***The Age of the Church, No. 1

DS7B***

In continuing our study of the dispensations, we have now come to the very fascinating era in which you and I live today. We began, first of all, with the time that the gentiles were God's stewards of His world household. That was called the dispensation of the gentiles. The age of the gentiles came to an end as an age of failure, and man was again seen to be incapable of being able to achieve righteousness on his own. We came then to the second stewards of God's world, and that was the Jews. The Jews replaced the gentiles. They failed. The gentiles and the Jews were dismissed, consequently, as God's stewards. They have today been replaced by a third group of humanity known as Christians. Today the Christians are in charge of God's world household here in the dispensation of the church. This is the arrangement which is now in effect for you and me today. This is therefore a particularly important study. This is the time when you and I make it, or we fail to make it relative to our functioning under the order of life that God has designed for this age.

Obviously, you cannot know how to function as a believer unless you have been taught the ground rules from the Word of God. If you do not know the ground rules, you cannot enter into your privileged position in the greatest age that has existed, and perhaps that ever will exist--the age of the church. This is an age of particular intimate relationship with the person of the Son of God and with God the Father. So for you to know the divine set up for today is essential for you to be able to live your life to the fullest extent of the plan that God has for you--a series of decisions that unravel one step at a time. This is all on the background of the age of grace--the age of the church. If you are not living in a way which is compatible and conformable to that age, you will not enter into God's plan for your life.

Now Satan, of course, is trying to keep us in the dark concerning the features of our age. He does this in various ways. He does this, for one thing, in trying to keep us in the dark and in ignorance concerning Bible doctrine. He seeks to keep us from being instructed in these matters that relate to the age of the church. He seeks to undermine our unique opportunities in this age by causing us to mix the age of the church with elements from the age of the Jews. When you do that, you bring legalism into the grace system, and the result is religion. Unfortunately, there are many religious leaders to whom people look for guidance who are the most guilty of suggesting to people that they have vast quantities of information to transfer from the dispensation of the Jews into the dispensation of the church. That is wrong. That is disastrous. That's why we're trying to explain to you the distinctives of each age.

Some of the things that belonged in the age of the Jew have been carried over in one way or another into the age of the church. Principles of righteousness that were true in the age of the Jew are still true in the age of the church--for example, the moral code of the Ten Commandments. This is a system of expression of God's moral outlook designed specifically for the Jewish age. The elements represented in the Ten Commandments are brought over into the age of the church, but they are brought over in grace language on a grace appeal. All of them are brought except one, namely the one concerning the observance of the Sabbath day. The Sabbath day as a worship day is out in the dispensation of the church because the Sabbath day was the unique day of worship representing the Jewish age. Sunday (the Lord's Day) is the unique day representing the day of worship for the church.

Satan tries to get you to mix these up because this is one way to undermine your entering into the fullness of blessing and of service in this age. He also tries to do this by encouraging us to violate the divine institutions. These include the institutions of volition (freewill); of marriage; of family; and, of nationalism. All of these are under attack in our day. He also tries to do this by leading us to meet life in the power of human intellect and in human abilities rather than in the power of the filling of God the Holy Spirit. That's why we make such an issue that you understand the technique of the confession of sins. We are rapidly pressing forward to get these recordings concerning that study available to people because this is perhaps the crucial understanding that people need to have if they're going to walk with the Lord--how to confess--and biblically. Satan wants you rather to operate on your human smartness and capacities instead of God's ability through the filling of the Spirit.

God has a script, in other words, for the drama of all the ages, and you have a particular part to play in the age of the church because that's your scene and that's your moment. You have to know your part. You have to know your lines. You have to know your cues which is what we're trying to teach in this study--your cues relative to this scene, the dispensation of the church. We have a lot of pseudo distortions in this age. We have a lot of human traditions that have been imposed upon us. All of these are satanic because they restrict our liberty; they squelch our freedom; and, they squelch the relaxed position which God has called us to in this age. They give us all kinds of suitable relationships.

I was listening to a religious radio program this week, and there were two rabbis being interviewed. They were, of course, liberal, and they were trying to be very tactful. They spoke in terms of Christianity like we were just approaching God in two different ways, and yet we were all going in the same direction. This included the double-talk that is characteristic of liberals, and particularly of Jews who want to relate themselves in an acceptable way to Christianity. Then they had people call in. One man that, right away, I could tell from the way he was talking, was one of these real sweet Christians in the old sense of the fundamentalist type. He was the one who had certain dos and don'ts of a very legalistic nature as to what constituted spirituality. This came out particularly when he asked the rabbi some question concerning Jesus Christ, and then probed a couple of other things. The rabbi gave him a summary answer and drew some difference. Then he, without thinking, threw in the word "hell."

I forgot the exact phrase, but he said something like, "That's the difference. That's the problem. That's just the hell of it." And the man who was listening said, "What did you say?" And the rabbi said, "I said, 'That's the difference in our thinking.'" The caller said, "No, what's the word you used? The other word." Maybe the rabbi knew what he said, and he slipped up, you know, with kind of the way he normally talks. And he said, "What word?" And then the Christian said, "I think the people heard it." Now the only way he could have made it better is if he'd have said, "Oooh, what you said!" He would have proven to us that in the dispensation of the church, spirituality is what you say and what you don't say.

Now I'm not commending that. I have reservations. I'm not too keen on using "hells" and "damns" as swear words which is the only way you can use them because that's what they are. Furthermore, I think the rabbi probably wouldn't use it in the synagogue because he sounded like a gentleman to me, and gentlemen don't use words like that in the presence of ladies. As a matter of fact, if they're gentlemen, they won't use those words even in the presence of those who aren't ladies. So I'm not commending that. I think it's not a good thing to do. However, be that as it may, my point is that this pseudo spirituality just oozed out over the airwaves as I listened to that man asking his questions. "I think the people heard it." His point was, "Now everybody will know what a really unspiritual person you are because you used that word, and they won't pay any attention to what you say.

Well, we have the same as to how much a local church is worth relative to your personal life. One of the young people came up to me this afternoon and said, "I know just what you're talking about. I've had some people hitting me up to attend another church, and one of their appeals to me is, "We have dinners there. Furthermore, we have all kinds of youth trips and things we go on." So he said, "I asked this person, 'Well what do you learn about the Word of God?'" And he said, "And he looked kind of dumbfounded at me and said, 'Well, you know. We have sermons.'" And so our young fellow said, "Well, where I go at Berean church I get pretty detailed Bible doctrinal instruction. And I don't think I would be improved by going to your church." In other words, what was the appeal? If you come to our church, we'll fill your stomach. If you come to our church, we'll take you on trips.

Well we've had our share of trips. There were a bunch of us who rode those rubber rafts down the raging waters of the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon, and that was great. However, that was something in a different realm entirely than our walk with the Lord. That may have been social fellowship, and it contributed to a group of you who are the staff members who carry the ball in our summer camp ministries. But we wouldn't think of appealing to you to come to this church for that reason. If you appeal to people on things of that nature, then that is the way you will continue reaching them. If you appeal and say, "Hey, if you come to our church, they'll fill your stomach on Wednesday nights before prayer meeting," then what are you going to have to do? You're going to have to keep shoveling it into their stomach. You'll get all kinds of confusion when you start centering the age of the church and Christian fellowship on these social things that any unbeliever can do just as well.

Fellowship around eating can be disastrous and dumb. It doesn't really have anything to do with spirituality. You don't have to be extreme and say, "Oh, I'm never going to sit down and eat a meal with Christians. I'm never going to invite anybody over to my house." But neither do you make that the basis of your fellowship in the things of the Lord nor your center of attraction. I hope I'm getting through to you that we've got an insanity out here in the biggest of churches with hundreds of people sitting there--an insanity of orientation as to what constitutes accomplishments for the Lord's work.

So it is very important that you understand the realities that God has for a believer in the age of grace. Those are the only realities there are. These realities are the realities that come from being related to the most important single personality of this age which is God the Holy Spirit. If you are related to Him, and you know doctrine, then this is the greatest age to have ever been born in.

**The Mystery of the Church**

So we have come here to the age of the church. This is where it's at now for you. The age of the church is a mystery dispensation. The dispensation of the Jews is interrupted by the age of the church. We call this interruption an intercalation. An intercalation was a word that Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer used to teach us at Dallas Seminary. He was always looking for new terms--non-biblical terms--terms that didn't come out of the Bible, but terms which describe biblical truths. What he was trying to convey was that here was a time period that had suddenly been inserted within the dispensation of the Jews. However, the time period which had been inserted had nothing to do with what came before or with what came after. An intercalation is a good word to convey that. It simply means a period of time stuck in some place between other periods of time. But the period of time which is inserted has nothing to do with what came before and it has nothing to do with what follows. This is exactly what is true about the age of the church. It has nothing to do with the age of the Jews, and it has nothing to do with the tribulation phase of that age which follows.

So it's an intercalation; it's an interruption; and, it's a mystery. It was a dispensation which was not revealed in the Old Testament. You can read the Old Testament Scriptures from one end to the other, and you will get not the slightest inkling concerning the age of the church. It is never revealed. You will get this though, knowing now that such an age exists, if you go back and you read the Old Testament. You will discover places where there are gaps left where the church age is to be inserted. Much of the Old Testament prophecies, for example, go like this: They predict the coming of Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God--the suffering lamb. Then they also present Jesus Christ as the coming Messiah in the form of the conquering lion of the tribe of Judah.

Now the prophets, who wrote this on the basis of information from God, puzzled over this. They said, "How can Jesus Christ come and be a meek lamb under a curse and under death, and also be the conquering lion of the tribe of Judah?" What they didn't know was that there was going to be a time span between the First Coming and the Second Coming. The very descriptions indicate to us that there are two phases. There are places where it's simply a comma in an Old Testament sentence that separates what has to do with the First Coming of Christ and what has to do with the Second Coming of Christ. The church age was a mystery. The word "mystery" means it's not revealed.

Now the Lord Jesus Christ, during His earthly ministry, began giving hints concerning this amazing dispensation which was about ready to begin at the end of His lifespan on earth. We have this revealed in His farewell discourse to the church which is in John 13 through 17. In John 13:31-32, for example, He speaks about a period of time when he will be in glorification seated at the Father's right hand in heaven during a certain period of history. That of course was referring to what we call "the session," or His present ministry in heaven at the right hand of God the Father, awaiting the completion of His body the church. In John 14:33, he mentions the rapture event. He tells about the fact that He is preparing a place, and He's going to come back and receive us to Himself so that we can be where He is. What He was referring to in that point was the rapture event.

In John 14:16, He speaks about a fantastic truth that God the Holy Spirit is going to come to this earth, and He is going to indwell the believers, mind you, forever. He is going to dwell within the body of Christians forever. Immediately when He said that, the disciples said, "That is strange. That's never been true before. God the Holy Spirit never stayed with anyone forever. As a matter of fact, most people He never indwelt. Only a few. Now we are all going to be indwelt, and permanently?

John 14:20 revealed the dramatic truth which we call "positional truth:" "At that day, you shall know that I am in My Father, you in Me, and I in you." We are related by position to Jesus Christ. So right now, how good are you? Well you're just as good as Jesus Christ in the sight of God. I don't care what you've done. I don't care what you're doing now. I don't care how far in reversionism you may be. I don't know how far you have gone to tearing down your spiritual maturity structure. You are positionally in Jesus Christ. You are secure in that position. You are going to go to heaven someday. What you may do with your life now will determine your blessing now, and will determine your rewards out there in heaven. But you are related to Him forever. That's positional truth.

In John 14:26 and John 16:12-13, we have revealed that God the Holy Spirit is going to teach every believer directly. Now when they heard that, they must have really wondered. "Why," they said, "we've never heard such a thing in all our lives. God the Spirit is going to teach me as an individual?" Jesus said, "That's right. You as an individual--you personally--will have this instructor dwelling with you." This was never true before. John 15 tells about the production of divine good through the simple means of maintaining temporal fellowship. It talks about abiding in Christ. That's another word for confession, as in 1 John 1:9. In John 17, the Lord's Prayer is here expressed for a new class of believers. In John 17, He was praying for a group of believers who did not then yet exist. He was praying for church age saints. John 17 is the prayer that Jesus Christ uttered in your behalf.

In Acts 1:4-5, we have the command to the believers to wait for the inauguration of a new dispensation which is going to provide new power for service. In other words, Jesus Christ said, "Now you know what you're to do. I've spent 40 days teaching you. Before My resurrection and before My crucifixion, I could not explain these things to you. I've been giving you hints about something new coming up. I tried to tell you a little bit about that the last night when we had the last Passover supper together. I talked to you (in John 13 through 17), and I tried to reveal to you the things that we're coming. After My resurrection, I was able to explain these things for 40 days in more detail. You know what to do. You know the new age that's coming, but don't make a move until you have been empowered with a supernatural fantastic relationship to God and power from God that will enable you to do everything that the saints in the Old Testament longed to do but could not do." What was he saying? He was saying, "Wait for a new beginning," and that new beginning was here the beginning of the church on the day of Pentecost.

Well the timetable of this new dispensation was 40 days after the resurrection spent in instruction; then the departure of Jesus Christ to heaven; then ten days more of waiting in Jerusalem; and, then the coming of God the Holy Spirit to start the dispensation of the church (Acts 1:8). They waited as they were told, and then Acts 2:1-4 tells about that dramatic incident where the Holy Spirit came upon them--50 days after the resurrection. This took place on the day of Pentecost.

**The Jewish Feasts**

Now here's the relationship of the Jewish feasts, for just a moment. The Feast of Passover was related to Jesus Christ and His death for our sins (1 Corinthians 5:7). It was on this day that He died on the cross. He died as the ultimate fulfillment of the Passover lamb. Then followed the Feast of First Fruits. The Feast of First Fruits represented the resurrection of Christ. You have this in Leviticus 23:11. You can compare that with John 12:24 and 1 Corinthians 15:23. The Feast of First Fruits came the Sunday after Passover. This was the day that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Then the third feast relative to the dispensation of the church was the Feast of Pentecost. This represented the coming of the Holy Spirit to form the church. It came exactly 50 days after the resurrection of Christ, and Pentecost always fell on a Sunday.

Pentecost was celebrated by the baking of two loaves which were made from newly harvested grain. This feast of Pentecost had to do with the celebration of the harvest. These two loaves of bread represented symbolically the union of the particles of grain which was to represent the believers in the church age. The believers in the Old Testament were not in union with one another and with God. We in this age are aptly represented by a loaf of bread where the individual grains of wheat are lost and have become united together as one loaf. However, there was leaven to be included in these two loaves of bread. This was rather unusual. The reason for this was, of course, that leaven, being a symbol of evil, signified that the church as an organization would have evil as well as good with it. It would have believers as well as unbelievers within it as an organization. The very fact of leaven recognized that the church was not only the body of Christ, but it also recognized that it was an organization.

**The Gift of Tongues**

The beginning of the church age was the event where Jews and Gentiles lost their individual identity as Jews and Gentiles, and they were formed into one new body called Christians. The Jews entered this new body on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-3). The Holy Spirit marked His arrival by a tornado-like rushing sound of a wind as they gathered in that upper room. Then on each of the 120 believers there appeared split tongues of fire signifying the presence of God the Holy Spirit. This new dispensation was also marked by the gift of speaking in tongues that we read of in Acts 2:4. These tongues that they spoke on that day were actual real foreign languages. Acts 2:6 indicates that those who were present understood the disciples explaining the mighty things of God in their own native languages.

Now remember that people were gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost, and these were godly religious Jews who came from other parts of the Roman Empire and spoke languages that were native to the places that they lived. Remember that every one of these people also spoke Greek, the trade language. And there was also Aramaic which was a trade language among the Jews. So all of these people in the city of Jerusalem on this day could have understood the gospel had the disciples stood up and spoken to them in Greek, or had they stood up and spoken to them in Aramaic. We didn't have to have these foreign languages so that these people could understand the Word of God. This was a sign. This was an indication from God that something significant and different was taking place. It was an identifying mark. Therefore the gift of tongues had a specialized purpose. When that purpose had been fulfilled, the gift was discontinued.

**The Five Stages of Jewish Discipline**

Now what was the purpose of the gift of tongues? Well, Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 14 that it was the fulfillment of the prediction of Isaiah 28:11 where we are told that the Jews are going to be evangelized in gentile languages. Why? Because God said, "You are going to reject Me." And in Leviticus 26, you can read about the cycle of Jewish discipline. The cycle of discipline goes through five stages. They had now arrived at stage number four at the time that Jesus Christ arrived on the scene. Stage number four discipline against the Jewish nation constituted that they no longer were free in their own government. They were in their land, but a foreign government ruled them. In this case, it was the Roman Empire. The fifth stage of discipline that God said He would bring upon the people when they turned away from Him was that he would cause the foreign power which controlled them to scatter them out of the land of Palestine, and to come in and take over their land.

Now Isaiah said that the signal that God is about ready to take your land away from you and to scatter you around the face of the earth is the fact that you, as Jews, who all these centuries have been the depository of divine revelation, are going to be taught God's truths in the language of gentiles. Now a gentile in the eyes of a Jew was a dog. This was a humiliating thing to think that God's precious doctrines are to be explained to His people, the Jews, in some gentile's foreign language. That's why they spoke in tongues on the day of Pentecost. It was a signal to these people of what was coming. Well, it came. They had a little more time to straighten out. They did not. And in 70 A.D., the fifth stage of the Jewish cycle of discipline listed in Leviticus 26 came down on them like a hammer blow.

The nation was practically destroyed. Those who survived were scattered all over the world. Until the recent establishment of the state of Israel on the old territory where they once resided as the Promised Land--that nation which we have today--until the recent times, the Jews did not have a homeland. He was under this stage of God's discipline. As a matter of fact, he still is--now.

This also fulfilled another factor. It also fulfill the promise that a new era was going to begin marked by a new power. This new power was going to be the presence of God the Holy Spirit who would perform a fantastic thing which had never been done to believers before. That thing is called the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is what joined these Jews and Gentiles. It fused them together into one body like a loaf of bread where all the individual grains of wheat were indistinguishable, and they now became one loaf--one new body--Christians. You have this in Act 1:5, 1 Corinthians 12:13, John 14:20, and compare that with Acts 11:16.

So the tongue's gift was a temporary mark of a new dispensation from God, and also the mark that the Jew was about ready to have the final stage of discipline imposed upon him as a nation. 1 Corinthians 13:8 and 10 tell us that when the New Testament canon of Scripture is completed, then the gift of tongues would cease: "When that which is perfect is come" is in the neuter gender there in 1 Corinthians 13, and therefore it refers to a thing--not a person. It refers to the Scriptures--the revelation of Scripture. Up to that time, the gift of tongues along with the gift of knowledge and the gift of prophecy was the way God brought revelation. Tongues brought new revelation from God, but this ceased when the canon of Scripture was completed. Tongues today is a self-deception either from ignorance; from lack of doctrinal understanding; or, from manipulation of Satan.

The church began in one spot--the city of Jerusalem. It began with all Jewish believers. A little later, at the city of Caesarea, gentile believers were brought into this body (Acts 10:44-48, Acts 11:5-16). Then at various other times other believers were picked up around the empire and they were brought into the body of Christ such as in Acts 19:1-6. This continued until, finally, by the time of the destruction of the nation of Israel, the church age had fully arrived, and all were in the body of Christ.

**The Purpose of the Dispensation of the Church**

What's the purpose of this dispensation? The Jewish Pentecost was forming the first loaf. The gentile Pentecost at Caesarea was the second loaf. That's why there were two loaves celebrating the Feast of Pentecost. God's new stewards of His world household had now been established. They were to be the gentiles and Jews in the form of Christians (Ephesians 2:11-18). God was now going to gather a new people together for His name to be His Son's bride someday (Acts 15:14). This new age would demonstrate what the grace of God can do for a person who is willing to function on doctrine apart from any human effort. Now that's the point of the age of grace--what God can do for a person who is willing to learn doctrine and to obey it. It is what God will do for that person apart from any effort on his own, and it is something magnificent.

Well what's the extent of this dispensation? Well, it starts here on the day of Pentecost, and will end at the day that we call the rapture--the catching away of the church. We have the day of Pentecost beginning in Acts 1:4. We have the end at the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. This dispensation began with the sound of rushing wind. It's going to end with the sound of the trumpet and of the voice of the archangel.

This dispensation has certain characteristics that make it distinctive from anything in the past. And I'd like to run through those in tying this up for you now. This information concerning the church age is not to be found in the Old Testament. During the apostolic age, the New Testament Scriptures were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as we have revealed in 2 Peter 1:21 and 2 Timothy 2:16. The New Testament is the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). By 96 A.D., all of the New Testament books were written, and the gifts of revelation such as prophecy, knowledge, and tongues ceased. It is required of all of us that we learn what these New Testament books contain in the nature of doctrinal guidance and instruction. It is our daily food; it is our source for spiritual maturity and happiness; and, it fulfills a natural deficiency which all of us have within our being.

**The Features of the Age of the Church**

Here are the unique features:

1. **Positional Truth**

Number one is positional truth. Every Christian receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit. At salvation, this unites them permanently to Christ (Romans 6:3, Romans 8:38-39). Christianity is not a religion. It is a relationship to a person, Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:26, Ephesians 1:5-6). Now the Jews never had any such relationship to God. They were never in a positional truth relationship. The Jews were God's servants. You and I are called His children (Psalm 34:22, and compare Galatians 3:26 and John 1:12).

1. **The Universal Indwelling of Christ**

A second factor that is characteristic of this age is the universal indwelling of Christ. Jesus foretold that this would happen in John 14:18, and 23, and John 15:5. Why does Christ indwell every Christian? For the purpose of fellowship. If you're on good terms with the Lord Jesus Christ who indwells you, you've got everything.

1. **The Universal Indwelling of the Holy Spirit**

The third characteristic is the universal indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In the past, the Holy Spirit only indwelt certain people. He came upon them so that they could perform certain tasks, then He would leave them. He would often leave people permanently because of carnality. Today, you and I as Christians live with God the Holy Spirit permanently indwelling us. He is the source of our power for living and for service (John 14:16, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). In other words, the Holy Spirit will never leave you. You may be carnal, but He will never leave you. He will discipline you, but He will never depart from you. The Old Testament tabernacle and the temple were things of beauty and things of great value because that's where God dwelt. Now God makes of you and me, equally and more so, things of great beauty and of attractiveness because God the Holy Spirit indwells us.

1. **The Universal Priesthood of all Believers**

Characteristic number four is the universal priesthood of all believers. God has made every Christian part of a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:5-9). The Christian represents himself before God, and that's the only person you represent before God. That's why the priesthood is private. Nobody else can approach God for you. Now you may invite other believers to pray with you concerning a matter. If you care to invite them, and they care to share that with you, that's perfectly in order. But never get the impression that if you come, for example, and ask me to pray for you in respect to something, that somehow I have some priestly access to God that's going to make points for you that you can't make on your own. I can't get anything done for you before God. All I can do is pray that God will so arrange your life and so direct you that you will do what you should do so that He can bless you and so that He can straighten out the problem that you may have. Only you can deal with your problems before the Lord. That's why we tell you that the place to take your problems is to the Lord.

Don't go with such an asinine concept like I heard on the religious radio program from a seminary Christian education professor. He told a lady to find herself some other woman who could be a confidant, with whom she could cry and pray and let her hair down. In her case, it was because she had a lousy husband, and so she could gossip about her husband to this woman. Now that is not God's order. Privacy of priesthood is for you to handle your problems with the Lord. Talk to the Lord about it. The Jews could approach God, you remember, only through that specialized priesthood of Aaron. Now, a Christian approaches God any time directly (Hebrews 10:19-20).

1. **A Completed Canon of Scripture**

Next, today we have a completed canon of Scripture. No previous dispensation had a total bible. Our Bible contains propositions of divine viewpoint for all matters that pertain to our life here on earth. It fills the spiritual deficiency in our souls with which we are all born (Colossians 1:9).

1. **A Supernatural Life**

We also have a supernatural way of life to which we have been called. The Old Testament saints had no special power to obey the 613 rules they were given. The only thing a Jew could do was to learn those rules and get up in the morning and say, "Now, I'm going to keep every one of these. I'm going to keep every one of these." And then he says to his wife, "Now you watch me, will you? We're going to keep every one of these." Then before half the morning was over they'd broken a dozen of them. And they'd start again. There was no capacity to obey God. Now along comes God, and he calls the Christian to live a supernatural life. Literally, you are called to live a life that only God can live. There is no way to do that.

However, God's says, "Yes, there is a way to live a supernatural life because I have given you the power of God the Holy Spirit living within you. I have given you a living human spirit which acts as a reservoir depository of doctrinal instruction and viewpoint. And I'm going to fill that doctrinal deficiency in your soul. I'm going to fill the reservoir of your human spirit, and then God the Holy Spirit, as you are filled with Him, is going to cycle this information up to your mind. Your mind is going to have all the information it needs. Your soul, your emotions, and your will are going to have all the information they need to act in accordance with the will of God, and blessing will pour upon you. You will walk the way God walks. You will think the way God thinks. You will have the emotions that God has. You will make the decisions that God would make.

That's the life that you've been called to. You cannot excuse yourself and say, "Well, I'm trying to do the best I can. I'm just trying to live the best way I know how." Well that's a lousy life because you don't know how to live. The best way you know how to live is far short of your heritage to which you've been called. Human effort can never please God (Romans 7:18, Romans 8:8-9). You and I, thank God, are not under that pathetic law system that revealed our incapacities in such a stark way. We're under the grace system that makes the supernatural life possible.

1. **The Filling of the Holy Spirit**

One thing more that is unique for this age is the filling of the Holy Spirit. The Jews of the Old Testament knew nothing about this. It is the desire of God the Holy Spirit to fill you. What does that mean? It means to control you (Ephesians 5:18). The filling of the Holy Spirit is secured through the simple act of confessing your known sins (1 John 1:9). This also covers your unknown sins--those that you have forgotten or ignored. It enables the grace system of perception to function so that you can learn doctrine and you can grow to spiritual maturity. All of your divine good production is hinged upon your being filled with the Spirit. It is the ground for you to be able to pray (Ephesians 6:18). You will accomplish fantastic things in prayer if you pray as one who is filled with the Spirit. It is the ground of your witnessing and of your teaching the gospel in an effective and true way (Acts 1:8). It is the means of glorifying Christ (John 16:14).

These are the characteristics never found before. They are true only of the age of grace. Every one of these things is true of you, or can be true of you, depending on the decision that you make to enter into the way that God has designed for you to live in this age.

Well, there is much more. This age has all kinds of fantastic marvelous provisions for us. They enable us to be more than conquerors through Christ who loved us and gave Himself for us. We can be more than conquerors. If you are anything less than a conqueror in your Christian life, it's because you don't understand the dispensation of grace. So what are you going to do? Well, some guy is going to come up to you and say, "Hey, we're having a Victorious Life Conference at our church. Would you like to come and learn how to be victorious in your Christian life?" I found that in most of the Victorious Life Conferences, you don't learn a thing about being victorious. You learn the gimmickry. You learn the devices. Because somehow it eludes preachers to appeal to people only on the basis of what God has said, they come up with these little devices.

I was in the East on one occasion with my family at a Christian camp that we were passing through and visiting, and they came to a beautiful high point of the week with the campers. These were high school kids. They got us all out there in the woods, and they had some bleachers, and we all sat around there. Then they started a fire--just a little fire. Then a fellow got up there and he gave us a very emotional appeal. He really warmed the cockles of our hearts. He challenged us to live our lives for the Lord. He challenged us to go out and be the Lord's servant. He challenged us to be devoted to the cause of Christ. Then he said, "And I want to tell you this day that I am going to be devoted to the cause of Christ." And he reached over to a pile of sticks, and he picked up a stick. He held it up and he said, "God, this is my life. And I'm giving it to you to burn brightly for your glory," and then he threw it on the fire. And sure enough the fire burned a little more brightly.

Then he said, "I want the rest of you now, who will give your life to the Lord, to come down and take one of these sticks. Take this stick and say, 'God this is my life, and I'm giving it to you now.'" And so pretty soon people would come out of that stand and they'd pick up a stick and they'd throw it in the fire. They were poor pathetic people, and the fire got bigger and bigger. For an old camper like me, it did put a joy in my heart to see that big campfire. But how sad it was for these poor people that I knew wouldn't be one step closer to functioning the supernatural life that they'd been called to live because they knew nothing about the characteristics of the age of grace--the uniqueness of the provisions that God has made for them to live a life like that.

Another very famous speaker gets to the point where he says, "Some of you lack assurance of your salvation. I'm going to tell you how to get assurance for your salvation. I want you to go home and get a stick; put a sharp point on it; get a hammer; and, go out in the backyard and hammer this stick into the ground. And when you hammer it in, say, "Satan, I am putting this stake in the ground as testimony that God has saved me. And then every time you feel a little lack of assurance, go out in the yard and look at that stick, and it will remind you what God has done for you.

I kid you not. There are thousands of people that fill the Dallas memorial auditorium to listen to this kind of gimmickry. And they go charging out of there all souped up because they've heard a lot of hotshot illustrations and personal experiences because they equate that with something that they can do. Do not be a fool. But become wise. And do not be carried away by churches that can fill an auditorium with hundreds of people. That is great, but if you do not hear the Word of God being proclaimed, then it is nothing.

God has something very magnificent in this age. That's what makes us the unique people of all of human history. Christians are the stewards of the dispensation of grace.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1971

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