***The Age of the Church, No. 2

DS8A***

We are continuing our study on the doctrine of the dispensations. We have come now to the dispensation in which we live. The Bible reveals four main ways in which God has arranged His household. There was one age when the world was run by gentiles. That was the age of the gentiles, and it came to an end at the Tower of Babel. There was a second age that followed that in which God's stewards were the Jewish people. The age of the Jews was temporarily interrupted by the arrival of the age in which we live, the age of the church. It will yet be concluded in the closing seven years of the tribulation period. So we are looking now at the age of the church. Then we will follow it with the millennial or the Kingdom Age.

It is very important that you look at human history the way God looks at it. That's what dispensations are all about. There is nobody in the world who is not a dispensationalist who is a Christian. If somebody comes up and says. "I don't believe in the doctrine of dispensations." immediately you know that he does not understand the doctrine of the dispensation. So don't let that throw you. Unless you are still sacrificing your lambs; unless you are still reporting to the authorities people who are working on Saturday so that they may be executed; and, unless you are keeping all of the 613 rules of the Old Testament law, you are a dispensationalist. You may not understand the doctrine and, consequently, you will be shortchanging yourself on the effectiveness and the blessings that can be yours.

Worse than that, you will then be pliable to Satan's manipulations in bringing from some previous dispensation that which does not apply in the age in which you live. A great deal of legalism and a great deal of lack of liberty that we have today is because of this misapplication. This is not only lack of liberty among ourselves as Christians, but lack of liberty on the political scene. Liberty is the thing that our founding fathers sought to give us. So there were many things that this nation has as our heritage in the form of liberty which were directly the result of the concepts that our religious oriented forebears had from the Word of God, because the key note of the age in which you live is liberty.

Grace means freedom. Grace means absolutely no pressure. Grace means no placing upon you any restrictions upon your volition in your exercise between you and God. This has to be true in a church. It has to be true nationally. It has to be true in your social relationships. It has to be true within a marriage relationship so that the volition of the husband and the wife is respected, and so on. All the way down the line, freedom is what life is all about.

So the dispensation of the church is the great age of personal freedom. It is the great age of liberty. This is why we keep stressing to you that you, as a priest of the Lord Jesus Christ, cannot be a priest unless you have privacy. What you do with your life is between you and the Lord. Other people have no right and no business interfering with your life or trying to impose upon your life that which you are doing. Your life is a matter between you and the Lord, and the Lord will be able to handle your life in anything that needs discipline. He does not need other people to be bringing that discipline upon you.

**An Intercalation**

We have said that the church is an intercalation. Intercalation is a word that has reference to time, and it means that it is a period of time inserted into a program of time. It has been inserted inside of the dispensation of the Jews. Two phases of the dispensation of the Jews have been completed. One phase is yet to come--the phase of the tribulation. The age of the church is a period that was never revealed in the Old Testament, but room was left for the church age to be inserted. Even in Old Testament Scriptures, as we read now from the frame of reference of where we know where history is going and where God's plan is going, we can look back and say, "Well, look there. Right here in the Old Testament was a gap left that we never realized that that was a gap before, but there is a gap for the specific purpose of inserting the church age."

For example, we have one such gap in Daniel 9:24-27. There is an interval here between what is called the 69th week of Daniel and the 70th week of Daniel. In this passage, these weeks are separated. As the people of the Old Testament read it, they didn't know why the separation was there. We know it was so the church age could be inserted.

We have the same thing in Isaiah 61:2-3. Here the Lord Jesus, reading this passage in the New Testament, stops in the middle of a sentence at a comma, and he closes the book when He's reading in the synagogue, and He hands the scroll back to the chief elder of the synagogue. This was a very strange place for Him to stop. But the reason He stopped is because the comma comes after the words "the acceptable year of the Lord." That was what He was fulfilling at that time. The rest of the sentence deals with His Second Coming when He comes in judgment and in vengeance. Therefore, when he closed the book, the first words He said were, "These words have now been fulfilled in your hearing this day." If He had read the rest of the sentence, He could not have said that. Only the first part of that sentence was being fulfilled. So the comma marked the place of the intercalation.

In Hosea 3:4-5, we have the word "afterward" which indicates that there is going to be a long period of time during which Israel will be dispersed, and "afterward," she will be brought together in her nation once more. Now the "afterward" is the separating signal--the gap signal--for the church age.

In Hosea 5:15 through Hosea 6:1, we have the ascension of the Lord and the repentance of Israel referred to. Hosea 5:15 refers to the ascension of the Lord, and Hosea 6:1 refers to the repentance of Israel. The ascension of the Lord and the repentance of Israel (which has not yet taken place) has already been separated by nearly 2,000 years. So here again, as you read the Old Testament, the story and the information just flowed along. However, now as we read back, we see that there were divisions and separations made for the specific purpose of including the age of the church.

In Psalm 22:1-23, we again have the indication of a separation. In verses 1-21, we have the sufferings of Christ portrayed. And remember please, that this Psalm 22 was written 800 before Christ died. It described a method of execution by crucifixion which was purely Roman, and which did not even exist at the time the psalm was written. This is one of the proofs of inspiration. Verse 22 tells about Christ's resurrection, which is in the past for us, but then verse 23 goes right on and tells about His coming and the deliverance of Israel. He has not yet returned to deliver Israel. So between verses 22 and 23, you again have a gap.

In Psalm 110:1-2, we have the present work of Christ in heaven described, and in the next verse we have His return in power. There again was a separation--the two in Scripture just flowing one after another, yet there was a gap between them.

The insertion of the church age then was also to be noted in the Israel's ecclesiastical year. Let's look at that again for just a moment. As the Jewish year would pass, there were certain festivals in which the Jews were to observe certain feast days. In Leviticus 23, we have these described, and it is interesting to note that even in these festival days, which again were pictures of how Christ was going to come and what He was going to do, we have again a gap indicated for the intercalation--for the inserting--of the church age. In the spring of the year, they had three feasts: Passover; First Fruits; and, Pentecost. What these feasts represented has been fulfilled. All three have now been fulfilled. The death of Christ fulfilled the Passover picture; the resurrection of Christ fulfilled the First Fruits; and, the descent of the Holy Spirit fulfilled the picture of Pentecost.

Then several months of the year went by, and there was a gap--no more feasts. Then suddenly you get to the fall of the year and then bang, bang, bang. One after another come three more feasts completing the festival order of the Jewish year. These were Trumpets; Atonement; and, Tabernacles. These have not been fulfilled. What these feasts represent have not yet been realized. The Trumpets stand for the calling back of Israel to the land. That has not been fulfilled. Atonement stood for Israel's cleansing from sin as a nation. This has not been fulfilled. Also, Tabernacles, which pictures Israel in her millennial blessing, has not been fulfilled. So we have here three feasts which have been fulfilled, and three feasts which have not been fulfilled. What comes in between? Church. The very festival year--the series of feasts--indicates to us, as we look back now, why God put the gap in there. This was His way of letting us know, as we look back, that the church was a mystery. To us, it was a hidden secret, but it was not a mystery to Him. It was in His plan.

We have indicated that the dispensation of the church began on the day of Pentecost. It ends at the rapture just before the Second Advent of Christ. Therefore, the church today is not fulfilling in any sense the covenants of Israel. Now we've gone over those covenants. We won't do that again. But the point is that the church is not fulfilling any promises to the Jewish people. That's why we use the word intercalation. The church age has nothing to do with what came before. It has nothing to do with what will follow. The church age saints are a distinctive body. They have a distinctive place in God's plan of the ages. In many respects, it's the finest time to have been born. It's the unique body of people who will have the most intimate relationship to Jesus Christ for all eternity over any body of saints.

**Christians in the Church Age**

There are certain things that are unique to the church age. These were never true of people in other dispensations. That's why it is so important for you to recognize the doctrine of the dispensations and what constitutes the distinctives of the age in which you live. For example, we have positional truth. We are united to Christ by the baptism of the Holy Spirit which every believer receives automatically at the point of salvation (1 Corinthians 12:13). That gives you positional truth. You can be the biggest rat on the face of the earth from that point on, but you will never again lose your salvation. However, God will discipline you. He says that He will scourge you. The Scriptures say that He will flail the skin off your hide. He will bring you around, and if you go far enough in your reversion condition, He will impose upon you the sin unto death. He will take your life and will move you to heaven. But positional truth is a security in Christ. It is there. It is permanent, and you've got it. No believer in any other age was ever related to God in that way.

We also have the universal indwelling of Christ. He is indwelling us forever for the purpose of fellowship. Any time of the day or night you may enter into fellowship with the person of Jesus Christ. You do not have to seek some kind of gimmickry or some kind of device. You do not have to attend some kind of special meeting. You don't have to get around a campfire and sing songs while somebody strums a guitar in order to have fellowship with Christ. You don't have to do anything. He is within you, and He is there for the purpose of fellowship.

Also, the Holy Spirit lives within you. This is magnificent. People in the Old Testament would have given anything to have been able to have God the Holy Spirit living within them forever. This is true of you. It is not true of any of the believers of other dispensations.

We have a universal priesthood. In the Old Testament, they had to approach God through the Leviticus priesthood. You can go to God directly at any time. As a matter of fact, you are the only person who can go to God for you. No one else can represent you. Therefore, you have to learn how to function within your priesthood.

We have a completed Bible. We have a supernatural lifestyle to which we've been called. We also have the filling of the Holy Spirit which makes it possible for us to be spiritual Christians. We will look at that a little more in a moment.

**Relationships in the Church Age**

This age gives us certain relationships. We are going to simply talk in terms of summary because I realize that much of what we're saying we have gone through in detail in the nature of our study of the New Testament epistles. But this is just to tie it all together, so that you have a concise capsule picture of the dispensation of the church.

**Society**

We have a relationship to society. As a matter of fact, when we look at the Christian's relationship, this is the first thing that you should begin with. We need to recognize that he is in a world that he is not part of. Now what kind of a world do we live in? Well, people think that all you need to do is to have a good relationship with people and then you'll be happy. So if you work out relationships between people, all will be well, and the code word is "love." If you can just learn to love everybody and get everybody to love you (which would be a job in itself) that would solve all the problems and everybody would be happy. However, once Adam and Eve assumed an old sin nature, they proceeded to do just that thing.

Eve had gotten Adam in trouble to begin with by being pushy and taking over the role of leadership that should have been his, and he was dumb enough to tolerate it. So she got a little pushy again. She went to Adam and said, "Listen Adam, let's make ourselves some clothes here out of fig leaves." Adam said, "OK." They put things together and they actually made themselves little aprons. They walked around and said, "Yeah, that looks good. That's beautiful." Well, that was fine. It was representative of human good effort and of human relationships, and that went along great. But by the week's end, the leaves had dried out, and the first time they sat down, it was goodbye style time. It was back to sewing. That's about what human good amounts to. So the relationship between them did not work out.

Along comes their first child, and they trained their children and spent many years raising these boys. The first one turned out to be a murderer. Now obviously, something was wrong with human relationships. Just loving one another and trying to work out the problems between ourselves as people with old sin natures did not make us happy. Sin throws us out of touch with God. No amount of our human good effort, consequently, is going to smooth things out for people. That's why Isaiah 64:6 says that all of our righteousnesses--all of our human good efforts to smooth out human relationships--are filthy rags. That is a very strong word in the Hebrew. It's too strong for me even to explain it to you because you would be offended.

Titus 3:5 tells us the same thing--that God has no use for our personal righteousnesses. But God has supplied, consequently, the key for happy human interrelationships, and that's, of course, salvation. When we have that salvation (belief on the Lord Jesus Christ), we have the solution to human relationships. This is the problem that all the sociologists ignore and all the politicians ignore. They ignore that the solutions to human relationships lie in the key of salvation. Consequently, every effort through the centuries--and it will go right on to the millennium--every effort of every politician to straighten out and to smooth out human relationships is going to be like taking hold of a handful of water. It will elude him about the time he thinks he has grasped it. There is no way that this can be done.

**God the Father**

So the Christian has certain relationships to a society that is disoriented to what true relationships are. The Christian begins his place in society with certain relationships that the unbeliever does not have. For example, you as believers are related to God the Father. The unbeliever has a relationship to God, but only in terms of God as his Creator. We have this in Psalm 119:73. However, you are an intimate member of the family of God. It is a personal relationship. We have by nature hostility toward God (Romans 5:10, Colossian 1:21). But this hostility is changed at salvation. Spiritual birth puts us into God's family. Therefore, we become the Father's children (John 1:12, Galatians 3:26). Once we become God's children, as we cannot undo physical birth, so we cannot undo spiritual birth. You will forever be your earthly father's son or daughter, and you will forever be your heavenly Father's child (John 10:28-29).

So consequently, anybody who suggests that you can lose your salvation does not understand how salvation was entirely the production of God, and that there is no involvement humanly within salvation. That must be made clear when you explain salvation to people. You must explain to them that all God wants them to do is to accept something that He's already prepared. Believing that God is telling the truth is not a work. It is a non-meritorious reception of what God has produced, so there is no credit to man. Man, having had no part in salvation, cannot undo it either.

**Jesus Christ**

The Christian also has a relationship to the Son of God. That's why we say that Christianity is not a religion. That's a bad word to use about Christianity. Christianity is a relationship. It is a faith relationship to the person of the Son of God. He is given to us as a gift (John 17:6). The Lord Jesus Christ is described as the Father's firstborn. Therefore, Hebrews 2:11 tells us that Jesus Christ is our older brother. Now all of these are terms to help us to understand the family relationship that we bear to the members of the Trinity. The Lord Jesus Christ as our elder brother is also our ready Helper (Hebrews 2:18, Hebrews 4:15). In Philippians 3:10, the apostle Paul tells us that the life goal is to know Christ.

How do you know Christ? Well, that knowledge comes through learning Bible doctrine. Doctrine is the mind of Christ. To know Him, you must know His Word. If you cannot explain what propitiation is and what Christ has done for us relative to that, then you do not have the mind of Christ. If you cannot explain the doctrine of the security of the believer in salvation, you do not have the mind of Christ. If you cannot explain how to be spiritual, then you do not have the mind of Christ. All of this that's contained in the Word of God is what you must know in order that you can function in this age. I don't care how old you are and how long you've gone to church. Unless you know the contents of the categories of truth of the Word of God, you cannot function in this age. If you do not function in this age, you will go out into eternity and discover that you have been robbed of fantastic rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ which could have been yours. A Christian is permanently related to the Son of God.

**The Holy Spirit**

There is a relationship to the third member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Spirituality means that you are on good terms with God the Holy Spirit. You are on good terms with God the Holy Spirit as the result of having done one thing. How does a person become spiritual? What is a spiritual Christian? This is often confused with spiritual maturity, but spirituality is a relationship to God the Holy Spirit. It means that He is controlling your life. He is the quarterback who is running your life. How do you deliver control to Him? By the simple use of 1 John 1:9. Confession of your known sins makes you a spiritual person. You don't have to be sorry for your sins. You don't have to promise God that you'll never do it again. You don't have to promise God that you're going to do anything. You don't have to make promises to yourself, most of which you will not keep. God will discipline you for your sins--your persistent sinning, but spirituality is an absolute state. If we confess our sins, He forgives. Furthermore, He cleanses us from all unrighteousness, and that means that the sins you have forgotten are cleansed by confession or those that you know.

This is a fantastic relationship with the living God. Through God the Holy Spirit, you can have His power--the power of God--functioning in your life. Notice what this means. That means that you wake up in the morning and you are in a status of spirituality. All known sins are confessed. I remind you again that it is the duty of God the Holy Spirit to stand as sentinel over our souls to call our attention to what we are to confess. So don't wake up in the morning and the first thing you do is that you get miserable by saying, "Oh, I wonder if I've confessed all my sins. Let me see. What did I say? What did I do? Is there anything else I should confess?" If there is, He will let you know. So just relax.

Having done that, that means that you get up, and as you drive to work, you're driving that car under the power of God. You're going about your business under the power of God. You're doing your job under the power of God. Better yet, you're making decisions under the power and the mentality of God. You're making choices under God's direction and under God's decision-making mechanisms for you. This is absolutely unbelievable. Nobody in any other age ever had that kind of power going for him. That is spirituality. It is yours for the simple taking through the confession technique. So we are related to God the Holy Spirit who enables us to have harmony between ourselves as Christians. When we walk by means of His capacities, then the old sin nature is under His control. If you are a spiritual Christian, the Holy Spirit controls you. If you are a carnal Christian, your old sin nature is controlling you.

**Angels**

You also have relationships with angels. That's a very very big thing. There are two kinds of angels. There are elect angels who obeyed God and rejected Satan's offer of rebellion. Then there are fallen angels who accepted Satan's offer of rebellion. They are both active. There are about two-thirds elect good angels, and about one-third bad angels. However they are not small in number. There are millions and millions of demonic beings and millions and millions of angels. Every one of you as believers has a guardian angel. Every one of you as believers probably has a familiar spirit angel--a demon angel that has been assigned to you. This is a spirit being. It's not somebody that you'll recognize.

So you have a familiar spirit demonic being who also is out there to bring Satan's influence on your life. Remember that he does it through your thinking. Satan hits you through the mind. This is satanic; this is demonic; and, this is how Satan works. Satan can take your mind and he can fill it with concepts and ideas. This is why it is important that you and I must possess the mind of Christ. The only way we're going to get the mind of Christ is through learning the Word of God. And the only way you're going to get the Word of God is through sitting in a local church in a group meeting where you have a pastor-teacher who is exercising his gift of explaining the Word of God, or bringing together what the Word of God has to say upon some topic so that you get the whole picture. That's the only way that you will progress substantially in the Christian life relative to securing the mind of Christ.

Hebrews 1:14 tells us that the elect angels care for believers. Christians are targets for the work of the fallen angels. They constantly bring us under attack as Ephesians 6:11-12 tell us. For this reason, God describes, there in Ephesians 6, armor which He has prepared and provided for our defense against the demons who are constantly out to attack the believer. The demon angels can greatly influence the Christian though they cannot indwell you. They cannot indwell you, but you can be greatly influenced. Angels learn by watching Christians, both good angels and evil angels. The subject of the interest in evil angels, of course, is rising now because of some of the entertainment that's out. Television is filled with the influence of spirit beings and demon beings.

However, the problem is that, generally, people who view these things come off with the reaction that the kids do when we finish some campout and somebody has told a ghost story. They say, "Oh, boy. Wasn't that scary?" They didn't really think that any of this stuff is for real. I'm telling you that the demons are there and they are for real. They can indwell unbelievers. They indwell unbelievers in two ways, by the way. The man at Gadara received an angel which the Greek describes as a filthy angel. He was a vile angel. Some demons are more sophisticated; they are more cultured; and, they are more refined. Consequently, some people who are indwelt by demons are very sophisticated and refined, but their thinking is controlled by Satan, and they are people who are directing the activities that Satan wants them to accomplish.

So don't simply fall into the trap of thinking that somebody who is influenced or possessed by a demon is going to be somebody who's doing bad things. He'll be the most cultured, refined, sophisticated, and smart person you probably have ever met. If you've ever talked to some of these people who have been leaders in Satan-worship cults, this is one thing that comes out very clearly. As they gathered in the higher echelons of leadership, one of the things that evolved was the fact that these people who were possessed by demonic beings were very sophisticated and held in high esteem within our society.

**Other People**

The Christian also of course has a relationship to people. He has this relationship to believers as members of the same family and as citizens of heaven with him. No unbeliever is in this family--only believers. But we must stress that while you are related to believers in this age, that there is nobody who is a star personality. There are many religious leaders who are constantly plaguing us with the idea that some Christians are stars. Once in a while, you hear some preacher get up and say that what he would like to do is to pick ten wonderful men out of his congregation, and spend all of his time teaching them. Well, there are not ten wonderful men in anybody's congregation. They are all sheep who need some teaching, and that's all that they are. All of us stand on an equal ground of potential with our spiritual gift, whether you you're a man or a woman. Nobody should discount you and put you down with a remark like that. This is not the plan of God.

It is the plan of God that every believer should perform his function within the body with his gift. There are no stars. If the Lord happens to use you in some very wonderful way, it may be in your local church congregation, and there is marked blessing upon what you are doing, the credit goes to God the Holy Spirit who is the functioning agent within you that enables you to do it. If it were not for Him, you would be doing nothing but human good for which the world might praise you and your fellow Christians might praise you, but which God rejects. So don't fall into the trap of thinking that there are stars in the Christian life.

I think it is a terrible thing when spiritual leaders sometimes gain some prominence, maybe on a national level. Sooner or later, somebody comes up and says, "Well, listen. We'd like to write your life story. That's very pleasing under the occupational hazards of the ministry for somebody to come up to you and say, "You know, you're doing a very wonderful ministry. I'd like to see this ministry reach out." And then they come up with an idea and say, "Here's how we could have a greater outreach for the ministry."

This is why I like the system of sending out recordings on the basis of money that comes in. When money doesn't come in, we don't send recordings out. This makes it clear when God has to say, "Yes, I want that to go out." Or He says, "No, I don't want that to go out," and He shuts the spigot of the money off. That's the way that we ought to function if we understand that there are no stars in the Christian life.

However, it is very tempting when someone comes along and says, "We'd like to write your life story." Do you know what happens? Other Christians, who don't know any better, go out and buy that book. Then they start reading it and they find out that he got up at 5:30 in the morning to read his Bible. So here this poor character starts getting up at 5:30 in the morning to read his Bible so that he too can be a wonderful spiritual force and a moving power. Pretty soon, he's so sleepy at work, and he does his job so badly that he gets fired. His spirituality gets a great and deep wound. So he goes back, and he reads a little more, and he discovers that this man went up and down the streets, and he would grab people and say, "Do you want to go to heaven? Are you a Christian? Stand up against the wall and I want to show you something." So you go out, challenged to witness for the Lord. Or maybe he went out into the swamps, and he preached there. He preached to the frogs, and the frogs croaked back at him in order that he could learn to preach and speak for the Lord.

Now you just carry it on. You've read the books. Anybody who understands the dispensation of grace; the privacy of the priesthood of the believer; the freedoms that are ours; and, the star role of the Lord Jesus Christ will never let somebody come along and write his life story. He will never allow anybody to start making a star out of him under any condition whatsoever. This is very discouraging to believers. Pretty soon their eyes are fixed on people; on some personality; on some routine; or, on some gimmick, and they've gotten their eyes off the Lord, and they're in trouble.

Who do you think comes up with that kind of an idea? Mr. Devil, his majesty, Satan himself. He's always out to get you. Until the Lord Jesus Christ was gone to heaven, He was the target of all satanic attack. This began right at the first when he attempted the destruction of the Abel line. When you get to Genesis 6, you've got this interrelationship where demons married human women and produced the halfbreed half-angel and half-men giants that were destroyed in the flood. He almost pulled it off so that there would be no pure human beings on earth to fulfill Genesis 3:15. He tried to destroy the line of David through which Christ would be born. He tried to destroy the Christ child when He was born. He went through and made his final attack at the cross itself. He made his appeals in the wilderness to get Christ to obey him, and all the way down the line.

When the day of Ascension took place, Satan was raging. He put his hands in his pockets; stormed into his command center; and, called his chief agents in and said, "The game plan has now changed. Jesus Christ has ascended to heaven. He's beyond our reach. I want you to lay a barrage on every Christian all over the face of the earth from now on, as the centuries flow. Unless we destroy the Christians; unless we destroy their testimony; and, unless we pervert and warp what is the dispensation of grace and its liberty and its distinctives, our doom will come. And gentlemen, I need not remind you," Satan probably said, "that we have already had our prison prepared for us in the form of the lake of fire. And unless we can delay the return of Christ, that's where you're going to be. So get out and start hustling." And it is that kind of panic which is motivating Satan to create the kind of distortions that we live under in this which should be our greatest age, but is so often our most distorted.

The elect angels take care of us. The fallen angels attack us, and they can influence us. We are related to believers. We are related to unbelievers. Our relationship has to be governed by doctrine itself. Our mental attitude love enables us to have smooth relationships. This is the oil of relationships, not only with believers, but with unbelievers. The unbelievers are part of Satan's family. They're destined for the lake of fire. This is the area to which you and I are witnessing. The world reacts to Christianity with indifference; with condescension; with ridicule; and, with hostility, and it doesn't take it seriously. It proceeds to try to solve its little problems with its little viewpoint. The world seeks to appeal to the old sin nature in the Christian. Remember that you have the old sin nature, and therefore the world is working on that facet within you (1 John 2:15-17).

So if you're going to avoid worldliness, it's a matter of attitude of mind. Don't fall into one of Satan's traps that worldliness is what you do; worldliness is something you don't say; or, worldliness is some place that you don't go to. That's not true. Worldliness is an attitude of mind relative to Jesus Christ. It's an attitude of mind which is created by the fact that you have breathed in doctrine. Therefore, you have assumed the mind of Christ. Therefore, you have God's thinking governing your life. That will determine where you go; that will determine what you say; and, that will determine what you do. Consequently, you will be functioning against the world system rather than in cooperation with it.

**Responsibilities**

You know I have certain responsibilities as believers. The Lord Jesus Christ has left us a job to do, and that is part of what the dispensation of grace is all about. He is the star person of the universe, and He is the person who guides us. Our service is for God. Our life belongs to God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). He provided eternal life for us by grace (Colossians 2:14). The unbeliever will note the life that you and I live, and he will be affected accordingly. Christian service is built upon our knowledge of the Word (2 Timothy 2:15). God has a plan of service for each of you. That's very clear in Ephesians 2:10. He has works which He has created for you to perform. The goal of the Christian life is for you to build spiritual maturity in your soul. Out of that, everything else flows. It is not the goal for you to storm out to perform something for the Lord.

**Roles**

We are, first of all, to build that maturity. In building that maturity, you then come to the point of executing the two roles that have been committed to you in this age. The first role is that you are a priest of God. The second role is that you are the ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are appointments by grace. God has chosen you for priestly service (1 Peter 2:9-10). God has saved us to be his ambassadors of the truth of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19-21). Consequently, every one of us has been constituted a saint. As I've told you before, you may simply take your name and add the word "saint" before it, and that would be very fitting. It has nothing to do, again, with what you are doing and how you're living. It has only to do with your position.

As Christian priests, you are called upon to perform certain sacrificial functions. 1 Peter 2:5 tells us that we are priests of God to present spiritual sacrifices. These include: the sacrifice of self (Romans 12:1, Philippians 2:17); the sacrifice of praise to God (Hebrews 13:15); the sacrifice of substance, which includes your money (Romans 12:13, Galatians 6:6-10, Hebrews 13:16); and, the sacrifice of service (Hebrews 13:16). As a priest of God, you have access to Him in prayer (Hebrews 4:16). Furthermore, this is your duty (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Praying is not optional. The Christian priest can speak for himself and he can intercede for others. God the Holy Spirit speaks for us, Romans 8:26 tells us, when we can't put our prayers together properly. The Lord Jesus Christ intercedes for every believer (Hebrews 7:25-26). We are priests of God.

We are also His ambassadors. Consequently, we are to function in these two roles. As priests, we give money to the Lord's work. We give that money on a grace principle according to 2 Corinthians 9:8 and Philippians 4:19. In this way, the Lord's work is conducted and it is sustained. This is the basic way to raise money for the Lord's causes. We do not raise money through sales and other techniques that are suitable and legitimate out in the business world in our normal life. As you read the Word of God, you raise money not through rummage sales and by running potluck suppers, etc. But you receive money for the Lord's work on the basis of God's people earning and then giving according to the moving of the Spirit of God.

By the way, unless you have gone very carefully through the doctrine of grace giving, you might want to stop giving for a while and get those studies ([Giving](http://www.christiandataresources.com/basicbibledoctrine.htm#giving)) and study the doctrine so that you know how to give your money in such a way that God will reward you for your gift. Please remember that you may go up to the offering box and you may sacrifice your substance in such a way that God will reward you for that investment. You may also give the same amount of money, and while it will be used in the Lord's work, you will not be rewarded for it, because of the mental attitude and the conditions under which it was given. All of this is revealed to us in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. So I would commend to you that study.

**Rituals**

Also there are two rituals that we as priests perform. One is water baptism that we have in Matthew 28:19. The other is the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Water baptism identifies us with Jesus Christ. It's a symbol. It's simply an act. It shows that we have been identified. There is no merit. It is not a sacrament. The Lord's Supper reminds us of the mission of Christ and describes for us that which He has provided in salvation. When we take the Lord's Supper, we do not have our sins forgiven. There are some churches where people come by and they take the Lord's Supper, and as the wafer is given to them, they are told to depart and to sin no more. The distinct impression is given that when I have taken the wafer of the Lord's Supper and shared the juice of the wine of the grapes that my sins have somehow been cleansed. These are two rituals. Water baptism is to show we have been identified with Christ, and the Lord's Supper reminds us of the basis of our salvation and His death upon the cross.

**Witnessing**

Our witnessing is also not optional. It is a requirement. Proper motivation for this can only be received as we know the Word (2 Corinthians 5:14, Colossians 2:23). The unbeliever will spot a phony Christian, and all too often Christians who try to be ambassadors of the Lord are in that category. The unsaved world reads us (2 Corinthians 3:3).

So as the Lord's priests, and His ambassadors, we have many functions to perform. However, we perform these functions in the face of an old sin nature. The only way we can control this sin nature is through doctrine in the human spirit. 1 Peter 2:11-20 speak to us of this control. In verse 11, we are told how to have victory over ourselves. In verse 12, we're told how we are to conduct ourselves so as to reflect the glory of God. In verses 13 through 15, we have our duties presented to us as citizens with respect to the divine laws of establishment. The Word of God establishes certain basic regulations for a nation. These are to be respected. The authority inherent in those regulations are to be respected. Verses 16 through 18 give us conduct for ourselves in our business and in our employment. Verses 19 through 20 gives us a pattern of conduct such as brings credit to the Lord. There is possible victory over that old sin nature through the learning of the Word of God.

So check yourself out concerning the long range results of the investment of your life. You have much at stake through all eternity and the rewards that you will receive. This is not salvation but much is at stake with your potential rewards. You have to understand that you can squander all that now. While you may materially be a very wealthy person here on earth, you may find yourself ready for a poverty program in heaven. So the Christian in this age should certainly stand out as something special. No other group of believers ever had our privilege; our possessions; our capacities; or, our relationship to the Triune God. Therefore, if we are not standing out as lights, then there's no light in the darkness of this world at all. The only way you will be a light and avoid the pseudo light of human good is by entering into the provisions of the Word of God; the filling of the Holy Spirit; and, the relationship of functioning under the Spirit of God which we'll look at in more detail next time.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1971

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