

THE UNIQUE WORK IN THE LORD'S RECOVERY

Message 3

The Iniquity of the Sanctuary versus Building with Gold, Silver, and Precious Stones

Scripture Reading: Num. 18:1; 1 Cor. 3:6-7, 9, 11-12, 16-17

- I. The book of Numbers shows us that the sins of the priests were iniquities committed against the sanctuary; using today's terminology, they are sins committed in God's work (18:1; 1 Cor. 3:12b):**
- A. There are sins committed in our daily life, but a worker of the Lord can commit an additional kind of sin; they are sins in God's work.
 - B. Sinning in the work means offending God in His holiness, glory, and sovereignty; in God's work everything that is incompatible with God's will is a sin and is an iniquity of the sanctuary.
 - C. There are three very important considerations in God's work that we should never forget; if we fail in any of these three points, we have committed an iniquity against the sanctuary:
 - 1. The initiation of God's work must be according to His will; no work can be initiated by ourselves (Rom. 11:36).
 - 2. The advance of God's work must be according to His power; no work can be carried out by our own strength (Acts 1:8; Zech. 4:6; Phil. 4:13; 2 Tim. 2:1).
 - 3. The result of God's work must be for His glory; no work should result in our own glory (John 7:18; Eph. 3:21; 2 Cor. 4:5).
 - D. There are three results or punishments for the iniquity of the sanctuary:
 - 1. There is a loss of the power of life; a man becomes stale.
 - 2. There is the experience of spiritual death; there may even be sicknesses or physical death; God does not allow those who sin in this way to continue (cf. Num. 18:1-7; 1 Cor. 11:29-30).
 - 3. There will be judgment at the judgment seat of Christ; at the judgment seat no sin will be greater than the iniquity of the sanctuary (2 Cor. 5:10).
 - E. The initiation of God's work must be His will and His will alone:
 - 1. We have no right to initiate anything; God's will must be the unique beginning of all His works.
 - 2. We cannot consider any of God's work as a common thing; whether or not we are fresh to others depends on whether spiritual things are fresh to us.
 - F. The advance of God's work can only be carried out by His power; we can never fulfill God's will by our own ability:
 - 1. Only God's power—God's "money"—will be accepted by Him.
 - 2. Even after a man knows God's will, there is still the danger that he will try to accomplish it by his own power, ideas, charisma, or eloquence; Abraham's begetting of Ishmael is one example (Gen. 16:15—17:1).
 - 3. The goal of a work must be spiritual, but the method and means by which we reach God's goal must also be spiritual; otherwise, we will commit the iniquity of the sanctuary by bringing the flesh into the sanctuary of God (Num. 18:7).
 - G. The result of God's work is for God's glory and not for our glory:
 - 1. God has chosen the ones who are weak, foolish, and despised by the world for His work; 1 Corinthians 1:29 says, "So that no flesh may boast before God."
 - 2. God does not wish to see us getting the glory; we can only enter into the Lord's glory.
 - 3. We may be very poor and weak, but as soon as we render a little help to some brothers and sisters and as soon as we save a few people, we begin to steal God's glory; stealing His glory is committing the iniquity of the sanctuary.
 - 4. When some gain more spiritual knowledge and experience, it is possible for them to increase in spiritual pride; they still work by themselves and seek their own glory.
 - 5. There is nothing more abominable in the eyes of God and nothing more evil in His work than pride; God "rejects" (1 Sam. 15:23) and "resists" the proud (1 Pet. 5:5); the word reject means to be finished with someone, whereas resist is a word that is used against Satan (James 4:6-7).
 - 6. In this world everyone under Satan's deception is a proud person; a proud person does not know himself; those who know themselves will not be deceived (Gal. 6:3).

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- H. Ordinary sins must pass through the priests' judgment, but the iniquity of the sanctuary is a direct offense against God, and God judges it directly:
 - 1. This is because the sanctuary belongs to God, and the iniquity of the sanctuary is an infringement on God's glory and on God Himself.
 - 2. "This is a very serious matter; I can only speak of it under the precious blood. I ask for the Lord's forgiveness, and I also ask for the brothers' forgiveness" (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 42, p. 366).

II. **We need to be God's fellow workers who are "working the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 16:10) and "abounding in the work of the Lord" (15:58) by allowing Christ to work Himself into us (Eph. 3:17a) so that He may grow in us (Col. 2:19), transform us (2 Cor. 3:18), and flow out of us (John 7:37-38) to work Himself into others for the church as God's farm, God's building (1 Cor. 3:9):**

- A. The church is God's farm, which produces gold, silver, and precious stones (vv. 9, 12).
- B. First, we have the growth on God's farm; then the plants on this farm become the precious materials for God's building (vv. 6-7, 12).
- C. Gold, silver, and precious stones signify the various experiences of Christ in the virtues and attributes of the Triune God; these precious materials are the products of our enjoyment of Christ (v. 12; 15:45b; 6:17).
- D. The precious materials for God's building are related to the Triune God—to the Father's nature, the Son's redemption, and the Spirit's transforming work (2 Pet. 1:4; Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:12; 2 Cor. 3:18).
- E. We are becoming gold, silver, and precious stones for God's building (1 Cor. 3:12):
 - 1. In God the Father, we have His life and nature as the gold; in God the Son, we have His redemption as the silver; and in God the Spirit, we have transformation as the precious stones.
 - 2. In order to build with these materials, we ourselves must be constituted with them; we need to be constituted with the Father's nature, the Son's redemption, and the Spirit's transformation.
 - 3. We need the growth in the nature of God the Father, the redemption of God the Son, and the transformation of God the Spirit; this growth makes us gold, silver, and precious stones for God's building (vv. 12, 16-17).
 - 4. Through our eating of Christ along with our spiritual digestion, assimilation, and metabolism, Christ becomes us, and we become Him; then we become the precious materials for God's building (John 6:57; Eph. 3:17; Gal. 4:19).
- F. God's eternal goal is the building—the temple built with precious materials on Christ as the unique foundation (1 Cor. 3:11-12, 16-17):
 - 1. The growth in the divine life produces materials for the building of God's habitation; this habitation, the church, is the increase, the enlargement, of the unlimited Christ (Eph. 2:21-22; John 3:29-34).
 - 2. First, we have the farm for the growth in life; then we have the building for God's eternal purpose (1 Cor. 3:9; Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:20-22; 4:16).
 - 3. The actual building of the church as the house of God is by the growth in life of the believers (1 Cor. 3:6-7, 16-17; Eph. 2:20-21; 1 Pet. 2:2-5):
 - a. True building is the growth in life; the extent to which we have been built up is the extent to which we have grown.
 - b. In order to have the genuine building, we need to grow by having ourselves reduced and by having Christ increased within us (Matt. 16:24; Eph. 3:17).
 - 4. We also need to learn to coordinate with the transforming Spirit to perfect the saints by ministering the Triune God as gold, silver, and precious stones to them for their transformation by the Triune God's attributes being wrought into them to become their virtues; this is portrayed in Song of Songs 1:10b-11:
 - a. Transformation is a heavenly, spiritual, divine metabolic change in our being.
 - b. Transformation in the church life is carried out by the transforming Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2).
 - c. After the lovers of Christ enter into the church life, they begin to be transformed by the remaking of the Spirit (S.S. 1:9-16a; 2:1-2).
 - d. In this transforming work there is the need of the coordination of some "transformers"—the perfecting ones who help the seekers to know God in His nature and to experience Christ (1:11; Eph. 4:11-12).
- G. To build the church with wood (the nature of the natural man), grass (the fallen man, the man of the flesh), and stubble (lifelessness) is to commit the iniquity of the sanctuary; it is to mar the church as God's temple, God's building; instead, we should build with gold, silver, and precious stones (1 Cor. 3:12, 16-17).