

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

(Friday—Evening Session)

Message Three

**The Kingdom and the Church**

Scripture Reading: Matt. 16:18-19; 18:15-22; Rom. 14:17; Rev. 1:6; Col. 1:12-13

**I. The Bible first presents the kingdom and thereafter presents the church; the presence of the kingdom produces the church—Matt. 4:23; 16:18-19:**

- A. The life of God is the kingdom of God; the divine life is the kingdom, and this life produces the church—John 3:3, 5; Matt. 7:14, 21; 19:17, 29; 25:46:
  - 1. The kingdom is the realm of life for life to move, rule, and govern so that life may accomplish its purpose, and this realm is the kingdom.
  - 2. The gospel brings in the divine life, and this life has its realm, which is the kingdom; the divine life with its realm produces the church—2 Tim. 1:10.
  - 3. The gospel of the kingdom brings forth the church because the kingdom is the life itself, and the church is the issue of life—Matt. 4:23; Acts 8:12.
- B. The kingdom is the reality of the church; therefore, apart from the kingdom life, we cannot live the church life—Matt. 5:3; 16:18-19; Rev. 1:4-6, 9:
  - 1. The reality of the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 5—7) is the content of the church life; without the reality of the kingdom, the church is empty.
  - 2. Since the kingdom life issues in the church life, as we live corporately in the kingdom life, we spontaneously live the church life—Rom. 14:17.
  - 3. A believer who does not live in the reality of the kingdom cannot be built into the structure of the church—Eph. 2:22.
- C. Without the kingdom as the reality of the church, the church cannot be built up—Matt. 16:18-19:
  - 1. The church is brought into being through the authority of the kingdom.
  - 2. The keys of the kingdom are given to make the building of the church possible—v. 19; 18:18; cf. John 20:23.
  - 3. When the kingdom of the heavens is able to assert its authority over a company of believers, those believers can be built up into the church—Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:15-16.
- D. The purpose of the vital groups in the church life is to live the kingdom life—the God-man life; a vital group is a real representation of the church—Matt. 18:15-22.

**II. The genuine church is the kingdom of God in this age; today the believers live the kingdom life in the church—16:18-19; 18:17-18; 13:44-46; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; Eph. 2:19; Col. 4:11; Rev. 1:4-6:**

- A. Each time the Lord Jesus spoke of the church, He mentioned it in relation to the kingdom; this indicates how intimately the kingdom and the church are related—Matt. 16:18-19; 18:17-18:
  - 1. Romans 14:17 proves that the church in this age is the kingdom of God.

2. *The kingdom of God* in 1 Corinthians 4:20 refers to the church life (v. 17), implying that in the sense of authority, the church in this age is the kingdom of God.
  3. The term *fellow citizens* in Ephesians 2:19 indicates the kingdom of God, the sphere wherein God exercises His authority.
- B. The word *kingdom* in Revelation 1:6 reveals that where the church is, there the kingdom of God is; the church represents the kingdom.
  - C. In the church as the kingdom, we are under rule, government, discipline, and exercise—1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5.
  - D. In the Lord's recovery, at the same time we are both in the kingdom and in the church, in the treasure and in the pearl—Matt. 13:44-46.
  - E. Although the church today is God's kingdom, we are in the kingdom in reality only when we live, walk, and have our being in the spirit, not in our natural man—Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:16, 25.

### **III. The Father has delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love—Col. 1:12-13:**

- A. The kingdom of the Son of God's love comprises three ages: the present age, in which the church is; the coming age, in which the millennial kingdom will be; and the eternal age with the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth—v. 13:
  1. The stress in Colossians 1:13 is the kingdom of the Son of God's love in this age, which is the reality of the church.
  2. The church life today is the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love, which is as delightful to God the Father as the Son of God is—4:15-16.
- B. We need to understand the intrinsic significance of the church as the kingdom of the Son of God's love—1:13:
  1. The Son of God is the embodiment and expression of the divine life; hence, the kingdom of the Son is a realm of life—1 John 5:11-12; John 1:4.
  2. The kingdom into which we have been transferred is the kingdom of the Son of God's love; this realm of life is in love, not in fear—Col. 1:13.
  3. The kingdom in which we find ourselves today is a realm full of life, light, and love—1 Pet. 2:9.
  4. The Son of the Father is the expression of the Father as the source of life—John 1:18, 4; 1 John 1:2:
    - a. The Son of the Father's love is the object of the Father's love to be the embodiment of life to us in the divine love with the authority in resurrection—Matt. 3:17.
    - b. The Son, as the embodiment of the divine life, is the object of the Father's love—17:5:
      - 1) The divine life embodied in the Son is given to us in the divine love—1 John 5:11-12; John 3:16.
      - 2) The object of the divine love becomes to us the embodiment of life in the divine love with the authority in resurrection; this is the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love.
  5. To be transferred into the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love is to be transferred into the Son, who is life to us—1 John 5:11-12:

- a. The Son in resurrection is now the life-giving Spirit, and He rules us in His resurrection life with love—1 Pet. 1:3; Rom. 6:4-5; 1 Cor. 15:45b.
  - b. When we live by the Son as our life in resurrection, we are living in His kingdom, enjoying Him in the Father's love; here we have the church life—Col. 3:4; John 6:57.
  - c. Because the Father delights in His Son, the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love is a pleasant thing, a matter of delight—Matt. 3:17; 17:5.
- C. In the church as the kingdom of the Son of God's love, we have the reality and practicality of the organic Body of Christ—Col. 2:19.
- D. In the church as the kingdom of the Son of God's love, we have the reality and practicality of the universal one new man—Eph. 2:15; 4:24; Col. 3:10-11.

### **Excerpts from the Ministry:**

#### **THE KINGDOM OF THE SON OF GOD'S LOVE**

Paul tells us that the Father has “delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Col. 1:13). The authority of darkness denotes the authority of Satan. God is light, and Satan is darkness. God has delivered us out of Satan's authority of darkness into God's marvelous light. Darkness is Satan as death, but light is God as life. To be delivered out of the authority of darkness is to be delivered from the devil, who has the might of death (Heb. 2:14; John 17:15). We have been delivered from the devil, Satan, by the death of Christ (Col. 2:14-15) and by the life of Christ in resurrection (John 5:24).

We have not only been delivered out of the authority of darkness but also transferred into the kingdom of the Son of God's love. The kingdom of the Son is the authority of Christ (Rev. 11:15; 12:10).

According to the New Testament, the Son of God is the expression of the divine life and its embodiment. This means that the kingdom of the Son is a realm of life. The fact that the kingdom into which we have been transferred is the kingdom of the Son of God's love indicates that this realm of life is in love, not in fear. The kingdom in which we find ourselves today is a realm full of life, light, and love.

The Son of the Father is the expression of the Father as the source of life (John 1:18, 4; 1 John 1:2). The Father as the source of life is expressed in the Son. The Son of the Father's love is the object of the Father's love to be the embodiment of life to us in the divine love with the authority in resurrection. The Son, as the embodiment of the divine life, is the object of the Father's love. The divine life embodied in the Son is given to us in the divine love. Therefore, the object of the divine love becomes to us the embodiment of life in the divine love with the authority in resurrection. This is the kingdom of the Son of His love.

To be transferred into the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love is to be transferred into the Son who is life to us (5:12). The Son in resurrection (1 Pet. 1:3; Rom. 6:4-5) is now the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b). He rules us in His resurrection life with love. This is the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love. When we live by the Son as our life in resurrection, we are living in His kingdom, enjoying Him in the Father's love.

We have been transferred into a realm where we are ruled in love with life. Here, under the heavenly ruling and restriction, we have genuine freedom, the proper freedom in love, with life, and under light. This is what it means to be delivered out of the authority of darkness

and transferred into the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love. Here in this kingdom we enjoy Christ and have the church life.

**Comprising the Church in the Present Age,  
the Millennium in the Coming Age,  
and the New Heaven and New Earth in Eternity**

The kingdom of the Son of God's love comprises three ages: the present age, in which the church is; the coming age, in which the millennial kingdom will be; and the eternal age with the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and the new earth. These three aspects of the kingdom are considered by Paul in Colossians 1:13 as the kingdom of the Son of God's love.

The words *the Son of God* are a delight to the Father's ears. When the Lord Jesus was baptized, the Father declared, "This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I have found My delight" (Matt. 3:17). When the Lord was transfigured, the Father made the same declaration (17:5). Because the Father delights in His Son, the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love is a pleasant thing, a matter of delight. This is the reason it comprises only three sections—the section of the church life, the section of the heavenly part of the kingdom of the heavens in the millennium, and the new heaven and the new earth with the New Jerusalem as the consummation of the church and the kingdom. In each of these three sections the kingdom of the Son of God's love is a matter of delight. The Father, by His mercy and grace, has transferred us out of the darkness of Satan into this pleasant part of the kingdom.

**The Stress in Colossians 1:13  
Is the Kingdom of the Son of God's Love in This Age,  
Which Is the Reality of the Church**

The stress in Colossians 1:13 is the kingdom of the Son of God's love in this age, which is the reality of the church. The church life today is the kingdom of the Son of God's love, which is as delightful to God the Father as the Son of God is. We, the believers, all have been transferred into this delightful kingdom of the Son of God's love. God the Father loves the delightful part of the kingdom, just as He loves His delightful Son as His own. So, the church, as the delightful part of the divine kingdom, is considered a great blessing to God's redeemed people by the apostle Paul in the book of Colossians, a book which is on Christ as the all-inclusive portion of God's people (1:12).

**All the Believers Have Been Transferred  
into This Aspect of the Kingdom**

John 3:5 indicates that it is through regeneration that all the believers have been transferred into the kingdom of the Son of God's love. Through regeneration we have been brought out of the darkness of Satan into this delightful aspect of the kingdom. God loved the Son, so He gave this part of the kingdom to Him. Through God's salvation and regeneration, all the believers of His Son have been transferred into this section of the kingdom. (*The Conclusion of the New Testament*, pp. 2581-2584).

**THE PURPOSE OF THE VITAL GROUPS**

I am thankful to the Lord that He has restored this fellowship on the vital groups. This has been frustrated by Satan for more than two years. In this chapter we want to see the purpose of the vital groups in their intrinsic significance. The purpose of the vital groups is to live two kinds of lives: the kingdom life and the church life. We must repent and admit that we have defects in these two kinds of lives. Even though we may have been in the recovery

for years, we have not seen that the vital groups are for living the kingdom life and the church life.

The New Testament revelation is concerning these two lives. The center of the four Gospels is the kingdom. Matthew and John are the two books that take the lead to touch the truth of the kingdom. Matthew's main point is the kingdom of the heavens, and the main point touched by John is the kingdom of God. John, of course, is a Gospel of life, but life brings us into the kingdom of God. We are regenerated into the kingdom of God. If we are not born anew, we cannot see or enter into the kingdom of God (3:3, 5). In Acts and the Epistles the center is the church life...

The scriptural base for our teaching concerning the practice of the vital group meetings is in Matthew 18:15-22 and 2 Timothy 2:22. Matthew 18:15-22 teaches us how to have small groups in the kingdom life. Then 2 Timothy 2:22 teaches us how to have a church life in the degradation of the church.

### **To Live the Kingdom Life**

We need to read and consider prayerfully the Lord's speaking in Matthew 18:15-22, which reveals how we can live the kingdom life. Verses 15 through 17 say, "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go, reprove him between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not hear you, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to hear the church also, let him be to you just like the Gentile and the tax collector." If this sinning one would not listen even to the church, what should we do? The text says that we should let him be to us like the Gentile and the tax collector, that is, like an unsaved person who is outside the fellowship of the church.

Verse 18 then says, "Truly I say to you, Whatever you bind on the earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on the earth shall have been loosed in heaven." We have to see the connection between verses 17 and 18. Verse 17 is so low, saying that we should let the sinning one who will not listen to the church be to us like a Gentile and a tax collector. But verse 18 says that we should touch heaven by our binding and releasing prayer. This is the prayer of the vital group. Verse 19 says, "Again, truly I say to you that if two of you are in harmony on earth concerning any matter for which they ask, it will be done for them from My Father who is in the heavens." This is the practice of a vital group of two or three in harmony touching the very God in heaven. These are the two or three mentioned in verse 16: "But if he does not hear you, take with you one or two more..." These are the members of a vital group.

If a brother sins against us, we need to deal with him first in love. If we cannot get through, we should bring with us one or two more to contact him. If we still cannot get through, we should tell it to the church, and if the church cannot get through, then the sinning brother will lose the fellowship of the church. But this is not all. We have to then pray in the way of binding and releasing, and we have to pray in harmony. Whatever we pray, our Father in heaven will accomplish to gain that person. Verse 20 says, "For where there are two or three gathered into My name, there am I in their midst." This is the reality of the vital groups. These two or three are gathered into the Lord's name for His purpose, not into their names for their purposes.

Many times we feel that a certain saint is a hopeless case, and we stop with this feeling toward him in our small groups. We always end our small group meeting in verse 17. We would not take Christ as the heavenly ladder in verse 18 to climb up to the heavens with

prayer that binds Satan and looses the sinning brother. We and the church may have no way with this brother, but should we give him up? The Lord Jesus said that we should let him be to us like a Gentile and a tax collector. But the Lord went on to say that we have to bind Satan. We have to bind the binding one and release the bound one by praying together in harmony.

We should not bring in any opinions by uncovering the fallen condition of the one for whom we are praying. We have to bind the binding one, Satan, and we have to release the sinning one, the one bound by Satan, through our prayer in harmony. To be in harmony is as musical sounds in harmony. When a piano is played properly, the many keys on the piano are struck in such a way so as to produce harmonious music. When we pray in harmony for certain backsliding, sinning ones, our prayer to recover them becomes like music to the ears of the Father in heaven.

After the Lord spoke this word, Peter came to the Lord to ask Him a question. Verses 21 through 22 say, "Then Peter came and said to Him, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times? Jesus said to him, I do not say to you, Up to seven times, but, Up to seventy times seven." It may have been that Peter was the one against whom a brother sinned. He did not want to forgive this brother again, so he asked the Lord, "How many times should I forgive him? Seven times?" The Lord said that Peter should forgive him seventy times seven, or four hundred ninety times. If we have a spirit to forgive a sinning one up to four hundred ninety times, surely that one will be recovered. Do we who are participating in the vital groups have such a spirit?...

A vital group is a real representation of the church. The church should learn how to deal with a sinning one by the example of Paul. Paul did not have the peace when this sinful one was removed, so he still did something to take care of the situation. The most important thing is to cherish and forgive. To visit is to cherish. Paul sent Titus to visit Corinth in order to cherish the Corinthians. Then Paul told them to forgive. Forgiving should follow cherishing. Then we can recover and gain people.

### ***The God-man Life***

The kingdom life is the God-man life.

### ***How to Take Care of a Sinning Brother in a Vital Group***

In summary, what is covered in Matthew 18:15-22 unveils how to take care of a sinning brother in a vital group. You should go and reprove him between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother (v. 15). If he does not hear you, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established (v. 16). If he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church (v. 17a). If he refuses to hear the church also, the vital group should pray by exercising the authority of the church, which is the authority of the kingdom (vv. 17b-18; 16:18-19). Such a situation is dealt with by the vital group in harmony with the Lord in their midst (18:19-20) with a forgiving spirit (vv. 21-22). By this way the vital groups live the God-man life as Christ did when He was living on the earth. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1994-1997*, vol. 5, "The Vital Groups," pp. 61-65)