

# THE CRUCIAL POINTS OF THE MAJOR ITEMS OF THE LORD'S RECOVERY TODAY

(Saturday—Evening Session)

Message Nine

## **The Lord's Recovery versus the Present Evil Age and the Eschatology of the Church**

Scripture Reading: Gal. 1:4; 5:4; 6:13-15; Rev. 11:15; 19:7-9; 21:2, 10-11

### **I. The Lord's recovery is versus the present evil age—the evil age of religion—Gal. 1:4:**

- A. Galatians 1:4 says that the Lord Jesus Christ “gave Himself for our sins that He might rescue us out of the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father”:
1. An age refers to a section, an aspect, the present or modern appearance, of the world as the satanic system, which is used by Satan to usurp and occupy God's people in order to keep them away from God and His purpose—Eph. 2:2; 1 John 2:15-16.
  2. According to the context of Galatians, the present evil age in 1:4 refers to the religious world, the religious course of the world, the Jewish religion; this is confirmed by 6:14-15, which speaks of the religious world which to the apostle Paul was crucified.
  3. The purpose of Christ's giving Himself for our sins was to rescue us, to pluck us, to extricate us, out of the present evil age—1:4.
  4. Christ's death on the cross to deliver us from the present evil age was according to the will of God, which concerns Christ and the church—Col. 1:9.
- B. Religion is something formed by the human mind under Satan's instigation and inspiration in order to oppose God's economy—1 Tim. 1:4; Eph. 1:10; 3:9:
1. Religion is something for God and for the benefit of people, yet it is without Christ and apart from the Spirit of Christ—Gal. 5:4-5; 3:1, 5, 14, 24.
  2. To be religious is to worship God and serve God without Christ or the Spirit; whenever we become religious, we become ensnared in the present evil age.
  3. Satan formed the religious world to keep us away from God, the will of God, and God's eternal purpose—1:4; 5:4:
    - a. Satan utilizes religion to keep people from Christ and the church as God's will.
    - b. As long as Satan can keep us away from Christ and His Body as the will of God, he is satisfied—Col. 1:9; 4:12; 1:18; 2:19:
      - 1) The religious age is evil because it keeps people from Christ and the church—Eph. 5:32.
      - 2) Nothing is more evil in the sight of God than that which keeps us from Christ—Gal. 1:4; 5:4.
      - 3) The religious snare deprives us of all the benefits of the indwelling Christ—1:15-16; 2:20; 4:19.

4. The Lord has no way to fulfill His purpose in religion, including Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism.
  5. Between us and religion is the cross; religion as a world has been crucified to us, and we have been crucified to religion—6:13-14.
- C. For Paul, the present evil age was Judaism; for us today, the present evil age is deformed and degraded Christianity—1:4; Matt. 13:31-33, 44-46:
1. We need to realize how much we need to be delivered from the influence of religion in the present evil age.
  2. The church is the living Body of Christ, but what surrounds us today is a religion—deformed and degraded Christianity—full of traditions, organizations, performances, and falsehoods; the Lord cannot accomplish His purpose in this situation.
  3. We all need to be delivered from religion, from Christianity as the present evil age; we must come out of Babylon, and Babylon must come out of us—Ezra 1; Rev. 18:4; Zech. 3:1-4.
  4. The history among us in the Lord’s recovery has been a history of coming out of Christianity—a history of coming out of and being outside of the present evil age—Gal. 1:4; Heb. 13:12-13.
  5. Because the Lord’s recovery is different from today’s religion—deformed and degraded Christianity—it is impossible for there to be reconciliation between the recovery and Christianity—Matt. 13:31-33, 44-46; Rev. 18:4; 19:1-3, 7-9.
  6. We need to maintain the gap between the Lord’s recovery and Christianity; the wider this gap is, the better, because it is a gap between us and the present evil age—Gal. 1:4.

**II. There is not only an eschatology of the world, the study of the end of the world, but also an eschatology of the church—Rev. 11:15; 12:10; 21:2, 10-11; 22:16:**

- A. The eschatology of the church involves the Catholic Church, the Protestant church, and the original and recovered church.
- B. The expression *the recovered church* refers to the original church, the church according to the divine revelation in the Scriptures—Matt. 16:18; 18:17; 1 Cor. 1:2; Rev. 1:11:
  1. The apostles established the original church, but even while Peter, John, and Paul were still living, the church fell from its original state to a degraded state, a deformed state, even a transmuted state—1 Tim. 3:15; 2 Tim. 2:18-21.
  2. As indicated by 2 Timothy, 2 Peter, and 2 and 3 John—letters of recovery—the recovered church came into being not long after the original church had been established—Acts 14:23.
- C. The real condition and end of the Catholic Church are revealed in Revelation 17.
- D. In the Protestant church there are many “tares,” false believers—Matt. 13:37-42.
- E. The original and recovered church is the genuine church—1 Cor. 1:2; 3:9, 16-17:
  1. In the recovered church we always take the narrow way—Matt. 7:14.
  2. Those who participate in the recovered church learn the special lessons of the Christian life:

- a. To know Christ—Phil. 3:10.
  - b. To know the flesh and the self—Rom. 7:18; Matt. 16:24.
  - c. To learn how to be crucified to live the God-man life—Gal. 2:20.
- F. At His coming back, the Lord will judge and deal with the Catholic Church, the Protestant church, and the original and recovered church:
- 1. He will summon all His genuine believers in every kind of church to His judgment seat to be judged and dealt with by Him—2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 4:5.
  - 2. In that judgment the Lord will discern whether they have built with gold, silver, and precious stones or with wood, grass, and stubble—3:12-15.
  - 3. The overcomers who are transformed into gold, silver, and precious stones will be rewarded to be in the New Jerusalem in the thousand years of the kingdom—Rev. 2:7; 3:12.
  - 4. Religion will be terminated, but the bride of Christ will be prepared—19:1-4, 7-9.
- G. Eventually, all genuine believers will be in the ultimate consummation of God's purpose—the New Jerusalem—21:2, 10-11.

**Excerpts from the Ministry:**

**EXPERIENCING AND ENJOYING CHRIST AS THE ONE  
WHO RESCUES US OUT OF THE RELIGIOUS AGE**

**Giving Himself for Our Sins  
That He Might Rescue Us out of the Religious World  
according to the Will of God**

In Galatians 1:4 Paul says that Christ “gave Himself for our sins that He might rescue us out of the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father.” This verse reveals Christ as the One who rescues us out of the religious world.

***Giving Himself for Our Sins  
That He Might Rescue Us out of the Religious World***

Although Christ was crucified for our sins, the goal of His crucifixion was to rescue us out of the present evil age. An age is a part of the world as the satanic system. An age refers to a section, an aspect, the present or modern appearance, of the system of Satan, which he uses to usurp and occupy people and keep them away from God and His purpose. The world system of Satan has different ages or sections. We may regard each decade as a distinct age or section of Satan's world system. The present age is the present section of Satan's cosmos, his world system. Whereas sins are devilish, the present age is satanic. As the devil, the enemy of God is involved with sins, and as Satan, he is involved with the evil age. God's enemy is subtle, lurking behind sins and the evil age. Apart from the crucifixion of Christ, we have no way to deal with sins, behind which the devil hides, or the evil age, behind which Satan hides. Christ was crucified for our sins so that He might rescue us from this evil age. This indicates that only Christ can save us from the devil, Satan. Both sins and the evil age have been dealt with by the crucified Christ. He gave Himself for us on the cross according to the will of God. He died for our sins so that we might be delivered from the present evil age. Therefore, if we would be delivered from this evil age, our sins must be dealt with. If we, through the preaching of the gospel, help others to receive the forgiveness of sins, they will begin to realize that they need to be rescued from the present evil age.

Literally, the Greek word translated *rescue* in Galatians 1:4 means “to pluck out of, to draw out of, or to extricate from.” According to the context of this book, the present evil age here refers to the religious world, the religious course of the world, the Jewish religion. Paul tells us in verses 13 and 14 how he conducted himself in the present evil age, the religious world under Satan’s usurpation: “You have heard of my manner of life formerly in Judaism, that I persecuted the church of God excessively and ravaged it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many contemporaries in my race, being more abundantly a zealot for the traditions of my fathers.” That in this book the present evil age mainly refers to the religious world and not the secular world is also confirmed by 6:14-15, where circumcision is considered a part of the world—the religious world, which to the apostle Paul was crucified. Here the apostle emphasizes that the purpose of Christ’s giving Himself for our sins was to rescue us, to pluck us, out of the Jewish religion, the present evil age. This is to release God’s chosen people from the custody of the law (3:23), to bring them out of the sheepfold (John 10:1, 3), according to the will of God. Thus, in his opening word Paul indicates what he intended to deal with: he wanted to rescue the churches, which were distracted by Judaism with its law, and bring them back to the grace of the gospel.

At the time of John 10 God’s people, His sheep, were in the fold of Judaism. But as Galatians 1 makes clear, Christ came to bring His sheep out of the fold and to form them with the Gentile believers into one flock, the church (John 10:16). Hence, the fold is religion, whereas the flock is the one universal church, the one Body of Christ, consisting of all the believers in Christ. Today in the sight of God the various denominations, sects, and independent groups are folds. Furthermore, a fold is anything formed into a legality. Anything that is first used by God and then becomes a legality is a fold. For example, baptism by immersion is correct, but if we make this a legality, we will form another fold. Today Christ is seeking to rescue His sheep out of the various religious folds and to bring them together as the one flock.

The Lord Jesus came into the fold, opened the door, and led the sheep out of the fold. The Judaizers crucified Him, but through His death on the cross, the Lord gave Himself for our sins in order to rescue us from the religious fold. The principle is the same both with the believers in Paul’s time and with us today.

### ***According to the Will of God***

Although many Christians know that Christ died for our sins to deliver us from God’s condemnation and the lake of fire, few realize that Christ gave Himself for our sins that He might rescue us from the religious world. This is a crucial matter because Christ gave Himself for our sins to rescue us out of the religious world, not according to His choice but according to the will of God. It was not because Christ was rejected by the Jews that He hated Judaism and went to the cross in order to rescue His disciples out of Judaism. Rather, it was according to God’s will, that is, His plan, His economy, that Christ gave Himself for our sins to deliver us out of the Jewish religion. In His economy God planned that Christ would rescue His chosen people out of Judaism, the law, traditions, and rituals.

The book of Ephesians reveals that the will of God is to have the church as a living Body for Christ (1:22-23; 3:10-11); it is not to have an organization but an organism. The will of God is not to have the Jewish religion or the religion of Christianity. Rather, it is to have the organic Body of Christ. The will of God is not to have circumcision or uncircumcision. Rather, it is to have a new creation (Gal. 6:15), which is the church as the new man (Col. 3:10).

Furthermore, Romans 12:2 says, “Do not be fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which

is good and well pleasing and perfect.” According to the context of this chapter, the will of God is the Body life (vv. 4-5). We need to enter into the Body life. As long as we are outside the Body life, we are outside God’s will.

In contrast to the will of God, which is to have the Body of Christ, Satan’s aim is to systematize people into his world and keep them away from God’s will. In Paul’s day Satan used Judaism to systematize all Pharisees, scribes, priests, and elders among the Jewish people. Today Satan uses the religion of Christianity to systematize many of the Lord’s people away from God’s will, the organic Body of Christ. Just as Paul was delivered out of the age of Judaism, today genuine believers and seekers must be delivered out of the religious system of Christianity to accomplish God’s will to have the organic Body of Christ. (*The Conclusion of the New Testament*, pp. 3251-3254)

#### **SATAN UTILIZING RELIGION TO KEEP PEOPLE FROM CHRIST AND THE CHURCH AS GOD’S WILL**

Nothing used by Satan is as subtle as religion. Satan uses sin and worldliness to keep people from God, but it is easy to understand that sin and the world are not good. However, it is difficult to realize that religion is a strong enemy of Christ. Satan utilizes the veil of religion to deceive people. This is true not only of Judaism but even of Christianity, which is a more developed religion. We may compare Satan’s system to a large university, in which there are many departments. In Satan’s “university” there are departments of dancing and drinking for those who like those things, but if someone considers those things to be ungodly, Satan will offer them a better department—the department of religion. Because the people in this department kneel, pray, fear God, and praise Him, it seems very attractive.

As long as Satan can keep someone away from Christ and His Body as the will of God, he is satisfied. However, there is no “department” of the genuine church in Satan’s system. The Lord said, “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). Satan is truly afraid of the church. If someone seeks after dead and doctrinal knowledge, he can find it in Satan’s department of religion, but if some proclaim themselves in a proper way to be the church, Satan trembles. Many good Christians today have been cheated by Satan. They may speak about the Body of Christ, but they have no practice of the Body. They may even say, “It is too difficult to have the church life. Once you touch the matter of the church, you have many problems. It is wiser to stay away from it.” This is the subtlety of the enemy. The wonderful Jesus has been imparted into the believers for the purpose of the Body and the practical church life. We must not expect that some day in the future the church will arrive or that the church will be in heaven. Rather, the church must be here today on the earth, even in our own locality. If we are not in the church life, we are still veiled and are being cheated.

#### **CHRIST, THE CHURCH, GOD, AND REVELATION BEING VERSUS RELIGION, TRADITION, MAN, AND THE TEACHING OF MAN**

In Galatians 1 there are four negative items and four positive ones. On the negative side there are religion (represented by Judaism—vv. 13-14), tradition (v. 14), man (vv. 1, 11-12), and the teaching of man (v. 12). Then on the positive side we have Christ, who is versus religion (vv. 1, 12, 16); the church, which is versus tradition (v. 13); God, who is versus man (vv. 10, 15); and revelation, which is versus the teaching of man (vv. 12, 16). Paul was “an apostle (not from men nor through man but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead)” (v. 1). Paul’s source and origin as an apostle was not man but God. Moreover, the gospel he announced to the Galatians was not according to man, received from man, or taught by man (vv. 11-12). Rather, his gospel was received through a revelation

of Jesus Christ. Teaching produces a religion, in which there are many traditions, but a revelation conveys and imparts Christ, issuing in the church, which is God's will. God, Christ, the church, and revelation are versus man, religion, tradition, and the teaching of man.

#### RELIGION BEING THE PRESENT EVIL AGE

Verse 4 says, "Who gave Himself for our sins that He might rescue us out of the present evil age." Paul's emphasis here is not that we are rescued from hell but that we are rescued out of the present age. The world as a whole is Satan's system, which is divided into many different ages. The nineteenth century was one age, and the twentieth century is another. Before World War I was one age, and after World War II was another. The 1960s brought yet another age with a certain kind of behavior, dress, and appearance. All these ages put together compose the world. Paul says that Christ gave Himself for our sins to rescue us out of the present evil age. According to the context of Galatians, the present age at Paul's time was religion. To be rescued from religion at that time was to be delivered from the present evil age.

At the time of the apostle Paul, Judaism had become the "modern" religion in the regions of the Mediterranean Sea, including Asia Minor, where Galatia was. To be one who was circumcised, who kept the Sabbath, and who kept the ordinances concerning eating according to Leviticus was to be an up-to-date religious person. In the same principle today, Christianity is the modern, popular religion of much of the world. To be modern is simply to be according to the present age. Thus, to be delivered out of the present evil age is to be delivered out of something modern. Christ gave Himself for our sins that He might deliver us out of the religion of the modern age, which in Paul's time was the religion of Judaism and in our own time is the religion of Christianity.

A dictionary may tell us that *religion* is a good word, but Galatians 1 indicates that religion is versus Christ. It is something that persecutes the church, ravages it, and tries to root it out. Some may say that Judaism is the wrong religion, and now we have the right religion. However, this is not accurate. Religion is anything done for Christ but not having the presence and reality of Christ. Judaism was a religion founded according to the holy Word, just as today the fundamental things of Christianity are also based on the Word of God. Nevertheless, many in Christianity honor only its outward traditions and holidays without being truly for Christ in a pure way. By this we can see that religion is versus Christ. Today we still need to be delivered from the present evil age of religion.

In God's eyes, the old and traditional practices in Christianity without the presence and reality of Christ are a part of the present evil age. The religious age is evil because it keeps people from Christ and the church as God's will. There is nothing as evil in God's eyes as that which keeps us from Christ. In this principle, traditional and religious Christianity today is the present evil age, just as Judaism was in the days of the apostles. At that time, it was not mainly the world or the sinners that opposed the apostles. It was Judaism as the present evil age. The Jewish religion even condemned the Lord Jesus to death according to their understanding of the Scriptures. Paul says, "You have heard of my manner of life formerly in Judaism, that I persecuted the church of God excessively and ravaged it" (v. 13). Is this not evil? What can be more evil than this? Man discerns religion according to the view of tradition and morality, but God discerns it from the view of His eternal purpose. Nothing damages God's eternal purpose as much as religion. Millions of people have been distracted by Catholicism and the Christian denominations. On the one hand, they bring people to God initially, but on the other hand, they distract people from God's eternal purpose to have the church as the built-up Body of Christ in oneness. Even today, the Lord's recovery is confronting opposition from traditional Christianity as the present evil age.

**RELIGION BEING SOMETHING FOR GOD  
YET APART FROM CHRIST  
AND WITHOUT THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST**

Religion is something for God and for the benefit of people, yet it is apart from Christ and without the Spirit of Christ. As long as Christ is not in something, no matter how good it may be, it is only religion. Even if we pray or study the Bible but are not in the spirit and do not have the Spirit of Christ, we are in religion, which does not bring forth the church. The Lord's recovery is to bring us back to the proper church life, and Christ as the Spirit is the only element that produces the church. As long as we do things in the spirit and with the Spirit of Christ, we have the church life. Otherwise, whatever we do may be good, may be for God, and may be for people's benefit, but we will simply produce another kind of religion. We all must pray, "Lord, be merciful to me that I would not do anything that produces a religion." Whatever we do must be realized and practiced in our spirit with the Spirit of Christ as the presence and reality of Christ.

We all need this revelation, and all the veils upon us need to be removed. Then we will see that what matters is not to have certain practices but to have the living Christ revealed in us (v. 16). Mere teaching is not able to help us. Rather, the more we speak, fellowship, and meet in the way of the church, the more the veils are removed and the more we receive a revelation in our spirit. God's desire is not a matter of religion but of the living Christ, the life-giving Spirit, dwelling in our human spirit. On his way to Damascus, Paul received not mere teaching but a revelation from the heavens so that he could see Christ and God's will to have the church, which comes out of Christ. At that time Paul became clear not by man's teaching but by a revelation of Christ from God. This is what we need today, and this is what the Lord is bringing to pass at this time.

Do not think that the Lord's recovery is here to produce another religion. If we are practicing even the best things in a religious way, we should give them up. Verse 15 of chapter 6 says, "Neither is circumcision anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation is what matters." The new creation—the new man, the church—is produced only by Christ in our spirit. If we read Galatians again and pray-read the crucial verses in it, we will see that Christ is versus religion, and the church is versus traditions. Moreover, the proper gospel is not out of man but from God, and we receive it not by mere teaching but by revelation. In Galatians 1:15-16 Paul tells us that at a certain time it pleased God to reveal His Son in him. God's will today is to bring us back to Himself as the origin, the beginning, and to bring forth the church life by revealing Christ in us, not as an outward teaching but as an inward reality.

**HAVING OUR ENTIRE BEING UNVEILED  
TO SEE CHRIST AND RECEIVE HIM INTO US**

God's will is simply to reveal His Son, Christ, in us. We need to leave behind the religious ways of meeting, praying, and teaching in today's Christianity. We should even leave behind our old traditional knowledge of the Bible. What we need is to have our entire being unveiled to see Christ and receive Him into us. As we experience the indwelling Christ's operating within us, we all love one another, and the result is that we have the church life. The church life is not a matter of religious teachings, gifts, regulations, forms, or ordinances. Galatians 3:28 says, "There cannot be Jew nor Greek, there cannot be slave nor free man, there cannot be male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Here there is nothing but Christ. Therefore, we should never argue about such matters as who is right and who is wrong. Both right and wrong avail nothing; Christ is everything.

We all, both young and old, must be saved from religion as the present evil age. May the Lord have mercy upon us so that our veils can be removed, that we may with unveiled face

behold the living, indwelling, and transforming One to have a wonderful, direct fellowship with Him (2 Cor. 3:18). Out of this experience we will have the church life, not according to religious teachings, gifts, regulations, forms, or ordinances but by the indwelling Christ. It pleased God to reveal His Son in us, all our veils are being removed, and we see only God's eternal purpose—Christ and the church. We should not care for anything other than this. (*Enjoying Christ as the All-inclusive Spirit for the Practical, Genuine, and Real Church Life*, pp. 11-16)