

The Economy of God – Excerpts from Chapter 20

THE TRIPARTITE MAN AND THE CHURCH

We must remember that God's economy and the mark of His economy is to dispense Himself into us. We were made in three parts: the body outwardly, the spirit inwardly, and the soul between. God's intention is to dispense Himself into the spirit of man and then work Himself into man's soul.

TRIPARTITE MAN COMPLICATED BY THREE PERSONS

Before God could fulfill His intention, Satan, the enemy of God, wrought himself into the body of man. Thus, in the members of the body there is sin—sin personified. As an illegal king, it can overrule and force us to do things against our will. Satan himself, as the evil nature and as the law of sin, dwells in us to corrupt our body. The flesh is the body poisoned by Satan, and in us, that is in our flesh, nothing good dwells (Rom. 7:18). Our flesh serves the law of sin against our mind and against our will (vv. 15, 20).

Satan came into our body as the law of sin, but praise the Lord, when we were saved, the Triune God came to dwell in our spirit as our life. Christ as our life is in our spirit. What then is in our soul? It is self. Our self is in our soul. Have we been impressed that all three beings—Adam, Satan, and God—are in us today? We are quite complicated. The man, Adam, is in us; the devil, Satan, is in us; and the Lord of life, God Himself, is in us. Hence, we have become a little garden of Eden. Adam representing the human race, the tree of life representing God, and the tree of knowledge representing Satan are the three parties in the garden of Eden, and now they are all in us. Adam, the self, is in our soul; Satan, the devil, is in our body; and God, the Triune God, is in our spirit. But we are more than a little garden; we are a great battlefield. Satan is in us fighting against God, and God is in us fighting against Satan. Satan takes our body, which is the flesh, as the base for his battles; God takes our spirit as the base for His warfare.

Galatians 5:17 says, "The flesh lusts against the Spirit." This means that our flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit lusts against the flesh. These two are contrary to one another, so we cannot do the things that we desire. The corrupted flesh fights against the Spirit, and the Spirit fights against the flesh. These two parties are always warring with one another. Satan is in our flesh as sin, and the Triune God as the Spirit is in our spirit as life, and day by day there is a spiritual warfare raging between them in the battlefield of our soul.

TRIPARTITE MAN REPRESENTED BY THE MIND

The mind in Romans 7 is an independent mind, trying to do good by itself, so the apostle brings us into chapter 8 and tells us how the mind must be dependent. The independent mind, trying to do things under its own power, will be defeated. On what then must the mind be dependent? Romans 8:6 says, "The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace." There are two possibilities for the mind: it may depend either on the flesh or on the spirit. If it depends on the flesh, the result will be death, but if it depends on the spirit, there will be life and peace. Have we seen the difference between the independent mind in chapter 7 and the dependent mind in chapter 8? An independent mind will be defeated, but a mind dependent on the spirit will have victory. Since there are two parties within us—Satan in our members and the Triune God in our spirit—we can no longer be really independent, so we should never try. If we do, we will surely be defeated. If we attempt to defeat the enemy, we will eventually be defeated by him. We must therefore turn in dependence to another One, to the Triune God within our spirit. The key to victory is to always set our mind on the spirit.

TRIPARTITE MAN REALIZING THE BODY LIFE

Now we go on from Romans 8 to Romans 12. Chapters 9, 10, and 11 are parenthetical chapters, so chapter 12 is the continuation of chapter 8. In chapter 7 the mind is independent, but in chapter 8 the mind is dependent—dependent on the spirit. The mind in chapter 7 represents the independent self struggling by its own effort, which always ends in defeat. The mind in chapter 8 represents the dependent self resting upon the Lord Jesus. This gives the Lord the opportunity to saturate our whole being with Himself, causing us to become a living

member of His Body. We are then brought to chapter 12. Chapter 12 deals with three things for the realization of the proper church life: the body, the mind, which is the main part of the soul, and the spirit.

Our Body Presented for the Church Life

Once we rely upon Christ and He takes possession of our whole being, our body is released from the usurping hand of the enemy. When we lived independently, Satan could take possession of our body and force us to do things against our will. Now, as we rely upon Christ, the strongest One, He releases our body from the enemy's usurping hand. Then what is the next step? We must present our body to the Lord (v. 1). This is one thing that many dear Christian brothers and sisters have not yet done. We must present our body definitely to Him, saying, "Lord, I thank You that my body, which was formerly a body of sin and a body under death, is now enlivened and released. I present this body to You for Your Body. If I keep my body in my hands, Your Body cannot be realized." If we are going to realize the Body of Christ, we must definitely and practically present our body to Christ.

Brothers, do we come to the meetings with our heart or with our body? Many Christians say, "I do have a heart for the church life." Yes, they may have a heart for the church life, but their body is not for the church life. Their body is left at home. We must be able to say, "I not only have a heart for the church life, but I also have a body for the church life." Is our heart for the church life and our body for our private life? If so, how can we realize the church life? We can talk very nicely about it: everything is Hallelujah, and everyone is in the heavenlies. But actually everything is just in the "air" and in the heart. If we are going to realize the Body life of Christ, we must definitely present our body to the Lord. "Lord, formerly my body was under the usurping hand of the enemy. Now I thank You that You have released this body. Here, I present it to You. It is no longer my body but Your sacrifice." Then we will be able to realize the church life.

Our Mind Renewed for the Church Life

After the body is presented, the mind must be renewed. When we take our full share in the practical life of the church, we must have our mind purged, renewed, and reeducated. To have our mind renewed and reeducated, we must drop all our old thoughts and natural ideas and all the teachings and considerations of traditional Christianity. This is what it means to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. Then the church life is possible; otherwise, the mind will be the biggest problem and the greatest source of trouble in the church. Some dear ones have brought in so many problems since they came into the church. Before they came, the church was very much at peace and in unity, but since they came in, their minds have created trouble for the church. They think, "My heart is good," but actually their minds are terrible. Many old things have to be stripped off for the transforming of their minds.

Our Spirit Burning for the Church Life

First of all, the body must be presented; then the mind, representing the soul, needs to be renewed; and finally, the spirit must be on fire, burning fervently. We have to be burning in spirit (v. 11) We should be burned and burning. We must be burning in our spirit.

The Christian life may seem to be individual and private, but really it is not; it is a corporate life, a Body life. You alone are not the Body; you are a member, and you need others as members in order to realize the church life. When we stop trying to do good by ourselves and learn to depend on Christ and live by Him, we are a living member and prepared to be a functioning member of His Body. Then we have to realize the church life by definitely presenting our body to the Lord, by having our mind renewed, and by having our spirit on fire. When the body is presented, the soul is transformed, and the spirit is on fire, then we will have the church life. We will be a living, functioning member—not a troublesome, cold, or dead member. We will not be a member out of function but a prevailing and aggressive member in function. We will have the reality of the church life.