

Experiences of God's Economy

*Touching problems with the
value system of God's economy*

We love God's economy. It is just Christ being everything and the church being the result and issue of Christ being everything. When Christ is everything, then the issue is God's heart's desire, the church. It is not a matter of trying to have the church and then adding Christ in. It is Christ being everything, and that is the church. So praise the Lord for God's wonderful economy.

Consider how the apostles touched the church life. Whatever they touched, they were brothers with a clear focus. It was not just outwardly arranging the church in certain ways or just solving problems, but it was knowing that God wants to conform all His people to the image of Christ. So the kind of ministry that is found in the pages of the New Testament leads the saints into a deeper fellowship with the Lord in some way or another, or it opens up something of the truth about the church, about the kingdom, about God's purpose. It takes what is apparently mundane and links it to the eternal value system. For example, that one little turn to the Lord or that apology or keeping the oneness of the Spirit between

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us in the bond of peace — all these things are really the divine activity of God operating to build up His eternal habitation. So we see a different set of values in the New Testament in dealing with problems.

The world has its value system, and we have our value systems. But may we lay ourselves open to be so renewed that we would have the identical value system of the Triune God — that we would feel the way God feels, that we would see things and perceive things in the same way. This value system is in every page of the New Testament. Whatever the New Testament ministry touched, the emphasis of God's economy was there. This is a great thing.

I have been reading about Jonathan Edwards. We know that he was part of the Great Awakening, when the Spirit moved in those early years of American history. The Puritans had fallen back into formalism and worldliness and deadness in the churches. And then eventually in Northampton, Massachusetts, the Lord touched the believers where Edwards was meeting, and the Spirit came. They experienced a dynamic display of the Spirit, and people were quickened. Many kinds of people were saved and taverns were shut. It was real revival. It was an awakening. All this happened. And in that congregation, Edwards was leading them to know Christ and to focus on Christ. Some of the most descriptive language of the riches and the excellencies of Christ that has ever been uttered in English words came out of Jonathan

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Edward's mouth. In his ministry you can taste the sweetness of his relationship with the Lord and the centrality of Christ in his understanding and experience.

But somehow when an issue arose, the church in Northampton lost whatever focus he might have shared and instead got into an issue. It became a big problem. As I was reading this, I felt like talking to the pages, "Don't you know, saints, right here it's a matter of turning to the Lord. You could bring God into that situation." What a mercy it is that we could have our eyes opened not just in a church meeting, but on a Monday afternoon, in our daily life. So many times we have not linked what we heard in the meetings to the situation that we are going through. But increasingly as we all testify and share with one another, we are responding by saying, "This is that. What I'm going through is just what this saint has gone through." We begin to make links in our experience and say, "This — what I am going through — is that which is revealed in the New Testament ministry."

The need for a deeper fellowship

The book of 1 Corinthians deals with problem after problem, and in the dealing with each problem we see God's economy. For example, we see Paul touching a narrow view of the church by ministering the truth of the

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universal church. Then we see him touching an organic division in the church by directing the saints into a deeper fellowship with the Lord in His name: "I beseech you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:10). That name is linked to their calling. They had been called into the fellowship of God's Son (v. 9). So by their fellowshipping with the Lord, Paul knew God would be faithful to do something among the saints where there was an organic division, where there was not the harmony and the reality of oneness present with the saints.

The way Paul touches the problem is by saying, "God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." Some were saying, "I am of Paul," and others "I am of Apollos." These words of strife were creating an atmosphere that was disintegrating the presence of the Lord in their meetings. This is what strife does. Strife disintegrates the reality of the church. Then the church becomes a form. It becomes cold, and the Spirit is not free to circulate in the atmosphere of the church. Then you do not feel an enlivening when you touch the church. Through the centuries, the enemy has always tried to disintegrate the Lord's presence by strife. So Paul is saying that God is faithful with all of us regardless of our situation or how we were "cut" from our mother's womb. "God is faithful

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through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son.” It is by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ that he beseeches them to all speak the same thing.

Spending time to let the Lord go deeper

When there are cleavages and discordant things surfacing in us, this is a call to deeper, more intimate and thorough fellowship with the Lord. It is not just touch and go. It is a fellowship of getting ourselves into His presence and lingering there for some time, until the noise in our mind and our heart is quieted. We need to leisurely take time to sit in His presence and open ourself to Him and read the Word and also the writings that are of the nature of the New Testament ministry. These are writings that will lead us to God and expose us. They will unveil His economy at the deepest level and deepen our fellowship with Him. Then we are not just fast food Christians, but we are spending time to let the Lord go deeper. Ask Him the question, “Lord, why is there strife in me?” It is not just saying, “Lord, deal with the strife,” and then off you go. But stay there and ask Him why and let Him expose. Let Him show you that you have a preference that is rooted in your self. Let the light shine.

When the light shines and we see our preference in God's light, there is nothing we can do to change ourself

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by the energy of our flesh. But when the light shines, we can look and say "Amen." That in itself kills the preference, and the Lord is able to work at a deeper level. Rather than not facing it, rather than not admitting it, rather than living a life of denial, we live opening to Him and letting the cross work at the deepest level. And that cannot come quickly. It takes time to be in His presence, to let Him shine.

Paul took three years in Arabia. His whole being was in a rage. We do not know much about Paul during those three years except that he was obviously with the Lord and letting God completely renovate his whole being. He had views. He had concepts. He was a filled-up man. How could anyone physically take the believers into prison and have them killed, and watch Stephen get martyred right before his eyes, if that man did not have a lot in him. It was not just a little emotional break-out with Paul. He was constituted with a self-life that would not quit until God shut it down.

We have been called into the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ. How deep is your fellowship? How deep is my fellowship with the Lord? To live our whole life in fellowship, we need to have a running start. We need to spend some time with the Lord, and then continue to nurture that fellowship with Him through the day.

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Then His life is living in us, and there is a dividing of soul and spirit. We see the self and we see Christ. This is God's economy. It is into the fellowship of His Son.

Things related to a hidden life with God

In the church life oftentimes we go on for some years and then the Lord takes another major step in our experience. We have the sense that it is a call for a deeper fellowship with God. This happened in the Gospels. The Lord told the apostles, "Come away for a while. Rest a while." There are times and seasons in our life when this is necessary, because it is so easy to be caught up in the mundane things of life and not go much deeper than that. So go to your closet. Shut the door. Pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. We all need to have a secret life with God, a hidden life. And that brings the blessedness that funnels so much life into the church. There is so much life because everyone is enjoying the Head and the Source, and we are in fellowship with Him.

Paul says, "God is faithful through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ." That is where God is faithful — in the fellowship. So say, "Lord, deepen my fellowship with You." In that fellow-

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ship, you have experiences such as taking your gift to the altar in Matthew 5. This is a picture of being in the realm of fellowship. You are enjoying the Lord. You are going to the altar. You are touching God. And while you are going, while you are in that fellowship, you remember that your brother has something against you. So the Lord says to leave the gift there and go be reconciled to your brother first, and then come back and continue. This shows that in the process of fellowship with the Lord, light comes. Things surface in our consciousness. God shines. And then we can say "Amen" and let Him do that interior work. We find ourselves over and over again humbling ourselves, telling Him, "God, I am more wretched than I thought. This runs deep. Self is at the core." Opening to Him in this way allows His life to be imparted and allows Him to actually transform us and change us into the same image. But that comes by beholding Him with an open face, without any self-justification or anything that would try to excuse oneself. We are openly admitting in His light what we are, and then beholding Him and letting Him transmit His nature into us. We get changed and become a person with a different essence, the essence of Christ. This happens by deepening our fellowship.

To deepen our fellowship, sometimes we need a running start or someone to help us get going. We need

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to read books like *The Inner Chamber*, by Andrew Murray. I read that book years ago and remember the kind of registrations I was having as I turned the pages. I can still feel what was going on in me — “Lord, I want this kind of life. I want to know You. I want to spend time with You. I want to take time with You.” It was a New Testament kind of ministry that drew my heart in the right direction and just gave more confirmation to the life within and more supply. So, Lord, deepen our fellowship.

Considering the depth of our fellowship

Have you ever considered the depth and the nature of your fellowship with the Lord? How deep is it? Is it just calling on the Lord? Do not misunderstand me. Is it just interrupting your thoughts with “Jesus,” and that is it? If it is just that, it is short. The Lord Jesus was into the bosom of the Father, and He would spend prolonged time with the Father. The disciples would find Him praying. As a man His fellowship with His Father was surely displayed again and again throughout the Gospels, especially in Luke. Luke mentions prayer, the times of prayer and the experiences where the Lord prayed. In the other Gospels you do not see the prayer side that much. But in Luke’s Gospel, the Lord is always praying.

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When Peter said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” the Lord said, “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you” (Matt. 16:16-17). When you read this account in Matthew, it looks like Peter just came up with this response on his own. But when you read the account in Luke, it mentions that the Lord had been praying and then He asked them the question, “Who do men say that I am?” So when Peter said, “You are the Christ,” that was a direct answer to the Lord’s fellowship with the Father concerning these brothers. So thank God for the fellowship that is opened up in the New Testament that deepens our experience with the Lord. This is necessary for all of us.

As we grow in the Lord, as days go on, we need to ask the Lord, “Deepen my fellowship.” Especially it is a call for this when chronic things keep surfacing. These things keep appearing. They are chronic. The Lord wants to get to the depths, and that requires spending some time with Him, opening to Him and deepening our fellowship, our communication, our talking with Him. This deepening of our fellowship comes in our relationship with Him, and it comes equally by hearing the church, by hearing the Body. We must have ears to hear the members because the nature of our Christ today is as the Head filling the members.

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Fellowship with the Lord and hearing the Body

When we deepen our enjoyment of the Lord and fellowship with Him, and when we have an openness to the Body and an ear to hear the fellowship in the Body, this is how the Lord takes us deeper, this is how the Lord goes on in us. Notice the word “hear” in Matthew 18:15-17. Hear the members. Hear the Body. We could give testimony of how God has operated in all our lives due to our fellowship with Him and with one another, and how we have heard, how something a member said penetrated into us and the Lord took us deeper. This is how the Head communicated to us. Both the Head and the members are necessary for the Lord to take us on in His economy.

When Paul deals with the matter of division in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 he says, “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul?” (v. 13). Paul identifies this church division with, “Is *Christ* divided?” This is touching the church with God’s economy. It is putting it in the realm where it belongs. Instead of dealing with it as a denominational squabble or something of that nature, or instead of dealing with it as some kind of personal problem, Paul puts it where it belongs — “Is Christ divided?” When he touches division, he is not just solving a problem, but he

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is releasing revelation about the church, that the church is the Body of Christ. When he says, “Is Christ divided?” he is addressing the church as Christ, Christ corporate, the Head filling the members, the whole Christ, the Head and the Body. This shows us how Paul touched this problem with revelation, with an unveiling of the nature of the church.

The three “knowings” of the new creation

Second Corinthians 5:15-18 says, ¹⁵ “And He died for all that those who live may no longer live to themselves but to Him who died for them and has been raised. ¹⁶ So then we, from now on, know no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him so no longer. ¹⁷ So then if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away; behold, they have become new. ¹⁸ But all things are out from God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation.” This is an opening of the realm of the new creation, which the church is. And there are three knowings in the realm of the new creation — the knowing of Christ, the knowing of ourselves, and the knowing of one another. These are the three knowings in the new creation.

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Knowing Christ in the new creation

The church is the new creation. Our meetings, our fellowship, our relatedness to one another, is not in the old creation. It is in the new creation. And in the new creation there are three things we all need to know. We need to know Christ in the new creation. We need to know ourselves in the new creation. And we need to know one another in the new creation. These three knowings are all here in 2 Corinthians 5. In verse 16 Paul says concerning Christ, "Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him so no longer." This is a new knowing of Christ. It is the knowing of Christ in the new creation, which means the knowing of Christ as the new man, as the Head of a many-membered Body. Paul's revelation of Christ has changed. He used to think of Him as merely the individual Jesus of Nazareth, alone, by Himself. But he no longer knows Christ according to the flesh. He does not know Him in the realm of the old creation. He knows Him now in the realm of the new creation. He saw this on the day he was knocked to the ground on the road to Damascus. Saul saw when he heard a voice say to him, "Why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you persecute" (Acts 9:4-5).

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Saul was not persecuting Jesus of Nazareth. He was persecuting the Christians. He was hauling them into prison. But now he had a revelation of the resurrected Christ as the Head of His many-membered Body, and that to touch the members was to touch Him. So the knowing of Christ in the new creation is to see Christ in this way. It is to see Christ and to know Christ as He is in all the members. He flows out through the members, and that is why it is so utterly critical to hear the Body. It is because the kind of Christ today is the resurrected One, the life-giving Spirit, the Head who now lives in His members. He is not just doing things, if you understand, all by Himself there in the heavens. The way He is doing things is through His members.

So Saul learned this from day one. When he said, "Lord, what shall I do?" the Lord did not give him a further vision or a dream direct from the heavens of what he should do. The Lord said, "Go into the city and it will be told to you what to do." And Saul went to a very humble disciple, Ananias. We do not know anything about this brother. He was just there. And through Ananias the Lord told Saul that He appeared to him and called him for a purpose (Acts 26:16). Then what came out of Ananias' mouth was God's call in Paul's life. It was through the members, it was through the Body, that Saul received this tremendous vision. The Lord touched

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him and then the Lord guided him to the members. And that is how he received. That is the Christ in the new creation that Paul says we no longer know according to the flesh.

This is the knowing of Christ. And we need to see the church this way. The church is not a denomination. That is such an insult to the cross. It nullifies what Christ did on the cross. He slew the Jew. He slew the Gentile. He slew circumcision and uncircumcision. He broke down all the barriers existing between humanity — racial, cultural, religious, social. All those things were taken out of the way on the cross. And what came through the cross was the new man, members organically joined to this Head, where Christ is all and in all (Eph. 2:13-22; Col. 3:10-11). So to bring back a Greek church and a Jew church and a circumcised church is to nullify the cross. It is an insult to Calvary. It is saying that the cross did not do its work. The cross terminated the old creation, the old man, old relationships, preferences, Paul churches, Peter churches, doctrinal churches, experience-oriented churches. All of that was terminated on the cross. God forbid that we would nullify the cross by seeing the church in any other way than as just Christ enlarged. This is the Christ in the new creation. So when Paul opens up the matter of division, he does not try to solve a little

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argument between the saints. He says, "Is Christ divided?" indicating that he brought in the revelation of the knowing of Christ in the realm of the new creation. That is the first knowing.

Knowing ourselves in the new creation

Let us go back to 2 Corinthians 5:15 again: "And He died for all that those who live may no longer live to themselves but to Him who died for them and has been raised." Here it is so clear that on the cross Christ died for all. And verse 14 says, "One died for all, therefore all died." So we no longer live to ourselves. In the realm of the new creation, the second knowing is to know ourselves, and that is that we are not the point of reference anymore. We no longer live to ourselves but to Him. This is knowing ourselves in the new creation.

What does this mean practically? It means that the old source in me died, and I no longer live to it. So in the fellowship of the church in the new creation, if any of us are on the level of taking things personally, we are in the wrong realm. In fellowship in the church the light is here, and we get exposed. Something may be said, something may happen in a church meeting, something of the light of God shines, and we take it to ourselves and say, "I don't

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fit here. I don't belong here." We ourselves are the point of reference. This expresses something other than the new creation, where we no longer live to ourselves.

That means we have to learn how to take sides with Christ, to identify with Christ against ourself, regardless of how it kicks, how it fumes, how it yells, how it is angry, how it reacts. We side and identify with Christ in the new creation over against ourself, and have a dividing of soul and spirit. The fellowship is not personal. It is about a six thousand year old problem. You are only going through a piece of the pie. We all experience a piece of the old Adam pie (Rom. 5:14—6:6). It comes out in my nature. It comes out in your nature. It is expressed in all of us. It is all the same. There is no difference. But when we pass through it, it becomes very personal. Then we get subjective.

But the knowing in the new creation is a knowing of ourselves: "One died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all that those who live may no longer live to themselves but to Him." This means that whatever is exposed in us, whatever the light shines on, we are living to Him. We are even against ourself, one with Him. This is the dividing of soul and spirit. And this is the knowing of ourselves in the church. What does that do? It creates an atmosphere of God Himself living here, where there is

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a fellowship and a presence of the Lord and a freedom and a flow. God can pass through us and live His life and operate.

But the enemy is subtle. He has come in devious ways through the centuries, through the self undealt with in some form. In Matthew 16 when Peter told the Lord to pity Himself, the Lord said, "Get behind Me, Satan." Then immediately He said, "If you are going to follow Me, you must deny yourself, Peter." This is the great denial, that one great denial. Deny yourself as the source of everything. The real attack in the church against God's building is through the self. It is when we become involved personally with our own offenses and hurts. That is old creation behavior. New creation is no longer living to yourself but to Him. This goes deep. You can feel the scourging sometimes. You can feel it because you are involved. But unless we pass through those kinds of experiences where you can feel the pressure of your self-life screaming for life, wanting to live, we will still remain at a certain level. So do not despise whatever He is doing at whatever level He is doing it. This is the knowing of ourselves in the new creation — no longer let the self be the point of reference, but live to Him. Identify with Him.

This knowing of ourselves cannot exist where pride

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is. If you are proud, if you are not willing to humble yourself, to fall down on your face and to admit, it is hard for God to get through. But if you say, “Lord, humble me,” and you humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, the identification with Him is easy. The looking at yourself objectively, the condemnation of yourself, the refusal of yourself, and the absoluteness not to pity the self-life is infused into us because it has already been lived. He already did it. And now we identify with Him. But that comes by “humble yourself under the mighty hand of God” (1 Pet. 5:6). Then God flows. This is the knowing of ourselves in the new creation.

Knowing one another in the new creation

In 2 Corinthians 5:16 Paul says, “So then we, from now on, know no one according to the flesh.” And then he says in verse 17, “So then if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away; behold, they have become new.” What is new is that we no longer know one another according to the flesh. We know one another in the realm of identifying with Christ. So I not only identify with Christ in myself, but I identify with Christ in you. That is why the church is wonderful — it is transparent. The meetings calibrate us to identify with

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Him. We know one another in this way. If we refuse to pray, if we refuse to open our spirit, how can we know one another in this realm? But if we will simply humble ourselves and pray and open up to God and let God flow, we will know one another in the realm of the new creation.

In both 1 and 2 Corinthians when Paul touches the church with the problem of division, he touches it with an unveiling of Christ in the new creation, of ourselves in the new creation, and of one another in the new creation. We are members one of another, receiving one another, and enjoying the common Christ that flows between us. This revelation was brought into a church that was teetering with division and organic breaks. This is how the church is shepherded in God's economy.

Who could lead others to a vision of what the church is? Christ is filling the church. Who could lead others to know themselves? You are no longer the point of reference. Don't identify with that sulking in you. Identify with Christ. Know Him. Know one another not in the old creation, but identify with one another in Christ. This is how the church is brought out of those lower realms into the realm of the new creation, the new man. Lord, we want this. We desire this. We want You to go on despite everything and anything in us. Despite it all, we want to know You in the new creation. We want to know

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ourselves and one another in that realm. Amen! This brings us into God.

What a mercy it is to even have a little bit of bent in that direction. To have some inclination despite the pressure of the self and the flesh, to have a little bit of bent in that way, means that the mind of the Spirit is operating in us. We just take care of that and say, "Lord, keep renewing me." This constantly purifies the church. This is how to handle the church. It is with the washing of the water by this word, by this speaking, by this rhema. It is not political. It is not in the realm of just tickling the ear. Rather, all of us are brought into the realm of revelation, and that gives the opportunity for the Spirit to touch us, to speak to us, and to operate in us for the producing of the church in the new creation. Amen.

The all-sufficiency of Christ for a reasoning mind

In 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 Paul is dealing with reasoning minds. In verse 19 he says, "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the understanding of those who understand I will set aside." Later in chapter 3 he also says, "the Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are vain." Also in 1 Corinthians 1:22 he says, "For indeed Jews require signs and Greeks seek

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wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified.” Here he is dealing with saints in an environment where the wisdom and the reasoning of the mind is so prevalent. It is a mind that requires. It is a requiring mind. It requires answers. Some of us just have to have answers. We require it. We cannot go on unless we get answers. Or we are seeking after wisdom. We are not content with Christ, not satisfied with Christ, but wanting answers. Some of us may have lived this way all our lives, requiring and seeking after, requiring and seeking after, missing Christ.

But the way Paul touches a reasoning mind, the understanding of the wise, the reasonings of the mind, the seeking, the requiring — that kind of mind — is to reduce them to Christ. In 1 Corinthians 1:30 he says, “But of Him are you in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom to us from God.” And then he just reduces them to Christ. What a blessed thing when we are content with Christ Himself as our all-sufficiency over against our requiring and seeking after mind, that reasoning mind. The way Paul touches it is to unveil Christ once again: “When I came to you declaring the mystery of God, I did not know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. You wanted to know so many things, but I didn’t know anything among you except Christ — Christ as your righteousness, Christ as your sanctification, Christ as your redemption.” He presents an all-inclusive, sufficient Christ.

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“Then in verse 31 Paul says, “He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord.” So even here Paul knew that whenever you are seeking after wisdom and whenever you are requiring these things, what is underneath the surface is a boasting, proud heart. So Paul puts the ax right in the middle of this and says, “No flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him are you in Christ, so that our boast is the Lord.” He again brings us back to Christ and His all-sufficiency. Our boast is nothing else but the Lord Himself.

*Views and interpretations determined
by what realm we live in — soul or spirit*

Then in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, Paul touches the soulish realm of the wisdom of men by ministering the realm of the Spirit. Now obviously here Paul is going right to the source of things. If you look at verses 11-16, you see the realm of the Spirit over against the realm of the soul. In verse 11 he says, “For who among men knows the things of men, except the spirit of man which is in him? In the same way, the things of God also no one has known except the Spirit of God.” Then he goes on in verses 13-16, “Which things also we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught by the

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Spirit, interpreting spiritual things with spiritual words, or with spiritual men. ¹⁴ But a soulish man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he is not able to know them because they are spiritually discerned, or discerned spiritually. ¹⁵ But the spiritual man discerns all things, but he himself is discerned by no one. ¹⁶ For who has known the mind of the Lord and who will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.”

Here Paul touches the source of the spirit and the soul. He touches the lack of receptivity, of appreciation concerning the wisdom of God, that hidden wisdom, which is related to the church, God's building, and the sense of value that you could have in your breast to want and love the church more than anything. To have that capacity within your being, in your heart, is directly related to whether or not you are a person in your daily life that lives out of the soul life and functions in that realm or lives out of the realm of the Spirit and functions in that Spirit. He says that the soulish man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God. So instead of rejecting the message of the church foolishly, ask yourself the questions, “What realm do I live in? Am I a soulish person? Do I live by my mind? Do I live by feelings? Do I live by my own will?” These are the questions to ask. It is not a matter of understanding a little bit better. It is a matter of living from the Spirit and

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touching the Spirit and having a change of your source in a progressive way.

That means obviously you are a person who spends time with the Lord. You fellowship. You love the church. You keep coming forward with your spirit, and you live in the realm of the spirit, not the soul. If we live in the soul, we automatically shut up our being from receiving further revelation. The soulish man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God. He just looks at something and says, "That's foolish. These people are just too much for the church." It is a view he has. It is a kind of unspoken judgment sitting here — "This is too much." Instead of staying there and being in darkness the rest of your life, put a question mark on the fact that the things of the Spirit are foolishness to you. They are foolish in your mind. This may be God's call to have a transfer.

You do things soulishly. You live soulishly. You live by your feelings, your emotions. After being in the church life forty years, I could tell you that the attacks that have come to the church, the real attacks of Satan through individuals over the years, have not been due to just a little misunderstanding, but to ones living in the wrong realm and as a result pulling up a view from that realm. That realm has a view. You interpret according to that realm.

In 1 Corinthians 2:15 Paul says, "But the spiritual

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man discerns all things, but he himself is not discerned.” I have a value about Jesus Christ and about the church. You cannot criticize me. You do not have authority to do that. You live in the world. You live in front of the TV. You live for yourself. You have your own goals. Don't you judge me. You cannot judge me. You are not qualified. “The spiritual man discerns all things, but he himself is not judged by anyone.” That means I have a set of values in me, and those values are Christ and the church. It is not that I am any better. But the cross has worked. God has worked. I see. I have an appreciation for Jesus, for the church, for the churches, for His purpose. I have an appreciation. You do not have that appreciation. Don't judge me. Go to God. Let Him deal with your TV. Let Him deal with the inordinate things in your relationships with other people, even how you are at the office. Let Him cut in. Allow the Spirit to deal with you.

Do you know what will happen to you? You will come and you will embrace me and say, “Praise the Lord, Brother Bill! Jesus is Lord!” It is not that we are all just excited here emotionally and are all on a bandwagon over something. I guarantee you, there are lots of dealings of God in the church life here. And to have the same values and the same appreciations is to be in the realm of the Spirit. Paul calls it the spiritual man. So do not expect that everyone will understand why we love the church so

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much. It is not just a matter of understanding. The soulish man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God. They are foolishness to him. Neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. That means you must be in the realm of the Spirit. Then your discernment and appreciation goes higher.

Sometimes I admire some of the saints — just the appreciation they have for one another, the appreciation they have for the Body. They have a sense of value in doing even one thing for the saints, in caring for them practically, from fixing something to caring for them. There is a sense of value even about this property, the way it is so meticulously cared for, the serving, the handling. Who would think of lawyers and doctors and engineers being out on the grounds picking up cigarette butts? The value, the sense of appreciation — where does that come from? It comes from interacting with the Spirit. Amen! This is how Paul touched the church. He brought the church into the source. Just look at the New Testament. This is the New Testament ministry.

Exposing symptoms and touching the source

In 1 Corinthians chapter 3 we see Paul touching outward symptoms by exposing their source. This is so clear in verses 1-4: “And I, brothers, was not able to speak

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to you as to spiritual men, but as to fleshy, as to infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, for you were not yet able to receive it. But neither yet now are you able, ³ for you are still fleshly. For if there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly and do you not walk according to man, or according to the manner of man? ⁴ For when someone says, I am of Paul, and another, I of Apollos, are you not men of flesh?" Do you see? The way the New Testament ministry handles these problems of jealousy and strife is to right away lead the saints to the source.

Paul says, "Look, there is jealousy and strife among you. Are you not fleshly? And do you not walk according to man?" In other words, take the symptom and follow it to the source. That is why it can become very frustrating to our flesh-life here. So many saints just do not relate to that realm. We may relate right/wrong, yes/no. We want answers. Somebody give me an answer. Well, the answer is "wrong source." That is the answer. Wrong source. Amen! A brother prayed something yesterday when we were together. The word that came out was, "It is not agreement, Lord. It is You." In the way that came out of the prayer, there was so much light. We are not here just agreeing. It is not just agreement. It is God. Agreement can be outward, but not God. God must be inward.

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So this is source, touching source, being brought into source. Paul exposes jealousy and strife. Then he says, "You need milk and not meat." He handles the church at that point in a different way. He feeds them with milk. It is still feeding, nourishing. Their capacity is not where it should be at this particular juncture, but this means they need some milk. You can see that the way Paul handles things is by bringing the saints into the realm of God, into the realm of source, into the realm of revelation.

In 1 Corinthians 3:7-17 Paul handles the church and touches the church in such a marvelous way. In verses 9-10 he says, ⁹ "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's cultivated land, God's building. ¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, and another builds upon it. But let each man take heed how he builds upon it." Then he says in verses 12-13, ¹² "But if anyone builds upon the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, stubble, ¹³ the work of each will become manifest; for the day will declare it, because it is revealed by fire, and the fire itself will prove each one's work, of what sort it is." "Sort" is a source word. What sort of work is it? Is it gold, silver, precious stone?

And then he says in verses 16-17, ¹⁶ "Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit

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of God dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him; for the temple of God is holy, and such are you.” Here when he touches the church and the division of the church, he unveils the church in a deep way. If we were here promoting our work, we could not talk this way. We would lose members. If this is our work and we talk this way, we might offend someone. But Paul says, “You are God’s building and we are workers here, and we have to build with Christ. We have to build with the good material,” which is related to the source from which we come — gold, silver, and precious stones. And you are the temple of the living God. Be careful how you touch the church, how you touch God’s house.

The fear of the Lord

Look at the way Paul talks: “You are the temple of the living God. And this is where God lives.” When it is the church, when it is the reality of the house and the vision of the church, there is an awesome respect and fear. Incidentally, the fear of the Lord is an attitude of fearing the element of your self in anything. That is what it means to have the fear of God. If you are a person that fears Him, the fear means you fear any self-life intruding and touching the church. That is the real fear. It is an openness to the Lord. “Work out your own salvation with *fear* and

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trembling, because it is God operating in you.” “Do all things without murmurings and reasonings.” The fear is the fear that you do not want any of the self injected. You are going to fellowship, you are going to serve, and there is a fear of God in you. That fear is, “Lord, don’t let any self-life muddy this thing.” This is the fear of the Lord. And then there is an awesome sense of the church, God’s building.

Touching fornication by connecting it to leaven in the church

In 1 Corinthians chapter 5 Paul touches fornication by its relationship to the church. In verse 4 he deals with it by saying, ⁴“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you and my spirit have been assembled, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” So here is immorality in the life of an individual in the church. And there was not repentance, but even there was a kind of puffing up. The way the New Testament ministry relates to that problem is to actually link that problem to the church itself. Immorality must be judged in the light of the church. And even Paul says, “When we come together, to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. . .” This is a kind of heavenly

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discipline being administrated through the church, of someone who does not repent of that kind of life and turn from it. Paul deals with fornication by linking it to the church.

Then Paul renews the minds of the saints in verse 6: “Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” So what he does is point out the fact that this kind of thing existing in the church is leaven. This opens the church up in a new kind of way. It is not just a free-for-all. Someone living immorally, in their attitude, their way of life, and their values, existing among the brothers loosely, becomes leaven. This begins to affect other saints in the church, especially some weak brothers and sisters who are tempted. It becomes a temptation to them. Years ago in the church life there was a brother among us who would just freely drink his beer. One day he took several brothers, new brothers, and they all went out drinking on a big boat. Later we had fellowship with him, and he was not willing to give that kind of thing up. So we felt there was no way to continue unless that brother dealt with the Lord, because it was leaven in the church.

This is seeing that the church is not a mere organization. It is the Body of Christ. So such a thing as fornication, so gross, is dealt with in the light of its leavening effect on the rest of the members. Of course,

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in different forms there could be leaven. Our worldliness, anything that is not dealt with, becomes leaven. It begins to influence. We have influence over one another. So the way Paul touches these things is by touching them with not only Christ, but with the church as God's very embodiment, that nothing would be leaven.

Then in verses 9-10 he says, ⁹ "I wrote to you in my letter not to mingle with fornicators, ¹⁰ but not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous and rapacious, or idolaters, since then you would have to go out of the world." Paul is talking about unbelievers here that do not know the Lord. The Corinthians were confused about their relationship with these kinds of persons. Of course, these people need the gospel. And obviously he said to them, "Such were some of you." So he is not talking about going to the mountains and not living in this world. But listen to what he says in verse 11: "But now I have written to you not to mingle with anyone who is called a brother," listen to this, "if he is a fornicator or a covetous man or an idolater or a reviler or a drunkard or a rapacious man, with such a one not even to eat." This is in the Bible. It indicates to us the subtlety of Satan when one is professing to be a brother and lives this way.

I had to deal with this this week. Someone outside was influencing another, saying they were a believer,

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talking to another believer, a new believer, and yet living totally another kind of life. So we went over these verses together and saw that the way Paul touches such a problem causes us all to stand still and to say, "Lord, have Your way in me. Swallow everything up in me that would be the wrong influence on any saint."

So we could see God's economy of the depths of the church and of Christ becoming everything. This is at the heart of the New Testament ministry. This is not just solving problems. It is an opening of Christ, the church, and God's expression in the church, that there could be the testimony of Jesus. Oh, may the Lord grant us more and more renewal of our minds as we enjoy the Word in this way, seeing and touching the church life with God's economy. It is over and over again bringing the saints out of all kinds of realms into the realm of the new creation, into the realm of God's economy, into the realm of Christ, the church, the preciousness of the church, the depth of Christ. So, Lord, deepen our fellowship. Deepen our fellowship that we might enjoy Your faithfulness to purify the church and to rid us of every spot and wrinkle and get us ready for Your coming to be a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle. Amen.

— *Bill Freeman*
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