

## THE UNIQUE WORK IN THE LORD'S RECOVERY

(Friday—Second Morning Session)

Message Five

### **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.
- 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.

**Excerpts from the Ministry:**

**THE INIQUITY OF THE SANCTUARY**

God's Word shows us that some sins are committed before man, while others are committed before God. Some sins are committed against ordinary laws, while others are iniquities committed against the sanctuary. In short, there are sins committed in our daily life and sins committed in the work. 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. Most people only commit sins in their daily life, but a worker of the Lord can commit an additional kind of sin. Most sins are common sins, but a worker of the Lord can commit some special sins—sins in God's work. We have to pay special attention to this matter. A sin pertaining to the work may not necessarily involve such things as pride or jealousy. When the flesh is manifested, when the self-will is exposed, and when one speaks rashly or makes suggestions rashly, one often commits the special sin that pertains to the work. Those who do not engage themselves in God's work will not commit the iniquity of the sanctuary. But those who work for the Lord are liable of committing the iniquity of the sanctuary in addition to all the other common sins. 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.

I have often said to others as well as to myself that there are three very important considerations in God's work which we should never forget. First, the initiation of God's work must be according to His will. Second, the advance of God's work must be according to His power, not our own power. Third, the result of God's work must be for His glory. If we fail in any of these three points, we have committed an iniquity against the sanctuary. No work can be initiated by ourselves, no work can be carried out by our own strength, and no work should result in our own glory.

**THE INITIATION OF THE WORK BEING OF GOD  
AND NOT OF US**

In the meetings the sisters have their heads covered with respect to the brothers. This signifies that everyone is covered before Christ. He is the Lord, and only He is the Head. Only He is worthy to be the Lord of all, and only He is worthy to initiate any work. In God's work, no decision should be made through the discussion of two or three brothers. The result and worth of a work, whether or not it is spiritual and pleasing to God, depend not on the amount of work that has been done, but on how much of the work is initiated by ourselves and how much is initiated by God. The less we initiate, the more spiritual, worthwhile, and acceptable it is to God. I thank God that I do not have to initiate anything. He arranges everything. I do not have to be responsible for coming up with anything. We often think that we should do this or that, but God has His own agenda. We do not have to be His counselor. We only need to do His will and find out if something is according to His will. We do not have to worry about the result. The initiation of God's work must be His will and His will alone. We have no right to initiate anything. God's will must be the unique beginning of all His works.

I would like to ask the local responsible brothers a question: In your locality, do you embark on a work just because this is what many people want or because it is a logical thing that produces good results? Or do you do it because you know that it is God's will? Brothers, to initiate anything rashly is to commit an iniquity against the sanctuary. In spiritual things

there is no ground for your own proposals or directions. God does not need you to be His head. In the book of Job God said to Job, "Who is this who darkens counsel / By words without knowledge?... / I will ask of you, and you shall inform Me" (38:2-3). Every time I read this, I laugh within myself. Man likes to be God's counselor. But God does not hire any counselors. Paul said, "Who has become His counselor?" (Rom. 11:34). I am afraid the co-workers have not been as serious about the work in the sanctuary as they should have been. Perhaps you were quite careful at the beginning, but today you have become quite careless and loose. Those who have a little more authority speak more and dominate more. Those who have just entered the Lord's work may be more careful than those who have been working for eight or ten years.

The book of Numbers shows us the distinction between holy things and common things. We should not fall into unholiness through touching something in a common way. Many things are holy and not common. Have you ever baptized someone? The first time you baptized someone, you were probably quite serious. But after five or ten times, it becomes common to you. There is nothing new in the sanctuary. The priests changed the showbread, dressed the lamp, and burned the incense. They did the same things day after day and year after year. But if they were just a little bit careless, they would have committed the iniquity of the sanctuary and died. Therefore, no priest could consider his work a common thing. The first time a worker has to give a message, he is very serious. But after he speaks a few more times, it becomes a common thing to him. Many have said to me, "You seem to be prepared all the time." But I can testify that every time I read the New Testament, I feel as if I have never read it before, and every time I speak, I feel as if it is the first time I have ever spoken. Brothers, 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.

Take the example of the breaking of bread. The first time we have to bless the bread we are solemnly aware of its significance. We are very careful before the Lord, and we are truly like the priests. Subconsciously, God's power and His Spirit come upon us. But gradually, we become more relaxed. Our spiritual feeling is not as strong as before, and we have little spirit for prayer and worship. A person may realize that God has not given him the power and the anointing at a particular time; however, he may think that since he has done it before, he can do the same thing today. In this way he loses his spiritual freshness and the power of life. There are three results or punishments for the iniquity of the sanctuary. First, there is a loss of the power of life; a man becomes stale. Second, there is the experience of spiritual death; there may even be sicknesses or physical death. God does not allow those who sin this way to continue. Third, there will be the judgment at the judgment seat. I have the deep sense that at the judgment seat no sin will be greater than the iniquity of the sanctuary.

Brothers, we have to take this matter seriously. We cannot initiate the work. A man can only be satisfied when his desires are met. In the same way, God can only be satisfied when His will is fulfilled. We have no other choice than to do God's will. We cannot replace God's will with anything else. All the sacrifices in the world cannot replace God's will. Men may think that their work is better than God's will and that His will may be wrong, but please remember that God does not need any counselors. He only wants us to do His will. We may have done a lot of things for God, but no matter how much we have done, the only thing that counts is God's will.

#### **THE ADVANCE OF GOD'S WORK BEING BY GOD'S POWER AND NOT OUR POWER**

The advance of God's work can only be carried out by His power. We can only accomplish God's will and purpose by means of His power. In order to accomplish God's will, not only



must the beginning be of God, the process of carrying it out must also be according to His will. We can never fulfill God's will by our own ability. Once I went to Hong Kong with three hundred dollars in my pocket. I had to cross the harbor from Kowloon to Hong Kong, which cost five cents. I asked a man to give me change, and he said that my money was no good. I showed him the three hundred dollars, but he insisted that my money was useless. He then told me that in Hong Kong only Hong Kong currency is accepted. This is like the Chinese Customs Department which accepts only currency issued by the Chinese Central Bank. The same kind of relationship exists between God's will and His power. It does not matter how much "money" you have in your pocket, you cannot buy anything in God's kingdom with it. Only God's power—God's "money"—will be accepted. 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. This is where the problem lies. The starting point and final goal of a work may be according to God, but the means and power that a man uses to accomplish His will are of great significance. Every worker of the Lord must check with himself about the means that he uses to accomplish God's will.

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. God said, "The stranger who comes near shall be put to death" (Num. 18:7). The accomplishment of God's work has nothing to do with our power. The question is not how much we have done, but whether we have done something according to God's power. A brother said, "Only that which is from heaven can go back to heaven." A sister also said, "If the Lord comes, we can go home." Let me ask whether we will be going home or visiting as a guest when we go to the Lord. The answer lies in whether or not we come from the Lord. If I came from the Lord, my return would be like going home. Otherwise, it would be like a visitation. I cannot say that I am returning to Amoy, because Amoy is not my home. If we are to return to heaven, we must first come from heaven. If a man derives his strength from Adam, he can only return to Adam; he can never return to God. A worker must remember that God's work can only be accomplished by God's power. Otherwise, no work can please God.

#### **THE RESULT OF GOD'S WORK BEING FOR GOD'S GLORY AND NOT FOR OUR GLORY**

The initiation of God's work is His will and the advance of His work is His power. These two things have nothing to do with us. In the same principle, the result of God's work is God's glory, not our glory. After I preached in a place, a brother came to me and said, "Brother Nee, you spoke so well tonight! Are you proud of it?" I did not answer him immediately, because no one had ever asked me such a question before. I thought about it, and asked myself if I was proud of my speaking. Then I answered him, saying, "I have never thought about this question before. Perhaps I am very proud, but I have never thought of it." That evening I learned that as long as we are only for God's will and glory, we will never think of usurping His glory. If we have the thought of usurping His glory, we will surely have a problem with the first and second point.

One thing which may be superfluous can be brought up at this point. Why does God not allow man to be saved by works (Eph. 2:8-9)? What is the purpose of God monopolizing the work of salvation? The purpose is that God wants to have all the glory. The amount of work one does determines the amount of glory he receives. God does not want us to share His glory. Therefore, He does not allow us to do anything. This is why He has chosen the ones who are weak, foolish, and despised by the world for His work. First Corinthians 1:29 says, "So that no flesh may boast before God." God does not wish to see us getting the glory. He can give

everything to man. He is even willing to give His Son to man. But He will not give His glory to man. We can only enter into the Lord's glory. 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. It is very easy for us to commit the sin of stealing the Lord's glory.

None of us wants to be a thief. However, stealing God's glory is the act of a thief. God requires that we not only remove outward, evil acts, but also that we do not steal His glory. God is the God of all goodness, and we are men of all evil. We can only say that all goodness is found in Him alone. Stealing God's glory is committing the iniquity of the sanctuary. The showbread, lampstand, and incense altar are all Christ. Other than Christ, there is nothing in the sanctuary. God does not want us to have any glory of our own in the sanctuary. If a man enters the Holy of Holies, he should only see the ark, which is Christ, and the cherubim above the ark, which represent God's glory. Everything that we see in the tabernacle is related to God's glory. The temple was filled with God's glory. In it we see only Christ; we do not even see the sacrifices.

The question today is who is qualified to share God's glory. Last year God might have called some brothers to His work. He might have given you the experience of the outpouring of the Spirit, and you might have received the overcoming life. During the past year, I have heard that many have worked for the Lord in a wonderful way, but I am afraid that some will begin to become proud. I am afraid that when some have more spiritual knowledge and experience, they will also increase in spiritual pride. They have not yet seen God's will and glory. Therefore, they still work by themselves and seek their own glory. Please listen to the Bible. It says that God "rejects" (1 Sam. 15:23), and "resists" the proud (1 Pet. 5:5). It is difficult to find stronger words than these in the Bible. The word *reject* means to be finished with someone, whereas *resist* is a word that is used against Satan. There is nothing more abominable in the eyes of God and nothing more evil in His work than pride. We have no ground to stand on other than being in dust and ashes.

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. When we come before God, we have to realize that everything we have is unclean. Unless the Lord's blood covers me constantly, I dare not work for Him. In fact, I cannot even be a Christian if I do not have the covering of His blood. What do you have that is not from the Lord's grace? Do you think that you are better than others in any way? Are you holier than others in any way? If God exposed everything within you, you would find out how much uncleanness there is within. During the past few days we talked about the excommunication of a certain brother. Every time we came to God, we came with fear and trembling. Had it not been for the Lord's grace, we would have been worse than our brother is.

We are under God's grace today. We cannot enter into God's glory yet. We have to wait for the time of resurrection before we can obtain God's glory. Today we can only remain humble and useless like Lazarus the beggar, who was always begging under the table. We can only be those who receive and accept grace in true humility before His face.

It is unfortunate that those who partake of God's work can commit the iniquity of the sanctuary. How evil is the sin against the sanctuary! If you read Numbers 18, you will see that the punishment for sins committed in the sanctuary was primarily death. The sin of coming near to the sanctuary results in death (vv. 1-7). The sin against the sanctuary does not need to go through man's judgment; God judges it directly. Those who come near to the sanctuary die immediately; there is no need for the priests to judge it. 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. Many sins offend God indirectly, but the iniquity of the sanctuary is a direct offense against God. 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. 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, pp. 359-366)