

THE VISION, PRACTICE, AND BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

(Thursday—Evening Session)

Message Three

God's Purpose for the Church (3) To Head Up All Things in Christ

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:10; 4:15-16; Col. 2:19

- I. “Unto the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him”—Eph. 1:10:**
- A. The economy, or dispensation, that God, according to His desire, planned and purposed in Himself is to head up all things in Christ at the fullness of the times.
 - B. This is accomplished through the dispensing of the abundant life supply of the Triune God as the life factor into all the members of the church so that they may rise up from the death situation and be attached to the Body.
 - C. *The times* refers to the ages, and the fullness of the times will be when the new heaven and new earth appear after all the dispensations of God in all the ages have been completed. (A dispensation is the act or instance of dispensing. It refers to God's dispensing of Himself into His chosen people. We need the element of God with His life and nature to be wrought into our being. This is the meaning of dispensation.):
 - 1. Altogether there are four ages: the age of sin (Adam), the age of the law (Moses), the age of grace (Christ), and the age of the kingdom (the millennium).
 - 2. God dispensed Himself into Abel, Enosh, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with Joseph, Moses, and, of course, with the Lord Jesus.
 - 3. This dispensing continues in the New Testament Epistles; God's dispensation is even greater than it was at the time of the apostle Paul; today there is a deeper, higher, and wider dispensation of the grace of God—cf. Eph. 3:2; 1 Pet. 4:10.
 - 4. This dispensation will continue through the millennium until the fullness of the times; the ultimate, the consummate, dispensation will be the dispensing of the Triune God into the whole city of the New Jerusalem—Rev. 22:1-2.
 - 5. We enjoy a miniature of this consummate dispensation in the church life today; as we enjoy the Spirit as the living water and eat Christ as the tree of life in the church life, we are awaiting the consummate dispensation, in which we shall be fully saturated with the Triune God.
 - 6. Where life is, there is light also (John 1:4; 8:12); because the New Jerusalem is saturated with light, it has no need of the light of the sun; the glory of the Triune God will be our shining and controlling light (Rev. 21:23).

7. In the New Jerusalem there will be no night, no death, and no darkness; instead, there will be life and light, causing everything to rise up and be in good order.
 8. In the New Jerusalem as the center of the new heaven and new earth, all things will be headed up in Christ (v. 24); this will be the fulfillment of the heading up of all things in Christ spoken of in Ephesians 1:10.
- D. God made Christ the Head over all things (v. 22); through all the dispensations of God in all the ages, all things will be headed up in Christ in the new heaven and new earth; that will be God's eternal administration and economy.
 - E. Thus, the heading up of all things in verse 10 is the issue of all the things covered in verses 3 through 9—God has chosen us, predestinated us, redeemed us, forgiven us, and graced us for the purpose of heading up all things in Christ.
 - F. Verse 22 reveals further that this heading up is to the church so that the Body of Christ may share in all that is of Christ as the Head, having been rescued from the heap of the universal collapse in death and darkness, which was caused by the rebellion of the angels and the rebellion of man; to be rescued from the collapse is to be headed up.
 - G. The believers participate in this heading up by being willing to be headed up in the church life, by growing in life and by living under Christ's light—John 1:4; 8:12; Eph. 5:8-9; Rev. 21:23-25.
 - H. The picture in Ezekiel 37 of the dead, dry, and scattered bones shows that the unique way to have the Body, the church, and the house of God in the genuine oneness is the way of life:
 1. When the breath entered into the dead ones, it became life to them, and they lived and stood up in oneness to become an exceedingly great army.
 2. The dead bones were enlivened and became one as the issue of the dispensing of life and the growth in life—vv. 1-14.
 - I. The heading up of all things in Christ takes place through the dispensing of the abundant life supply of the Triune God into us; the more the factor of life is ministered to us, the more we rise up and become attached; God's way to head us up is to work Himself as the factor of life into us that we may rise up and be attached to one another.
 - J. When everything is headed up in Christ, there will be absolute peace and harmony (Isa. 2:4; 11:6; 55:12; Psa. 96:12-13), a full rescue out of the collapse; this will begin from the restoration of all things (Acts 3:21).

II. We need to grow up into Christ, the Head, in all things—Eph. 4:15:

- A. The organic building up of the Body is the growth of the Body, which is the growth of God, the increase of God as life, in all the members—2:21-22; 4:16; Col. 2:19; cf. John 3:30.
- B. To grow in life is to have more of God in us; our problem is that we are short of God—cf. Job 1:1-5; 42:1-6.
- C. The growing members are the building members—Eph. 4:16.
- D. In order to grow up into the Head, we must hold to truth in love—v. 15:
 1. *Truth* here means things that are true—Rom. 3:4:
 - a. We need to hold to God's eternal economy—1 Tim. 1:3-4:

- 1) This is the economy of the mystery hidden in God—Eph. 3:9.
- 2) This economy is to have the church as the organic Body of Christ to consummate in the New Jerusalem for the manifestation of Christ as God’s multifarious wisdom—vv. 10-11; 1:22-23; 1 Cor. 1:30.
- b. We need to hold to the all-inclusive Christ—John 14:6; Eph. 1:23:
 - 1) His measure is immeasurable—3:18.
 - 2) His riches are unsearchable—v. 8.
 - 3) His love is knowledge-surpassing—v. 19.
- c. We need to hold to the church as the Body of Christ—1 Tim. 3:15:
 - 1) The Body of Christ is the corporate Christ—Acts 9:4; 1 Cor. 12:12.
 - 2) The Body of Christ is the fullness, the expression, of Christ and of God—Eph. 1:23; 3:19.
2. We hold to truth in the element and sphere of the divine love—4:15.
3. We grow up into the Head in all things—*in all things* means in everything, big or small, in our daily life and in our work—cf. Zech. 4:6, 10.
4. We grow up into the Head through acknowledging the authority of the headship of Christ—cf. Josh. 9:14:
 - a. As the Head of everyone—1 Cor. 11:3.
 - b. As the Head of the church—Eph. 5:23.
 - c. As the Head of all things—1:22, 10.
5. We grow up into the Head by allowing Christ to increase and grow in all the inward parts of our being:
 - a. In order to grow in life, we must know, we must use, and we must exercise our mingled spirit:
 - 1) Ephesians 1:17 shows that we need to pray for a spirit of wisdom and revelation to fully know Christ and God’s economy.
 - 2) Ephesians 2:22 says that all the believers are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.
 - 3) Ephesians 3:5 says that the mystery of Christ has been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in spirit.
 - 4) Ephesians 3:16 shows that we need to pray to be strengthened into the inner man, which is our regenerated spirit with God’s life as its life.
 - 5) Ephesians 4:23 tells us to be renewed in the spirit of our mind.
 - 6) Ephesians 5:18 tells us to be filled in spirit.
 - 7) Ephesians 6:18 tells us to pray at every time in spirit.
 - b. In order to grow in life, we must feed on the milk and food of the holy Word, as the embodiment of Christ, the living Word of God—1 Pet. 2:2; Heb. 5:13-14.

III. As we grow up into the Head in life, our function will come out from the Head for the building up of the Body—Eph. 4:16:

- A. When we allow Christ to be the Head in everything and when we grow up into Him in all things, we will be supplied with the riches of His life, receiving something from Him to transfuse into other members of the Body—1 Cor. 14:4b; John 7:37-39:

1. To build up the Body of Christ is to minister Christ as the life-giving Spirit into the saints for their growth into Christ—2 Cor. 3:6, 8.
 2. We must help the saints learn to enjoy the Lord and be nourished by the Lord so that they can grow—Phil. 1:25; 2 Cor. 1:24.
- B. All the Body causes the growth of the Body of Christ—Eph. 4:16:
1. This growth is through every joint of the rich supply—all the particular gifts in the Body of Christ—vv. 11-12.
 2. This growth is through the operation in the measure of each one part—every member in the Body of Christ—vv. 7-8.
- C. The building up of the Body of Christ is in love and by love—1 Cor. 8:1b:
1. Love is the most excellent way to be anything and to do anything for the building up of the Body of Christ—12:31b—13:13.
 2. The goal of the book of Ephesians is to bring us into love as God’s inner substance (1 John 4:8, 16) so that we may enjoy God as love and enjoy His presence in the sweetness of the divine love, and thereby love others as Christ did—Eph. 5:25; 6:24; 1:4; 3:17; 4:2, 15-16; 5:2.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE MEANING OF DISPENSATION

Now we need to understand what a dispensation is. According to one teaching, a dispensation refers to an age. However, this understanding is not accurate. Another teaching is that a dispensation refers to the way God deals with people during a particular period of time. For example, in the dispensation of innocence God dealt with man in one way, and in the dispensation of conscience He dealt with man in another way. Likewise, God deals with people in different ways in the ages of human government, promise, law, grace, and the kingdom. This understanding of dispensation is not incorrect, but it falls short. A dispensation is the act or instance of dispensing. It refers to God’s dispensing of Himself into His chosen people. Although I have studied this matter of the dispensations for many years and have studied a number of diagrams, I have never been told that God’s dispensation is the dispensing of Himself into His people. We need to forget all the diagrams and remember one basic point: God is now dispensing Himself into us.

THE DISPENSING OF LIFE

As we have pointed out, when Satan, the power of death, injected himself into man, Satan became death and darkness to man. Death brings in corruption, and darkness brings in confusion. Satan’s goal is to corrupt God’s creation and to cause confusion. But praise the Lord that where death abounds, life abounds all the more! After Satan came in to deaden, God came in to enliven, to impart life. Where there is life, there is light also. Death ruins, but life heals; darkness brings in confusion, but light brings in the proper order. We need to keep in mind that Satan came in to deaden God’s creation and that death ruins and darkness confuses. God, however, has come in to enliven the deadened creation and to bring in order. In this order all things are headed up in Christ.

God’s dispensation is the dispensing of life into people who have been deadened.

Although Adam had become deadened, God came in to dispense something of Himself into Abel. He did the same with Enosh and Enoch. Do not think that in himself, a deadened person, Enoch was able to walk with God for three hundred years (Gen. 5:22). This was possible only through God's dispensing of Himself into him. The same was true of Noah. Noah walked with God and had strong faith because God was dispensing Himself into him. God's dispensing of Himself began with Abel and has increased with each generation. Thus, the dispensation with Enoch was greater than with Enosh and greater with Noah than with Enoch. With Abraham it was still greater. Acts 7:2 says that the God of glory appeared to Abraham. That appearing certainly was a dispensing. Abraham could have faith in God because God had been dispensed into him.

The same thing happened to us when we heard the gospel and repented. As we were repenting and confessing our sins to God, God was dispensing Himself into us, although we might not have been conscious of God's dispensing at the time. As we recall our experience, however, we realize that this was the case. On the day I repented and made confession to God of my sinfulness, something was dispensed into my being. I wept, but inwardly I was on fire. This was God's inspiration and also His dispensation. When God comes to inspire us, He dispenses Himself into us. Nothing can change us like God's dispensation. It can transform a robber into a saint, because it dispenses the holy nature of God into him. I encourage you all to go to the Lord for thirty minutes for His dispensation. During that time, forget your problems and your environment. Simply open to Him and confess your shortcomings and wrongdoings. The more you confess to Him, the more the way will be open for Him to dispense Himself into you.

No matter what term we use—dispensing, inspiring, transfusing, or infusing—the experience is the same. I do not care for terminology; I care for the divine element being imparted into you. We need God to get into us. We need the element of God to be wrought into our being. This is the meaning of dispensation.

There is a shortage of this dispensation of God into man among most Christians today. Many teach about the seven dispensations but never tell people that a dispensation denotes God's dispensing of His life and nature into His chosen people. Our burden today is not to teach doctrine; it is to dispense God's life and nature into His people. Please do not bring to this ministry your opinions or concepts. If you do, you will be wasting your time. We are not interested in arguing doctrinal points or concepts. Our burden is to transfuse God into you. You may know a great deal of doctrine but be very short of the divine element. What you need is the dispensing of the element of God into your being. I was with the Brethren for years and eventually became bored with their disputes over doctrine. We may not be short of doctrine, but we are short of the divine element. God's dispensation is to impart His very element into us.

THE ULTIMATE DISPENSATION

We have seen that God dispensed Himself into Abel, Enosh, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham. He had an even greater dispensation with Moses and, of course, with the

Lord Jesus. The dispensing continues in the New Testament Epistles. It may surprise you to know that God's dispensation at the present time is even greater than it was at the time of the Apostle Paul. I doubt that when Paul was on earth there was a congregation who had the privilege of hearing the things that you are hearing today. Today there is a deeper, higher, and wider dispensation of the grace of God. This dispensation will continue through the millennium until the fullness of the times. The dispensation of the fullness of the times will be the highest and the broadest. This dispensation will be in eternity, as revealed in Revelation 21 and 22.

In these chapters we have a new environment, the new heaven and the new earth with the New Jerusalem. Revelation 21:1 says, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and the sea is no more." In the Bible the sea signifies death. For there to be no more sea means that there will be no trace of death. By that time death will have been swallowed up. At the end of the millennium, death, the last enemy, will be abolished and cast into the lake of fire. In place of death, there will be a new environment, a new sphere, a new circumference, in the center of which will be the New Jerusalem.

If you read the book of Revelation carefully, you will see that the New Jerusalem is actually a great mountain with a height of twelve thousand stadia, more than thirteen hundred miles. At the top of the mountain there is the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 22:1). Out of the throne flows the river of water of life; it flows down the mountain and reaches the twelve gates of the city. The water of life is for drinking, for the life supply, not for bathing nor for baptizing. In the water of life grows the tree of life (Rev. 22:2). This indicates that when you drink the water of life, you eat the tree of life. Therefore, when you drink the water, you receive the life supply. Here we see the ultimate, the consummate, dispensation: the dispensing of the Triune God into the whole city of New Jerusalem. This will cause the city to be filled, saturated, permeated, and soaked with the water of life. This is the highest dispensation purposed by God for the fullness of the times.

THE MINIATURE IN THE CHURCH LIFE

We enjoy a miniature of this consummate dispensation in the church life today. In the church we have the flow of life, we drink the water of life, and we eat the tree of life. This is God's dispensation in the church life. However, it is not the highest dispensation, the dispensation of the fullness of times. As I enjoy the living water in the church, I am awaiting the ultimate dispensation. We shall all be in this consummate dispensation, and we shall be fully saturated with the Triune God.

God on the throne refers to the Father, the Lamb refers to the Son, and the river of water of life refers to the Spirit. John 7 reveals clearly that the river of life denotes the Spirit. Thus, in Revelation 22 we have God the Father, God the Son as the redeeming One, and God the Spirit flowing with God the Son as the tree of life to be our life supply. This is the dispensation of the Triune God, the top dispensation, the dispensation of the fullness of the times.

This dispensation began with Abel and has been increasing throughout the ages until it eventually will reach the dispensation of the fullness of times. We are

getting close to that dispensation. If we realize this, we shall be beside ourselves with joy. Not even the Apostle Paul was as close to the ultimate dispensation as we are. Hallelujah, we all shall share in the consummate dispensation! In the Lord's recovery we have in the church life a miniature of that coming dispensation. How wonderful! This is why we enjoy singing these lines from a hymn in the supplement:

Drink! A river pure and clear that's flowing from the throne;
Eat! The Tree of Life with fruits abundant, richly grown;
Look! No need of lamp nor sun nor moon to keep it bright, for
Here there is no night!

Oh, in the church life we drink the water of life and eat of the tree of life! By eating and drinking we become saturated with God's very life through His dispensation. The more life that is dispensed into us, the higher we rise up. This is the heading up in Christ.

THE LIGHT OF LIFE KEEPING EVERYTHING IN ORDER

Where life is, there is light also. John 1:4 says, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." This light is the light of life (John 8:12). In Revelation 21 we have both life and light. Because the New Jerusalem is saturated with light, it has no need for the light of the sun. Revelation 21:23 says, "And the city has no need of the sun nor of the moon that they should shine in it, for the glory of God illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb." In the New Jerusalem we shall have the glory of the Triune God as our shining light. In the new heaven and new earth with the New Jerusalem there will be no night, no death, and no darkness. Instead, there will be life and light. This will cause everything to rise up and be in good order.

Wherever there is light, things are kept in order. Suppose there were no lights in the city of Los Angeles. What darkness and confusion there would be! Life regulates, and light controls. In the church life we do not have regulations, but we do have the regulating life and the controlling light. When the church is full of life, it is also full of light. Then everyone in the church is regulated by the inward life, not by outward regulations; and everyone is controlled and kept in order by the light of life. Here in life and in light, we are headed up. In Revelation 21 we see the Head, the Body surrounding the Head, and all the nations walking in the light of the city (Rev. 21:24). This will cause the new heaven and the new earth to be a bright sphere. Therefore, in the new heaven and the new earth with the New Jerusalem as the center, all things will be headed up in Christ. This will be the fulfillment of the heading up of all things in Christ spoken of in Ephesians 1:10.

In order for this to take place, we need the dispensation of life. The life that is dispensed into us eventually becomes the light of men. In the dispensation of the fullness of the times, all the nations will walk in the light of the city. This means that there will be no death, no darkness, no corruption, and no confusion. Instead, everything will be in good order, headed up under Christ, the unique Head, to express the Triune God in eternity. This heading up of all things will be an eternal

expression of the Triune God. Today's church life is a foretaste of this. It is a miniature of the new heaven, the new earth, and the New Jerusalem. As those in the miniature, we are enjoying the dispensation of life with light, and we are being headed up in Christ. (*Life-study of Ephesians*, pp. 90-96)