

# THE APOSTLES' TEACHING

by Witness Lee

**T**he apostles' teaching is the entire teaching of the New Testament from the first to the last page. It is not merely a part of the New Testament. All twenty-seven books of the New Testament are the apostles' teaching.

## God's Speaking in the Son to His New Testament People

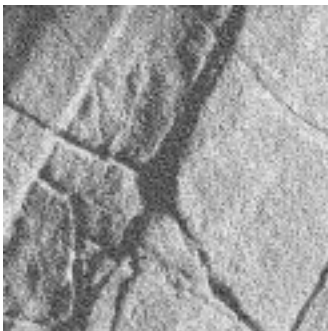
The entire teaching of the New Testament, which is the apostles' teaching, is God's speaking, God's oracle, in the Son to His New Testament people. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, "God, having spoken of old in many portions and in many ways to the fathers in the prophets, has at the last of these days spoken to us in the Son." In the New Testament, God only speaks in one person, the Son. It may seem that God spoke in the Son, Jesus Christ, only in the four Gospels, and that in Acts and the Epistles God spoke in Peter, Paul, James, John, and Jude. However, we should not consider that Peter, Paul, James, John, and Jude are separate from the Son of God. They are members of the corporate Son of God (1 Cor. 12:27). In Acts 9 when Saul of Tarsus was persecuting the followers of Jesus, he did not realize that he was persecuting Jesus. He thought he was only persecuting Stephen and the other believers. On his way to Damascus, however, Jesus appeared to him. Acts 9:4-5 says, "And he fell on the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? And he said, Who are You, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus, whom you persecute." This was not simply the individual Jesus, who is Christ. This was the enlarged, corporate Christ, and Stephen, Peter, and all His followers were His members. The entire New Testament is the speaking of God in the Son, regardless through whom He spoke, because the speakers in the New Testament spoke as the members of Christ.

**E**ven today God is still speaking in the enlarged, corporate Son. When we speak as the members of Christ, our speaking becomes His speaking. Every time before I speak in a meeting, I like to offer a prayer: "Lord, be one spirit with me that I may be one spirit with You. Lord, speak in my speaking, making my speaking Yours." This kind of prayer makes a difference in the speaking. When I speak in this way, I do not merely speak in myself; I speak in the Son.

God's speaking in the Son to His New Testament people was firstly the direct teaching of the Lord Jesus in the four Gospels. These direct teachings of the Lord Jesus are the healthy words (1 Tim. 6:3a). They were spoken to His first group of disciples and were taught to all His disciples (Matt. 28:19-20). The Lord charged His first group of disciples to disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the Triune God, "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (v. 20).

God's speaking in the Son is also the teaching of the Spirit of truth (John 16:12-15). In John 16:12-13 the Lord told the disciples, "I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of reality, comes, He will guide you into all the reality; for He will not speak from Himself, but what He hears

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He will speak; and He will declare to you the things that are coming.” What the Spirit spoke through the New Testament writers was the speaking of Jesus.

**T**he teaching of the Spirit of truth is the teaching according to godliness (1 Tim. 6:3b). Godliness is not merely piety, but the living that is the expression of God, the manifestation of God in the flesh. The teaching and speaking of the Spirit according to godliness is through the apostles. This teaching was firstly through Peter and Paul in Acts, including their words, their works, and their way of working. The words, works, and way of working of Peter and Paul in Acts were the Spirit’s speaking. This teaching was next through Paul in his fourteen Epistles, from Romans to Hebrews. Without the fourteen Epistles of Paul, there would be a gap in the New Testament that could not be bridged. The teaching of the Spirit of truth was next through James in his Epistle, Peter in his two Epistles, Jude in his Epistle, and John in his three Epistles and Revelation.

The arrangement of the books of the Bible was under the inspiration and sovereign control of the Spirit. After the Acts are the fourteen Epistles of Paul, followed by the short books of James, Peter, John, and Jude, and the book of Revelation. Paul’s speaking is lengthy, but the speaking of James, Peter, Jude, and John in their Epistles is shorter. The difference in the lengths of the Epistles may be compared to our functioning in the meetings. We all should speak, but sometimes our speaking should be short. The church needs the short speakings. However, some have to speak for a longer time. The longer speakings of Paul and John unveil to us the mystery of our mystical union with Christ. These two writers speak many times of our being in Christ and His being in us. The Gospel of John often uses the phrases *into Him* and *into Me* (7:5, 31, 38-39, 48). John 14:20 says, “In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” Paul also says many times that we are in Christ and Christ is in us (Rom. 8:1; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20).

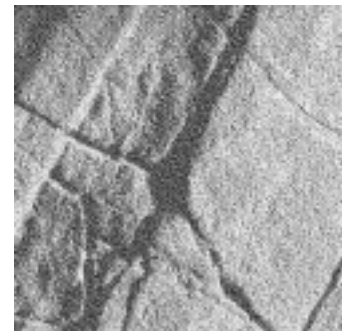
### Completed through Paul and John

God’s speaking in the teaching of the New Testament was completed through Paul and John. The word of God as the revealed mystery was completed by Paul’s writings. Colossians 1:25-26 says, “Of which I became a minister according to the stewardship of God, which was given to me for you, to complete the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from the ages and from the generations but now has been manifested to His saints.” The entire New Testament was completed by John’s writings. Revelation 22:18-19 says, “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this scroll; and if anyone takes away from the words of the scroll of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and out of the holy city, which are written in this scroll.” No other book in the Bible says this. Only the last book of John declares that his writing is the completion of the entire New Testament revelation.

### The Unique, Divine Revelation of God’s New Testament Economy

The entire teaching of the New Testament, the teaching of the apostles, is the unique, divine revelation of God’s New Testament economy. This revelation is concerning the mystery of God—Christ (Col. 2:2-3, 9), the mystery of Christ—the church (Eph. 3:3-11), and the great mystery—Christ and the church (5:32). These three items comprise God’s New Testament economy. The crucial constituents of God’s economy are Christ as the mystery of God, the church as the mystery of Christ, and Christ and the church as the great mystery in the universe. The entire New Testament is a unique, divine revelation concerning mainly three persons or items: the Triune God, the all-inclusive Christ, and the church as the organism of the Triune God, the organic Body of Christ. These three are crucial, vital, and basic. Whether or not our speaking is

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according to the New Testament economy can be measured by its relationship to these three items.

### **Concerning God's New Testament Economy from the Incarnation of God to the Consummation of the New Jerusalem**

The apostles' teaching is the entire speaking of God concerning God's New Testament economy from the incarnation of God to the consummation of the New Jerusalem (Matt. 1:18-25; Rev. 21:1-3, 9-11). This speaking is not concerned with baptism, head covering, foot-washing, or the Lord's table; it is concerning God's New Testament economy. Many Christians have never heard the term *God's New Testament economy*. The Greek word for *economy* may also be translated *arrangement*, *administration*, or *plan*. God has a plan, and thus, He has an arrangement. In order to carry out His plan under His arrangement, He needs an administration.

#### *The Incarnation of the Triune God*

God's New Testament plan is to get Himself incarnated (Luke 1:30-31, 34-35). How marvelous this is! For thousands of years God remained as the divine God, but He had a New Testament plan. The first step of His plan was to become incarnated, to get Himself mingled with man in order to enter into man. This was the procedure by which God was brought into man that He might mingle Himself with man. God was born in a virgin (Matt. 1:18, 20) and spent nine months in Mary's womb. In this way He partook of man's blood and flesh (Heb. 2:14). After His birth He passed through human living (Acts 10:38; 1:21). Human living is a part of the incarnation. God became a man in order to live on this earth. He did not become a man to stay on the earth for only a few hours and then go back to the heavens. No, He stayed here for thirty-three and a half years. He spent approximately thirty years in a carpenter's home. Then He began to travel as a traveling preacher. That was His living. He suffered very much, and He knew the feeling of summer and of winter. He knew all the turmoils common to man.

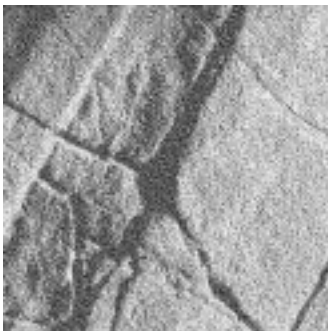
#### *The All-inclusive Death of Jesus Christ*

The second step in God's plan is the marvelous, all-inclusive death of Jesus Christ. Such an all-inclusive death dealt with sin (2 Cor. 5:21) and with sins (1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18; 1 Cor. 15:3). It also dealt with the old man (Rom. 6:6) and the flesh (Gal. 5:24). The all-inclusive death of Christ also dealt with Satan, the serpent (John 3:14; Heb. 2:14), and with the world (John 12:31-33, 24), which is hanging on Satan (1 John 5:19). This death solved all the problems between man and God and accomplished God's eternal redemption, signified by the blood flowing out of the crucified Jesus (Heb. 9:12; John 19:34). The all-inclusive death of Jesus Christ also released the divine life as the eternal life, signified by the water flowing out of the crucified Christ (John 19:34). The all-inclusive death of Christ is our death and our history, because we are in Him. How marvelous is His death!

#### *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ*

After His all-inclusive death, the Lord Jesus resurrected (Matt. 16:21; Acts 2:24; 3:15; 5:30). The resurrection of Jesus Christ testifies that God is satisfied with His death for us and that we are justified by God in Him and with Him (Rom. 4:25). Our being justified in Him is the objective justification, and our being justified with Him is the subjective justification. Christ now lives with us, and we live with Christ. Thus we live a life that enables us to be justified subjectively. In His resurrection Jesus the man was begotten as the Son of God (Acts 13:33; Rom. 1:4). The resurrection of Jesus was Christ's birth. Jesus the man was born as the Son of God. The resurrection of Christ also imparted the divine life into the believers of Jesus Christ and begot them as the many sons of God (1 Pet. 1:3; Rom. 8:29; John 12:24).

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The resurrection of Jesus Christ also made Him the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Finally, this resurrection consummated the Triune God and made the Spirit of God the ultimate consummation of the Triune God as the Spirit (Matt. 28:19; John 7:39; Rev. 22:17). Before His incarnation the Triune God as the divine person did not have the human nature. Thus, we may say that He was perfect but not completed. He was short of the human nature. Through incarnation He obtained the human nature; yet He was still short of something in that He had never entered into death. Even after He died on the cross, the Triune God was still short of something because He had not yet entered into resurrection. In resurrection the consummation of the Triune God was completed. It was not until this consummation of the Triune God in resurrection that the Triune God's title "the Father, the Son, and the Spirit" was mentioned. After His resurrection the Lord Jesus met the disciples on a mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:16), and He told them to go and disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (v. 19).

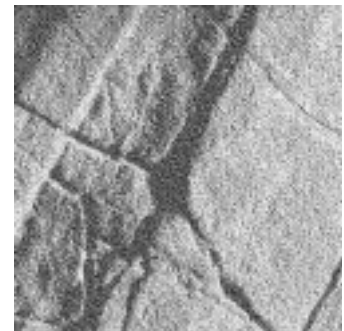
The Triune God has now been completed; He has now been consummated. Christ's resurrection was the consummating of the Triune God. The Spirit of God is now released, and the Spirit of God is the ultimate consummation of the Triune God as the Spirit. The title *the Spirit* is simple, but the significance of this title is not simple. The Spirit is the processed Triune God. John 7:39 says, "But this He said concerning the Spirit, whom those who believed into Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified." Jesus was glorified in His resurrection. After He was glorified, the Spirit was there. In the last chapter of the last book of the New Testament, the title *the Spirit* is used (v. 17). In such a title no reference is made to God, to Christ, to the Son, or to the Father. The Spirit is the consummated, processed Triune God. This One is the Bridegroom. Our Bridegroom is a marvelous person—the Triune God, processed and ultimately consummated as the Spirit. In the Spirit is the Father, the Son, the human nature, the all-inclusive death, and the resurrection. Everything is in the Spirit. The Spirit is the Bridegroom, and the regenerated, sanctified, transformed, conformed, and glorified tripartite man is the bride. At the end of the Bible there is a wonderful couple who constitute a wonderful story of the Bridegroom with the bride. Still, with Christ's resurrection God's plan was not yet finished.

### *The Ascension of Christ*

The final part of God's plan is the ascension of Christ. The New Testament reveals that Christ's ascension had two parts, the secret part and the open part. Most readers of the Scriptures have not realized that there was a secret part to Christ's ascension. This secret part took place early in the morning on the day of resurrection. On that morning the resurrected Christ did not see anyone but Mary. After Mary realized who He was, she tried to touch Him, but He would not allow her to do so because He had not yet ascended to the Father (John 20:17). Later He came back to His disciples and offered Himself to be touched by them (v. 27). Before His coming back to the disciples, He did not allow anyone to touch Him, because the freshness of His resurrection should be presented to the Father for the Father's satisfaction, that God might taste His freshness in resurrection. This was typified by the firstfruit of the harvest (Lev. 23:10-11).

**T**here was also an open part to Christ's ascension. A number of the Lord's disciples saw His open ascension. At that time the angels came to declare that Christ would come back in the same way as they saw Him ascend to the heavens (Acts 1:9-11). The open part of Christ's ascension was for Christ to be crowned with glory and honor (Heb. 2:7), to be made both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36), to be made a Leader and Savior (5:31), and to be made Head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22). Such an ascension is the consummation of Christ as the Savior. A little man, a Nazarene, was made the Lord of all and the Christ, the Accomplisher of God's economy. Christ was made the top Leader among the leaders so that He also could be a

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Savior. If He were not a Leader, He would not have the capacity to save us. As a Leader, He has every kind of capacity to be our Savior.

Christ is also the Savior. To become the Savior He accomplished everything. He passed through death, entered into resurrection, and ascended to the heavens. He was glorified; He was crowned with glory and honor. He was made the Lord and Christ and was also made the Leader and Savior. Furthermore, He was made Head over all things to the church. Now He is fully consummated as the Savior, the One who is able to save (Heb. 7:25). Christ is also omnipresent. He is the life-giving Spirit. Like the air that surrounds the globe, He is waiting for people to believe in Him and to receive Him. The first four basic steps of God's plan include incarnation, the all-inclusive death of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the ascension of Christ. The Triune God has been completed, and our Savior has been consummated. These are the things that the apostles' teaching covers. We need to know all these things.

### **The Contents of the Full Gospel of God and the Constitution of the Christian Faith**

The apostles' teaching, the entire teaching of the New Testament, the unique, divine revelation of God's New Testament economy, is the contents of the full gospel of God (Rom. 1:1-4). The gospel of God mentioned in Romans 1:1-4 is the full gospel of God, comprising not merely a part of the New Testament, but the entire New Testament.

The apostles' teaching is the constitution of the Christian faith (Jude 3; 1 Tim. 1:19; 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). The Christian faith refers to our belief. Our belief, our faith, our creed, is a great matter. It is the entire New Testament. Our creed is a long one. It starts from the beginning of Matthew and continues to the end of Revelation. This creed is our belief, and our belief is the Christian faith.

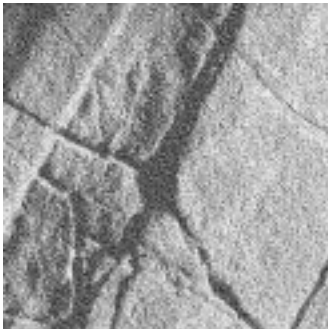
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### **Any Teaching Different from this Unique Revelation Not Allowed by the Apostles**

Any teaching different from this unique revelation is not allowed by the apostles (1 Tim. 1:3-4; 2 John 9-11). In 1 Timothy 1:3 Paul told Timothy, "Even as I exhorted you, when I was going into Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus in order that you might charge certain ones not to teach different things." The different teachings included things from the Old Testament, yet they were different from God's New Testament economy, God's New Testament dispensation. Such teachings were not allowed by the apostles. The apostles were strict in this matter. Second John 9-11 says, "Everyone who goes beyond and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God....If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not say to him, Rejoice! For he who says to him, Rejoice, shares in his evil works." John warned us not to say anything to such a one, but to stay away from him. Some may feel that they are not able to be so strict. However, even one who claims to be a Christian but teaches differently from the apostles' teaching, the New Testament teaching, the unique revelation of God's New Testament economy, is an evildoer, and we should not greet him. To teach differently is not a small matter. It is a direct work of Satan.

### **Any Other Belief Besides This Unique Faith Not Allowed by the Apostles**

Any other belief besides this unique faith is not allowed by the apostles (Gal. 1:7-9). Galatians 1:8 says, "But if even we or an angel out of heaven should announce to you a gospel beyond that which we have announced to you, let him be accursed." Paul taught us in Romans 12:14 to bless and not curse those who persecute us, but here Paul tells us that some people are to be accursed. The apostles were very strict in their teaching, that is, in the New Testament teaching, the contents of the full gospel of God and the constitution of our Christian faith.



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## All Teachings Different from the Unique Revelation of God's New Testament Economy Being Considered by the Apostles as Winds of Teaching

All teachings different from the unique revelation of God's New Testament economy were considered by the apostles as winds of teaching (Eph. 4:14). In this regard the apostles were very strict. These winds of teaching are in the sleight of men's cheating. The Greek word for *sleight* refers to the playing of dice in gambling. The different teachings are like the playing of dice for the purpose of cheating us. This sleight is in the craftiness of men's deception. The differing teachings are a deception, cheating, and falsehood. They are with a view to inducing men into the satanic system of error. Behind men's sleight, men's craftiness, in teaching things different from the New Testament economy, is the satanic system. Satan has a system, and if it were possible, he would induce all Christians into it. The goal, the aim, the purpose, of his system is to carry the saints away from the central lane of the divine revelation with the intention of frustrating and even tearing down the building up of the Body of Christ. Some winds of teaching do not appear to be evil. However, the factor of evil is there to induce the saints into the satanic system of error, to frustrate them from building up the Body of Christ, and even to tear down the building up of the Body of Christ. The winds of teaching also cause the babes to be tossed by waves and thereby to suffer uneasiness in the church life.

**T**here is a good test for discerning the winds of teaching. Certain teachings cause us to be cold and even deadened. After listening to such a teaching, we are deadened within. A certain teaching may also take away our morale for following the Lord, caring for His interest, and loving the church. If any teaching, regardless of how good or scriptural it may appear to be, has any of these negative effects, this is strong evidence that this teaching is a wind that will blow us away from the central lane of God's New Testament economy. Many of us have suffered the blowing of the winds of teaching. We may have had the morale to follow the Lord, to love the church, and to love the Bible, but after listening to such a teaching for half an hour, the morale was gone, and we were deadened.

If the teachings differing from the unique revelation of God's New Testament economy did not appear to be good, no one would accept them. Teachings may be compared to seafood, but according to the typology in Leviticus, certain foods from the sea are unclean. Leviticus 11:10-11 tells us that aquatic animals without fins and scales are unclean. The guarantee of cleanness is in the fins and scales. The "fins" and "scales" of the New Testament teaching are the Triune God, the all-inclusive Christ, and the church as the organic Body of Christ. By these we can measure others' teachings. If a teaching is not related to these three items, it does not have "fins" and "scales." Regardless of how good such a teaching may appear to be, for safety's sake we should not take it.

The New Testament only contains twenty-seven books, but within it there are many facts. One might emphasize a particular point, such as speaking in tongues in 1 Corinthians 14, claiming that it too is a part of the New Testament teaching. Although such a teaching may seem scriptural, it may not have "fins" and "scales." We must learn to have discernment in our "eating," in our receiving of teachings. We must not receive any teaching so easily. Those who bring the winds of teaching often appear to be very loving, apparently showing care and concern for us. However, we should not quickly receive their word. We must consider whether their teaching has "fins" and "scales."

The apostles' teaching, the New Testament teaching, is very crucial. Whenever we hear something differing from the apostles' teaching, we should not be bothered or affected. We should simply come back to the apostles' teaching. However, if we are not able to properly discern a teaching, we should fellowship with certain saints to receive some help. In God's New Testament economy, there is only one kind of teaching revealed and recognized by God—the teaching of the apostles. We need to continue steadfastly in this teaching (Acts 2:42). AFC

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