

# VITAL FACTORS FOR THE RECOVERY OF THE CHURCH LIFE

(Saturday—First Morning Session)

## Message Four

### **The Factor of Authority in the Body of Christ and in the Local Churches**

Scripture Reading: Rom. 9:23; Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:22-23; Heb. 4:16; Rev. 4:2; 22:1-2

#### **I. God is the supreme authority; He has all authority—Rom. 9:21-22:**

- A. God's authority is actually God Himself; authority issues out from God's own being—Rev. 22:1.
- B. All authority—spiritual, positional, and governmental—derives from God—2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10; John 19:10-11; Gen. 9:6.
- C. Knowing authority is an inward revelation rather than an outward teaching—Acts 22:6-16.
- D. The Lord Jesus was a man under authority; He humbled Himself, did the Father's will, and was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross—Matt. 8:9; John 4:34; 6:38; Phil. 2:7-8.
- E. In His divinity, as the only begotten Son of God, the Lord had authority over all, but in His humanity, as the Son of Man and the King of the heavenly kingdom, all authority in heaven and on earth was given to Him after His resurrection—Matt. 28:18.
- F. Now as the Ruler of the kings of the earth, the God-exalted Jesus is the Ruler over all the ones who are in power; He is the chief Ruler in the divine government for the fulfillment of God's eternal plan—Acts 2:23, 36; 5:31; Rev. 1:5.
- G. In Christ's ascension God made Him the unique Head of the Body, the church, and inaugurated Him into the headship of the universe; the Head of the whole universe is Jesus—Col. 1:18; Acts 2:36; Eph. 1:22-23.

#### **II. Christ is both the Head corporately of the Body, the church, and individually of all the believers; He is the Head directly of every one of us, and we all are under His authority—Col. 1:18; 1 Cor. 11:3:**

- A. For Christ to be the Head is for Him to have all the authority in the Body—Rom. 9:21, 23; Matt. 28:18:
  - 1. The Body cannot move freely; it can move only at the direction of the Head.
  - 2. The authority to direct the Body and all its members rests with the Head.
- B. Whether we are under the authority of the Head determines whether we know the life of the Body—1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 4:15-16; Col. 1:18; 3:4:
  - 1. The Body can have only one Head and can submit only to one Head—1:18.
  - 2. Only Christ is the unique Head, and we must submit to Him, honoring and testifying to the unique headship of the God-exalted Christ—Eph. 1:22-23; Matt. 23:8-12.
- C. In order to live in the Body, we need to recognize the authority in the Body—Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18; 2:19:
  - 1. Concerning the authority in the Body, first and foremost is the need for the authority of the Head flowing throughout the whole Body—Eph. 5:23-24:

- a. When we submit directly to the Head, we also care for the Body; it is impossible for us to say that we are submitting to the authority of the Head without caring for the Body.
- b. Only the Lord is our Head, and only He has the authority to direct the moves of the members of His Body.
- 2. In the Body the elders and the apostles are deputy authorities, carrying out the authority of the Head—Acts 14:23; 1 Tim. 5:17a; 1 Cor. 12:28:
  - a. On the one hand, all the members of the Body submit directly to the Head—Eph. 5:24a.
  - b. On the other hand, the members submit to the deputies of the Head—Heb. 13:17.

**III. The order of the church comes out of the authority in the church—the honoring of the unique headship of Christ—Col. 1:18; Phil. 1:1:**

- A. In the church there is no human organization, but there is a spiritual order—v. 1; 1 Cor. 14:40; 11:34b.
- B. The Head of the church is Christ the Lord, and the authority in the church is the headship of Christ—Matt. 28:18; Col. 1:18.
- C. In the church there must be order, but this order comes from the headship of Christ—Eph. 1:22-23.
- D. We can have the real practice of the church life only by submitting to the unique headship of Christ—Col. 1:18; 2:19:
  - 1. The order in the church comes from the headship of Christ being realized by us in a practical way—1 Cor. 11:3, 16; Eph. 1:22.
  - 2. If we do not have the spiritual order in the church that comes from realizing the headship of Christ in a practical way, there is no possibility for us to practice the real church life—1 Cor. 11:3; 14:40.

**IV. In the church God's authority is expressed and represented by the apostles and elders—12:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-3:**

- A. God has appointed elders and apostles to be the authority in the church—1 Cor. 12:28; Acts 14:23.
- B. Apostles and elders have no authority in themselves; they have authority only as they stand under the authority of the Head; they exercise authority in the church by representing the authority of the Head.
- C. In order to manifest His authority in the church, God appoints elders in every local church to represent His authority—v. 23; Titus 1:5:
  - 1. In the universal church there is the office of apostleship, which gives the apostles the position and the right to appoint elders for the administration of the local churches—1 Cor. 12:28; Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5.
  - 2. The Holy Spirit was one with the apostles in their appointment of the elders, and the apostles did this according to the leading of the Holy Spirit—Acts 20:28.
  - 3. The authority of the elders is for representing and expressing God's authority—1 Pet. 5:1-3.

4. The main responsibility of the elders as overseers is not to rule but to shepherd, to take all-inclusive tender care of the flock, the church of God—Acts 20:28.
5. The scriptural principle with regard to eldership is plurality; with the plurality of the eldership, there is no definite leader, and the unique headship of Christ is regarded, preserved, and respected—14:23; Titus 1:5.
6. In the church life we need to obey the ones leading us and submit to them (Heb. 13:17); if we cannot submit to God's appointed deputy authority, we cannot submit to God.

**V. There is a divine government in the church life today, and this government comes from the throne of God and of the Lamb—Rev. 22:1-2:**

- A. The divine authority in the church is for God to dispense Himself into us as life, as the life supply, and as the all-sufficient grace; only by submitting to the throne can we share in His all-sufficient source of the flowing grace—2 Cor. 13:14; Rev. 22:1-2, 16a.
- B. The throne of grace in Hebrews 4:16 is the throne of authority in Revelation 4, which becomes in Revelation 22:1-2 the throne of God and of the Lamb, out from which flows “a river of water of life, bright as crystal” (v. 1):
  1. Although the throne is the throne of authority, the throne of headship, out of the throne flows the river of water of life—v. 1.
  2. The fact that the throne is not only the throne of God but the throne of God and of the Lamb means that God in the Lamb is flowing out as grace for our enjoyment:
    - a. We should never separate authority from grace or grace from authority; grace and authority are one—Heb. 4:16; Rev. 22:1.
    - b. Whenever we come to this throne, we have the sense that the grace of God is like a river flowing into us—Heb. 4:16; Rev. 22:1-2.
  3. Today the Lord Jesus does not reign merely with authority; He is reigning in the church, among the churches, and over all the churches through the flowing of His life as grace—4:2-3; 5:6; 7:9; 22:1-2.
- C. The throne, the authority, of God and of the Lamb is not only the source of the divine administration; it is also the source of the divine fellowship—vv. 1-2:
  1. Authority and fellowship are two lines in the Body—1 Cor. 11:3; 12:12-13, 18; 1:9; 10:16-17.
  2. Whereas the throne is a matter of authority, the flowing river is a matter of fellowship, signified by the street, which is of “pure gold, like transparent glass”—Rev. 21:21:
    - a. The throne represents the divine authority, and from the throne flows the river of water of life for us to enjoy the divine fellowship—22:1-2.
    - b. In this fellowship there is the divine authority, for in God's economy authority always goes together with fellowship—2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10, 14.
  3. In order to build up a local church in a practical way, we need both the throne of God and of the Lamb and the water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne and flowing on the street—Rev. 22:1-2.