

Excerpts from The Economy of God – Chapter 23 (part 2)

THE CHURCH— THE MANIFESTATION OF GOD IN THE FLESH

The manifestation of God in the flesh has very much to do with the church being the house of God and the pillar and base of the truth. When we are the living Body of Christ in a certain place, we are really the house of God and the pillar and base of reality. We are then the increase, the enlargement, of the manifestation of God in the flesh. God manifests Himself again in the flesh, but in a wider way. The principle of the New Testament is the principle of the incarnation, which is simply God Himself manifested in the flesh. In other words, God is mingled with human beings, not in an outward way but in an inward way. The church is the manifestation of God, not the manifestation of doctrines or gifts. The church must have God in Christ through the Spirit manifested, not the doctrines or gifts demonstrated.

NOT BUILT BY MERE TEACHINGS

Furthermore, we should not give attention only to the teachings. In order to help us, allow me to use a simple illustration. When I was a boy, I and many others studied in a Christian school and received a Christian education. We were taught with the stories of the Bible. Although we were not saved, most of us were brought into Christianity and learned the doctrines. Many times we argued with people that Christianity was the right religion. The missionaries ministered all the doctrines and teachings to us. We learned that God is a God of three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. We learned that Christ was born of a virgin and lived, walked, and worked on this earth, and we even believed that He was resurrected. But if you asked us, “Are you saved?” we did not know. To us God and Christ were only terms. I have to testify that by that time hardly any of the several hundred members in that church were clear about salvation. They were known, however, as Christians. Sometimes all the members of the church paraded on the streets, holding up crosses and singing “Onward Christian Soldiers.” I share this in order to illustrate how empty mere teachings are.

Today some insist on ministering a set of teachings such as predestination, free will, absolute grace, and eternal security. You can minister all these teachings, but the life and the spirit within people may never be touched. To continue my testimony, one day a member of our family was saved, and then I got saved. We finally had a real touch with God, and life touched us deeply within and wrought a real change. Even the outward living and the outward walk were changed. The real change in our lives influenced others also to be saved. Thereafter we knew that we must have something more than teachings. All the teachings in the Scriptures must simply be a vehicle to transmit Christ into us. If they do not fulfill this purpose, we are desperately short of something.

NOT BUILT BY MERE GIFTS

The same principle applies to the matter of gifts. Many Christians today think that since they have the gifts, they are quite spiritual. But in fact, it is not so. If you read 1 Corinthians, you can see the state of the Corinthian believers. They exercised the gifts even more than the apostle, but did they have the real growth of life (14:18-20)? No, they were fleshly and childish (3:1-3). As the teachings must be the means to convey Christ to others, so also the gifts must be the means only to convey Christ. God’s intention today is not to give us many teachings and gifts but to minister and impart Christ into us.

Here is a real incident. I met a person who was full of the knowledge of the Bible, but as he talked about the Bible, he was smoking. After talking about the book of Matthew and the ten virgins for half an hour, he said, “Excuse me, I have to smoke a little. I know this is wrong, but I am weak.” Then he went into the book of Revelation and talked about the ten horns, the seven heads, and the forty-two months. He had the strength to teach, but eventually he had to say, “Excuse me, I have to smoke a little more.” Although he was so strong in Bible teaching, he was very weak in the spiritual life.

I also saw many people speaking in tongues. After the demonstration of the gift, they were careless in their daily living. Some were even more careless than unbelievers. It was easy for them to lose their temper at home. All

these things simply prove one thing, that God's intention is not to give us teachings and gifts but to give us Christ, the living One. He uses the teachings, when given in a proper way, to convey Christ to us, and sometimes He uses certain gifts as the means to minister Christ to us and stir up people to receive Christ. But we all must realize that God's intention is that we may know the living One, the Triune God, and experience Christ in the Holy Spirit.

Do you remember the story in the Old Testament of a donkey that spoke a human language? That was genuine speaking in tongues. I doubt whether all the tongues are as genuine today. I read an article recently in which the writer reported that he had contacted more than one hundred persons speaking in tongues. He said that every one without exception doubted whether the tongue he spoke was genuine. Yet the writer still encouraged people not to doubt but to continue their experience. After I read that, I said to myself, "At the time of Pentecost, did Peter doubt whether the tongue he spoke was genuine? Was there anyone at that time who had such doubts?" But today, why do so many people question whether or not their tongue is genuine? The simple answer is that many tongues today are not genuine.

But even if you are speaking a genuine tongue, I must tell you that this is not life. Even King Saul received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (1 Sam. 19:22-24), but do not think that he experienced life. On the contrary, it simply exposed him. After he received the outpouring, he made himself naked. This illustrates that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is different from life. Life is not the outpouring; life is only Christ Himself in the Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, I do beg that you will try your best to understand that I am not trying to criticize, but I am very burdened. When I see the desperate situation of the Lord's people, I do not know what to say or what to do. When the teachings are taught, people are responsive. When the gifts are mentioned, many are stirred up. But when the inner life and the indwelling Christ are ministered, how great is the need for an inner revelation! The doctrines and the gifts are outward, but Christ is hidden within. How the Lord's people need to know this indwelling One, who is so living and powerful—converting, regulating, strengthening, refreshing, and always transforming and saturating us!

NOT BUILT BY POSITION

We must also see that the building of the church is not a matter of position or responsibility but a matter of life in the inner being. It is not a matter of putting someone into a position, but it is the growth to maturity of the inner life. The inner being must be wrought by God through His inward working. The more we put people into position, the more we will have nothing. But the more we help people to realize the growth of life, the more the life will multiply. The growth of the inner life is the sure way of building up the church. Then through matured life we will spontaneously be qualified to exercise responsibility.

Again we need to repeat: God's intention is to impart Christ into us and make Christ everything within us. God uses the teachings to help some, He uses the gifts to help others, but these are not the main thing. Inner revelation is needed to see the goal of the living Christ dwelling within us. Then wherever we are meeting together, we are the living house of the living God. The living God dwells, lives, and works in us, and we bear the testimony of Jesus, who is the reality of this whole universe. Then we will have a real manifestation of the living God in the flesh. This is the way of God's recovery today. Let us look to the Lord for the inner grace so that we may have the reality of the church.