

LIVING AND SERVING ACCORDING TO GOD'S ECONOMY CONCERNING THE CHURCH

(Friday—First Morning Session)

Message Four

A Proper Prayer Life for a Proper Church Life

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 2:1-4, 8; Exo. 28:29-30; 31:1-3; Col. 4:2

- I. **“I exhort therefore, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men; on behalf of kings and all who are in high position, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all godliness and gravity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of our Savior God”—1 Tim. 2:1-3:**
- A. After speaking of God's economy and after charging Timothy to war the good warfare for God's economy (1:3-4, 18), Paul indicates that a prayer ministry is the prerequisite for the administrating and shepherding of a local church (2:1-3, 8).
 - B. A prerequisite for having a proper church life in the Lord's recovery today is to have a prayer life; a proper church is a praying church; all in the Lord's recovery must be prayerful and stand against the sin of prayerlessness—1 Sam. 12:23.
 - C. The elders in the church must take up Paul's charge to “first of all” pray (1 Tim. 2:1); those who take the lead in the churches must have a prayer life; if we exercise ourselves to have a prayer life, the church will be living and uplifted.
 - D. Instead of talking so much and even instead of working so much, we should pray more; only after we have prayed for a matter thoroughly should we make a decision concerning it, not by ourselves independently, but in oneness with the Lord and according to His leading.
 - E. The Greek word for *intercessions* denotes an approaching of God in a personal and confiding manner, that is, an intervening, an interfering, before God in others' affairs for their benefit.
 - F. “Recently, my activity was limited for a time so that I could rest and care for my health. When I heard about certain needs, I prayed for them. Perhaps the Lord limited me that He might impress me with the fact that prayer is more important than work. May we all learn the lesson that the way to have a good church life is to pray. This is crucial. If our talking is turned into praying, the church in our locality will be transformed”—*Life-study of 1 Timothy*, second edition, p. 28.
 - G. We should pray on behalf of all men because God our Savior desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth; our prayer is required for the carrying out of God's desire—1 Tim. 2:4.
 - H. “I desire therefore that men pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and reasoning”—v. 8:
 - 1. Hands symbolize our doings; hence, holy hands signify a holy living, a living that is pious and that belongs to God; such a holy life strengthens our prayer life.
 - 2. If our hands are not holy, our living is not holy and is not for God; we then have no supporting strength to pray, no holy hands to lift up in prayer.
 - 3. Wrath and reasoning kill our prayer; wrath is of our emotion, and reasoning is of our mind.
 - 4. To have a prayer life and pray unceasingly, our emotion and mind must be regulated to be in a normal condition, under the control of the Spirit in our spirit.

II. In order to be infused with the instruction of God to care for the church, the elders must have much and thorough prayer so that they can enter into the reality of “reading the saints,” just as the high priest in the Old Testament read the stones on the breastplate with the Urim and Thummim in the presence of God—Exo. 28:29-30:

- A. After the Urim and the Thummim were put into the breastplate, it became not only a memorial but also a breastplate of judgment—v. 30:
1. *Urim* means “lights,” “illuminators”—v. 30:
 - a. The Urim was an illuminator inserted into the breastplate under the twelve stones; it had the capacity to contain oil for burning, and the fire used to burn the oil came from the altar.
 - b. The Urim had twelve illuminators, one to illuminate each of the twelve transparent precious stones on the breastplate so that they could shine with light (David Baron).
 - c. The Urim typifies Christ as lights, illuminators (John 8:12; Luke 1:78-79), shining through the Spirit (the oil) and the cross (the fire from the altar).
 2. *Thummim* means “perfecters,” “completers”—Exo. 28:30:
 - a. The names on the twelve stones on the breastplate contained only eighteen of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet; the remaining four letters were put on the Thummim, making it the perfecter and completer (David Baron).
 - b. By the shining of the Urim on the individual precious stones and by the darkening of the stones, the full alphabet of twenty-two letters could be used to spell out words and sentences.
 - c. The Thummim typifies Christ as the perfecter and completer (Heb. 12:2); thus, He is the spiritual alphabet for both inscribing and completing (cf. Rev. 22:13a).
 - d. Together, the Urim and the Thummim typify Christ as God’s witness, God’s testimony (3:14), as the means for God to speak to His people (Heb. 1:2).
 - e. In the New Testament, the reality of the Urim and the Thummim is the mingled spirit—the unveiling Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, indwelling our receiving spirit, our regenerated human spirit—Rom. 8:4, 14, 16; Rev. 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10.
- B. According to the Old Testament, the Urim and the Thummim added to the breastplate were a means for God to speak to His people to indicate to them His leading; thus, we may say that the breastplate of judgment is a “breastplate of leading”—Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21; Deut. 33:8; Josh. 7:16-21; 1 Sam. 23:6, 9-12; 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Neh. 7:65.
- C. In spiritual experience, in order to know God’s leading we must judge whatever is of the flesh, the self, the old man, and the world; the fact that God’s speaking as His leading was through the breastplate signifies that God makes His leading known to His people through the church.
- D. The breastplate of judgment for God’s leading was like a heavenly, divine, and spiritual typewriter, and His way of speaking through the breastplate with the Urim and the Thummim is the opposite of what we would expect:
1. God speaks not through the stones that are shining but through the stones that become dark; this means that God speaks through negative situations; because the Lord’s speaking by the breastplate of judgment is through negative situations, that speaking is a judgment.
 2. Normally the twelve stones in the breastplate were under the shining of the Urim; suddenly a piece inscribed with a certain name would become dark; this darkening of a particular stone was God’s instant speaking:

- a. Paul's Epistles and the seven epistles of the Lord Jesus to the seven churches in Asia (Rev. 2—3) were all written according to this principle; they were written according to the negative situation of the churches, not according to the positive things found in the churches.
 - b. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians according to his reading of the negative situation at Corinth, but although his writing was based on the negative things, in this Epistle he ministered positive things—the riches of Christ—to the church—cf. 1:9.
 - c. The saints in Corinth became the letters used by Paul in the spiritual typesetting of his Epistle; in the same way, in a local church the leading ones need to seek the Lord's guidance by reading the actual situation and condition of the saints.
 - d. The problem among Christians today is that because there is so much darkness, there is no way for God to expose the darkness; in order for the darkness to be made known, there must first be the shining of the light; God speaks through things that become negative in the midst of the shining of the light—cf. Eph. 5:8-9.
 - e. By reading the negative situations in this way, we come to know God's leading, His judgment; then in our locality we will know what God wants us to do, and we should then follow His leading.
- E. The breastplate is the building up of the Body life and the means for us to know God's will concerning His people; by much and thorough prayer, we can experience the reality of the breastplate; then we will receive the Lord's judgment of what we have to do or what we must not do; we will know the Lord's way, and the whole church will go on according to the judgment given by the Lord.
- F. The elders need not only the Bible and the Holy Spirit but also the brothers and sisters as the alphabet; this means that they need to bear the brothers and sisters before God and read the condition of every brother and sister before God; in this way the elders' meeting will become the watchtower of the church, and the elders will know what God wants them to do and what God's present will is in the church life.

III. The leading ones, those who minister the word in the church, should take the lead to have a prayer life; they need to “persevere in prayer, watching in it with thanksgiving”—Col. 4:2; Acts 6:4:

- A. Whether the church is living and fresh and enriched depends on this one thing—that we are being filled continuously with the Spirit; in order to be filled continuously with the Spirit, we need to be those who are willing, empty, and praying—Phil. 2:13; Matt. 5:3, 8; Luke 1:53; Eph. 5:18.
- B. The wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and skill for the noble work of building up the church must be God Himself as the Spirit to us; only the Spirit of God can build His own dwelling place through us—Exo. 31:1-3; Zech. 4:6.
- C. Because the elders are short of prayer, they are short of the Spirit; it is when we are fully condemned in our prayer under the shining of the light of the Lord's indwelling presence that we receive wisdom and the real understanding of the Lord concerning the situation, concerning people, and concerning the church.
- D. If all the saints in all the churches persevere in prayer, the recovery will be greatly enriched and uplifted; furthermore, the saints will enjoy the Lord, His presence, and His instant and constant anointing; all day long they will enjoy the smile of the Lord's face, and the living person of Christ will become their experience and enjoyment.