

Message Six

**The Basic Factor of the Decline—
Turning Away from Paul’s Completing Ministry**

Scripture Reading: 2 Tim. 1:12-18; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; 6:3-4

I. The Lord’s recovery today is the recovery of the central vision of Paul’s completing ministry; this is the vision of the age in the ministry of the age—Col. 1:25; cf. Acts 9:4-5, 15; 22:14-15; 26:16-19:

- A. In the New Testament the apostles, especially the apostle Paul, completed the word of God, the divine revelation, regarding God in us as our contents, Christ as the mystery of God, and the church as the mystery of Christ, thereby giving us a full revelation of God’s economy—Eph. 3:9; 2 Cor. 4:7; Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:4.
- B. The goal of the Lord’s recovery is the completion of the word of God, which is the commission of the age—Acts 26:18-19:
 - 1. We need to complete the word of God in the sense of fully preaching the word, declaring all the counsel of God, all of God’s economy, so that we may present every man full-grown in Christ—20:26-27; Col. 1:28-29.
 - 2. We need to complete the word of God in the sense of experiencing Christ subjectively to enjoy Him in our daily living so that the proper church life may come forth to be the corporate manifestation of God in the flesh, the great mystery of godliness—Phil. 1:19-21a; Eph. 3:16-21; 1 Tim. 3:15-16a.

II. The basic factor of the decline and apostasy of the church is the turning away from Paul’s completing ministry—2 Tim. 1:15; cf. 2:17-18; 4:4, 10, 14-16:

- A. For all those in Asia to turn away from Paul meant that they turned away not from his person but from his ministry centered on the economy of God—1:15-17; 4:4; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; Eph. 3:2, 8-11, 16-21; Col. 1:25; 1 Cor. 9:17.
- B. Among the seven churches in Asia was the church in Ephesus, which was fully established by Paul’s ministry—Acts 19:1-20; 20:17-38; Eph. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:3-4.

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- C. About thirty years after Paul said that all who were in Asia had turned away from him, the Lord used John to speak to the churches in Asia in the stage of His intensification—Rev. 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6.
- D. Because they turned away from Paul's ministry, the churches in Asia declined into degradation; the first letter being written to the church in Ephesus proves that they took the lead to forsake Paul's ministry and teaching—2:1-7; cf. 3:16.
- E. The church in Ephesus left their first love because they left Paul's ministry—Eph. 1:4; 3:16-19; 4:2, 15-16; 5:2; 6:24; Rev. 2:4.
- F. The striking point of the churches' degradation was the teaching of Balaam (v. 14), the teaching of the Nicolaitans (v. 15), and the teaching of Jezebel (v. 20); these different teachings crept in because the churches turned away from Paul's teaching, the unique teaching of God's eternal economy:
 - 1. Different teachings separate us from the genuine appreciation, love, and enjoyment of the precious person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as our life and our everything—2 Cor. 11:2-3.
 - 2. Teachings that differ from the healthy words of the Lord always issue from people's pride and self-conceit, which blind them—1 Tim. 6:3-4.
- G. One church in Asia was unique and highly appraised by the Lord—the church in Philadelphia; the Lord appreciated them because they kept the word, which means they did not turn away from the healthy teaching of God's economy, the teaching according to godliness—Rev. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1:10; 6:3; 2 Tim. 4:3.
- H. The ministry of the healthy, living words of the Lord always brings forth godliness—a life that lives Christ and expresses God in Christ—1 Tim. 6:3; 2 Tim. 1:13; Matt. 4:4; John 6:57, 63; Rev. 2:7.

III. Whether or not a particular ministry is part of the New Testament ministry can be proved by applying three governing principles: the principle of the

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processed Triune God being dispensed into His chosen people; the principle of Christ and the church; and the principle of Christ, the Spirit, life, and the church—1 Cor. 1:10; cf. 14:8:

- A. If your teaching can pass this threefold test, your teaching is a part of the New Testament ministry, the ministry of the age—1:10; cf. 14:8.
- B. The leadership in the New Testament ministry is the leadership of the controlling, God-given revelation of God's economy—Acts 26:19; Prov. 29:18:
 - 1. You should not do a work to attract people to follow you; such a one who makes himself attractive is wrong, and if you are attracted to follow him, you help him to be wrong, destroying yourself and him—cf. 2 Cor. 4:5.
 - 2. In the Lord's work we should beware of the ambition to get a place or a district for our work, captivating people to be our private co-workers; our fallen disposition by birth likes to captivate people—1 Cor. 11:19; Gal. 5:20.
 - 3. We should never follow any person; we should simply follow the Lord according to the heavenly and consummate vision of the age—Acts 26:19.
- C. The saints who have been raised up by this ministry have a taste for this ministry; this taste is the controlling factor in the Lord's recovery—1 Pet. 2:3.
- D. Those who have been raised with this taste will reject a taste that is contrary to it; this means that if you speak something contrary to the taste of the Lord's recovery, your speaking will be rejected, and you will suffer loss.

IV. There are two secrets of discerning the genuine New Testament ministry:

- A. The genuine ministry stirs up our love for the Lord Jesus as our Bridegroom so that we may enjoy Him to the uttermost as our Husband—2 Cor. 11:2-3.
- B. The genuine ministry strengthens us to follow Christ

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in the fellowship of His sufferings for the sake of His Body—vv. 23-33; Col. 1:25; cf. 2 Tim. 2:12, 16-18.

V. In order to be preserved in the Lord's recovery, we must "guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us"—1:14:

- A. According to verse 13, the deposit must refer to the deposit of the healthy words of God's economy, including the riches of life in the Lord's words, which He has stored in us; we have to deposit the Lord's healthy words into our being, like we deposit money in a bank—1 Tim. 6:20; Col. 3:16; Psa. 119:72:
1. To hold a pattern of the healthy words means to live by the healthy words, being nourished with the words of the full gospel concerning God's New Testament economy and the sweet words that contain and convey the riches of Christ—2 Tim. 1:13; 1 Tim. 4:6.
 2. If we are persons acting, behaving, and having our life in the Spirit through the exercise of our spirit, all that has been deposited in our being will be guarded through the Spirit who is indwelling us—2 Tim. 1:12, 14.
- B. In a darkened and confused situation, we must cleave to the enlightening and ordering word in the New Testament, the healthy teaching of God's economy, which concerns God's dispensing of Himself in His Divine Trinity into His chosen people so that they may be constituted into the Body of Christ for the manifestation of the Triune God—Titus 1:9; Acts 2:42; 1 Tim. 1:3-4.