***Spiritual Growth, Spirituality, and Spiritual Maturity

Colossians 1:25-29

COL-214***

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1 Timothy 3:16-17: "All scripture is inspired by God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

1 Timothy 1:13-14: "Retain the standard of sound words, which you have heard from me in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard through the Holy Spirit, Who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you."

1 Timothy 2:15: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the Word of Truth."

We invite your attention this morning to the subject of "The Mystery of the Church," segment number 29, in Colossians 1:25-29.

The church-age believer, we have seen, has special, spiritual relationships with God that were never held by believers in other dispensations. We are unique. The church-age believer has spiritual power that was never experienced by believers in past dispensations. We are unique in that respect. The church way of life is based upon the spiritual food of Bible doctrine, and the spiritual power of being filled with the Spirit. Those are two great realities to which God calls us every day of our lives. And they are realities. These are not inspirational platitudes. They are the realities of what makes a normal human being – to have a human spirit filled with doctrinal viewpoint, and to have the indwelling Holy Spirit free to guide the life accordingly.

**The Filling of the Holy Spirit**

We Christians are to live by this spiritual food, and by this spiritual power system. Each day, we are commanded to grow in the knowledge of doctrine (this truth), in order that we might possess God's thinking. We call that divine viewpoint. Each day a Christian is commanded to be filled (or controlled) by the indwelling Holy Spirit, in order to be in temporal fellowship with God the Father, so that that Christian has spiritual power in his life. And he does not then have to be tossed about by every vain, stupid doctrine that comes out of the human mind, or by every whim and trickery of Satan, in order to bring that believer down into a whimpering, pathetic creature of sin. To be filled with the spirit, then, is a very important relationship with God.

To do it, the Bible gives us three directions. Two commands are negative: 1 Thessalonians 5:19: "Do not quench the Holy Spirit." This is refusing to obey the leading of the indwelling Holy Spirit – that leading that comes through doctrine, and through the personal intuitive guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is negative volition to what God lays upon your heart to do – following instead, the desires of your old sin nature. Quenching will neutralize the Holy Spirit in the Christian's life. And that will take that believer out of temporal fellowship, so that he is neither filled nor controlled by the Spirit. He has no power. Then he will fall back upon his human willpower to try to live the Christian life, and it'll be a total disaster.

The second negative command to be filled with the spirit is in Ephesians 4:30: "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit". These are evil acts performed by the believer in the form of sin and human good. These are violations of the moral laws of God. This has to do with ethical issues of doing what is right, by the standards of God, and not by the compromised readjusted standards of the human mind. Grieving will cause the Holy Spirit to experience great distress relative to that believer, and it takes that Christian out of temporal fellowship, into carnality, so that he is no longer filled (or controlled) by the Holy Spirit.

In addition to these two negative commands for being filled with the Spirit, there is one positive command. That one is in Galatians 5:16: "Walk by means of the Holy Spirit" – in dependence upon the Spirit. It means to live the Christian life in the spiritual power of the Holy Spirit, not in the spiritual power of your good intentions.

**Spirituality**

To be filled with the Spirit and so to be in the condition that the Bible calls spirituality. One may be either in spirituality (filled with the Spirit), or you may be in carnality which is not filled with the Spirit. You may be controlled by the Holy Spirit, and be a spiritual Christian. You may be *not* controlled by the Holy Spirit, and you'll be a carnal Christian. The Holy Spirit guides the Christian through the Word of God, and then He enables him to obey the Word of God, and to do what is right. A Christian who is functioning under the techniques of the Christian life is living by means of the Holy Spirit.

However, to walk by means of the old sin nature takes that Christian right out of temporal fellowship. He is not then filled or controlled by the Holy Spirit. He has no guidance in his life, and he has no power.

It is sad to say that if you could walk up to the average Christian in Christendom today, and said, "How can I be filled with the Spirit?" And many of them would think they know that they have something to say about that. Most of them would look at you with a blank stare. They wouldn't have the foggiest notion. They would never be able to say, "Well, there are two negative commands in the Bible to achieve that status. You do not quench the Spirit; and, you do not grieve the Holy Spirit." And they could explain what that means: "And there's one positive command. You walk by means of dependence on the Holy Spirit. He runs your life. He tells you what to do. You never are thinking on your own." They wouldn't know that. And I guarantee you that if they don't know that: they're muddling through life; their lives are not significant; their lives are a sham of the potential; and, when they get to heaven, there'll be no treasures stored there for them.

Restoration to the status of being filled with the Spirit requires the confession technique of 1 John 1:9: to confess to the Father: "I have quenched the Spirit. I have said, 'No.' I've grieved the Spirit. I've said, 'Yes' to sin. Or I've been walking by means of the lust patterns of my sin nature, not by means of the Holy Spirit.

A believer, at any point in time, is either a spiritual Christian, or a carnal Christian. He is in temporal fellowship, or he is out of it. The spiritual Christian who is filled with the Spirit is imitating God in his life; while a carnal Christian, who is not filled with the Spirit, is imitating Satan in his lifestyle. And that is easily visible in Christians. But it also tells us that you can be a really top-rate Christian filled with the Spirit, walking a godly life, and in significant Christian service. But that doesn't mean that the devil cannot pull you out of it, and bring you down into a pile of nothing, as a carnal Christian, and your joy would be gone.

The church-age believers have the potential, then, for a wonderful life of joyful satisfaction of serving God the Father now, and of an eternity enriched with rewards from the Father for Holy Spirit-led good works which we have performed in His service. Life in the grace of God is wonderful. And it should nearly bring tears to our eyes if we ever grasp what it is to be under the power system of the church-age believer – that God has so treated us with such kindness and ability.

So, Romans 8:28 can say to us: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good, to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." It doesn't matter what comes into your life. When you are a Christian who's walking by means of the Holy Spirit, you're filled with the Spirit. You're not quenching; you're not grieving; and, you're depending upon Him. Everything in your life (the ups and the downs) are all in a mosaic of a wonderful pattern of grace.

Please notice Romans 8:35-38: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Should tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword?" Christians experience all these things: "Just as it is written: 'For Your sake, we're being put to death all day long. We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' But in all these things, we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us, For I'm convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." And that love of God is what is expressed in the maximum way for the Christian who is living the life of being filled with the Spirit. They could not do that in the Old Testament times, nor in any other previous dispensation.

Then there's Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." No matter what the status is at the time, I can do it. If I am operating under the Spirit of God, and I'm not out there trying to do what I shouldn't do, I can do what He lays upon my heart. I don't care what my mind tells me. If my heart is burdened to do something in the service of God, then I can do it, and He will make the results right for what I do, and for me personally: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me," as long as you are a Spirit-filled Christian.

Then there's 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has overtaken you, but such as is common to man. And God is faithful, Who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it." Satan, the devil, is always throwing temptations against us, and if you are not walking by means of the Spirit (you're not walking as a Spirit-filled Christian), that will bring you down. And if you don't know about how to be filled with the Spirit, as most Christians don't, they're always being brought to their knees by the temptations of the world; the devil; and, the old sin nature.

Then there's 1 Peter 5:10. Peter says, "And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, Who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." As a Spirit-filled Christian you will become the focus of satanic attack. You will become the object of the world's resistance and contempt. But after that period is gone past, as it will, the grace of God will carry you through, and you will end up perfect: conformed to the image of Christ; strengthened spiritually; and, established as a believer – stable and sure in Christ.

So, the life of the Christian who is filled with the Spirit is a magnificent life with great potential. But, on the other hand, the life of a Christian who is not filled with the Spirit becomes, I can guarantee you, very ugly, and very meaningless. You wonder why you wake up in the morning. You wonder why you muddle through the day. The Christian who is not filled with the Spirit is a life of great unhappiness. It's a life of great loneliness in time. It is the prodigal son syndrome all over again – a prince of God, going to the pigsty.

**Spiritual Growth**

Now, spiritual growth in the church age, then, is a very important concept that we must understand as believers. And it is a doable thing. Spiritual growth – spirituality is being filled with the Spirit, with all known sins confessed, and walking by means of the Holy Spirit, and not rejecting His guidance, and not violating His principles of scriptural morality.

**Spiritual Maturity**

Spirituality leads to spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity is something else. Christians are at various stages of spiritual maturity. In fact, the Bible tells us that there are three basic stages: babyhood; adolescent; and, adult. In 1 John 2:12-14, the apostle John says, "I'm writing to you little children (baby Christians) because your sins are forgiven you for His Name's sake. I'm writing to you fathers (adult Christians – mature Christians), because you know Him Who has been from the beginning. And I'm writing to you, young men (adolescent Christians – on the way of growing up to spiritual maturity), because you have overcome the evil one. I've written to you children, because you know the Father. I've written to you fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I've written to you young men, because you are strong, and the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one."

As the Word of God abides in us, that means that we receive it with positive agreement. The result is we're going to start growing up spiritually.

Now, all stages of spiritual maturity, whether they're babyhood or adult, are spiritual, but they're not equally mature. However, the Christian life is always in motion. It's always moving toward spiritual maturity (building a spiritual maturity structure in the soul); or, it is moving toward reversion, which is sliding back.

Forward progress comes from functioning under the grace system of provision that God has provided, which begins with the local church ministry, and the expository preaching of the pulpit. That is the starting point for growing up spiritually. If you don't have that, you'll never come to spiritual maturity in the image of Christ. It takes the Word of God to do that, and your positive volition response to the instruction.

If you are indifferent to learning doctrine, or negative to the doctrine that you have received, then you'll become hardened in your soul. The facet of your soul will have calluses upon them. And instead of being led by your mind through Scripture, you'll become an emotional yo-yo. You'll act upon how you feel about things.

1 John 5:16 says that if you persist long enough in that calloused reversion condition, then God may take you to heaven ahead of your time.

So, while you and I, as Christians of the church dispensation, are alive, no matter what has happened, and no matter where we have come, it is always possible for us to turn back from reversion, and start back up towards spiritual maturity.

That's beautifully portrayed in Revelation 3:15-20, where God speaks about the church in Laodicea, which is very rich, and thinks it has need of nothing. It is so consumed with its material possessions. And God says, "You don't realize that, in my eyes, you're just naked. You need some salve to anoint your eyes. And you need My discipline. And I'm calling upon you to change your mind." And then we have that great verse of Revelation 3:20. It portrays a picture of Christ standing at your heart's door: "Behold, I stand at the door of that reversion Christian – that Christian out of fellowship with Me. And I'm knocking: 'Christian, let me in. Come back to Christ. Start walking by means of the spirit.' Behold, I stand at the door, and I knock, and if anyone hears My voice and opens the door (by confession of his known sins)," Christ says, "I'll come back in to that life, and we'll dine (an expression of personal fellowship) with him, and he with Me." That's the life of the Christian, where we are on good terms with God our Father.

As we progress in the spiritual life, and as we maintain the status of spirituality, we will get more and more mature. Therefore, we will get stronger and stronger in our dealing with sin. A completed spiritual maturity structure finally reaches the prime of life spiritually that James 4:6 refers to as a super-abounding grace life, where God is filling your cup of blessing to the point of overflowing. No one (none of us) will ever reach the maximum of what we can be spiritually, but there is nothing to hinder us to keep moving ahead, if we operate on the principles of maintaining our temporal fellowship – being filled with the Spirit.

In Philippians 4:12-13, the apostle Paul says, "I know how to get along with humble means (I know how to live when I'm broke), and I also know how to live in prosperity (when I've got it all)." It is equally important that a Christian be able to handle both. And I guarantee you, if you're not filled as a Christian, you won't know how to do either one. You'll not know how to handle your poverty, and you will not know, certainly, how to handle your prosperity without destroying yourself, or losing your life in wasting it, as the prodigal son did. Paul says, "In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of being filled, and going hungry; both of having abundance, and suffering need. I can do all things through Him Who strengthens me."

Paul says, "God carries me through. His grace will carry me through. All I have to do is maintain my status of spirituality and start building myself into spiritual maturity. When I reach that maturity, James 4:6 says, "He gives a greater grace – super-abounding grace ('megas') (meg'-as) in the Greek. Therefore, it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Those who humbly refuse to grieve Him; refuse to quench Him; and, refuse to listen to the sin nature, but instead listen to the Holy Spirit, God says, "I'll shower abundant grace upon you."

Every now and then, somebody wants to know how to rear their children. Well, every time you hear an expository preaching service, that's how to rear your children. And, in heaven's name, here is one verse right here, which is teaching them the relationship to the Spirit of God, and maintaining that. That says it all. Then you'll have a person who is oriented to the grace of God. Then you'll have a person who has a relaxed mental attitude; that is, he has an emotional rapport with people. And you'll have a person who has a mastery of the details of life. He can handle money. And he will know that if he wants more money, he has to give it to God.

R. G. LeTourneau, the great manufacturer of giant earth-moving machinery is one of the classic examples of all-time. This man said, at some point of his life, when he was not doing well in his business: "I'm making a mistake. I'm saying I have bills to pay. I have expenses. And I don't realize that, no matter what I have, the first goes to God. That's it. I don't care if I'm practically dead broke, with creditors knocking at my door. I shouldn't have gotten myself in that position. But what I get from God, the first goes to Him. Most Christians never learn that. They think when they get their bills paid, and everything's back in order, they're going to do something. You'll never do it.

Now, R. G. LeTourneau said, "That's my mistake. From now on I'm giving to God." And while the Christian has no percentage that he is expected to give, he said, "I'm going to start at 10%." And bingo! Suddenly, the R. G. LeTourneau Corporation started making money. And he kept faith with God. He put 10% into God's work, and kept 90%. Then he said, "Now I'm a Christian. I don't have a percentage. I'm going to up this to 20%." So, he gave 20% to God, and 80% to myself. Bingo! And the business went greater. By this time, he began to suspect that the Scripture says (God says), "You try Me out. You give to Me, and see if I don't give to you, pressed down and flowing over. Do you think that you don't have it to give? You're mistaken. You will ensure yourself poverty that way.

So, this man started ratcheting this up, 10% at a time. And the time came in his life when he could stand up before businessmen, and give a testimony that was really resounding: I keep 10% of all that I earn, and I give 90% to God. And I'll tell you men," LeTourneau said, "I can't spend the 10%. That 10% is so big, that I've got all the cars, and houses, and everything I can have. I can't spend it. And I'm almost tempted to not give God that much, because I know that every time I give to Him, he's going to sock it right back to me with more money.

That is the mastery of details of life. That is what the Spirit of God can do for anybody. You will have then, as mature Christians, the capacity to love with no bitterness, and with no mental-attitude problems because you have troubles. Your eyes are on the Lord. And you'll have an inner happiness apart from people; circumstances; and, things.

Now, the only way, when you get to the super-grace spiritual maturity structure, that you can maintain that position is by the continual nurturing of that spiritual life upon the Word of God. That's why, if you do not attend the church services, you have taken the first step toward destroying your spiritual maturity.

Hebrews 4:12: "For the Word of God is living active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as a division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." As long as the Word of God is there, the Spirit of God can keep your mind focused in the right direction.

**Jesus Christ's Spiritual Maturity Structure**

Our Lord Jesus Christ, as you know, was not only God, but He was also Man. The two natures never mixed. And in His humanity, He had to follow all the steps that you and I do, from childhood on up. He did not begin with spiritual maturity. As He was taught the Word of God by his parents, His spiritual maturity structure was built in His soul.

This is indicated to us in Luke 2:40, "And the child (referring to Jesus) continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom. And the grace of God was upon Him. "Increasing in wisdom" – that's a word for doctrine: "And the grace of God was upon Him." The more that He grew in His humanity, and the knowledge of the grace of God through the Word of God, the more intense was His consciousness of Who He was, and His Father, and the blessings upon him. And this was His life pattern.

Notice Luke 2:52: "And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom (doctrinal understanding), and in stature (He grew up physically), and in favor with God (spiritually, He moved on to a super-grace lifestyle), and in favor with men" (He was in socially and properly related to them).

Now, how did this reflect itself – this kind of maturity in the humanity of Christ, in His life? Well, for one thing, He became a person of prayer. It seems so trite to hang that little plaster thing that they make, that you can hang on your wall – that little display thing. It says "Prayer Changes Things." I have one. And yet, nothing could be truer. It is the key to everything.

What did Jesus Christ do? Here's a super-grace person in His humanity. When He's under pressure, Luke 6:12 says, "And it was at this time that He went off to the mountains to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God." He had just had this confrontation with the Pharisees over the fact that He had healed the man on the Sabbath day. People were rushing to Him for spiritual ministry, and for physical healing, and the Lord Jesus Christ now is under great demand and great pressure in His humanity. And what does he do? He steps aside to pray.

This is like Martin Luther, who at one time said, "I'm going to have to spend some hours in prayer this morning, because I have so much that I need to do for God." Well, Martin, why don't you get on with the work then? You're spending your time praying. He understood, like Jesus did, that you can't get the work done if the prayer doesn't come first.

Please notice Luke 22:41-42. Here, Jesus is in agony in the garden of Gethsemane: "And He withdrew from them (the disciples) about a stone's throw. And He knelt down, and He began to pray, saying, 'Father, if You are willing, remove this cup (dying on the cross, and bearing the filth and the sins of the world) from Me. Yet, not My will, but Yours be done.'" He was saying, "Father, is there any other way We could do this?"

So this was a super-grace Child of God Who is praying.

Also, notice also that while He prayed when he was under stress, He also prayed when things were good. Luke 5:15-16: "But the news about Him was spreading even farther, and great multitudes were gathering to hear Him, and to be healed of their sickness." Jesus had fame. And people were listening to Him. He was in a prosperous condition now.

Verse 16: "But He Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." He turned to the disciples and said, "You help these people. I have to go and pray." He prayed when He was under pressure. He prays when He's in prosperity.

Then, in Luke 9:16, he prays as an expression of His thanksgiving, when it's time to thank God: "And he took the five loaves and the two fish and, looking up to heaven, He blessed them and broke them, and kept giving them to the disciples to set before the multitude." Wait a minute, Jesus, you have 5,000 men here to feed. Who knows how many women and men? And you are thanking God? You're expressing in prayer your thanksgiving for five loaves and two fish, Thanksgiving is a principle of prayer for whatever little He had you see.

Christians are always thinking: "When I get more, I'll do more." Now you won't. And, of course, prayer was His line of communion with His Father. In Luke 9:29, this is on the Mount of Transfiguration: "And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming." For one moment, the "kenosis" was reversed. He hid His glory of His deity, which had been hidden, but was now revealed, and He stood there in all of His glorified deity – the Man upon the mountain. And at that moment, He was talking with His Father.

You and I, who been transformed in the image of Jesus Christ, when we are spiritually mature Christians, we are to the glory of God as a fine Christian wife is to the glory of her husband. That's what the Bible says. And we are to the glory of our Father. And when we are in that position, it is a great honor to us to honor Him in prayer.

Furthermore, the Lord Jesus Christ, because, even as a Child, had moved so rapidly towards spiritual maturity, demonstrated the principle of obedience to authority. How often do we see young people constantly breaking the rules, and constantly being told, "Don't touch this," and they do touch it: "Don't go here," and they do go there. "Don't do that, and they do it." The Lord Jesus was not like that. This was a real Man. This was a real Boy. Luke 2:51: "And He (Jesus) went down with them (His parents), and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them. And His mother treasured all these things in her heart." Indeed, what a pleasure it was to have such a Child Who was obedient to the authority. And when He was obedient to the authority of His parents, He was also obedient to the authority of God. In fact, it was because He was obedient to God's authority that He would be to His parents. If He's not obedient to God's authority, He certainly would not be obedient to His parents. If He's not obedient to God's authority and doctrinal principles, then He will not be obedient to the moral code of God, or anything else His parents had to say to Him.

In Philippians 2:8, we're told about Jesus: "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross." His obedience was all the way to what the Father wanted Him to do. The Father had sent Him into this world, that first Christmas day, and gave Him a human body so that He could die for the sins of the world.

Hebrews 5:8: "Although he was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered." He learned to walk by life when it was hard, but He kept the faith.

Now, the happy thing about all this (I want to point out) is that we Christians who live in the church age, and only we church-age Christians, can do spiritually in our humanity exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ did. His lifestyle; His abilities; His powers; and, His achievements – those can be ours. He never operated in His deity. This was just a Man who was filled with the Spirit.

In John 14:12, Jesus said, "Truly, truly I say to you: He who believes in Me, the works that I do, he shall do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to the Father." Jesus says, "I'm leaving behind My ministry. You are going to do the great things of Christian service that I have been doing – things that you can't even imagine of what you'll be capable of. But once you are willing to accept that you are willing to believe in me, which means that you'll learn the Word of God; you'll accept the principles of doctrine; and, you'll maintain the power system of being filled with the Spirit, you'll do everything that I did. And you'll do greater things than this. And you'll have the heart to do it."

For most Christians, they don't have the heart to do it, even if they should have the inclination and the vision to do it. It is Christ who gives the heart to the spirit-filled Christian.

In Colossians 3:20, we have specific guidance (as He was a Child) to Christians: "Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord."

1 John 3:22: "And whatever we ask, we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in His sight." If you are not under expository preaching on Sunday, you have no commandments that you're able to keep. You do not know doctrinal principles. They are not stored in their human spirit. There is nothing for the Holy Spirit to use to guide you. Therefore, you cannot do things that are pleasing in His sight.

Now, you can see why I am coming down so hard on being filled with the Spirit. It has to come to your mind during the day. It's not something that has to be a doctrinal principle, but you never operate on it. If you don't operate on it, you're not operating on anything.

So, what's the bottom line? It's expressed for us – the goal of church-age living and spiritual maturity. 1 Timothy 4:7-8: "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. In the future, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who love His appearing." The crown of righteousness is one of those special crowns that God has preserved. There are four special crowns (medals of honor). The crown of righteousness goes to Christians – not to all Christians, but to those who have spent a maximum time of their lives in temporal fellowship. They have spent a maximum time of their lives filled with the Spirit. They have not been grieving the Holy Spirit by sin. They have not been quenching Him by saying "No." They have been walking in dependence upon the Spirit of God, not upon dependence of their sin nature, such that that sin nature then guides him by what people think in the world system, and Satan in that whole sorry mess. And a Christian can walk as if he's just one of the gang out there in the world.

That is not what we are called to. Ours is the great honor of fighting the good fight, and finishing our course – the mission that God has called you to. And He has given you spiritual gifts, and the material means to do that. And some of us have kept the faith, and some of us will not. But in the future, that will be recognized for those who have. And God is going to award not only those who are faithful, but all those who love His appearing. And Paul said, "I love His appearing, but I don't want to be ashamed when He comes. So, I want to be very sure that I am doing what I should be doing as a believer: that I have kept the faith; that I maintained the filling of the Spirit; and, that I've lived at the super-grace level.

So, this has been our study of the church – this marvelous age in which we live. It is so magnificent that human words are a frail vehicle of transmission of the potential for life under the power system of the Spirit of God, and of doctrine in the human spirit.

But this period that we live in is going to come to an end. The dispensation of the church – the end is, I think, on the horizon.

I was listening to the news the other night, and the reporter quoted Dr. Jerry Falwell, who said that, in his view: "There can be no more than ten years left before Christ returns and the rapture takes place – the catching up of Christians."

Well, we don't know the details and the time that this will happen. The rapture is the event. The church began on the day of Pentecost, and it will end on a day of the rapture. This will be a very private event. It will only deal with people such as yourselves, who are Christians – saints in the church age. The rapture will not include any believer from the Old Testament. Adam and Eve not going to be in it. Abraham is not going to be in it. David is not going to be in it. The great prophets of the Old Testament are not going to be in it. The saints who are people who become believers during the tribulation – they're not going to be in it. Only we Christians will be in the rapture. It is a special select company of this new species of human beings that God has brought to Himself to be the body of Christ, Who is the head of that body, and is to be related to Jesus Christ in a special way, through the millennium, and through all eternity, as a wife to her husband – the most intimate relationship imaginable to the human mind.

None of those great people of the Old Testament are going to be related to Christ that way. You and I are His special people. Therefore, He has given us all these special powers, and privileges, and capacities.

**The Rapture**

The day that the rapture takes place, the bodies of the believers will be propelled through space, into heaven. And it will just happen: zip! And suddenly, we'll be aware that something big is coming off.

This is described for us in John 14:1-3 by Jesus Himself: "Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in Me. In My Father's house (the new Jerusalem) are many dwelling places. If it were not so, I would've told you. For I go to prepare a place for you" (a special apartment in that dwelling place). The King James Version talks about this as a mansion.

Then Jesus says, "And if I go (and I will) and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." And What He is referring to here is the event of the rapture: "I will come for you church-age believers, and I'll receive you to myself, and then I will take you to where I am, which is in heaven, to the new Jerusalem. So where I am, you may be also."

Now, the specific procedure which that will take place is spelled out for us in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Here, the apostle Paul gives us more details about what Jesus was referring to in John 14: "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep (Christians who have died), that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope (as if you're never going to see those people again). For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. And we do believe, and we do know, that Christ died, and, on the third day (72 hours later) He was raised. And, as He was our pattern in all things: in death and resurrection, He will be our pattern in death and resurrection for ourselves.

All those who have fallen asleep in Jesus (believers of the church age). For this we say to you, by the word of the Lord (God has given me this information) – that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord (the rapture day) shall not precede (go ahead of those who have fallen asleep – the Christians who are dead in the graves. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with a voice of the archangel, and with a trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first (first the Christians in the grave pop up to meet the Lord in the air). Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up after them, together with them; that is, in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. And thus, we shall always be with the Lord."

Now, there is no previous training necessary for this trip. There'll be no mishaps along the way, once it begins. When we're out of here, we're out of here. There'll be no one left behind who is in Christ, who is in the body of Christ (the church), dead or alive. Everybody goes. And the Father Himself stands at the door into heaven, waiting to greet us, and to welcome us home.

Now, the apostles understood this principle. They were taught this by the Lord. This was a great doctrine for the first two-and-a-half centuries of Christianity. All of the early church writings that we have from the early church leaders – they were all pre-millennial to the core, with each one of them looking forward to the catching up of the believer before the start of the Millennial Kingdom. And they understood what this tremendous passage in I Thessalonians meant.

So, when John concludes the book of the Revelation, and completes our Bible, this is what is on his mind – the rapture event. After this terrible, terrible period of human history that he has described, that has been revealed to him in this book, in which has recorded these things while he was on the island of Patmos, he says, "Boy, do I ever breathe a sigh of relief. I'm not in any of this stuff that I've just written about." After the third chapter, the church is gone. The seven letters were the end. After that, the church is not in the picture anymore. It's just the devil's tribulation world.

So, in Revelation 22:20, John finishes the book. He says, "He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming quickly. Amen.' Come Lord Jesus." John says, "Let's go. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

God, our Heavenly Father, we do thank You again for the magnificence of our position in Christ; who we are; where we are heading; and, how all this will end up someday in Your presence. We do thank You for the fact that the Word of God explains all of this. And if we're willing to study Your Word, the Spirit of God is willing to teach it to us. And we have done that this morning, and we pray that the hearts of these believers would be comforted, and that they would rejoice once more in the fact of who they are – the royal family of God, that special people of the church age, the bride and body of Jesus Christ. In His name, we do thank You.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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