

## THE RECOVERY OF THE PRIESTHOOD FOR GOD'S BUILDING

(Saturday—Evening Session)

Message Six

### **Being Laboring Priests of the Gospel of God by Serving God in Our Spirit in the Gospel of His Son**

Scripture Reading: Rom. 1:9; 15:16; 16:25

- I. “That I might be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, a laboring priest of the gospel of God, in order that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, having been sanctified in the Holy Spirit”—Rom. 15:16:**
- A. Paul's being a laboring priest of the gospel of God to minister Christ to the Gentiles was a priestly service to God, and the Gentiles whom he gained through his gospel preaching were an offering presented to God—1 Pet. 2:5:
    - 1. By this priestly service many Gentiles, who were unclean and defiled, were sanctified in the Holy Spirit and became such an offering, acceptable to God—Rom. 15:16; 16:4-5.
    - 2. These Gentiles were set apart from things common and were saturated with God's nature and element and were thus sanctified both positionally and dispositionally; such a sanctification is in the Holy Spirit—6:19; 15:16.
    - 3. Based on Christ's redemption, the Holy Spirit renews, transforms, and separates unto holiness those who have been regenerated by believing into Christ—3:24; 12:2; John 3:15.
  - B. Paul is a pattern of the priesthood of the gospel; in the Epistle to the Romans, which concerns the gospel of God, he tells us how sinners can be saved and justified by believing in the Lord, how they advance in Christ by being sanctified and transformed, and how they present themselves to God as living sacrifices so that they may become members of the Body of Christ to live the church life, expressing Christ corporately and awaiting His coming—1 Thes. 2:1-12; Acts 20:17-36; Rom. 1:16-17; 3:24-26; 12:1, 4-5; 13:11.
  - C. The New Testament service ordained by God is that all believers are priests to serve God with the offerings that He desires—Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9:
    - 1. As priests of the gospel of God, we offer saved sinners, as parts of the enlarged and corporate Christ, to God as sacrifices—Rom. 15:16.
    - 2. The offering of the believers to God is in three steps:
      - a. Those who preach the gospel offer the newly saved ones to God as spiritual sacrifices—v. 16; 1 Pet. 2:5.
      - b. After the new believers grow and begin to understand what it is to be a believer in Christ, they are encouraged to offer themselves to God as a living sacrifice—Rom. 12:1.
      - c. As the believers continue to grow unto maturity, those who labor on them present them full-grown in Christ—Col. 1:28.
  - D. In order to function as priests of the gospel, we need to see that the gospel of God includes the entire book of Romans; this Epistle shows us that when we preach the gospel, we make sinners the sons of God and members of the Body

of Christ, and we help them to grow so that they can be active members in the practice of the Body life in the local churches—1:16-17; 3:24; 5:10; 8:16; 12:2, 4-5.

- E. The service of the priesthood of the gospel is the service of the church as the Body of Christ; the focus of our service is to save sinners and offer them to God, and the goal of our service is the building up of the Body of Christ—15:16; 12:4-5; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Eph. 4:11-12, 16.

## II. “God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son”—Rom. 1:9:

- A. For all the requirements related to the believers revealed in the New Testament, especially that of announcing the gospel of God, we need to receive the divine supply of the Body through the dispensing of the processed Triune God—Eph. 3:2; Heb. 4:16; Rom. 5:17, 21; John 7:37-38; Acts 6:4; Phil. 1:5-6, 19-25.
- B. We need to see that our service to God in the gospel is our worship to God; in the New Testament, serving God is actually the same as worshipping God—Matt. 4:9-10; S. S. 1:2; cf. Psa. 2:11-12:
  - 1. Paul said that the believers at Thessalonica “turned to God from the idols to serve a living and true God”—1 Thes. 1:9:
    - a. God must be living to us and in us in every aspect of our daily life; the fact that God controls, directs, corrects, and adjusts us, even in such small things as our thoughts and motives, is a proof that He is living—Phil. 1:8; 2:5, 13; 1:20.
    - b. We live under the control, direction, and correction of a living God to be a pattern of the glad tidings that we spread—1 Thes. 1:5-8; 2:10; 2 Thes. 3:5.
    - c. As believers in Christ, we must live a life in our spirit which bears the testimony that the God we worship and serve is living in the details of our life; the reason we do not do or say certain things should be that God is living in us—Rom. 8:6, 16.
  - 2. The Greek word for *serve* in Romans 1:9 means “serve in worship,” as used in Matthew 4:10, 2 Timothy 1:3, Philippians 3:3, and Luke 2:37; Paul considered his preaching of the gospel as a worship and service to God, not merely a work.
  - 3. When we come to serve God, or worship God, we need a blood-purified conscience; our defiled conscience needs to be purified so that we may serve God in a living way—Heb. 9:14; 10:22; 1 John 1:7, 9; Acts 24:16; cf. 1 Tim. 4:7.
  - 4. To serve God in the gospel is to serve Him in the all-inclusive Christ, because the gospel is simply Christ Himself—Acts 5:42; Rom. 1:3-4; 8:29.
  - 5. In order to preach the gospel of God’s Son, we must be in our regenerated spirit (1:9); in the book of Romans Paul stressed that whatever we are (2:29; 8:5-6, 9), whatever we have (vv. 10, 16), and whatever we do toward God (1:9; 7:6; 8:4, 13; 12:11) must be in our spirit.
  - 6. Paul served God in his regenerated spirit by the indwelling Christ, the life-giving Spirit, not in his soul by the power and ability of the soul; this is the first important item in his preaching of the gospel.

7. The gospel of God, unto which Paul was separated, is the subject of the book of Romans; the book of Romans may be regarded as the fifth gospel—1:1; 2:16; 16:25:
  - a. The first four Gospels are concerning the incarnated Christ, Christ in the flesh, living among His disciples; the gospel in Romans is concerning the resurrected Christ as the Spirit living within His disciples—8:2, 6, 9-11, 16.
  - b. We need the fifth gospel, the book of Romans, to reveal the subjective Savior within us as the subjective gospel of Christ.
  - c. The central message of the book of Romans is that God desires to transform sinners in the flesh into sons of God in the spirit in order to constitute the Body of Christ expressed as the local churches—v. 29; 12:1-5; ch. 16.
  - d. All of us need to function as priests of the gospel of God according to the revelation of the book of Romans; we need to learn the elements and details of the gospel, we need to experience the full content of the gospel, and we need to exercise our spirit to learn how to minister the gospel—15:16.
- C. “We are the circumcision, the ones who serve by the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh”—Phil. 3:3; cf. Rom. 2:28-29:
  1. The flesh refers to all that we are and have in our natural being; anything natural, whether it is good or evil, is the flesh—Phil. 3:4-6.
  2. As believers in Christ, we should not trust in anything that we have by our natural birth, for everything of our natural birth is part of the flesh.
  3. Even though we have been regenerated, we may continue to live in our fallen nature, boast in what we do in the flesh, and have confidence in our natural qualifications; therefore, it is important that we be deeply and personally touched by these verses in Philippians 3.
  4. We need the Lord’s light to shine on us concerning our nature, our deeds, and our confidence in the flesh; we need to be enlightened by the Lord to see that we still live too much by the flesh and that we boast in our deeds and qualifications.
  5. We need the Lord’s light to shine on us so that we have no trust in our natural qualities, qualifications, ability, or intelligence; only then shall we be able to testify that our confidence is wholly in the Lord; after we are enlightened in this way, we shall truly serve and worship God in our spirit and by the Spirit—vv. 7-8.
  6. One day, when the light shines on us concerning this, we will want to prostrate ourselves before the Lord and confess how unclean our nature is; then we will condemn everything we do by our fallen nature; we will see that in the eyes of God whatever is done in the fallen nature is evil and worthy of condemnation.
  7. Formerly, we boasted in our deeds and qualifications, but the time will come when we will condemn the flesh with its qualifications; then we shall boast in Christ alone, realizing that in ourselves we have absolutely no ground for boasting.

8. Only when we have been enlightened by God shall we be able to say truly that we have no trust in our natural qualifications, ability, or intelligence; only then shall we be able to testify that our confidence is wholly in the Lord; after we are enlightened in this way, we shall truly serve and worship God in our spirit and by the Spirit.
- D. Our work and labor for the Lord in the gospel is not by our natural life and natural ability but by the Lord's resurrection life and power; resurrection is the eternal principle in our service to God—Num. 17:8; 1 Cor. 15:10, 58; 16:10:
1. The life-giving Spirit is the reality of the Triune God, the reality of resurrection, and the reality of the Body of Christ—John 16:13-15; 20:22; 1 Cor. 15:45b; Eph. 4:4.
  2. Resurrection means that everything is of God and not of us, that God alone is able and that we are not able, and that everything is done by God and not by ourselves—Num. 17:8.
  3. All those who know resurrection have given up hope in themselves; they know that they cannot make it; everything that is of death belongs to us, and everything that is of life belongs to the Lord—2 Cor. 1:8-9; cf. Eccl. 9:4.
  4. We must acknowledge that we are nothing, have nothing, and can do nothing; we must come to the end of ourselves to be convinced of our utter uselessness—Exo. 2:14-15; 3:14-15; Luke 22:32-33; 1 Pet. 5:5-6.
  5. The resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit lives in us, enabling us to do what we could never do in ourselves—1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 1:8-9, 12; 4:7-18.
  6. When we do not live by our natural life but live by the divine life within us, we are in resurrection; the issue of this is the reality of the Body of Christ as the goal of the gospel of God—Phil. 3:10-11; Eph. 1:22-23.

**Excerpts from the Ministry:**

**THE UNIQUE PATTERN OF THE PRIESTS OF THE GOSPEL  
IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The unique pattern of the priests of the gospel in the New Testament is the Apostle Paul (1 Tim. 1:16). We need to see how Paul did his work as a priest of the gospel. According to the New Testament record, he did it in three steps of offering. First, Paul saved sinners to offer them up to God as acceptable sacrifices (Rom. 15:16). Second, he brought the believers up to lead them to present themselves to God as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1). Third, he warned and taught every saint in all wisdom to present each one full-grown in Christ (Col. 1:28-29). He did this by laboring and struggling according to God's operation which operated in him in power. Paul's announcing of Christ in Colossians 1:28 is to tell out Christ. To present every man full-grown in Christ is to offer every man full-grown in Christ.

**Saving Sinners to Offer Them to God as Acceptable Sacrifices**

According to Romans 15:16, Paul offered the saved sinners to God as acceptable sacrifices. All of the unbelieving sinners are in Adam. When we preach the gospel to them and they receive the Lord, they are transferred out of Adam into Christ. When someone believes into Christ, he becomes a part of Christ. The unbelievers

who are transferred into Christ are the increase of Christ. When I am preaching the gospel to offer saved persons to God, I am offering Christ—not the individual Christ but the corporate Christ. In the Old Testament, the priests offered bulls and goats as sacrifices. God was pleased with that because they were types of the coming Christ. Our work today in the New Testament age is to preach the gospel to save sinners, to make them parts of Christ. When we offer these ones to God, God considers them as parts of Christ. Thus, we are offering the increase of Christ to God. Because we are members of Christ, we can say that we are Christ. Paul said in Philippians 1:21, “For to me to live is Christ.” When we were offered to God, we were offered to God as Christ.

The bulls and goats that the Old Testament priests offered to God were types. They were not the reality. The reality of these offerings is Christ. God was happy with the offerings in the Old Testament because they pointed to the coming Christ, but today we are priests who do not offer the types. We offer the reality, and the reality is not just the individual Christ Himself without any enlargement or increase. We are offering the increase of Christ, the parts of Christ. I am very happy because through my ministry over many years I have offered a number of thousands of people to the Lord as acceptable sacrifices. When I see the Lord, I can give Him an account that I have offered a number of thousands of parts of Himself to Him. We need to consider how many parts of Christ we have offered to the Lord. We all have to answer this question. One day we will see the Lord, and we will have to give Him an account concerning our living and labor on this earth. How many parts of Christ we have offered to Him indicates how much we have labored.

In talking about his labor in the gospel, Paul said in Colossians 1:29, “For which also I labor, struggling according to His operation which operates in me in power.” To offer parts of Christ to God requires our labor, but not labor by our own strength or our own ability. We need to struggle according to His operation which operates in us in power. We are the New Testament priests of the gospel of God, so we have to labor on the sinners by imparting God, dispensing God, into them to bring them into Christ, making them parts of Christ which we offer to God as acceptable sacrifices. All of us as the New Testament priests are obligated to do this. One day we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and we will have to give the Lord an account.

When we talk about knocking on people’s doors for the preaching of the gospel, what we mean is to visit people. We visit people to impart Christ into them. Visiting people to impart Christ into them must be a part of our Christian daily life. In our daily life, we must impart God and dispense Christ into others to make them, the sinners, parts of Christ that we may present these parts as sacrifices offered to God for His good pleasure. This will produce the members of Christ to constitute His Body and eventually issue in this Body being expressed on earth in many localities.

**Bringing the Believers Up to Lead Them  
to Present Themselves to God as Living Sacrifices**

After the saving of sinners, Paul continued to nourish the new ones, to bring

them up in the same way that we would raise up our children. When we bring up our children, we first teach them what to do, and after a period of time, we charge them to do it themselves. At the time of their salvation, Paul presented the saved sinners as sacrifices. Then Paul brought them up and led them to present themselves as living sacrifices.

When I preach the gospel to a sinner and he gets saved, he is now in Christ. I present this one to God in Christ, with Christ, and as a part of Christ, as a spiritual sacrifice. Now that he is saved, he is a babe in Christ. I should not leave him alone, but I have to feed him as a nursing mother. After revealing in Romans 1 and 2 that the believers were sinners, Paul did this feeding work in chapters three through eleven. Then in Romans 12, Paul, the feeder, begged the saints to present themselves to God as living sacrifices. Paul did not beg the saints to offer themselves to God in Romans 1. It was after his fellowship through eleven chapters that he could ask the saints in Romans 12 to offer themselves to God as living sacrifices and be His serving members. We have to offer ourselves directly to God, but we do this by being helped, by being perfected, by the preaching apostle. This is the pattern we have to follow.

When people receive the Lord as their life, they are babes. After a period of time of feeding on Christ, they grow and grow in life until, spiritually speaking, they enter into their teens. In a family, the parents cannot give the little children much responsibility, but later the parents can charge them to do things according to their stage of growth. When a child becomes thirteen years old, he comes out of elementary school and enters into junior high school. Paul's charge in Romans 12:1 is something just out of "elementary school." The elementary teaching is in Romans 1—11. Romans 12:1 may be considered as a charge to those who are now "thirteen years old." After the long teaching in Romans 1—11, the children have entered into "junior high." Paul offered them as sacrifices to God at their conversion. Now that they are in their "teens," he begs them to present themselves to God, to present their bodies as a living sacrifice to God.

After this offering in Romans 12, the practice of the Body life begins. After the saints' presentation of themselves to God, they can be the active members of the Body of Christ. Thus, in the following verses of chapter twelve, we see that the ones who present themselves as living sacrifices become functioning members of the organic Body of Christ. These living members function according to their gifts, such as prophecy or teaching (vv. 6-7).

Before Romans 12, there was no practice of the Body life. Beginning in chapter twelve the saints are beginning to be perfected to practice the Body life. After being perfected, the saints will do the same work as the gifted ones—the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers (Eph. 4:11-12). Even though the saints are not these particular gifts, they will do the same work that these gifts do. This work is the work of the New Testament ministry, which is to build up the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ is built directly by the perfected saints, not by the perfecting gifts. This Body is built up and expressed in many localities on this earth as the local churches.

### **Warning and Teaching Every Saint in All Wisdom to Present Each One Full-grown in Christ**

Because the believers are still not fully matured, there is the third step of Paul's gospel work in the New Testament priesthood. This third step can be seen in Colossians 1:27-29: "To whom God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: whom we announce, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man full-grown in Christ; for which also I labor, struggling according to His operation which operates in me in power." What kind of Christ did Paul announce? The Christ whom he announced is not that simple. He announced the indwelling Christ as the hope of glory. Paul announced a wonderful person. Christ as the hope of glory cannot work in us fully without a worker like Paul.

The word "warning" implies that there are troubles, problems, hardships, and mistakes that we can make. Therefore, we need to be warned. Warning also implies admonishing and rebuking. Paul warned and taught every man in all wisdom. "In all wisdom" means that Paul warned and taught one person in one way and another person in another way. He warned and taught every man face to face. Paul did this so that he could present, or offer, every man full-grown in Christ. Paul did not want to miss anyone, desiring to present every man full-grown.

In Acts 20 Paul said that he taught the saints publicly and from house to house (v. 20). He also said that he admonished each one of the saints for three years night and day with tears (v. 31). Paul went to the homes of the saints to teach them and admonish them one by one. I lived in Anaheim for many years, but I went to very few homes of the saints to visit them. I feel very sorry about this. We have been off in our service due to the traditional concept. Paul said that he taught publicly and that he also taught from house to house. "From house to house" in Greek means "according to houses." Paul taught, admonished, and warned the saints face to face. By this teaching from house to house to admonish each one of the saints, Paul ministered Christ to the saints to cause them to grow in life.

In the Old Testament, a full-grown priest had to be thirty years old. A person who was twenty-five years old could only be an apprentice, a learner, in the priesthood. The Lord Jesus began His ministry when He was about thirty years old (Luke 3:23), the full age for God's service (Num. 4:3, 35, 39, 43, 47). We need to labor on others by warning them and teaching them in all wisdom until they are full-grown in Christ. We warn each one and teach each one in many, many ways, that is, in all wisdom. The full-grown, matured saints become the active members of the organic Body of Christ, the parts of Christ. In other words, they all become the corporate Christ. To offer the saints full-grown in Christ is to offer the corporate Christ. In such a condition, they have become parts of Christ in full, the constituents of the corporate Christ.

Because we are not full-grown in Christ, we still need to be warned and taught in all wisdom. We may say that we are parts of the corporate Christ, but are we His parts practically, in our daily life? Do you believe that the parts of the corporate Christ would participate in anything sinful or worldly? Some of us may have grown

to the stage of Romans 12:1, the stage of presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice. Romans 12:1, however, is not at the stage of full growth. We have to be helped by the priests who handle us to grow up into the full growth in Colossians 1:28. The apostles who handle us, who serve us with Christ, desire to present us in Christ to God as parts of the corporate Christ.

Paul said that he labored for this by struggling. The Greek word for struggling means fighting, battling, or wrestling. It is not an easy thing to present every man full-grown in Christ. Paul did not labor according to his own ability or strength, but according to Christ's operation which operated in him in power. Christ's indwelling is so that He can operate and move in us in power. The power here is a dynamic power. Christ is working in us, but do we realize and sense that daily, day and night, Christ the living One is indwelling us and operating within us?

Some of the ones who are closest to me remind me to take care of myself in my old age. The ones close to me are concerned for me because they love me, but another One also loves me. This inner One is also operating within me all the time. Every time I go along with His operation, I am energized. The more I speak for the Lord, the stronger I am. We need to labor by struggling according to the One who operates in us, not according to our natural strength. We need to cooperate with the operation of the indwelling Christ. For the carrying out of His New Testament economy, God has done His part. He surely has consummated the works on His side to do everything for us. Now He is operating in us to make us the energizing priests. We have to take care of our part, to fulfill our duty. We may feel that we are weak, that we are nothing, and that we can do nothing, but as long as we are willing to operate, He will be our energizing power. As long as we are willing to do business, He will be our capital. The problem to Him is that we would not be willing to cooperate with Him.

The Lord told us in the New Testament that all of His chosen people, who are today's believers, are His priests (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10). No priest can be lazy because every priest has to offer something day by day. Every priest has to be very, very diligent, even aggressive, in offering sacrifices to God. God does not want the sweet smell of the offerings on the altar to stop. He likes this sweet savor to ascend to Him all the time for His acceptance. In Romans 15:16 Paul said that he was a minister of Christ Jesus to the nations, an energizing priest of the gospel of God, to offer the nations to God. The main offering of the New Testament priests should be the saved sinners as parts of the enlarged and corporate Christ, offered to God as the New Testament sacrifices of the gospel. In the Old Testament, the main offerings were bulls and goats, which were types of Christ. Today we are offering Christ, but not the individual Christ. We are offering the corporate Christ.

This kind of offering should continue all the time. As the New Testament priests, we have to make the preaching of the gospel a part of our daily life, our daily walk. A priest's daily life and daily work is to offer sacrifices to God. In the Old Testament, the priests offered bulls and goats all day long, morning and evening. This is a type of what we should do. As the New Testament priests, we should offer sinners, regenerated, sanctified, transformed, and even conformed to the image of Christ.



We should offer these persons as parts of the corporate Christ to God. We should not forget that as believers we are priests and that a priest is always offering something to God. Paul was offering the sinners he saved as sacrifices to God all the time.

We may have experienced Romans 12:1, but we have not reached the state of being full-grown in Colossians 1:28. To be presented to God full-grown in Christ is the last step to finish the sacrifice of the New Testament priesthood. This sacrifice needs three steps: salvation in Romans 15:16, growth in life in Romans 12:1, and the maturity in life in Colossians 1:28. All these steps are the work of the New Testament priesthood of the gospel. According to the divine revelation, to save sinners, to teach the Bible, to edify the saints, and to set up churches are all the work of the gospel. The preaching of the gospel of God is the New Testament ministry to carry out God's New Testament economy. We must bear this responsibility for God's good pleasure.

I have been with many of the saints for years, and I know that they love the Lord. They come to the meetings regularly, year after year. They give a lot for the Lord. In this book I have a real burden to tell all the saints that what I am teaching and preaching here is absolutely new. What most Christians practice, including us, is according to an accumulation of centuries of tradition. What we have practiced is partially according to the Bible and partially not according to the Bible. We all have been drugged by the traditional and unscriptural way of practicing the church life and of Christian service. We need to be sober and reconsider what the Bible says. We should only take the holy Word as our base.

Our gospel preaching today must be the priesthood of the gospel in the New Testament. The gospel of God is according to the teaching of the apostles in the New Testament and includes all of God's New Testament economy. When the priests in the Old Testament offered bulls and goats, they did not realize that these sacrifices typified Christ in His incarnation, in His human living, in His all-inclusive death, in His resurrection as life, in His coming to us as the life-giving Spirit to indwell us, in His ascension, and in His descension to be one with His saved ones and to make them one Body. Although the Old Testament priests did not realize this, we should realize it because we are in this present New Testament age.

If we do not know these things, we are deficient. Because the Lord has shown me all these things, I am burdened. I do not care for any other work. I am burdened to present to all the saints these new seeings, these new visions, these new lights. The truth concerning the priests of the gospel of God is altogether new to me. I have been teaching the Bible for over sixty years, but this point cannot be found in any of my writings in the past. Thank the Lord that I have seen this matter and that I can present it to all the saints. (*The Advance of the Lord's Recovery Today*, pp. 30-38)