

**THE ONE NEW MAN  
FULFILLING GOD'S PURPOSE IN CREATING MAN**

(Saturday—Second Morning Session)

Message Eight

**Carrying Out the Stewardship of God  
for the One New Man**

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:25; Eph. 3:2, 9; 1 Cor. 4:1-2; 9:16-17; 1 Pet. 4:10

**I. In order to carry out His economy, God must have stewards to serve, minister, manage, and execute His economy—1 Cor. 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:10:**

- A. The Greek word for *steward* is of the same root as the word for *economy* in 1 Timothy 1:4 and Ephesians 1:10:
  - 1. It means “a dispensing steward,” “a household administrator, who dispenses the household supply to its members.”
  - 2. A steward is a dispenser, one who dispenses the divine life supply to God's children—Luke 12:42; 16:1; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 4:10:
    - a. The apostles were appointed by the Lord to be such stewards.
    - b. The dispensing service, the stewardship, is the ministry of the apostles.
- B. In God's economy revealed in the New Testament, there are mainly two mysteries—Rom. 16:25; Rev. 10:7:
  - 1. The first mystery, revealed in the book of Colossians, is Christ as the mystery of God—2:2.
  - 2. The second mystery, revealed in the book of Ephesians and explained in it, is the church as the mystery of Christ—3:4.
- C. In the dispensing ministry it is most important that stewards be found faithful—1 Cor. 4:2; 7:25; Luke 12:42; Matt. 24:45; 25:21; Luke 16:10-12; 19:17; Eph. 6:21; Col. 1:7; 4:7, 9; 1 Tim. 1:12; 3:11; 2 Tim. 2:2; 1 Pet. 5:12; Rev. 2:10, 13; 17:14.

**II. In the New Testament economy of God, there is the desperate need for the stewardship of God—1 Tim. 1:4; Col. 1:25:**

- A. The stewardship is God's divine arrangement to carry out His New Testament economy—Eph. 3:2; 1 Cor. 9:17.
- B. The economy of God has become the stewardship of God given to all believers—Eph. 3:2, 9:
  - 1. In Ephesians 3 Paul uses the Greek word *oikonomia* with two denotations:
    - a. In relation to God, *oikonomia* denotes God's economy—v. 9.
    - b. In relation to us, *oikonomia* denotes the stewardship—v. 2.
    - c. The stewardship of God is according to the economy of God; with God it is a matter of economy, and with us it is a matter of stewardship.
  - 2. The stewardship of grace is the dispensing of the riches of Christ into our being so that we may grow and become the church—v. 8.
- C. The central point of the whole Bible is the desire of God's heart to dispense Himself into man—Phil. 2:13; Eph. 1:5, 9; 3:17a:
  - 1. God's economy is to carry out the dispensing of Himself into man—v. 9.

2. The one new man, who can fulfill God's eternal purpose, receives God's continual and eternal dispensing—2:15; 4:24; 3:17a:
  - a. Like a steady stream, God dispenses Himself little by little into those who are parts of the new man—Rev. 22:1.
  - b. God's continual, steady, and eternal dispensing constitutes us, coordinates us, and builds us up together.
- D. Paul's stewardship was to complete the word of God in order to dispense Christ with all His riches into the churches—Col. 1:25; 1 Cor. 4:1-2:
  1. Although Paul was used in the completion of the divine revelation centuries ago, there is still the need for its completion in a practical way today:
    - a. Satan, the enemy of God, is seeking to nullify the completion of the word of God.
    - b. It is the subtlety of the enemy to veil the word, which was completed through Paul—2 Cor. 4:3-4.
    - c. Without the completion of the word of God, God's purpose cannot be fulfilled, and Christ cannot obtain His bride or come with His kingdom.
  2. What we are ministering today is the completion of the divine revelation given to Paul.
  3. In the Lord's recovery we need more stewards who are able to complete the word of God—2 Tim. 2:2.

### **III. The stewardship of God is the stewardship of grace—Eph. 3:2:**

- A. The stewardship of grace is the economy of grace to carry out God's New Testament economy—v. 2.
- B. Grace is God Himself in Christ as the Spirit given to us, gained by us, and enjoyed by us—John 1:17; Acts 20:24; Eph. 3:2:
  1. The grace given to us in Christ was bestowed on us before the world began—2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 2:11.
  2. God, who was in the beginning, became flesh in time as grace for man to receive, possess, and enjoy, making God contactable, touchable, receivable, experienceable, enterable, and enjoyable—John 1:1, 14, 16-17.
  3. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is the bountiful supply of the Triune God (who is embodied in the Son and realized as the life-giving Spirit) enjoyed by us through the exercise of our human spirit—Gal. 6:18.
  4. Grace is the Divine Trinity transmitted into us for our enjoyment, the manifestation of the Triune God in His embodiment in three aspects—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—2 Cor. 13:14; Num. 6:22-27; Psa. 36:8-9:
    - a. The grace of the Lord is the Lord Himself as life to us for our enjoyment (John 1:17; 1 Cor. 15:10), the love of God is God Himself (1 John 4:8, 16) as the source of the grace of the Lord, and the fellowship of the Spirit is the Spirit Himself as the transmission of the grace of the Lord with the love of God for our participation—2 Cor. 13:14.
    - b. In 2 Corinthians 13:14 the grace of the Lord is mentioned first because this book is on the grace of Christ—1:12; 4:15; 6:1; 8:1, 9; 9:8, 14; 12:9.
    - c. The Holy Spirit as the circulation, the transmission, of the grace of Christ with the love of the Father is the supply in our Christian life and church life.

5. Day by day a marvelous divine transmission should be taking place: God is supplying the Spirit of grace bountifully, and we should be receiving and dispensing the Spirit of grace continually—John 1:16; Heb. 10:29b; Gal. 3:2-5; Eph. 3:2; 4:29.
  - C. The gospel of the grace of God is the stewardship of grace to dispense God into people for their enjoyment; Paul, in his ministry, solemnly testified of the gospel of the grace of God to minister God into people—3:1-2; Acts 20:24.
  - D. The Christian living is the living of grace, the experience of grace, so that we may carry out our stewardship of grace, the dispensing of grace—2 Cor. 12:9; 2 Tim. 4:22; Eph. 3:2.
  - E. The practical life and building up of the Body of Christ comes forth out of the inward enjoyment of Christ as the grace of God—1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 13:14.
- IV. Those who bear responsibility in the churches need to share in the stewardship of God—Titus 1:7, 9:**
- A. The elders should take the lead to dispense the riches of Christ into others.
  - B. All those who take the lead in the Lord’s recovery and bear the responsibility for the care of the churches need to realize that they have a part in such a divine stewardship.
- V. Because Paul, a faithful steward in God’s economy, was conscious of the one new man, what was in his heart was not simply a particular local church or a certain saint but the universal one new man—1 Cor. 4:1-2; 9:16-17; Col. 3:10-11; 4:7-17:**
- A. “If we are conscious of the one new man, we should no longer think that the churches in our country have nothing to do with the churches in other nations. Instead, we shall realize that all the churches are the one new man today. May we look to the Lord that we may not be sectarian in any way. We would not be sectarian either individually as believers or corporately as local churches. On the contrary, all of us, all the saints in all the churches, are just one new man” (*Life-study of Colossians*, p. 262).
  - B. “We also should rejoice that on earth today there is another man, the new man, that includes all the believers. This new man, who is born through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is now spreading and growing throughout the earth. Praise the Lord that we are part of this new man!” (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1982*, vol. 2, “The Fulfillment of the Tabernacle and the Offerings in the Writings of John,” p. 444).

**Excerpts from the Ministry:**

**THE STEWARDSHIP OF GOD**

In Colossians 1:25 Paul says that he “became a minister according to the stewardship of God.” For the sake of the full expression of God, there is the need for the stewardship of God.

It is important to understand accurately the meaning of *stewardship*. The Greek word rendered “stewardship” here, *oikonomia*, is the same word rendered “economy” in Ephesians 1:10 and 3:9. The word also appears in Ephesians 3:2, where Paul speaks of the stewardship of grace which had been given to him. According to ancient usage, *oikonomia* denoted

“a stewardship,” “a dispensation,” or “an administration.” At the time of Paul, many rich families had stewards whose responsibility was to distribute food and other supplies to members of the household. Our Father has a great family, a divine household. Because our Father has such vast riches, there is the need in His household for many stewards to dispense these riches to His children. This dispensing is the stewardship. Hence, a stewardship is a dispensation.

The word *dispensation* here does not denote an age or means by which God deals with people; it refers to God’s dispensing of His riches into His chosen ones. This dispensation is the stewardship with the dispensing ministry of the ministers of God. This ministry of dispensing is also God’s administration. Today God administrates by dispensing Himself into us. This stewardship, this dispensation, this administration, is God’s economy. In the New Testament economy of God there is the desperate need of the stewardship of God.

We have pointed out that stewardship refers to the dispensation of wealth in a royal or upper-class family. God’s royal family is rich in Christ. According to the Epistle to the Colossians, God’s family is especially rich in Christ as the all-inclusive and preeminent One, as the One who is the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation, and the Firstborn from the dead. The riches of such a Christ, who is the full expression of the Triune God, need to be dispensed into the members of God’s family. This service of dispensing, which in Colossians 1:25 is called the stewardship of God, was the work of the apostle Paul. It also should be our work today.

Not many ministers or workers in today’s Christianity carry out the stewardship of God. This means that not many are actually dispensing the riches of Christ into the members of God’s royal family. The stewardship of God is needed for this rich, all-inclusive, preeminent Christ to be dispensed into the members of His Body.

This stewardship is the ministry in the New Testament. The New Testament ministry is the dispensing of the unsearchable riches of the all-inclusive Christ into the members of God’s family. The apostle Paul dispensed the riches of Christ into the saints. This is what we are doing in the ministry today.

The stewardship of God is according to the economy of God. With God it is a matter of economy; with us it is a matter of stewardship. All the saints, no matter how insignificant they may seem to be, have a ministry according to God’s economy. This means that every saint can dispense the riches of Christ into others.

The desire of God’s heart is to dispense Himself into man. This is the central point of the whole Bible. God’s economy is to carry out the dispensing of Himself into man. We share in this economy through our stewardship, our ministry of dispensing the riches of Christ. After the riches of Christ have been dispensed into us, we need to take up the burden to dispense them into others. With God these riches are His economy; with us they are the stewardship; and when they are dispensed by us into others, they become God’s dispensation. When God’s economy reaches us, it becomes our stewardship. When we carry out our stewardship by dispensing Christ into others, it becomes the dispensation of God into them. Hence, we have the economy, the stewardship, and the dispensation.

Those who bear responsibility in the local churches need to share in the stewardship of God. This means that the elders should be those who take the lead to dispense the riches of Christ into others. Although Christ is all-inclusive and preeminent, there is still the need for Him to be dispensed into the members of God’s family. This dispensation takes place through the stewardship. Hence, between the unsearchably rich Christ and the members of His Body, there is the need of the stewardship. All those who take the lead in the Lord’s recovery and have responsibility for the care of the churches need to realize that they have a part in such

a divine stewardship. We are not here to carry on an ordinary Christian work. For instance, we are not concerned merely with teaching the Bible in an outward way. Rather, we desire to serve the riches of Christ to all the members of God's family. In our conversation with one another, we need to minister the riches of Christ. Even when we are invited to the homes of the saints for dinner, we need to dispense the riches of Christ. This is the stewardship of God.

Every member of the Body of Christ has a part in this stewardship. In Ephesians 3:8 Paul refers to himself as "less than the least of all saints." This indicates that Paul was even smaller than we are. If Paul could be a steward, then we also can be stewards and dispense the riches of Christ into others. In preaching the gospel, for example, we should not be concerned merely with winning souls. Rather, we should preach the gospel to carry out the stewardship of dispensing the riches of Christ into others. Day by day we need to fulfill our stewardship by dispensing the Triune God into man. Praise the Lord that we all have a share in this stewardship! We all have the privilege of dispensing the unsearchable riches of Christ into others. Therefore, we should not merely preach the gospel or teach the Bible; we should also impart the riches of Christ to others.

We have many opportunities to minister the riches of Christ to the saints. Suppose we are helping a family to move. We should not simply move the furniture, but we should supply the riches of Christ to the members of the family, especially to the sister. If we help in the moving without dispensing the riches of Christ, we may actually make things difficult for others. Our intention in helping a family move their belongings should be to dispense the riches of Christ. All our activity with respect to such a service should be with Christ.

Another opportunity to minister the riches of Christ to others is in giving or receiving hospitality. Both the hosts and the guests should minister the riches of Christ.

May the Lord open our eyes to see that we all have part in the stewardship of God. In every aspect of the practical church life, even in such things as ushering and cleaning the meeting hall, we need to dispense Christ into others. Firstly, we need to be filled with Christ and then minister the riches of Christ to others. This is our stewardship.

#### **THE STEWARD'S SUFFERINGS**

In Colossians 1:24 Paul says, "I now rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His Body, which is the church." The afflictions of Christ are of two categories: those for accomplishing redemption, which have been completed by Christ Himself; and those for producing and building the church, which need to be filled up by the apostles and the believers.

The fact that Paul mentions the afflictions of Christ in connection with the stewardship of God indicates that the stewardship can be carried out only through suffering. If we desire to share in the stewardship of God, we must be prepared to suffer. All those who participate in the service of the church or in the ministry must be ready to partake of the afflictions of a steward. This means that we must be willing to pay whatever price is necessary to fulfill our stewardship.

We have pointed out that when we give or receive hospitality, we need to carry out our stewardship by dispensing the riches of Christ into others. However, to provide hospitality may involve a kind of suffering. In like manner, to be the guest in someone's home also may be a cause of suffering. I have been a guest in the homes of many saints. The hosts have invariably taken care of me in a marvelous way, doing everything necessary to meet my needs. Nevertheless, I suffered simply because I was not in my own home. No matter how adequate the hospitality may be, I am always glad to be back home. However, I am happy to testify that many have spoken of the nourishment, edification, and strengthening they

have received through sharing in hospitality, as either a host or a guest. This indicates that to carry out the stewardship of God by dispensing the riches of Christ into the members of God's royal family is worth any kind of suffering, great or small. As we shall point out in the following message, the sufferings in which we share are for the building up of the Body of Christ. They are in no way related to the accomplishment of redemption.

## **THE STEWARD BEING A MINISTER**

### **Of the Church**

Speaking of the Body of Christ, the church, Paul says in 1:25, "Of which I became a minister according to the stewardship of God, which was given to me for you, to complete the word of God." Here Paul says that, as a steward, he became a minister of the church.

### **To Complete the Word of God**

In 1:25 Paul also speaks of completing the word of God. The word of God is the divine revelation, which was not completed until the New Testament was written. In the New Testament the apostles, especially the apostle Paul, completed the word of God in the mystery of God, which is Christ, and in the mystery of Christ, which is the church, to give us a full revelation of God's economy. According to 1:26, the word of God is the "mystery which has been hidden from the ages and from the generations but now has been manifested to His saints." This hidden mystery is related to Christ and the church, the Head and the Body. The unveiling of this mystery through the apostle Paul is a major part of the completion of the word of God as the divine revelation.

*From the ages* means from eternity, and *from the generations* means from the times. The mystery concerning Christ and the church was hidden from eternity and from all the times until the New Testament age, when it is being manifested to the saints, including all of us, the believers in Christ.

Prior to the time of Paul, the divine revelation had not been completed. Before Paul came forth to minister, God's revelation had already been given in the Old Testament. Furthermore, God had revealed Himself through the events recorded in the Gospels and in part of the Acts. However, it was necessary for Paul to write a number of Epistles concerning Christ as the mystery of God and concerning the church as the mystery of Christ in order for the divine revelation to be complete. This completion of the divine revelation is seen especially in four of his Epistles: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians.

Although the divine revelation was completed through the apostles, especially through Paul, in a practical sense it also needs to be completed through us today. This means that as we contact people, we must progressively, continually, and gradually preach the word in full. To preach the word in full, or to fully preach the word, is to complete the word. Among so many Christians today there is surely a great need for such a completing of the word. Recently, a magazine stated that in the United States there are fifty million regenerated Christians. How many of them know God's purpose in saving them? Very few. In Christianity the word of God has been preached, but it has not been preached in full. The preaching of today's Christianity has not completed the word of God. Hence, there is an urgent need for this completion.

We have pointed out that the word of God which needs completion is the mystery spoken of in 1:26. Many Christians preach the word of God, but very few tell people what God's mystery is. The word of God preached in the full gospel is not related to escaping hell and going to heaven; neither is it related to peace, joy, and a happy life. The word that needs to be completed is "the mystery which has been hidden from the ages and from the generations." This

mystery is concealed, hidden. If it were not hidden, it would no longer be a mystery. The mystery concealed from ages and generations is the word of God that must now be completed through the preaching of the saints. This concealed mystery, which has been made manifest to God's saints, is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (v. 27). Although I have heard the preaching of the gospel for years, I have rarely heard a message saying that when someone believes in Jesus Christ, Christ will not only save him but also come into his spirit and remain there as his life. Most of the preaching in today's Christianity is not like this. Thus, there is the need for the completion of the word of God.

If we do not minister the riches of Christ to others, their knowledge of the divine revelation will be lacking. As far as the revelation itself is concerned, there is no lack. Everything was completed centuries ago. However, in practice, there may still be a lack, especially if we do not fulfill our part of the stewardship of God. We all need to fulfill our responsibility to complete the word of God.

The new ones in the Lord's recovery need the completion of the word of God. For example, a new one may firmly believe that Christ is God and the Creator. However, he may not realize the all-inclusiveness of Christ and experience Him as such an all-inclusive One. He may not realize that, as a man, Christ is also a creature. When he hears about this aspect of Christ, he may be troubled. This indicates that someone needs to complete the word of God to him in this matter and point out that, although Christ is God, He is still a man. He is all-inclusive. In 1 Timothy 2:5 Paul speaks of the man Christ Jesus. Furthermore, after the ascension of Christ, Stephen saw the Son of Man in the heavens (Acts 7:56). Surely a man is a creature with flesh and bones. After His resurrection, the Lord showed His disciples that He had a body of flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). Since the resurrected Christ is still a man with such a body, it is correct to say that He is a creature. Nevertheless, due to the influence of religious tradition, many believers may be reluctant to make such a statement about Christ. To them, such a teaching may be heretical. We need to help them take the pure Word of God and believe whatever it says. This means that we need to help them have the completion of the word of God.

In the Lord's recovery we need more stewards who are able to complete the word of God. We all must bear the burden for this. We need to spend more time in the Lord's presence so that He may become our portion for our enjoyment and so that we may have the riches of Christ to minister to others. In this way we shall become those who complete the word of God. Then through our ministry other believers will be nourished, strengthened, confirmed, and built up.

The Body is built up as all the members carry out the stewardship of ministering the riches of Christ. May there be such a mutual stewardship among us. You minister the riches of Christ to others, and they minister Christ to you. If this is our situation, we all shall be nourished and enjoy Christ more than ever. Then through the stewardship of dispensing the riches of Christ, the church will be built up in a practical way. (*Life-study of Colossians*, pp. 89-96)