament, the proper church life is the kingdom life. If we live under the rule of the living God within us, that is, under the rule of the kingdom of the heavens, we shall have the kind of life recorded in chapters five, six, and seven of Matthew. We shall also have a life of the kingdom practiced in the church life. Hence, we should not separate the kingdom of God from the church.

In Romans 14:17 we see that the kingdom of God as the living of the church is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. When the authority of God's kingdom operates in us, righteousness, peace, and joy will characterize our daily life.

Righteousness, peace, and joy are actually the expression of Christ. When Christ is expressed, He is our righteousness toward ourselves, our peace toward others, and our joy with God.

As the believers live the kingdom life in the church, they will live righteously toward themselves. This means that we must be strict with ourselves and make no excuses for ourselves.

To live the kingdom life in the church also means that we live peacefully toward others. Our relationships with others must be characterized by peace. Toward others we must endeavor to pursue peace, continually seeking to be at peace with them. This peace is Christ Himself lived out from our being.

Living the kingdom life in the church also requires that we live joyfully to God in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of joy. If we are not joyful, this indicates that we are not in the Holy Spirit. If we are truly living the kingdom life, we shall be joyful with God, praising Him. Whenever we live righteously toward ourselves and peacefully toward others, we shall live joyfully to God in the Holy Spirit. Such a living is the kingdom of God as the living of the church.

**Those Developing and Growing
in the Life of God in the Church Life
Shall Be Richly and Bountifully Supplied
with the Entrance into the Kingdom of God**

In 2 Peter 1:3-11 we see that those believers who develop and grow in the life of God in the church life shall be richly and bountifully supplied with the entrance into the kingdom of God. After we have entered into the kingdom of God through regeneration, we need to go on to have a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. On the one hand, we have entered the kingdom; on the other hand, we still need a rich entrance. The initial entry into the kingdom is regeneration, but the rich entrance is through the full growth and development of the divine life revealed in 2 Peter 1:5-11.

According to Peter's word in 1:5-11, to grow to maturity is to develop what we have already received. We have been allotted the like precious faith, which is an all-inclusive seed.

All the divine riches are in this seed, but we must be diligent to develop them into virtue. Then we need to develop in our virtue, knowledge; in knowledge, self-control; in self-control, endurance; in endurance, godliness; in godliness, brotherly love; and in brotherly love, love. Through such a growth and development we eventually shall reach maturity and shall have a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The fact that those who develop and grow in the life of God in the church life will have a rich entrance into the coming kingdom implies that certain believers will not have a share in the coming kingdom, because they have not been living in the proper church life and have not had the adequate growth in the divine life. For this reason, at the time of the manifestation of the kingdom, they will have no participation in the kingdom. But those who grow and develop in the divine life to the full extent will be supplied with a rich and bountiful entry into the coming kingdom. (*The Conclusion of the New Testament*, pp. 2235-2241, 2243)