

THE RECOVERY OF THE PRIESTHOOD FOR GOD'S BUILDING

(Lord's Day—First Morning Session)

Message Seven

The Central and Ultimate Point of the Priesthood

Scripture Reading: Exo. 28:15-30

- I. According to Exodus 28:15-30, the breastplate of judgment is the central item of the priestly garments and the central and ultimate point of the priesthood:**
- A. The main purpose of the breastplate of judgment was for God's leading; God's people act according to God's leading obtained through the reality of the breastplate.
 - B. The breastplate typifies the church, and if we do not know the church, we do not know what God's leading is; actually, God's leading and the church are one.
 - C. God reveals what we should do through the church, by the church, and with the church; the church is God's leading, for the church bears the divine alphabet by which God makes known His leading—v. 21; cf. Psa. 73:2-3, 16-17, 22-28.
 - D. The breastplate of judgment functioned as a heavenly, divine, and spiritual typewriter to make known God's leading, and this heavenly typewriter was the very center of the priestly garments.
 - E. The breastplate was called the breastplate of judgment because from it man found his solutions; when the high priest went into God's presence with the breastplate, God's light shined, certain stones became dark, and God's will was fully manifested.
 - F. The breastplate being borne upon Aaron's heart for a memorial before Jehovah signifies the entire church as one built-up entity being borne upon Christ's loving heart for a memorial, a pleasing remembrance, before God—Exo. 28:29:
 - 1. The church as the Body of Christ, the peak of God's divine revelation, is God's great will in the universe—Eph. 1:5, 9, 11, 22-23.
 - 2. The Body life as the practicality and expression of Christ's Body is God's great will for us on earth—Rom. 12:1-2.
 - 3. The Body of Christ with the Body life is the good pleasure of God's will, His heart's delight—Eph. 1:5b, 9.
- II. The twelve precious stones on the breastplate, on which the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were engraved, signify all the redeemed and transformed people of God built together to become one entity—Exo. 28:17-21:**
- A. The twelve precious stones set in gold (vv. 17-20) symbolize the saints as transformed precious stones built together in the divine nature of Christ to become one entity, the church as Christ's Body (1 Cor. 3:10-12a; Eph. 1:22-23).
 - B. Therefore, the breastplate is a miniature of the building up of God's people, indicating that the believers in Christ are distinct individuals but are not divided—Rev. 21:18-20; Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:27.

- C. Precious stones are not created but are formed by the transforming of created things; this signifies that the church is produced by transformation, from something natural into something divine.
- D. As components of the church, the believers, who were created of dust (Gen. 2:7), must be transformed in their human nature by and with the divine nature through the working of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:3, 18) to become precious stones for God's eternal building (Matt. 16:18; John 1:42; 1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 21:18-21); the Christian life is a life of transformation—daily God is seeking to transform us (Rom. 12:2-3; 2 Cor. 4:16).
- E. The number twelve, composed of four (the creatures) times three (the Triune God in resurrection), signifies the mingling of the Triune God with His creature, man, for the complete and perfect carrying out of God's administration eternally—cf. Rev. 21:12-13.
- F. That the stones were arranged in four rows with three stones in each row indicates that the believers are not only transformed but also mingled with the Triune God.
- G. The setting of the stones in gold (Exo. 28:20) signifies that the transformed and mingled believers are built in the divine nature of Christ into one entity (2 Pet. 1:4).
- H. These people, being of the number twelve, complete the eternal purpose of God and become the administration of the divine government in the universe.
 - I. In God's eternal plan and according to His eternal view, the church, borne on Christ's heart (Exo. 28:29) and held in the span of His loving care (v. 16b; cf. John 10:28), is such a mingling of the Triune God with redeemed humanity.

III. The engraving of the names of the twelve tribes on the precious stones corresponds to the inscribing of Christ into the believers' hearts, making them living letters of Christ, with Christ as the content—2 Cor. 3:3:

- A. Christ is inscribed into the believers through their experience of Him and by the inscribing of the New Testament ministry—vv. 2-6.
- B. The letters engraved on the twelve stones typify Christ as the letters in the heavenly alphabet—cf. Rev. 22:13a.
- C. If we are not transformed and transparent and if we have not been inscribed with the Spirit of the living God along with Christ as the content, but are merely opaque stones without any letters inscribed into us, it will be impossible for God to speak through us.

IV. After the Urim and Thummim were put into the breastplate, it became not only a memorial but also a breastplate of judgment—Exo. 28:30:

- A. *Urim* means "lights, illuminators"—v. 30:
 - 1. 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.
 - 2. 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).

3. The Urim typifies Christ as lights, illuminators (John 8:12; Eph. 5:14), shining through the Spirit (the oil) and the cross (the fire from the altar).
- B. *Thummim* means “perfecters, completers”—Exo. 28:30:
1. 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).
 2. 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.
 3. 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).
 4. 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).
 5. 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.
- C. In Exodus 28:30 and in Deuteronomy 33:8 and 10, God’s judgments, referring to God’s law with its verdicts and judgments, are related to the Urim and the Thummim.
- D. The word *judgment* in Exodus 28:30 indicates that God has a regulation concerning everything among His people; the judgment leads to certain decisions, and as a result, we have God’s leading.
- E. 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.
- F. God’s leading through the breastplate always involved a judgment; God’s law includes His judgments, and these judgments become God’s leading.
- G. 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.
- H. In Romans 8:14 the leading of the Spirit, as the reality of God’s leading through the breastplate, issues from, and is the totality of, all the judgments in verses 1 through 13 of that chapter.
- I. 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:
1. The Lord’s speaking through the breastplate with the Urim and the Thummim required the making of the breastplate with the twelve precious stones engraved with the names of the children of Israel and the bearing of the breastplate on the heart of the high priest.
 2. In the same principle, God’s speaking today through the church with Christ as the Illuminator (Urim) and Perfecter (Thummim) requires the building up of the church with the believers as transformed, transparent precious

stones who have been inscribed with Christ as the letters of the spiritual alphabet (2 Cor. 3:3) and the bearing of the church on the hearts of the leading ones.

V. 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:

- A. God speaks not through the stones that are shining but through 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; it is the revelation of the Lord's mind concerning His people.
- B. 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:
 1. Paul's Epistles and the seven epistles of the Lord Jesus to the seven churches in Asia 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.
 2. 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.
 3. The saints in Corinth became the letters used by Paul in the spiritual type-setting 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.
 4. The problem among Christians today is that because there is so much darkness, there is no way for God to expose 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.
 5. By reading the negative situations in this way, we come to know God's leading, His judgment; then in our locality we shall know what God wants us to do, and we should then follow His leading.
- C. If we as the church would be the breastplate of judgment, we must fulfill certain requirements:
 1. We need to be transformed and transparent; then Christ as the spiritual alphabet must be inscribed into us clearly and definitely—2 Cor. 3:3, 18; cf. 1 Chron. 28:19.
 2. Just as God could not speak through the breastplate unless the stones had been inscribed with letters, so God cannot speak through His redeemed people unless they have been inscribed with Christ—Heb. 8:10.
 3. Because there is a shortage of transformation, transparency, inscribing, and enlightening, we need to pray that we may become transparent, have more

of Christ inscribed into us, and experience more enlightening—Rev. 22:1; 21:11; Psa. 119:130; Isa. 2:5; Eph 5:8-9; Psa. 89:15; 1 John 1:7.

4. The fact that Christ is the spiritual alphabet for both inscription and completion indicates that He is inexhaustible; although we may enjoy His inscription, there is still something more of Him that we need for completion—cf. Heb. 6:1; Phil. 3:10, 13-14.
- D. The breastplate is the building up of the Body life and the means for us to know God's will concerning His people; 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.
- E. We need to pray that every local church would become a breastplate according to the picture in Exodus 28.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

TODAY'S APPLICATION OF THE URIM AND THE THUMMIM

The twelve transparent stones in the breastplate indicate that the saints should be transparent in order for Christ to shine through them so that God's will may be shown. Suppose the twelve stones on the breastplate had been opaque instead of transparent. Furthermore, suppose nothing had been inscribed on any of the stones and no light was shining. Then the stones would have been opaque, without inscription, and without the shining of light. In such a case it would be impossible to use the breastplate to find out God's will, God's leading. This is the situation in most Christian groups today. There is no transparency, inscription, or light. It is very possible that this may be the situation of some local churches.

Many years ago in mainland China I visited some so-called churches. It seemed to me that everyone in these groups was opaque, altogether lacking in transformation and transparency. Furthermore, little of Christ had been inscribed into the saints. It seemed they had Christ in name, but they were very short of the experience of Christ. Moreover, there was no light among them. What they needed was a very basic, elementary kind of help. God's will could not be made known through them.

If you consider the condition of the majority of Christians today according to what we have covered in these messages, you will realize that in most cases with the believers there is opaqueness instead of transparency. There is virtually nothing of the inscription of Christ. Instead of the shining of light, there is darkness.

If as a local church we would be used by God as a breastplate, we all must be transparent, and we must have Christ inscribed into us. This means that we must have some definite experiences of Christ as the letters in God's spiritual alphabet. Our experience of Christ must not be vague. Rather, it should be clear and definite. However, the situation among most Christians, including us, is very different from this.

If we have been enlightened by the Lord and if we are bearing the burden of the Lord's interests, we shall be troubled by the situation among God's people. The more we consider the situation and condition of both the saints and the churches,

the more burdened we shall be. We shall be deeply concerned about the lack of transparency, the lack of inscribing, and the shortage of light.

RECEIVING THE LORD'S LEADING CONCERNING THE CHURCH

Today's application of the breastplate with the Urim and the Thummim also requires that the leading ones bear the saints and Christ on their hearts so that they may know the condition of the saints and the completion of Christ for God's leading. In every local church there should be a group of leading ones who bear the saints and Christ on their heart. These leading ones need to see the Lord's shining and read the saints. Then they will be able to receive God's leading concerning the church in their locality.

GOD'S WAY OF SPEAKING

God's way of speaking through the breastplate with the Urim and the Thummim is the opposite of what we would expect. God speaks not through the stones that are shining, but through stones that become dark. This means that God speaks through negative situations. 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. Our natural concept would be that God's speaking through the breastplate came from the stones that were shining. Actually, He spoke through the stones that suddenly became dark.

Paul's Epistles and also the seven epistles of the Lord Jesus to the seven churches in Asia 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. Take, for example, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. If there were no negative things found in the church in Corinth, I doubt that 1 Corinthians would have been written. Paul wrote this Epistle according to his reading of the negative situation at Corinth. By considering that situation, he knew what to write. But although his writing was based on the negative things, in this Epistle he ministered positive things—the riches of Christ—to the church.

The problem among Christians today is that because there is so much darkness, there is no way for God to expose darkness. When everything is in darkness, it is difficult to point out a particular matter that is in darkness. Suppose in a room there are many rows of lights on the ceiling. If all the lights are shining, it will be easy to find one that becomes dark. This illustrates how God spoke through the breastplate. The darkening of a particular stone was God's instant speaking.

The situation of Christians today is abnormal. Instead of light, there is darkness. As a result, God has hardly any way to speak. In order for the darkness to be made known, there must first be the shining of light. If there is no light in a room, there is no way for darkness to be shown. But when all the lights are shining, it immediately becomes apparent when a certain light becomes dark. That darkness is an indicator that something is wrong. If in a certain church things that are wrong are easily found out, that church is normal. But if in a particular church it is

not possible to find out what is wrong, this is an indication that the church there is in darkness. When darkness prevails, it is not possible for negative matters to be exposed. For this, light is necessary. What is exposed under the shining of the light is God's speaking. God speaks through things becoming negative. This kind of negative situation is an indicator of the shortage of Christ. By reading the negative situations in this way, we come to know God's leading. Then in our locality we shall know what God wants us to do, and we should then follow His leading.

JUDGMENT AND SUPPLY

The leading obtained through the breastplate always involves a judgment. This means that the Lord's speaking through the breastplate is through negative situations. If this speaking were only through positive situations, there would be no need of judgment, for everything would be positive and justified. But because the Lord's speaking is through negative situations, that speaking is a judgment.

The Apostle Paul was one who was truly shining. Under the shining of Paul, the darkness was exposed. Paul wrote certain of his Epistles according to the darkness, according to the negative condition, of the saints in the churches. Because Paul saw certain dark areas in the church in Corinth, areas that were letters of God's judgment, Paul could write Corinthians as a book of judgment. But along with all the judgment contained in this Epistle, there are many positive things: the riches of Christ ministered to the believers at Corinth. This is God's way of speaking. Both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, God's speaking is according to the negative situation, yet with the riches of Christ as the supply for His people.

THE NEED FOR THE ADEQUATE EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST

If we as the church would be the breastplate of judgment, we must fulfill certain requirements. First, we need to be transformed and transparent. Then Christ as the letters of the spiritual alphabet must be inscribed into us clearly and definitely. This is to have the adequate experience of Christ.

Recently a brother testified that often, when the leading ones speak to new ones or young ones about the experience of Christ, these leading ones realize that they themselves do not have the clear and definite experience of Christ. If we do not try to minister Christ to others, we may not realize how short we are concerning the experience of Christ. When we try to speak to others about the experience of Christ, we may find that we ourselves are still very short of experience. We may have little of the real experience of Christ to minister to others. As those who would shepherd the saints, we need the experience of Christ. Otherwise we shall lack the proper spiritual vocabulary required for ministering Christ. We may want to minister Christ to others, but what experience of Christ do we have? To some extent, we may be able to teach the Bible, for we may have been reading and studying it for years. But when it comes to ministering Christ, we have a shortage. We do not have that much of Christ inscribed into our being. Perhaps we have only part of a letter inscribed into us. This is the situation of many Christians today. Therefore, it is very difficult to know the Lord's leading through the breastplate.

Because there is such a shortage of transformation, transparency, inscribing, and enlightening, we need to pray that we may become transparent, have more of Christ inscribed into us, and experience more enlightening. Then we shall realize that, even if we are full of Christ, we still have a shortage, for something of Christ's riches is still lacking. This is what is indicated by the marvelous picture of the breastplate with the Urim and the Thummim.

RECOGNIZING OUR NEED FOR MORE EXPERIENCE

With the breastplate and the Urim and the Thummim we see two kinds of alphabets. One kind of alphabet is for inscribing, and the other kind is for completing. If we are not yet full of Christ, what we need is the inscribing. Christ must be inscribed into us until we are full of Him. It is when we are full of Christ that we recognize the need for completion. Thus, if we are not full of Christ, we need Him as the alphabet for inscription. But when we are full of Him, we need Him as the alphabet for our completion. Believers like the Apostle Paul, those who are full of Christ, realize that they still need Christ. However, those who are short of Christ may not sense the need for Christ. Many of today's lukewarm Christians do not have any realization of how much they need Christ. It is when we have Christ inscribed into us that we realize we are still short of Christ. Then we shall seek Him to be our completion.

It surely is a mercy of the Lord we can speak about Christ inscribed into us and Christ completing us. It is not easy to find Christians who speak concerning this. What we need now is more experience. Only through experience can we understand what it is to have Christ inscribed into us and to have Him complete us. Therefore, we all need to pray more regarding these things. I hope that every local church will become a breastplate according to the picture in Exodus 28. (*Life-study of Exodus*, pp. 1429-1434)