

SERVICE FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH

(Lord's Day—Second Morning Session)

Message Eight

A Life-ministering Service

Scripture Reading: 1 John 1:1-2; 2:25; 5:11-16

- I. As believers in Christ and children of God, we not only have eternal life and may experience eternal life, but we can minister this life to other members of the Body of Christ—1 John 5:11-16.**
- II. To minister life is to impart life; when we have a surplus of life, we can minister from this supply to others—1:1-2; 2:25; 5:11-13, 16.**
- III. The service for the building up of the house of God is a life-ministering service—a service of supplying others with the divine life—2 Cor. 4:12:**
 - A. The church service is to supply life, for it is a service of life—Rom. 8:2, 6, 10-11:
 1. If we merely handle business affairs or manage matters but do not supply others with the life of God, our service is a failure and is vain.
 2. No matter what our service may be, we should be clear that our service is a means to supply life to others—1 John 5:16; 2 Cor. 4:12.
 3. If the church were only for taking care of matters, not supplying life, the church would lose its nature and would be a society.
 4. We must serve in such a way that others may receive the supply of life; we need to be deeply impressed with this point and look to the Lord so that our service becomes an outlet for His life—John 10:10; 11:25; 1 John 1:2.
 - B. The life that we supply to others is in the Spirit, the Spirit is mingled with our spirit, and the life of God is located, abides, and grows in the mingled spirit—1 Cor. 15:45b; 6:17; Rom. 8:4:
 1. If we would supply the saints with life, we must release our spirit, for the divine life is in our mingled spirit—7:6; 1:9.
 2. If our spirit cannot be released, the divine life has no way to be released.
 - C. We need to see the distinction between life and moral character—7:21-23; 8:2, 11:
 1. Christians speak of being good, which involves moral character, good deeds, and good behavior, not of the divine life in the Word of God—John 1:4.
 2. In order not to hinder others from receiving the divine life, we must do good deeds and have good moral character; however, good deeds and moral character do not necessarily mean that the life of God is expressed through us:
 - a. We may be irreproachable and commendable in our service yet express merely good character, perfection, and human virtues, but these are not the life of God.
 - b. Whenever others touch us rather than Christ in us, they touch death and not life.
- IV. As serving ones, we need to be deeply impressed with the necessity of being able to minister life—1 John 5:11-16:**

- A. The service that is from God requires us to minister life to others—2 Cor. 4:1, 12:
 - 1. The service that God wants from us does not focus on doing a work but on ministering life—1 John 5:16:
 - a. The center and focus of the service of the saints and of the church are not to build up an enterprise or work but to minister life.
 - b. God's desire is that the emphasis of our service be on ministering life instead of producing a work or enterprise—2:25; 5:11-13.
 - 2. The only standard of measurement is how much the church has ministered God's life to others and how much element of the divine life has entered into others through the church's service—2 Cor. 4:12.
 - B. Bearing fruit is to minister life, that is, to release the supply of the vine's life—John 15:4-5.
 - C. In order to minister life to others, we need to be joined to Christ, abide in Christ, and give Him the ground in us to fill us so that His life, His nature, His likes, and His inclination become our life, our nature, our likes, and our inclination; in our service His all becomes our all—1 John 2:27; Eph. 3:16-17.
 - D. May God have mercy on us that all our service and work would be from Him, would come out of our fellowship with Him, and would be able to overflow with Him and His life as a supply to others—cf. Psa. 36:8-9.
 - E. We must always remember that the service of the church is God's flowing out to supply others with the divine life—John 7:37-39.
- V. To minister is to have the outflow of life—19:34; 7:37-39:**
- A. Life is the content of God and the flowing out of God; God's content is God's being, and God's flowing out is the impartation of Himself as life to us—Eph. 4:18; Rev. 22:1.
 - B. In order for life to be released from our spirit, our outer man must be dealt with and broken—2 Cor. 4:16; Heb. 4:12:
 - 1. If our outer man is not broken, there cannot be a pure flow of the divine life.
 - 2. If we want the divine life to be released from within us, we must be subdued in our soul and let our spirit dominate and rule over every matter; then the Lord's life will be able to flow out—Eph. 3:16-17.
 - C. Having the outflow of life requires that we be with Christ in His life-releasing death; this is to be identified with the smitten Christ, typified by the smitten rock—John 19:34; Exo. 17:6:
 - 1. When we identify ourselves with the smitten Christ, that is, when we are one with Him as the smitten Christ, the divine life as the living water flows out of us—v. 6; John 7:38; cf. Phil. 3:10.
 - 2. Our human life, our natural life, must be smitten so that the living water may flow out from within us—2 Cor. 4:10-11, 16.
 - 3. If we are one with the smitten Christ, identified with Him, we will experience the crucifixion of our natural life, and then just as Christ's divine life flowed out as living water through the smiting of His human life, we also will experience the flow of the water of life through the smiting of our natural life—vv. 10-12.

VI. If we would minister life to others, we need to be aware of the attack upon the church by death—Matt. 16:18; Rom. 5:17, 21:

- A. From Eden onwards, God's controversy with Satan has been on the issue of life and death—Gen. 3:3-4; Rom. 5:12, 17, 21; 1 Cor. 15:22.
- B. What is of God is characterized by life, and what is of Satan, by death; in the church everything that issues from God is life, and everything that issues from Satan is death—John 1:4; 10:10; 11:25; Heb. 2:14.
- C. The attack upon the church will come from death, from the gates of Hades—Matt. 16:18.
- D. Satan's greatest fear with regard to the church is her resistance to his power of death—2 Tim. 1:10.
- E. The eternal life within us can overcome death both in ourselves and in other members of the church—1 John 5:11-13, 16.
- F. We need to experience and enjoy the eternal life within us, and we need to minister this life to others by being a channel through which eternal life can flow—John 7:37-39; Phil. 1:24-25.
- G. God intends for the church to manifest the life of Christ; hence, the church must be full of life, and our service in the church must minister life—1 John 1:1-2; 2:25; 5:11-13, 16; 2 Cor. 4:12.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

SERVICE BEING THE OUTFLOW OF LIFE

Those who serve the Lord must be clear that every service should supply life. The elders should not think that their responsibility in the church is merely to handle business affairs and manage matters. The elders should not say that as long as they manage matters and handle business affairs properly, their service is adequate. The deacons should not say that their service is complete after they finish taking care of the business affairs. The church service is to supply life, for it is a service of life. If we merely handle business affairs or manage matters but do not supply others with the life of God, our service is a failure and is vain. We should never think that only those who minister the word are the ones who supply life but that the service of the elders or deacons is merely to handle business affairs and to manage matters. Such a concept is wrong and needs to be corrected.

Every service, whether preaching the gospel, giving messages, managing business affairs, or visitation, that is, whether the service is spiritual or administrative, should be a means for us to supply the life that we have received. Preaching the gospel is for the supply of life. Ministering the word is for the supply of life. Visitation is for the supply of life, and serving in the church business office is for the supply of life. Even ordinary things, such as sweeping and cleaning the windows, are a means to supply life. Apparently, there are many items in the church service, but spiritually, these many items have one purpose, which is to supply life.

Although the saints have heard the principles concerning service, I am fellowshipping concerning this again because we need to consider our service. No matter

what our service may be, we should be clear that our service is a means to supply life to others. The elders and the deacons must uphold this point.

Whether or not we are adequate in our service, our focus is on supplying life, not on accomplishing something.

The church is different from a society. The church is of life and is spiritual, but a society is like a business. In the church the point is not whether we do a good job but whether life is supplied. If the church were only for taking care of matters, not supplying life, the church would lose its nature and would be a society. The saints must uphold this point.

I am not saying that we can be sloppy in our service. When things are done incorrectly, the saints are not edified. We must serve in fear and trembling before the Lord lest our service be haphazard. However, we cannot be content with doing a service. We must serve in such a way that others may receive the supply of life. We need to be deeply impressed with this point and look to the Lord so that our service becomes an outlet for His life. We want to be delivered from mistakes, but the focus of such deliverance is not on doing a successful job but on the flowing out of life.

LIFE BEING IN THE SPIRIT

The life that we supply to others is in the Spirit. This means that the Spirit is the dwelling place of the life of God. In Romans 8:2 the Spirit is referred to as the “Spirit of life.” Since the life of God is in the Spirit, the Spirit is the Spirit of life. In addition, as children of God, we have His life in our spirit. The life of God is in the Spirit and in our spirit.

The life of God is not in human thoughts, views, or opinions. The life of God is in the Spirit and dwells in the regenerated human spirit. The divine life is in the two spirits, the Spirit mingled with our human spirit. Initially, the divine life was only in the Spirit, but now the divine life dwells also in our spirit. It is difficult for expositors to determine whether the spirit in Romans 8 refers specifically to the Spirit of God or to our human spirit, for the two spirits are mingled together. In chapter 8 the Spirit and the human spirit have become one spirit. Both the divine Spirit and the human spirit are similar in nature, for they are both spirit. The Spirit is mingled with our human spirit, and the life of God is located, abides, and grows in our mingled spirit. Hence, if we are to supply the saints with life, we must release our spirit, for the divine life is in our mingled spirit. If our spirit cannot be released, the divine life has no way to be released.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN LIFE AND MORAL CHARACTER

Let us consider what it means to supply life. Christianity speaks of being good, which involves moral character, good deeds, and good behavior. Christianity does not speak of the divine life referred to in the Word of God. The Bible says, “Death operates in us, but life in you” (2 Cor. 4:12). This means that when the death of Christ operates in us, life operates in others. This life is not moral character or behavior; rather, it is the life of God. This is a great distinction.

Those who serve God should indeed have good moral character, have good behavior, and do good deeds; otherwise, they will hinder others from receiving the divine life. In order not to hinder others from receiving the supply of life, we must do good deeds and have good moral character. However, good deeds and good moral character do not necessarily mean that the life of God is expressed through us. We may be irreproachable and commendable in our service yet express merely good character, perfection, and human virtues, but these are not the life of God.

Few among God's children can distinguish between life and good behavior. If a brother supplies others with copper, they will receive copper. If he supplies them with gold, they will receive gold. If we supply the saints with life, God's children will have a taste for life. People cannot have a taste for something that they have not seen. Christians do not have a taste for life because the element of life is lacking in Christianity. What is expressed in Christianity is good moral character and good behavior. We need to understand that the moral character and good behavior spoken of in the Bible are none other than the life of God being expressed through man. Our service depends on our knowing what is life and what is the outflow of life. (*The Service for Building Up the House of God*, pp. 39-42)

THE NECESSITY OF BEING ABLE TO MINISTER LIFE

The service that is from God requires us to have fellowship with God and minister life to others. The service that God wants from us does not focus on doing a work but on ministering life. The center and goal of the service of the saints and of the church are not to build up an enterprise or a work but to minister God's life. It does not matter what profession the worldly people are in—farming, business, industry, education; all emphasize having a successful enterprise. If their enterprise is successful, then they have reached their goal. However, the service of the church and of the saints is not like this! The service of the church and of the saints is nothing and worthless in God's eyes if all we have done is successfully finish our work, having built up either a big or a small enterprise. God's desire is that the emphasis of our service be on ministering God's life instead of producing a work or enterprise.

For the sake of the new believers, we will use words that are easily understood to explain this. For example, the church is here serving God, but the emphasis is not on how many meeting halls are built, how many enterprises are established, how many activities are carried out, how much work is done, or how many people are brought in. These are not the center and goal of the church service. To use these items to measure and judge the church service is a huge mistake. How weighty the church service is, how high it is, how much value it has, and how acceptable it is in God's eyes—all these are not measured by the aforementioned items as the standard, such as the number of people, the material things, the size of the enterprise, and the amount of work. Rather, the only standard of measurement is how much the church has ministered God's life to others and how much element of the divine life has entered into people through the church's help and service.

God measures the work and service of the church according to one point: how much supply of spiritual life the church has given people and how much increase of

the element of God's life people have received when they were helped by the church. God uses only this standard to measure the church's service. Even if we were to bring all the people in this locality into the church, convert all the houses into meeting halls, and stir up so many people to zealously preach the gospel, in God's eyes it would all be empty and worthless unless these people have the divine life, are filled with some of the divine element, have received enough of God, and have sufficient knowledge of God. God absolutely does not measure our service and work by anything apart from Himself. He measures our service and work only by how much of His element people have gained and been filled with inwardly. It is not that our service and our work are weighty before God if we build huge meeting halls, do things in an orderly way, or have large numbers of people. There is not such a thing! The weight of our service and work does not depend on the number of people, things, and activities. Instead, it depends on the amount of God's life people have touched, gained, been filled with, and experienced. It is not that our service, our work, is weighty if we gain a few more people, do a few more activities, and obtain a few more things. We can never use these as the standard for measuring our service and work. We must see how much our service and work have ministered the divine life to others. Some do not have the divine life yet, but after our contact with them and our help to them, God's life gets into them. Others have a little of God's life but are very immature and have only a shallow knowledge of God, but after our contact and fellowship with them, they have a deeper desire for God inwardly, they pursue God more deeply, and they gain more of His life.

Our service and work should only minister God's life to people and should only use God's life to attract people. When people come to our meetings, we should give them the sense that they have touched the spirit, met God, and received the supply of life. We should not let them feel that they have touched some other good things besides these items. Perhaps our meeting halls are primitive with only a small number in the meetings, but once a person enters our meetings, he senses the presence of God and touches God. When a person walks into this kind of meeting, he has an indescribable sensation that his darkness has turned into light, that he has found a way through his difficulties, that his weaknesses have been made strong, and that he has been uplifted from his depression.

The corporate service of the church should be like this, as should our individual service. When people contact us, even just for a moment, they should gain the help of life inwardly. It is as if we have something that comes out from within us and touches them inwardly to enliven them. They were in darkness inwardly, but after contacting us for a moment, they are enlightened. In the past they were lacking in their inward knowledge of the life of God, but after contacting us for a moment their knowledge improves and increases. We bring them into the Lord and enable them to receive the supply of life. The help that they receive from us is not material, social, emotional, or doctrinal. Rather, it is spiritual, of life, from God, and in Christ. What they obtain from us in life in this way is truly God Himself and the divine life.

In our work we should not use other things to attract people. We should not use social contacts, money, or anything apart from God, because all these things belong

to death. In our work we should attract people only with God and minister His life to them. Only this kind of service is spiritual, is from God, and is able to touch God.

In John 15 the Lord said that He is the vine and we are the branches. Apart from the vine, the branches can do nothing. The branches on the vine are not there to be its material; they are there to bear fruit. Bearing fruit is to minister life, that is, to release the supply of the vine's life. This is our function with respect to the Lord. Today the Lord does not need people to be His material, nor does He need human talent. He only needs people to abide in Him, to be filled with Him, and to release the supply of His life. This is truly like the branches of the vine being filled with the sap of the vine and releasing the supply of the vine's life. The branches of the vine do not know how to do anything but abide in the vine and allow its life to be ministered and to flow out through them.

This is the service of the church, which is not a great work or large enterprise with a huge accomplishment but the ministering and flowing out of the life of Christ. It requires us to be joined to Christ, to abide in Christ, and to give Him the ground in us to fill us, so that His life, His nature, His likes, and His inclination can become our life, our nature, our likes, and our inclination. In other words, His all becomes our all. When we abide in Him, live in Him, and fellowship with Him like this, we allow Him to pass through us and flow out from us. What flows out from us is His life, the life of the vine. This will minister life to others, and it will give them life. When people touch this, they touch Christ and the life of the vine. This is the service of the church.

George Müller, who founded an orphanage in England, was such a person living in God to serve God. Regrettably, however, some of the biographies written about him place too much emphasis on the success of his enterprise while neglecting the matters of his spiritual life, such as his abiding in God and living before Him. When I read his journal, I did not feel that he was operating a large business. I only felt that I was touching a person who lived before God, fellowshiped with God, allowed God to rule in him, allowed God to have a place in him, and was filled with God inwardly. Every time I read his journal, I was brought before God and given the sense of God's presence. This made me feel that Müller was one who lived in the light and who lived before God. You touch God when you read his writings. This is the life of George Müller; it is not a life that emphasized a successful enterprise but a life that knew God and flowed out His divine life.

We must always remember that the service of the church is God's flowing out to supply others with the divine life. It is not a matter of how many things we accomplish or how many works we do. Instead, it is a matter of how much God we flow out and how much of God's life we minister to others. This is where all the issues lie! God never uses other things to judge our work. He only uses His life to judge our work. The more our work has God Himself and the element of His life, the weightier and more valuable it is. If we do not have this, then our work is empty and a failure.

May God truly have mercy on us that all our service and work would be from Him, would come out of our fellowship with Him, and would be able to overflow with Him and His life as a supply to others. (*The Spirit and Service in Spirit*, pp. 111-115)