

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD  
IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AND THE CHURCH LIFE**

(Friday—First Morning Session)

Message One

**The Development of the Kingdom of God  
into a Realm over Which God Rules in His Divine Life**

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:15; John 3:3, 5; Luke 4:43; 17:20-21; 2 Pet. 1:4-11

**I. The kingdom of God is God Himself—Mark 1:15; Matt. 6:33; John 3:3:**

- A. God's kingdom has God as its content; God Himself is everything as the content of His kingdom—1 Cor. 4:20; 15:28.
- B. God is life, having the nature, ability, and shape of the divine life, which forms the realm of God's ruling—Eph. 4:18; John 3:15.
- C. The life of God is the kingdom of God and also our entrance into the kingdom of God; we must see this basic principle—vv. 3, 5, 15.
- D. In actuality, God's reigning over us is not an outward matter but a matter of the innate ability of the divine life—Rom. 8:2.

**II. The kingdom of God is the realm of the divine species, in which are all the divine things—John 3:3, 5:**

- A. God became man to enter into the human species, and man becomes God in life and nature but not in the Godhead to enter into the divine species—Rom. 8:3; 1:3-4; John 1:12-14.
- B. To enter into the divine realm, the realm of the divine species, we need to be born of God to have the life and nature of God, thereby becoming God-men in the kingdom of God—vv. 12-13.
- C. We were regenerated of God to be the species of God and enter into the kingdom of God—3:3, 5.

**III. The kingdom of God is the realm of the divine life for this life to move, work, rule, and govern so that life may accomplish its purpose—Matt. 6:13b; John 3:3, 5, 15-16:**

- A. The kingdom of God is an organism constituted with God's life as the realm of life for His ruling, in which He reigns by His life and expresses Himself as the Divine Trinity in the divine life—v. 5; 15:1-8, 16, 26.
- B. The unique way to enter into the kingdom of God is to receive God as life and gain God Himself; this is regeneration—3:5, 15; 1 John 5:11-12.

**IV. The kingdom of God is Christ Himself as the seed of life sown into His believers, God's chosen people, and developing into a realm over which God rules as His kingdom in His divine life—Luke 4:43; 8:5, 10; 17:20-21; Mark 4:3, 26-29:**

- A. The kingdom of God is a wonderful person—the Lord Jesus Christ, the embodiment of the Triune God—Col. 2:9:
  - 1. Wherever He is, the kingdom of God is—Luke 17:20-21.

2. The kingdom of God is with Him, and He brings it to His disciples—4:43; 17:21.
  - B. The Lord Jesus is the seed of the kingdom of God to be sown into God's chosen people to develop into God's ruling realm—8:5, 10; Mark 4:26-29.
- V. We need to experience the development of the divine life and the divine nature contained in the divine seed that has been sown into us so that we may have a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom—2 Pet. 1:1, 4-11:**
- A. We have been allotted the wonderful equally precious faith, and this faith is an all-inclusive seed—v. 1:
    1. All the divine riches are in this seed, but we must be diligent to develop them; to grow to maturity is to develop what we already have—vv. 1-8; 3:18.
    2. By developing these virtues, we grow in life, and we will eventually reach maturity, be full of Christ, and be qualified and equipped to be kings in the coming kingdom—Eph. 4:13-15; Col. 2:19; 2 Pet. 1:11.
  - B. We should be diligent to pursue the growth and development of the divine life and divine nature for a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom—vv. 10-11:
    1. The bountiful supply that we enjoy in the development of the divine life and divine nature (vv. 3-7) will bountifully supply us a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord.
    2. This supply will enable and qualify us to enter into the coming kingdom by all the riches of the divine life and divine nature as our excellent virtues (energy) unto the splendid glory of God—v. 3; 1 Pet. 5:10.
    3. The entrance into the eternal kingdom is supplied to us richly through our growth in life and through the development of the divine life within us.
- VI. As those who have been born of God to enter into the kingdom of God, we need to be recovered to the direct rule of God by the intuition of our spirit—Matt. 5:3; 1 Cor. 2:11; Mark 2:8:**
- A. In the dispensation of innocence we see the principle of God's rule; in the dispensation of conscience, the principle of self-rule; and in the dispensation of human government, the principle of man's rule:
    1. Before the fall man was ruled directly by God; he lived before God and was responsible to God—Gen. 2:16-17.
    2. From the time of Adam's expulsion from the garden of Eden to the time of Noah's departure from the ark, God established the conscience within man to represent Himself in ruling over man—Acts 24:16.
    3. After the flood, because man was subject neither to God's rule nor to self-rule, God authorized man to represent Him in ruling over man—Gen. 9:6; Rom. 13:1.
  - B. Because man has been degraded from God's rule to human rule, God, in saving man, must recover him from human rule to divine rule so that once again man may live before God in simplicity and under His direct authority—Matt. 5:3, 8; 6:33.
  - C. In God's plan of recovery man must retrace his steps from human rule to God's rule, passing through self-rule in between.

- D. The final goal of dealing with the conscience is not merely to restore us to self-rule but to bring us back to God's rule and to recover us to God Himself and, thus, to live in the presence of God—5:3.
- E. There is a great difference between self-rule and God's rule:
  - 1. Self-rule means that we live by the feelings of our conscience, being responsible to our conscience—Acts 24:16.
  - 2. God's rule means that we live by the intuition of our spirit, being responsible to the intuition, that is, being responsible to God:
    - a. Within our spirit there is a function to have a direct sense, to realize, discern, and perceive things; this is the intuition in our spirit—1 Cor. 2:11; Mark 2:8.
    - b. When we live by our intuition and are controlled by our intuition, we are living in the presence of God and are ruled directly by Him.
- F. When we are under God's rule, we live by the intuition of our spirit according to the sense of life—Rom. 8:6:
  - 1. The divine life is the highest life, with the richest, strongest, and keenest feeling (Eph. 4:18); this feeling is the sense of life.
  - 2. The sense of life makes us know whether we are living in the natural life or in the divine life, whether we are living in the flesh or in the spirit—Rom. 8:6.
  - 3. The sense of life guides, governs, controls, and directs us—v. 4.
  - 4. The kingdom of God has its reality, and this reality is the living of the divine life under the direct rule of God—Matt. 5:3, 8, 20; 6:33; 7:21.

**Excerpts from the Ministry:**

**DILIGENT TO MAKE  
OUR CALLING AND SELECTION FIRM**

In 2 Peter 1:10, Peter continues, "Therefore, brothers, be the more diligent to make your calling and selection firm, for doing these things you shall by no means ever stumble." Here to be diligent is to develop the spiritual virtues in the divine life, to advance in the growth of the divine life. This makes God's calling and selection of us firm.

If we are diligent to develop the virtues mentioned in verses 5 through 7, we shall confirm, make sure, our calling and selection. We shall never doubt that we have been called by God and selected by Him. However, some may question whether God has chosen them. The reason they have doubt concerning this matter is that they lack the virtues listed by Peter. But if we develop these virtues and are constituted of them, we shall have the confirmation that we have been called and selected. This is to make our calling and selection firm. Furthermore, in doing these things we shall never stumble, because we have been thoroughly constituted.

**ENTRANCE INTO THE ETERNAL KINGDOM**

In verse 11 Peter concludes, "For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly and bountifully supplied to you." The bountiful supply we enjoy in the development of the divine life and divine nature will bountifully supply us a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord. It will enable and qualify us to enter into the coming kingdom with all the riches of the divine life and divine nature as

our excellent virtues unto the splendid glory of God. This is not merely to be saved to go to heaven.

The eternal kingdom in this verse refers to the kingdom of God given to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Dan. 7:13-14), which will be manifested at His coming back (Luke 19:11-12). It will be a reward to His faithful believers, who pursue the growth in His life unto maturity and the development of the virtues of His nature, so that they may participate, in the millennium, in His kingship in God's glory (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:4, 6). To enter thus into the eternal kingdom of the Lord is related to the entrance into God's eternal glory, to which He has called us in Christ (1 Pet. 5:10; 1 Thes. 2:12).

Second Peter 1:11 indicates that we may have an entrance richly and bountifully supplied into the kingdom of our Lord. However, a good number of Christians will not have such an entrance, because they have never built up this entrance by developing the divine seed unto maturity. If we are not constituted of the divine virtues, we shall not be able to build up such an entrance. But if we have the development of the divine life and are constituted of the elements of the divine nature, a rich and bountiful entrance into the coming kingdom will be supplied to us. (*Life-study of 2 Peter*, pp. 54-56)

#### **MATURITY AND KINGSHIP**

In 2 Peter 1:8 through 10, Peter says that if all these virtues exist in us and abound, they shall constitute us neither idle nor unfruitful unto the full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he in whom these things are not present is shortsighted and has forgotten the cleansing of his past sins. Therefore, Peter charges us to be diligent to make our calling and selection firm by developing all these virtues.

In verse 11 Peter concludes, "For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly and bountifully supplied to you." In this eternal kingdom we shall not be subjects—we shall be kings. But in order to be kings in the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we need maturity in life. We Christians are destined to be kings in the Lord's kingdom. However, how can someone be a king in the coming kingdom if he lacks the maturity in the divine life? It is impossible to be a king without this maturity. Even if the Lord would want to enthrone as a king someone who is not mature, that person would realize that he is not able to exercise the kingship. This indicates that even we ourselves know that we need to grow to maturity in order to be kings.

According to Peter's word in 1:5-11, to grow to maturity is to develop what we have already received. We have been allotted the wonderful equally precious faith, and this faith is an all-inclusive seed. All the divine riches are in this seed, but we must be diligent to develop them into virtue. Then we need to develop in our virtue knowledge; in knowledge, self-control; in self-control, endurance; in endurance, godliness; in godliness, brotherly love; and in brotherly love, love. By developing these virtues we grow, and we shall eventually reach maturity. As a result, we shall be full of Christ, and, in Paul's words, we shall arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13). Then we shall be qualified and equipped to be kings in the coming kingdom. (*Life-study of 2 Peter*, pp. 63-64)

#### **THE RELATIONSHIP OF CONSCIENCE WITH GOVERNMENT**

Some students of Scripture have divided the Bible into seven dispensations: the dispensations of innocence, conscience, human government, promise, law, grace, and the kingdom. The first three dispensations are categorized according to the principle of government. In the dispensation of innocence we see the principle of God's rule; in the dispensation of conscience, the principle of self-rule; and in the dispensation of human government, the principle of

man's rule. Of the three kinds of government, the one that is under the rule of self is the one related to the conscience.

Before the fall no sin barrier existed between God and man. This was the so-called dispensation of innocence, when man was ruled directly by God. He lived before God and was responsible to God. Unfortunately, man failed under God's rule and became sinful within and without, so the holy and righteous God had to leave man.

Consequently, from the time of Adam's expulsion from the garden of Eden to the time of Noah's departure from the ark, God established the conscience within man to represent Him in ruling over man. This is the so-called dispensation of conscience. In this period man was ruled by his own conscience and was responsible to his own conscience. Unfortunately, under this self-rule, man again failed. He ignored the rebuke and control of the conscience, the issue of which was murder and fornication, which proceeded unto utter corruption and fullness of wickedness. God judged this dispensation by the flood.

After the flood God told Noah, "Whoever sheds man's blood, / By *man* shall his blood be shed" (Gen. 9:6, emphasis added). Because man was neither subject to God's rule nor obedient to self-rule, God authorized *man* to represent Him in ruling over man. Therefore, not long afterward, there was the beginning of nations; there came into being among the human races the rule of political authorities, the power of the society, and the control in the family. For example, in a nation there are the president and the officials; in a factory, the supervisors; and in a family, the parents and elder brothers, and so forth. These are the authorities set up by God to represent Him in ruling man. This is why Romans 13:1 says, "Let every person be subject to the authorities over him." This is the dispensation of human government, in which man is ruled by man and is responsible to man.

From the point of view of government, man's fall was a fall from God's rule to self-rule and then from self-rule to man's rule. The more one is ruled by God, the nobler he becomes, but the more one is ruled by man, the more base he becomes. Today man's condition is a complete rejection of God's rule. There may be a few people who are under self-rule, being controlled by their conscience; however, the impact of their conscience is very weak. The majority are living under human rule and never conform unless they are being ruled by someone. Yet many still fail in this dispensation of human government. They not only disobey but also endeavor to escape and even overthrow man's rule. Today what is set before our eyes is a rebellious and disorderly condition. Thus, man is a total failure whether under the ruling of God, self, or man.

Since man has been degraded from God's rule to human rule, God, in saving man, must recover him from human rule to divine rule, that man may once more live before God in simplicity and under His direct authority. However, this kind of recovery cannot be realized in a moment. As man became degraded by falling from divine rule to human rule, passing through the stage of self-rule in between, so in God's plan of recovery he must retrace his steps from human rule to God's rule, passing through self-rule in between. Since self-rule is the step between human rule and God's rule, when a man is saved, he must first be delivered from human rule and return to self-rule.

All those who live under human rule are living before man. They dare not do many things because of the fear of man. Whenever they are not under man's jurisdiction and observation, they do as they please. However, those who are under self-rule are not so. They live by the feelings of their own conscience. Being controlled by their conscience, they do not need to be ruled by others. They are restrained in all their utterances and behavior, not because of their fear of man but because of the ruling of their conscience. They are free to act only when their conscience approves. Outwardly, they appear to be still subject to the rule of man,

yet practically, this rule is unnecessary, because their conscience is sufficient to rule and control them.

Sadly, the condition of many Christians today is not so. Their behavior still requires the rule of man. Students must be controlled by their teachers, children by their parents, and business personnel by their supervisors. Often they care only for those who are around them outwardly but care not for the conscience within. This proves to a great degree that they are still living in the fallen condition of being ruled by man. Therefore, only severe dealings with our conscience will deliver us from the fallen condition of human rule to that rule by the conscience. Then in all things we can live and act according to the feelings of our conscience.

However, the final goal of dealing with the conscience is not simply to restore us to self-rule. If we remain only in the feelings of the conscience, we are still in a half-fallen situation and fall short of God's will. Therefore, dealing with the conscience is not just to cause man to return from human rule to self-rule, from the eye of man unto the conscience, but even more to cause man to pass through self-rule and attain to God's rule, to pass through the conscience and live in the presence of God. To deal with the conscience so that we are brought back to the conscience is still a negative objective; the positive objective is that we be recovered to God Himself. Therefore, the final goal of dealing with the conscience is to bring us back to God's rule.

Self-rule and God's rule differ greatly. Self-rule means that man lives by the feelings of his conscience, being responsible to his conscience; whereas God's rule means that man lives by the intuition of the spirit, being responsible to the intuition, that is, being responsible to God. We know that God through the Holy Spirit lives in our spirit. Therefore, we can say that the intuition in our spirit is the feeling of God. Hence, when we live by the intuition and are controlled by the intuition, we are living in the presence of God and ruled by Him. The conscience has only the feeling of right and wrong. It condemns all that is wrong and evil and justifies all that is right and good. But the intuition is above right and wrong, good and evil. It is above wrong and also above right; it is above evil and also above good. It condemns all that is wrong and all that is evil, but it does not necessarily approve all that is right and all that is good. It accepts only that which is of God, of the Spirit, and of life.

For example, lying is condemned by the conscience, whereas truthfulness is approved. If we live by the conscience, all is well as long as we do not lie but tell the truth. However, if we live by the intuition, walking according to the feeling of God, then not only can we not tell lies, but also we cannot always tell the truth. We have to ask: Are these words of God or of myself? God does not want us to lie; neither does He want us to speak the truth. What God desires is that we speak His words, words that are of Him, of the Spirit, and of life. Therefore, when a brother ministers, whether he is speaking the truth or not will be attended to by the conscience. But as to what he should minister, what subject he should choose, what God has in mind for him to speak—these are not within the limit of right and wrong, good and evil. The feeling of the conscience is unable to do anything in this respect. Only through the intuition can one touch the mind of God and be led by God to speak His words. These differences between the conscience and the intuition are also the differences between self-rule and God's rule.

Today there are too few who are living completely under the ruling of God. Many brothers and sisters are living in a condition that is a combination of the three kinds of government. The greater part of their being is under human rule; they still need to be ruled by man. Another part of their being is under self-rule, the rule of the conscience. But only a small part of their being is under God's rule so that they are controlled by God directly. This is a very abnormal condition. Therefore, there is the need to deal with the conscience more

thoroughly so that we can, on the negative side, be delivered from human rule and, on the positive side, enter into God's rule to be directly under His control. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1953*, vol. 3, "The Experience of Life," pp. 283-286)