

# God's Economy in Faith *vs.* Doctrinal Diseases

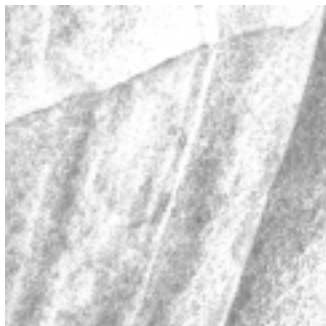
by Ron Kangas

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The apostle Paul was strict concerning teaching. Standing on the ground of his apostleship and writing as a God-appointed teacher “in faith and truth” (1 Tim. 2:7), Paul charged Timothy, his “genuine child in faith” (1:2), saying, “Take heed to yourself and to your teaching” (4:16). In addition, Paul gave Timothy direction regarding others’ teaching, especially unhealthy teaching, which is contrary to God’s economy. “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 nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God’s economy, which is in faith” (1:3-4). Elsewhere Paul tells Timothy, “If anyone teaches different things and does not consent to healthy words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the teaching which is according to godliness, he is blinded with pride, understanding nothing, but is diseased with questionings and contentions of words” (6:3-4a). The word of those whose teachings depart from the divine economy “will spread like gangrene” (2 Tim. 2:17). Expressions such as *diseased with questionings* and *spread like gangrene*, standing in contrast to *healthy words* and *the healthy teaching* (1 Tim. 1:10), indicate that one’s teaching may either spread disease or contribute to the believers’ spiritual health and growth in the divine life unto maturity for the carrying out of God’s economy. Teaching, therefore, involves the spreading of an organic element—either the nourishing supply of life or the germs of doctrinal disease.

God’s economy in faith is versus doctrinal diseases. By *doctrinal diseases* I mean spiritual disorders caused by the dissemination of teachings that not only are unhealthy but also that deviate from the basic revelation of the Scriptures and spread the germs of death and division, resulting in the degradation of the church from the house of the living God revealed in 1 Timothy chapter three to the “great house” exposed in 2 Timothy chapter two. The contrast between God’s economy with its healthy teaching and the doctrinal diseases caused by deviant teachings is a central thought in the books of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. This contrast is also the thesis of this article, which will attempt to outline crucial aspects of God’s economy in faith as unfolded in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, define the intrinsic nature and function of healthy teaching, and then contrast the divine economy, which promotes spiritual health, with different teachings, which cause doctrinal diseases resulting in deviation, degradation, and death.

The books of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are, in an exceedingly practical way, devoted to the divine economy. The subject of 1 Timothy is God’s economy concerning the church; the central thought of this book is God’s administrative arrangement, unfolded in the apostles’ teaching, regarding the church as His house and our conduct in it. The subject of 2 Timothy is inoculation against the decline of the church; the central thought of this book, written in the sense of recovery, is overcoming the decline of the church by remaining faithful to the truth in God’s economy. The subject of Titus is the maintenance of order in the church; the central thought of this book is maintaining the order in the church by holding to the faithful word, which is according to the apostles’ teaching. These three Epistles are focused on God’s economy in its practical implementation in the church



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life in the midst of an increasing tide of departure from the healthy teaching of the apostles, the divine revelation regarding the divine economy.

### God's Economy

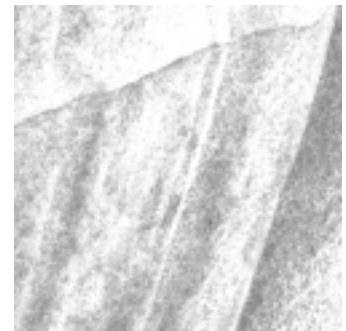
The Greek word for *economy* (*oikonomia*) in 1 Timothy 1:4 is composed of *oikos*, meaning "house," and *nomos*, meaning "law." *Economy* therefore denotes a household law, a law that is related to the management and administration of a household and the distribution, or dispensing, of many items to the members of the household. As revealed in the New Testament, God's economy is God's household management, His household administrative arrangement, His household government. The church of the living God is the house of God, the corporate manifestation of God in the flesh (3:15-16), and God has established an administration in and for His house and household, both of which are composed of God's children, those who have been born of God and who now have the life and nature of God to be the expression of God. Being the church of God composed of the children of God depends absolutely on the divine economy with the divine dispensing. It is crucial for us to realize that God's administrative arrangement in His economy is to dispense Himself in Christ into His chosen and redeemed people in order to have a living, organic house for His manifestation. This divine economy is carried out by the divine dispensing through the apostles' teaching. Paul's ministry "was centered on this economy of God (Col. 1:25; 1 Cor. 9:17), whereas the different teachings of the dissenting ones were used by God's enemy to distract His people from this economy" (Recovery Version, 1 Tim. 1:4, note 3).

This economy is revealed in Ephesians. Ephesians 1:10 says, "Unto the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him." All the kingdoms in the universe—plant, animal, human, and angelic—are for this economy and are moving, according to God's operation in Christ, toward its completion. Here in 1:10 *oikonomia* can also be rendered "dispensation," "stewardship," or "household arrangement." *Administration* may also be used to translate *oikonomia* because eventually and ultimately this economy, this stewardship, dispensation, and household arrangement, will become an eternal administration. In "the fullness of the times" the entire universe will be under one administration. "In His Christ to head up all things / Is our God's economy; / Taking Christ as Head and Center, / All is one in harmony" (*Hymns*, #981). God's economy to head up all things in Christ is accomplished through the dispensing of the abundant life supply of the Triune God as the life factor into the believers in Christ, the members of the Body of Christ, making them His eternal, corporate expression.

**I**n relation to God's eternal purpose (Eph. 3:11; 1:9; 2 Tim. 1:9), Paul uses *oikonomia* twice more in Ephesians. In 3:2 Paul speaks of "the stewardship of the grace of God which was given to me for you." In relation to God, *oikonomia* denotes economy, or administration, but in relation to the apostle in this verse, *oikonomia* denotes the stewardship for dispensing the grace of the Triune God, and the Triune God as grace, into God's chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people for the building up of the Body of Christ. In 3:9 Paul speaks of his ministry "to enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God." God's mystery is His hidden purpose, concealed in Himself, which is according to the desire of His heart. His will, according to His good pleasure, is to dispense Himself into His children as their life, their life supply, and their everything so that they may grow in the eternal life to be built up as the organic Body of Christ for His expression. Although this mysterious purpose was hidden in God throughout the ages, that is, from eternity and throughout all the past ages, through the apostles' teaching it has been brought to light, and now the believers in Christ, having been enlightened (1:17-18), can see it and participate in it.

God's economy revealed in the New Testament was formed by Him in Christ according

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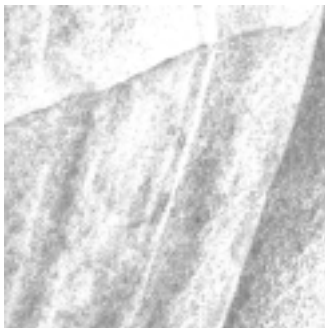
to His good pleasure, the desire of His heart. Unlike the book of Romans, which begins from the perspective of the condition of fallen humankind, the book of Ephesians was written from the perspective of God's good pleasure, the desire of His heart. Regarding this, 1:9 says, "Making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself." God's good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself for an economy, is to dispense Himself in His Divine Trinity into us, making Himself one with us and us one with Him as He, in Christ, builds Himself into our tripartite being (3:16-17), making us the same as He is in life and in nature but not in the Godhead for His corporate expression. In this divine dispensing, God the Father is the source—the fountain; God the Son is the course—the spring; and God the Spirit is the transmission—the river (John 4:14; 2 Cor. 13:14).

### God's Economy and Faith

This marvelous economy of God is "in faith" (1 Tim. 1:4) and, in the believers' experience, it is based on "the faith," which is "the common faith" (v. 19; 3:9; Titus 1:4). To say that God's economy is in faith means that it is initiated in faith, developed in faith, and carried out in the sphere, the realm, of faith. Furthermore, to say that God's economy is in faith is to assert that His economy is not in the natural realm, that is, not in the sphere of the old creation, and not in the work of law, that is, not in the efforts of the flesh to fulfill God's requirements apart from God and His grace. Rather, God's economy in faith is in "the spiritual sphere of the new creation through regeneration by faith in Christ (Gal. 3:23-26)" (Recovery Version, 1 Tim. 1:4, note 4). Understood in this way, to have faith is to confess that, in ourselves and by our own effort, we are unable to fulfill God's requirements but that God in Christ has done everything for us and that we should simply receive all that He has done. Therefore, "by faith we are born of God to be His sons, partaking of His life and nature to express Him. By faith we are put into Christ to become the members of His Body, sharing all that He is for His expression" (note 4).

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This "allotted faith equally precious" is a gift of God in His grace (2 Pet. 1:1), not a natural human capacity to believe in God and His word or to fulfill untapped human potential by engaging in "possibility thinking." Actually, our faith, our ability to believe in God, is God Himself infused into us, as indicated in Hebrews 12, where we are enjoined to look "away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith" (v. 2). As the Author, the source, of our faith, the Lord Jesus has imparted to us a marvelous believing ability; as the Perfector of our faith, the Lord Jesus develops this ability to substantiate things hoped for and unseen (11:1). As we seek Him, open to Him, love Him, enjoy Him, and delight in Him, beholding Him with an unveiled face (2 Cor. 3:18), He, the Lord of glory, infuses us with Himself, in particular with the element of faith, and in this way our God-given faith is developed. The more we experience this development of faith in our continual fellowship with the Lord, who is the Spirit in our spirit (v. 17; 2 Tim. 4:22; 1 Cor. 6:17), the more we are brought into God's economy with the divine dispensing. Everything in the outworking of God's economy depends on our subjective faith, on our divinely allotted capacity to believe in the Lord and to receive Him as our everything in our daily Christian life and church life. (See also *Faith and Love in God's Economy*, next page.)

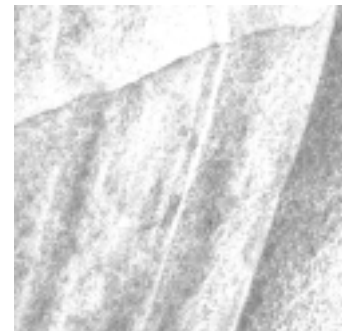


**T**o say that, in the experience of the believers, God's economy is based on *the faith* means that our participation in God's economy is founded on the objective faith. *Objective faith*, as used here, denotes that in which we believe, the central truths concerning the Triune God, the person and work of Christ—the complete God in His absolute deity and a perfect man in His sinless humanity—and in the Word of God as the infallible revelation of God. The faith thus implies our believing in Christ and taking His person and redemptive work as the objective of our faith, our subjective, God-infused believing ability. The objective faith is the common faith, the faith that is common to all genuine believers in Christ, who as God's chosen ones—the ones chosen by God the Father before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4)—have the same kind of subjective faith (Titus 1:1, 4). The

**F**aith and love are two inseparable, excellent virtues of the believers in Christ. Faith is given to us by God that by it we may receive Christ (John 1:12), the embodiment of the Triune God (Col. 2:9), and thereby enter into the Triune God and be joined to Him as one, having Him as our life, life supply, and everything. Love issues out of such a wonderful faith and enables us to live out all the riches of the Triune God in Christ with those who have believed into Christ with us, that the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—may have a glorious expression. Faith is for appreciating, substantiating, and receiving the unlimited riches of the Triune God; love is for experiencing, enjoying, and living out the immeasurably rich Triune God. Faith is for the believers to be joined to the Triune God, who is everything to them; love is for the believers to minister and transmit the Triune God to their fellow believers so that, in such a wonderful and powerful faith, all the believers may love one another with divine, transcendent love and live a corporate life in Christ. In this way the Body of Christ is realized and the processed Triune God is expressed today on the earth in the all-inclusive Christ through the immeasurable life-giving Spirit.

**T**he Epistle to Titus is the conclusion of the three books, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, and it concludes with the wonderful faith and the super-excellent love. This implies that, in the current of the church's degradation, in order to be able to effectively stand firm and overcome the downward trend and factor in the church, this wonderful faith and this super-excellent love are indispensable. We should not walk by sight or care for the outward situation. Rather, in this wonderful faith we should enjoy its source, which is the Triune God, to whom we have been joined through this faith, and by this super-excellent love of the Triune God we should love Him and all those who belong to Him. Only in this way can we become, in the current of the church's degradation, the overcomers whom the Lord is calling and is desiring to obtain in Revelation 2 and 3.

**T**his wonderful faith and this super-excellent love are out of the Triune God, who earnestly desires to be joined to us to be our everything. This Triune God passed through the process of incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection from the dead, and ascension to the heavens on high and was ultimately consummated as the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). This Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2), who includes divinity, humanity, and Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension and is the reality of the all-inclusive Christ (John 14:16-20), dwells in our regenerated spirit (Rom. 8:16; 2 Tim. 4:22). When we contact this Triune God through prayer and by looking to Him, by means of our spirit, which was once dead and was made alive, He infuses Himself into us in many ways to become the faith within us toward Him and the love outside of us toward those who belong to Him. Such faith and such love are the reality and expression (1 John 4:8, 16) of the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—in whom we believe and whom we worship and receive. Also, they are the rich grace given to us in Christ by the Triune God (1 Tim. 1:14), not only to be the motivating power and expression of our spiritual life but also to become our breastplate (1 Thes. 5:8), which covers and protects the vital parts of our being. It is by such faith that we receive and enjoy the divine life that is revealed and ministered to us in the entire Gospel of John (John 3:16, 36), and it is by such love that we love the Lord and those who belong to Him (John 21:15-17; 13:34-35). Such faith and love are connected and go together: love comes from faith, and faith operates and works through love (Gal. 5:6). Love with faith enables us to love our Lord in incorruptibility so that we may have an overcoming church life (Eph. 6:23-24) for the fulfillment of God's New Testament economy in Christ for the church. Therefore, it is in this faith that we are well pleasing to God (Heb. 11:6) and in this love that we are blessed of the Lord (1 Cor. 16:22). May this love with this faith be to the brothers from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 6:23). (Recovery Version, Titus 3:15, note 1)



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faith is “the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) and the faith for which we should earnestly contend against all heresies. The faith is also the faith at the oneness of which we all need to arrive through the process of growth and transformation in the divine life received through regeneration. In 1 and 2 Timothy *the faith* equals the contents of God’s economy. We need to be “nourished with the words” of this objective faith (1 Tim. 4:6) and “fight the good fight” of this faith, struggling on its behalf and keeping it unto the end (6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7).

Unfortunately, concerning the faith some “have become shipwrecked” (1 Tim. 1:19), and some will depart from it, “giving heed to deceiving spirits and teachings of demons” (4:1). Sadly, it is possible that even some in the practical church life, by living contrary to God’s economy in faith, may deny the faith and be “worse than an unbeliever” (5:8). The divine economy requires for its fulfillment that we exercise our subjective, God-given faith and stand on the foundation of the objective, God-revealed faith in the person and work of Christ.

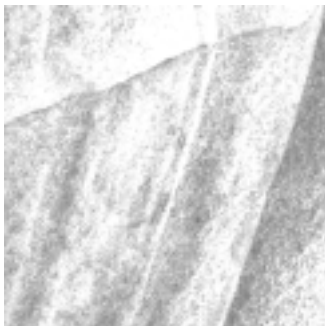
### God’s Economy and the Triune God

The economy of God is the economy of a God who is triune both in His essence and in His economy. The Trinity unveiled in the Bible is both the essential Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit coexisting and coinhering in the Godhead from eternity to eternity—and the economical Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit operating in time to fulfill God’s eternal purpose. The economical Trinity is the essential Trinity in operation to dispense the Triune God in His Divine Trinity into His redeemed people.

As books devoted to God’s economy, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are rich in their revelation of the Triune God. Consider the following references from 1 Timothy. Paul became an apostle of Jesus Christ “according to the command of God our Savior” (1:1). Grace, mercy, and peace are dispensed to us “from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord” (v. 2). To us “the grace of our Lord superabounded with faith and love in Christ Jesus” (v. 14). Christ Jesus “came [by incarnation] into the world to save sinners” (v. 15) through His vicarious, redeeming death on the cross. Jesus Christ, who displayed His long-suffering to Paul, is “the King of the ages, incorruptible, invisible, the only God,” to whom will “be honor and glory for ever and ever” (vv. 16-17). Our Savior God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth” (2:3-4). There is “one God and one Mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all” (vv. 5-6). Jesus Christ, who was God from eternity, became a genuine man through incarnation and then, while living on earth as a man, continued to be the very God. Now after His resurrection and in His ascension Christ remains the God-man and thus is uniquely qualified to be the Mediator, the go-between, of God and men. As the One dwelling in our spirit and speaking to us there (Rom. 8:9-11, 16), “the Spirit says expressly that in later times some will depart from the faith” (1 Tim. 4:1). God is the living God (v. 10), and the house of God, which is the church of the living God, is the place of His manifestation (3:15). In 5:21 Paul solemnly charged Timothy “before God and Christ Jesus,” and in 6:13 Paul again charged him “before God, who preserves all things in life, and Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate.” Paul went on to speak of “the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and then of “the blessed and only Sovereign,” “the King of those who reign as kings and Lord of those who rule as lords” (vv. 14-15).

In 2 Timothy 1 we read of “the will of God” and of grace, mercy, and peace “from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord” (vv. 1-2). God “has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the times of the ages” (v. 9). We were saved according to God’s eternal purpose and for this purpose. In verse 10 Paul goes on to speak of grace having been “manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who nullified death and brought life and incorruption to light

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through the gospel.” Paul exhorts Timothy to hold “a pattern of the healthy words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus,” and then he admonishes him to guard “the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us” (vv. 13-14). In verses 16 and 18 Paul speaks of the Lord granting a certain faithful, overcoming one “to find mercy from the Lord in that day.” We should be “empowered in the grace which is in Christ Jesus” and remember “Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, of the seed of David” (2:1, 8). Second Timothy 4:1 says, “I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom.” Verse 8 refers to the Lord Jesus as “the righteous Judge” and indicates that we should love “His appearing.” At the end of 2 Timothy, Paul was assured of two things: that the Lord would deliver him “from every evil work” and save him “into His heavenly kingdom,” and that the Lord, who is the Spirit, was with Timothy’s spirit (vv. 18, 22).

**I**n Titus 1:1 Paul refers to himself as “a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ.” God, “who cannot lie” (v. 2), is “our Savior God” (v. 3). Grace and peace are distributed to us “from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior” (v. 4). In 2:10 Paul speaks of adorning “the teachings of our Savior God in all things.” The grace of this Savior God, “bringing salvation to all men, has appeared,” training us to “live soberly and righteously and godly in the present age,” as we await “the blessed hope,” which is “the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (vv. 11-13). This great God, the God-man, “gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all lawlessness and purify to Himself a particular people as His unique possession” (v. 14). In 3:4 we are told the good news that “the kindness and the love to man of our Savior God” has appeared. In the following verses we have these marvelous words: “Not out of works in righteousness which we did but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (vv. 5-6). We, the believers in Christ, have been “justified by His grace” in order to become “heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (v. 7).

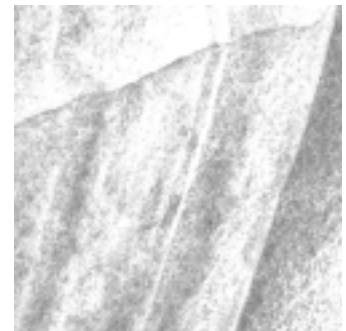
What a tremendous revelation of the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—is contained in these three Epistles! I believe that the more we study this particular unveiling of the Triune God, the more we will realize that Paul is not here writing a theological disquisition; neither is he engaging in abstract, doctrinal speculation concerning the eternal Trinity in the Godhead. On the contrary, as a recipient of divine revelation and a person rich in God’s economy both in knowledge and experience, Paul is speaking spontaneously, dynamically, livingly, and experientially of the God, the Christ, and the Spirit whom he personally knows and with whom he is constituted to be a minister of the new covenant. The Triune God in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus is a God known and experienced in and for His economy. The teaching concerning this, the apostles’ teaching, is truly the teaching “of our Savior God” (Titus 2:10).

### God’s Economy and Eternal Life

God’s economy is intrinsically related to eternal life, that is, to the life of God (Eph. 4:18). Because of this relationship between the divine life and the divine economy, the books of 1 Timothy and Titus strongly emphasize eternal life. First Timothy 1:16 says that Paul became “a pattern to those who are to believe on Him unto eternal life.” In 6:12 Paul charges Timothy to “lay hold on the eternal life, to which you were called and have confessed the good confession before many witnesses,” and in verse 19 he exhorts him to charge those who are rich to “lay hold on that which is really life,” that is, on the eternal life referred to in verse 12. Titus 1:2 speaks of “the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the times of the ages.” Finally, in 3:7 we read of the believers becoming “heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

We need to have a scriptural view and an accurate understanding of the eternal life,

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CONSTITUTED.





which we received of God through our believing into the Son of God (John 3:15, 36). Eternal life, a life on the highest plane, is the divine life, the life of God and even the Triune God Himself. *Divine* means being of God and having the nature of God. *Eternal* denotes that which is uncreated, without beginning or ending, existing by itself, and ever, unchangeably existing. Therefore, eternal life, the life of God, is uncreated and indestructible; it is without beginning or ending, self-existing, ever-existing, and never changing, remaining the same and continuing no matter what kind of blow it sustains or what kind of environment in which it is manifested. Furthermore, for the life of God to be eternal means that it is perfect and complete in quality, quantity, time, space, and existence. We received such a life when we received the Lord Jesus and were born of God (1:12-13). This eternal life—the only life that is really life—is the life that is in the Son of God and that actually is the Son of God (1 John 5:11-12; John 14:6). It is with this eternal, wonderful, and marvelous life that we, the believers in Christ, have been regenerated, and it is by this life, which is now “our life” (Col. 3:4), that we are being transformed through the dispensing of this life into our entire tripartite being, spirit, soul, and body (Rom. 8:10, 6, 11). God’s economy is an economy in this life, and God’s economy is carried out through our laying hold of and growing in the eternal life of the Triune God.

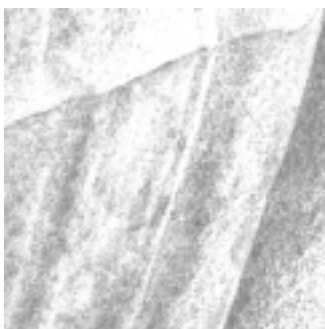
### God’s Economy and God’s Mercy and Grace

For our participation in God’s economy, we are utterly and continually dependent upon God’s mercy and grace, both of which are mentioned several times in the three Epistles we have been considering (1 Tim. 1:2, 13-14, 16; 6:21; 2 Tim. 1:2, 9, 16, 18; 2:1; 4:22; Titus 2:11; 3:5, 7, 15). Whereas theologians, especially those who espouse and promulgate the Reformed system of doctrine, concentrate on grace and on “the doctrines of grace,” less attention is devoted to God’s mercy. Mercy is the most far-reaching of God’s attributes, going farther to reach pitiful sinners than either God’s grace or His love. In fact, apart from God’s mercy, we cannot be in a position to receive God’s grace. Significantly, Hebrews 4:16, in speaking of our coming forward with boldness to the throne of grace, mentions mercy before grace. Because Saul of Tarsus was a blasphemer and a persecutor, first he was shown mercy (1 Tim. 1:13), and then he received superabounding grace (v. 14).

One may be humble enough to seek the grace of God without being destitute and desperate enough to seek the mercy of God. Mercy is for those who realize deeply that they are nothing, that they have nothing, and that they can do nothing about their miserable situation. In our pursuing of the Lord, we need to recognize, on the one hand, that all is of God’s sovereignty and admit, on the other hand, that all is of God’s mercy. Actually, in everything and for everything we must trust only in God’s sovereign mercy. God has mercy on whom He wills to have mercy (Rom. 9:15, 18). “So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” (v. 16). Reaching farther than His grace, God’s mercy finds us, touches us, melts us, and prepares us to receive His all-sufficient grace. God’s mercy has bridged the wide gap between our pitiful condition and God’s grace and has brought us to His salvation in grace (Titus 3:5, 7).

**I**f we examine the frequent mention of grace in these Epistles, if we are enlightened by the Holy Spirit through the Word as we read and study, and if we are willing to advance beyond traditional and superficial religious concepts, we may realize that grace is much more than “unmerited favor.” To be sure, when Paul was suffering from the “thorn” and the Lord, refusing to remove it, said to him, “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Cor. 12:9), He was referring to something beyond unmerited favor, to something that could supply and comfort Paul in the midst of his agony and in the depths of his affliction. If, by God’s mercy, we advance in spiritual experience and understanding, we will eventually realize that grace is the Triune God in His economy dispensed into us to be our enjoyment and to accomplish everything in us, with us, and through us for the carrying out of God’s economy (John 1:16-17; 1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 12:9; Gal. 6:18). Paul’s testimony to Timothy

GOD’S MERCY  
FINDS US,  
TOUCHES US,  
MELTS US, AND  
PREPARES US TO  
RECEIVE HIS  
ALL-SUFFICIENT  
GRACE. GOD’S  
MERCY BRIDGES  
THE GAP BETWEEN  
OUR PITIFUL  
CONDITION AND  
GOD’S GRACE.



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was, “The grace of our Lord superabounded with faith and love in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 1:14), and he encouraged his child in the faith to “be empowered in the grace which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:1). In Titus 2:11 Paul declared that the grace of God had appeared. This grace is actually God Himself in Christ as everything to us for our enjoyment. “This grace, which is in the indestructible life, is nothing less than Christ, the Son of God, who is the very embodiment of the divine life, dwelling and living in our spirit” (Recovery Version, 2 Tim. 4:22, note 2). This grace enables us to enjoy God, and this grace is God Himself enjoyed by us. To receive the abundance of grace (Rom. 5:17) is to enjoy God in His dispensing. Through God’s mercy we receive God’s grace, and in the grace of God we enjoy God and in so doing carry out God’s economy.

### God’s Economy and the Believers’ Spirit

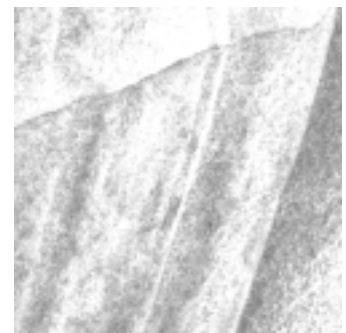
In our experience God’s economy with the rich dispensing of His life, mercy, and grace is focused on our regenerated human spirit (John 3:6; Gal. 6:18; 1 Cor. 6:17). Our spirit, which is different from our soul (1 Thes. 5:23), is the inner organ created by God for us to contact God and receive God so that God can become our life, our life supply, and our organic spiritual constituent to make us persons saturated and permeated with God. Virtually the last word written by Paul is recorded in 2 Timothy 4:22: “The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.” The resurrected Christ is not only the ascended One on the throne in the heavens; He is also the pneumatic One (John 20:22; 1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17) dwelling in and mingled with our regenerated spirit. What an astounding fact—the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected God-man, is with our spirit! Even He has caused us to become one spirit with Him! If we would participate in God’s economy and if we would enjoy the grace of God in His economy, we need to know our spirit and exercise our spirit to contact God. In Galatians 6:18 Paul indicates that grace is with our spirit, but in 2 Timothy 4:22 he reminds us that the Lord Himself is with our spirit. The more we turn to our spirit and exercise our spirit unto godliness (1 Tim. 4:7), the more we will enjoy the Lord as our grace.

This exercise will enable us to develop a proper and balanced spirit, “a spirit...of power and of love and of sobermindedness” (2 Tim. 1:7). As indicated above, the spirit here is our human spirit, regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit (John 3:6; Rom. 8:16). As this regenerated spirit, this mingled spirit, spreads into and throughout our soul (Eph. 4:23), it becomes a spirit of power (related to our will), a spirit of love (related to our emotion), and a spirit of sobermindedness (related to our mind). If we fail to recognize the need for such a spirit, if we neglect or fail to use our spirit, or if we go so far as to deny the existence of the spirit as an organ distinct from the soul, we will nullify God’s economy as far as we are concerned and will live as soulish persons, who do not discern and cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:11-16). If we would know God’s economy not merely as a doctrine but as a reality, we must exercise our spirit to contact God and live in our spirit for the expression of God, because it is in our spirit that we are one with the Lord and receive all that He is as our life, grace, and supply.

### God’s Economy and the Church

God’s goal in His economy is to have a corporate expression of Himself in Christ, the firstborn Son (Rom. 8:29), and the believers as the many sons (Heb. 2:10). In this age, which is the age of grace, the age of the church, and the age of mystery, the corporate expression of the Triune God is the builded church (Matt. 16:18), the organic Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23), and for eternity in the new heaven and new earth, this corporate expression will be the New Jerusalem, which is not a material city but a living, spiritual entity composed of the processed and consummated Triune God united, mingled, and incorporated with His chosen, redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, renewed, transformed, conformed, and glorified tripartite people. The books of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are concerned with the church as the practical, local, corporate expression of God.

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AND MINGLED  
WITH OUR  
REGENERATED  
SPIRIT.





The church is not the church of any practice or person, such as a pastor, priest, or Christian worker; rather, as the New Testament emphatically declares, the church is the church of God (1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; Acts 20:28). The expression *the church of God* indicates that the church has the nature of God and that it is constituted with the element of God; hence, the church is *of God*, having been produced with God as the unique source. The church is *of God* also because it has God as its nature and essence, which are divine, universal, and eternal. Because God is the nature and essence of the church, the church is divine—the same as God in life, in nature, and in expression but not in the Godhead. The church in Corinth, for instance, could be called *the church of God* because the divine essence, which makes the assembled believers the church of God, was actually there. Furthermore, to say that the church is the church of God also means that God, having purchased the church with His blood (Acts 20:28), is the Owner of the church. First Thessalonians 1:1 speaks of the church being “in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” The preposition *in* indicates that the church is in the Triune God. The church is composed of human beings—believers in Christ sharing an organic union with Him—who are in the Triune God. Such a church of God, a church that is in God, is expressed in localities such as Thessalonica. To designate this local expression of the church of God we may use the term *local church*. A local church is born of God the Father with His life and nature and is united with the Lord Jesus Christ organically in all that He is and has done.

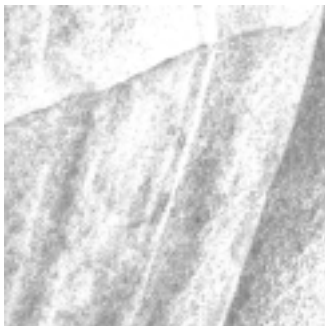
**T**he church of God is the house of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15). As God’s dwelling place, the church is both God’s house and His household, His family. *Oikos*, the Greek word translated “house” in 1 Timothy 3:15, can also be rendered “household.” The household of God, or the family of God, is the house of God. God’s family is His dwelling place, and God’s dwelling place is His family. Therefore, the house of God and the household of God are one thing—an assembly composed of the believers (Eph. 2:19; Heb. 3:6) who have been born of God, who are one with God, and who are the same as God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. The reality of this house as the dwelling place of the living God is in our spirit (Eph. 2:22).

First Timothy 3:15 reveals that the church is not merely the house of God but the house of the *living* God, the dwelling place of the One who is organically vital and active in and through the regenerated spirit of His children. The living God is living in the church, His dwelling place. This implies that the living God, who is now living in the church, His house, must be subjective to the church and not only objective. To say that the living God is subjective to the church is to say that He is inwardly real in the believers’ experience of Him and that the believers, God’s children, become living in Him. “Because He is living, the church too is living in Him, by Him, and with Him. A living God and a living church live, move, and work together. The living church is the house and household of the living God” (Recovery Version, 1 Tim. 3:15, note 3).

The church of God, as the house of the living God, is “a spiritual house” (1 Pet. 2:5). The house of God subsists mainly by the divine life, and for this reason it must be a spiritual house. This spiritual house is constituted of Christ as the living stone (v. 4) and of all the believers as living stones possessing and growing in the divine, eternal life received through regeneration. God’s goal in His believers is surely not to have a heap of stones; God’s goal is to have a house built up with spiritual stones that are built up with one another (Eph. 2:22). If we are deeply impressed with the Lord’s word in Matthew 16:18—“I will build My church”—and if we see the vision of God’s building presented in the Scriptures, we will realize that we need to grow and be transformed for the building up of God’s spiritual house. For this we need to feed on Christ as the nourishing milk in the word of God (1 Pet. 2:2-3). We should feed on Him, enjoying Him as our life supply, not only for growing in life but also for building up.

The church of the living God is “the pillar and base of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). *Truth*,

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CHILDREN.



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especially in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, means “reality,” denoting all the real things revealed in God’s Word, which are mainly Christ as the embodiment of God (Col. 2:9) and the church as the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). In 1 Timothy 3:15 *truth* refers specifically to the real things revealed in the New Testament concerning Christ and the church according to God’s New Testament economy. The church is the supporting pillar and holding base of these realities. This means that a local church, a local expression of the church as God’s universal spiritual building (Eph. 2:21), should be a building that holds, bears, and testifies the truth, the reality, of Christ and the church. Primarily, the church bears Christ as the reality, testifying to the whole universe that Christ, and Christ alone, is the reality (John 1:14, 17; 14:6). God’s New Testament economy is composed of two mysteries: Christ as the mystery of God (Col. 2:2) and the church as the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4). Therefore, Christ and the church, the Head and the Body, are the contents of the reality of God’s economy. As the pillar which bears the truth and as the base which upholds the pillar, the church testifies the truth, the reality, of Christ as the mystery of God and of the church as the mystery of Christ.

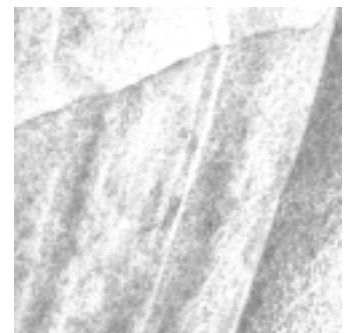
Since the church of the living God is the pillar and base of the truth, in the church life we need to arrive at the full knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4; 4:3; 2 Tim. 2:25; 3:7; Titus 1:1). The full knowledge of the truth is a rich understanding and a full acknowledgment and appreciation of the reality of all the spiritual and divine things that are unveiled in the Scriptures and received through faith. Every believer, every child of God, should have a full knowledge, a complete realization, of the truth of God revealed in the Word of God. This requires that we have the truth wrought into us and constituted into our being (1 John 1:8; 2:4; 2 John 1-2; 3 John 3-4). To have the truth constituted into our being is to have the truth wrought into us to become our constituent.

**O**ur spiritual constitution is directly related to the building up of the church. The kind of church we build up depends both on the kind of truth with which we are constituted and the kind of truth we teach. The more we realize this, the more we will know that there is a desperate need of the living truth to help the church not only to exist but also to be built up. If the truth is wrought into us and constituted into our being, we will be a great blessing to the church as the pillar and base of the truth.

If we study 1 Timothy carefully under the anointing and enlightening of the Holy Spirit, we may gradually come to realize that in addition to being the house of the living God and the pillar and base of the truth, the church of God is the manifestation of God in the flesh (3:16). God’s good pleasure, the desire of His heart, is to have many sons for the expression of His Son so that He may be expressed in the Son through the Spirit (Eph. 1:5, 9; Rom. 8:29). God has manifested Himself in Christ as an individual expression in the flesh (Col. 2:9; John 1:1, 14), but now, according to His economy, God manifests Himself in the church, the Body of Christ, as His enlarged corporate expression in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:15-16; Eph. 1:22-23). Ultimately, God will be manifested in the New Jerusalem as His ultimate and consummate corporate expression in the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1-2, 10-11).

God’s manifestation was first in Christ as an individual expression in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). Christ is the manifestation of God in the flesh. The New Testament does not say simply that the Son of God was incarnated; rather, it says that God was manifested in the flesh. God was manifested in the flesh not only as the Son but as the entire God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Hence, the entire God, not only God the Son, was incarnated; thus, Christ in incarnation is the entire God manifested in the flesh. In this wonderful One, the all-inclusive Christ, dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9). *All the fullness of the Godhead* refers to the entire Godhead, the complete God. Since the Godhead comprises the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the fullness of the Godhead must be the fullness of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Moreover, the fact that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily means that the entire Triune

SINCE THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD IS THE PILLAR AND BASE OF THE TRUTH, WE NEED TO ARRIVE AT THE FULL KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH OF GOD REVEALED IN THE WORD OF GOD.



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God is embodied in Him. The fullness of the Godhead is the expression of the Godhead, and this expression is in Christ individually, causing Him to be the manifestation of God, the entire God, in the flesh.

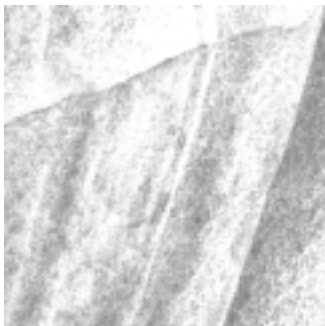
First Timothy 3:15-16 indicates that not only Christ Himself as the Head is the manifestation of God in the flesh but also that the church as the Body of Christ is the enlarged manifestation of God in the flesh, the mystery of godliness. In verse 16 *godliness* refers to the living of God in the church, to God as life lived out in the church, His house and household, to be expressed. Both Christ and the church are the mystery of godliness, the manifestation, the expression, of God in the flesh. Since the church is the expression of God, the mystery of godliness is the living of a proper church. Central to our understanding of this is the realization that God is manifested in the church, the Body of Christ, as His enlarged corporate expression in the flesh (Eph. 1:22-23). The manifestation of God in the flesh began with Christ when He was on earth, and today this manifestation of God in the flesh continues with the church, which is the increase, the enlargement, and the multiplication of the manifestation of God in the flesh.

**T**his is vitally and intrinsically related to the economy of God concerning the church life presented in 1 Timothy. When a church is taken care of according to what is written in 1 Timothy 1—3, the church will function as the house of the living God for His move on earth and as the pillar and base of the truth. Such a church becomes the continuation of Christ’s manifestation of God in the flesh. This is the great mystery of godliness—Christ lived out in the church as the manifestation of God in the flesh. This is God manifested in the flesh in a wider way according to the New Testament principle of incarnation, the principle of God working in, through, and with His redeemed and regenerated people and expressing Himself through them. In order to see this marvelous vision of the church of God as the corporate manifestation of God in the flesh, we need a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Christ, and we need the eyes of our heart to be enlightened (Eph. 1:17-18).

ENLIGHTENING  
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### **God’s Economy and Healthy Teaching**

The enlightening of the believers depends, to a great extent, on receiving proper teaching, that is, healthy teaching, the teaching that conveys the truth of God’s economy in all its crucial aspects. Because proper teaching is so important, Paul had much to say about it to Timothy and Titus. Paul said to Timothy, “Charge certain ones not to teach different things,” then he referred especially to those “desiring to be teachers of the law, though they understand neither the things that they say, nor concerning what they confidently affirm” (1 Tim. 1:3, 7). In verse 10 Paul speaks of “healthy teaching,” and in 2:7 he refers to himself as “a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.” In verse 12 Paul says, “I do not permit a woman to teach”; however, an elder should be “apt to teach” (3:2). First Timothy 4:1 is a serious word about demonic teachings: “The Spirit says expressly that in later times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and teachings of demons.” In verse 6 Paul reminds Timothy of “the good teaching” which he closely followed. Speaking of the things of God’s economy regarding the church, Paul exhorts Timothy, “Charge and teach these things” (v. 11). Verse 13 continues, “Until I come, attend to the public reading, to the exhortation, to the teaching.” This is followed by a strong word in verse 16: “Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things; for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.” In 5:17 Paul directs his attention to the elders: “Let the elders who take the lead well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in word and teaching.” In 6:1 Paul expresses his concern that “our teaching be blasphemed,” and then goes on to admonish Timothy, saying, “These things teach and exhort” (v. 2). Then Paul says, “If anyone teaches different things and does not consent to healthy words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the teaching which is according to godliness, he is blinded with pride, understanding nothing” (vv. 3-4).



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Paul continues along this line in 2 Timothy. In 1:11 he testifies that for the gospel of divine grace and eternal life, he was “appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.” In 2:2, burdened that some would be able to instruct others in the divine things of the divine economy, Paul says, “The things which you have heard from me through many witnesses, these commit to faithful men, who will be competent to teach others also.” “A slave of the Lord,” Paul reminds us in verse 24, ought to be “apt to teach.” Whereas others were “disapproved concerning the faith” (3:8), Paul could say to Timothy, “But you have closely followed my teaching” (v. 10). In verse 16 Paul goes on to declare that the God-breathed Scripture is “profitable for teaching.” Paul has even more to say about teaching as he draws this Epistle to a close in chapter four: “Proclaim the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and teaching” (v. 2). This is imperative in light of the prophetic realization that “the time will come when they will not tolerate the healthy teaching; but according to their own lusts they will heap up to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and they will turn away their ear from the truth and will be turned aside to myths” (vv. 3-4).

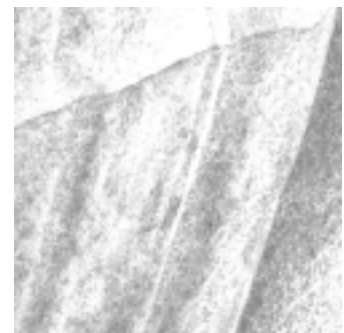
**S**ince unhealthy teaching is a major cause of chaos and disorder in the church, Paul also instructs Titus in the importance of proper teaching. An elder must hold to “the faithful word, which is according to the teaching of the apostles, that he may be able both to exhort by the healthy teaching and to convict those who oppose” (1:9). Certain dissenting ones “overthrow whole households, teaching things for the sake of base gain, which they ought not to do” (v. 11). In 2:1 Paul directs Titus to “speak the things which are fitting to the healthy teaching,” and in verse 10 he tells him that slaves should live in such a manner that they “may adorn the teaching of our Savior God in all things.”

In his exhortation concerning teaching, Paul frequently uses a most precious word: *healthy*. He speaks of *healthy teaching* (1 Tim. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1), *healthy words* (1 Tim. 6:3; 2 Tim. 1:13), *healthy in the faith* (Titus 1:13), *healthy in faith* (2:2), and *healthy speech* (v. 8). *Healthy* implies life in contrast to disease and death. Healthy teaching, teaching that is in line with and faithful to the apostles’ teaching (Acts 2:42; Titus 1:9), is a teaching according to God’s economy that ministers the supply of life to the members of God’s household, nourishing them and healing them. The same is true of healthy words and healthy speech, both of which are filled with and dispense the divine life to others. The divine revelation of God’s economy in the New Testament is actually a body of healthy teachings—teachings that bring us into contact with the God of life, the living God, and that dispense the life and reality of God into us through healthy words, healthy speech.

### God’s Economy and Different Teachings

Tragically, believers in vast numbers will not tolerate healthy teaching; they cannot bear to receive and closely follow the healthy words of the apostles’ teaching centered on God’s economy concerning Christ and the church. In our day in particular, Paul’s word has been fulfilled: “According to their own lusts” they “heap up to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Tim. 4:3). Turning away from and closing their being to the healthy teaching of God’s economy, they prefer those who teach different things, things that, although not necessarily heretical, are apart from or contrary to the crucial matters of God’s New Testament economy. Any teaching that distracts the believers from the center and goal of God’s economy is not, and cannot ever be, healthy. Such teachings may actually spread doctrinal diseases, contagious and deadly diseases caused by the teaching of things that deviate from the divine economy in the divine life. As a result, instead of nourishing and healing the believers, those who teach different things sow the seeds of death and poison into others. They spread the germs of doctrinal diseases, which deprive the children of God of the truth, lead them into degradation, and contribute to, or even directly cause, spiritual death. At the very least, those infected with a doctrinal disease will become unhealthy in the faith, organically unsound in the revelation of the divine reality

THE REVELATION OF GOD’S ECONOMY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT IS ACTUALLY A BODY OF HEALTHY TEACHINGS THAT BRINGS US INTO CONTACT WITH THE LIVING GOD AND DISPENSES THE LIFE OF GOD INTO US.



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regarding Christ and the church. This is the result of the teaching of those who are “diseased with questionings” (1 Tim. 6:4) and whose word “spread[s] like gangrene” (2 Tim. 2:17). The issue here is a matter of life or death.

It is also a matter of the degradation of the church—the degradation from the house of the living God in 1 Timothy 3:15 to the “great house” in 2 Timothy 2:20. The degraded church, as the great house, is filled with death, darkness, disease, division, and demonic teachings. On the one hand, teaching “different things” has caused the degradation of the church and the formation of the great house. On the other hand, the degraded church as the great house systematizes, embodies, and propagates a host of different teachings, all of which deviate from the central line of God’s economy and many of which disseminate the germs of doctrinal diseases.

### God’s Economy and the Apostles’ Teaching

God’s people need to return to and then continue steadfastly in the healthy teaching about which Paul writes in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. This healthy teaching, the content of the apostles’ teaching, is always according to the truth of the faith (Titus 1:13-14). As the substance of God’s New Testament economy, this healthy teaching both ministers the life supply to the believers and heals the spiritual diseases among the believers. In so doing, this kind of teaching rescues us from the degradation of the church—the great house—and recovers us to the truth, order, and normalcy of the genuine church—the house of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth, the corporate manifestation of God in the flesh.

A careful study of the New Testament in the light of God’s economy should enable us to know the intrinsic significance of healthy teaching, the apostles’ teaching, in and for God’s economy. Healthy teaching is an unveiling—a gradual rolling away of the veils that we may see the divine revelation (2 Cor. 3:16-18). Healthy teaching is an enlightening—the shining of Christ into our hearts through the word of life (4:6; Phil. 2:15-16). Healthy teaching is an infusing—the imparting of the divine element into us so that we may be constituted with the truth. Healthy teaching is a sowing—the planting of the word of God as a life-seed into the “soil” of our heart (Mark 4:2-3, 14, 20, 26-29). Healthy teaching is a nourishing—the imparting of the life supply in the word for our spiritual sustenance and growth (1 Tim. 4:6). Healthy teaching is a shepherding—an organic and all-inclusive tender caring for us as sheep in the flock of God (1 Pet. 5:2). Healthy teaching is an inoculating—the ministering of the word of God as a divine antidote against the decline of the church (2 Tim. 3:15-16). Healthy teaching is a dispensing—the transmitting of the processed and consummated Triune God into us as cleansed and open vessels unto honor (2 Cor. 13:14; 2 Tim. 2:20-21).

What is urgently needed today among God’s children is the recovery of healthy teaching, the apostles’ teaching, the teaching that conveys the divine truth in the divine economy. Paul was burdened that Timothy would continue in this teaching and hold it forth, and his charge to his child in the faith is surely applicable to us today: “Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things” (1 Tim. 4:16). “If you lay these things before the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, being nourished with the words of the faith and of the good teaching which you have closely followed” (v. 6). AFC

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