

God's Work

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This series of messages was given by the author at a special conference held in Shanghai from June 11 through June 18, 1940. They were delivered in Chinese, but a sister in the Lord took notes of these messages and set them down in English. This present volume is reproduced from the English notes with no more than some necessary tidying-up added.

Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version of the Bible (1901), unless otherwise indicated.

What Is God's Work?

1

Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be that I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself yet to have laid hold: but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3.12-14)

And working together with him. . . . (2 Cor. 6.1)

God has His work. This work is not your work or mine, nor is it the work of this mission or that group. It is God's own work.

Genesis 1 tells us that God worked and then He rested. In the beginning God created light, living creatures, man, and so forth. None but He could do this work of creation. And today He also has His work, which is not any man's work, and which no man is able to do. God's work can be done by none other than God himself. The earlier we acknowledge this the better. For man's works, man's thoughts, man's methods, man's zeal and earnestness and efforts and tireless activities have absolutely no place in what God is doing. Man can no more have a part in God's work today than he could have had way back then in creation.

In Philippians Paul says: "That I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus." The Lord Jesus has a special, specific purpose in laying hold on us—and that specific purpose is the thing we want to lay hold of. He has a purpose, and this purpose is that He might get us and that we might be co-workers with Him. Nonetheless it is still true that *we cannot do* God's work, since it all is absolutely and wholly His. But on the other hand we *are* His co-workers. So that on the one hand we must recognize and acknowledge that we cannot touch with even one little finger the work of God, yet on the other hand we are called to be co-workers with Him! And this is that

for which He has laid hold on us. The Lord has a definite purpose in salvation—and a clear and specific purpose in saving us—which is, that He might have us as His co-workers.

What Is God's Work?

What then is the work of God? Ephesians gives us this more clearly than does any other book in the New Testament. Verse 4 of Chapter 1 says: "Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love"; and in 2.7 it reads: "That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." In addition, 1.9 has this to say: "Making known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in him."

In any church meeting we often have those who rise up and speak out of their own mind. They are not speaking in the Spirit but are "out of tune". What they say is of little or no value. But in God's creation as He has designed it there is nothing out of tune. Everything is for the Son, everything is out from Christ and unto Christ. Not a thing is outside of Him. For God has included *all* in Christ: "In him were all things created . . . All things have been created through him and unto him" (Col. 1.16). All is in perfect harmony in God's plan. And God is going to bring everything in His creation up to this level and to this place of perfect harmony. But we can do nothing in the slightest in this; God is doing it all and will do it all.

Who Is God's Co-Worker?

God's co-worker is the church. In two verses quoted earlier from Ephesians we get a glimpse into the two eternities: (1) "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world"; and (2) "In the ages to

come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” And the name of the vessel through which this is to be done is “the body of Christ”, which is the container of Christ.

Now just who is a co-worker of God? Well, it is *not* one who wants to work for God, one who sees a need and wants to meet it; it is not even one who gets people saved; rather is it the one who does what God has appointed him to do in His eternal purpose, and *only* that does he do. If we truly see that for which we have been laid hold on by Christ Jesus, all our labors, all our former works for Him will be smashed to pieces.

The aim and object of God in everything is to reveal His Son, to manifest His Son, to “show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” This is His eternal purpose. Is this *your* object in the work you are doing now? If it is any lower than this, then you are not a co-worker with God.

You may ask the question: How shall I know that I am working together with God? This can be easily answered. Are you satisfied with what you are doing? If you do not satisfy God's heart, you will not be satisfied yourself. It is not a question of comparing your work with that of another. It is a matter of whether or not what you undertake is at all good—that is, good in God's sight, acceptable to God, out from Him and in line with His eternal purpose.

Paul declares: “That I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus.” We need not look around and criticize others, wondering if it can be possible that all the rest are wrong and only we few are right. This is valueless and hurtful. Never mind the others. Let *us* be sure ourselves to “press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

What Is the Church?

When we begin to look here on earth for some *thing*—a church, a testimony, a movement, a doctrine, an outward visible and tangible thing, we find it becomes at once just some more “technical Christianity”. It is merely an earthly thing—dead and useless. Now the body of Christ is living and spiritual. But when it is dead, it becomes at once a *thing* only.

We are simply to be a grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies and brings forth a harvest. This is repeated again and again and again throughout the ages. It is a matter ever and forever heavenly; there is never the touch of earth about it. The church is not a collection of Jews, Gentiles, British, Americans, Chinese, and so on. For does not Colossians say: “Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is all, and in all” (3.11)?

People think as we enter heaven's gates that in order to enter we must all have a piece of Christ in us—and that lets us in. This is a horrible misconception. For at heaven's entrance stands the cross, and on this cross you and I and every other human being were crucified. Every Jew, every Greek, every Britisher, every American, every Chinese, and so on was nailed to that cross and never got into heaven. All that gets in is *Christ*, nothing of *us* ever gains entrance. Now *that* is the church. Whatever in and about us that is *Christ* or *of Christ* is the church; whatever is of *us* in us—whatever is not Christ himself in us—is *not* the church and will never get into heaven but will instead be destroyed. That in us which is the unmixed life of Christ is all that God will ever recognize or will have anything to do with. And this element alone is that which can work together with God.

2

God's Work in This Dispensation

But unto each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. . . . And he gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ: till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we may be no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error; but speaking truth in love, may grow up in all things into him, who is the head, even Christ; from whom all the body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love. (Eph. 4.7,11-16)

We will now take up the subject of what is God's work in *this* dispensation. We find this given in the passage cited above. God's work in this dispensation is to form the body of Christ. And the work of the church is precisely the same—to form the body of Christ: "All the body . . . maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love." No mission, no Bible school, no evangelistic band, etc., etc., can ever take the place of the church or do the work of the church.

For the Perfecting of the Saints

The average church today is concerned mainly with the saving of souls; but in the New Testament—and right here in Ephesians—this is just not so. Christ has given some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers. Why? For the perfecting of the saints. The church's main concern today seems to be the saving of people from hell, from

punishment, from sorrow and loss. This is good, but it is not God's thought for the church. It is not His work for the church. His appointed task for the church is "the perfecting of the saints", because His work and the church's work is the forming and edifying of the body. It is said that in view of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus God purposed for Him a body; even so, the Lord God is also preparing a body for Him today. The apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers are given to the church to build up the body; that is, they as members of the body are for the building up of the body. The members of the body are *for* the body. The gifts to the church, which are members of the body, are for the body. The body is to build up the body.

Not Teaching, but Life

Can work for God therefore be outside of the church in some mission or evangelistic band or other organ? Never! Because it has got to be the church itself—the body—which does the work of the body. This settles the question of independent workers or independent works or independent missions, small or large, highly organized or motivated by faith. If apart from the body, they are apart from God's order.*

This is not a principle or a teaching, it is a matter of *life*. If you have revelation concerning this, then the moment you do the least little thing that is individualistic and not related to the body you will sense it and know it is wrong, be it ever so small a thing. There is absolutely no place for independency or individualism—for that is self, that is you, it is not Christ.

* God in His sovereignty may use such workers or works or missions, but this does not prove that they are after God's order.—*Editor*

Do you have this as a teaching? If you do not have body consciousness you have it in the mental realm and not by revelation. And if so, it is something you have taken on from the outside; it does not come from within. It is not spontaneous and it is not life to you. Instead, it is a thing in your mind and not a revelation; otherwise you would have body consciousness. If it is something you can put off, or get away from, or shelve, then you do not have revelation on the body.

If you are really *in* the body experimentally by revelation, you cannot get away from it. You have no other way, there is no choice, there is but *one* way for you. If you do not go *this* way, then there is *no other* way for you because you have seen the body by revelation. If it is revelation it will be an *inward* thing—in your spirit, not an outward thing—in your mind.

Outside of the church which is His body there is no possibility of work for God. If you go to a place where there is a *true* church, that is, an expression of the body of Christ which really is His church, you cannot work apart from that church, that is, unrelated to it. Do not get the idea that apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are the only workers God has set up in the body and for the body. No indeed; every single member of the body is meant by God to work for God and for the body unto the edifying of the body. It is not that some are workers and some are simply members of the body. All are workers. The body of Christ is to build itself up. *All must be out from the body and all must be for the body.*

We are not here to set up something, to establish a “thing”, to be a pattern for worship, to represent a new movement. We are here to represent an expression of the life of Christ in His body. Whatever in Shanghai is of the Lord, whoever is the Lord's, whatever and whoever represents a measure of the life of Christ—we own them as belonging to us. They are parts of us, whether they realize or

recognize it or not, and we are parts of them. Unless it is a *living* thing, it is not the church. A dead thing cannot be His body.

So often what holds a mission or a work together is a set of doctrines, some special teachings, or the founder himself who may have been a godly man. The Lord deliver us from this, for it is all a dead thing. The Holy Spirit cannot support it or minister to it, for it is a “thing” and the Holy Spirit can only use a living organism—the body, the church. All work must be out from the church and all work must be for the church, unto the building up and edifying of the church.

As a Body

The goal of all this is found in Ephesians 4.13: “Till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” This can never be realized individually; it can only be realized and attained to *as a body*. Hence let us ask God to deal with us, to cut off all individualism, all self-thinking and self-deciding, all individualistic action and movement. All our life must be lived in the body. Ask the Lord to teach us how to live there. Body life is not something that we can study. It is a most natural and spontaneous thing if we are *in* the body by *revelation*.

3

Revelation on God's Eternal Purpose

And Jehovah said, Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do? (Gen. 18.17)

And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it to his brethren . . . And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it to his brethren. (Gen. 37.5,9)

And Jacob called unto his sons, and said: Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the latter days. (Gen. 49.1)

According to all that I show thee, the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the furniture thereof, even so shall ye make it. (Ex. 25.9)

The meek will he guide in justice; and the meek will he teach his way. . . . The friendship of Jehovah is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant. (Ps. 25.9,14)

For I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God. (Acts 20.27)

But I hold not my life of any account as dear unto myself, so that I may accomplish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20.24)

If so be that ye have heard of the dispensation of that grace of God which was given me to you-ward; how that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery, as I wrote before in few words . . . whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of that grace of God which was given me according to the working of his power. (Eph. 3.2,3,7)

The eternal purpose of God can never be understood or grasped by the mind. It has to come by revelation. All work for God begins with consecration or is based on surrender. But such consecration or surrender only comes through revelation. As a matter of fact, the work of God (not our work, but God's work through us) begins only

when revelation comes. Outwardly is the heavenly vision, inwardly is the revelation.

God does not want us to just do a kind of general, miscellaneous sort of work for Him. He desires us to know His whole plan and to be working with Him toward a clear purpose and plan. For we are not only His servants but also His friends.

All surrender and consecration is valuable, but when it comes right down to it, it is only after revelation that surrender and consecration can be of much value, because only then can it be complete. Our surrender before this revelation is only in view of salvation. He has bought me with His blood, His love toward me is unspeakable. Therefore, I *ought* to give myself to Him. I ought to give myself and all that I have to Him because of His saving grace and love. But after revelation it is a different matter. When we see God's eternal purpose, it calls for a tremendous giving of ourselves to this purpose, with a surrender we have never dreamed of before—something deeper and more utter. Paul said, "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (Acts 26.19). He could go through anything and bear anything because of the heavenly vision.

Joseph was a perfect type of God's people, gathering up in himself all those who had gone before. But the crisis for him came when he dreamed his dreams. This was for him his revelation, in which he saw God's purpose and his own part in it. This was the beginning of God's work through him.

Moses had to go up to the mountain-top to receive the mountain-top pattern for the life of God's people—the Ten Commandments and all the law of God. Later, he had to obtain the pattern of the tabernacle: "See . . . that thou make all things according to the pattern that was shown thee in the mount" (Heb. 8.5).

In the tiniest bit of work we do for God it must be done according to the pattern shown us in the mount; that is, according to the revelation God has given us of His eternal purpose and plan. But the revelation that Joseph and Moses and others had had was individual. This is not so today. Today the revelation is to the church. It is not a different revelation for each individual, but the same revelation is given for the entire church.

Spiritual Work Based on Revelation

All spiritual work for God comes out of revelation. Apart from revelation on God's eternal purpose, there can be no truly spiritual work. There can be scattered, miscellaneous work for God which is blessed by Him, but it cannot be truly called spiritual work or co-working with Him unless it issues out of revelation as to God's eternal purpose. It must be revelation and not just a mental grasp of it—not just an understanding it and seeing it intellectually, for this is useless. It needs to be a “seeing” in your spirit: a seeing what the sphere and limitation of God's working are.

Now only revelation can deal with both work and worker. This light from heaven smashes us to bits. It shatters and slays *us* and *our work*. If it is mere doctrine or teaching it will leave us after a while. It goes, it evaporates as it were. But if it is light or revelation it is our *life*, and we cannot get away from it.

One day the Lord Jesus said, “He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. . . . He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father; so he that eateth me, he also shall live because of me.” Many were stumbled by this and left Him. But the disciples, when He asked if they also would leave Him, replied: “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.” (John 6.54,56,57,68) When we see the light it becomes our life, and there is

no alternative. We have no other way, for it is our very life. If we cannot go that way, we die. But thank the Lord, it is not something we have to remember or try to recall. If we have seen, we have seen and always will see. It never leaves us. For we find that the body answers to everything: it is our very life. We cannot live outside the body.

To Whom Revealed?

Every spiritual thing we possess has come to us by revelation. It comes in this succession: (1) light, (2) revelation, (3) life, that is, God's life, and (4) all His riches, all He is.

If God wants to do a new thing—a special thing—in Shanghai, in China, or anywhere in the world, will He disclose it to you or hide it from you? How many are there in Shanghai whom He will confide in if He is going to do something here? Let us see that it is only to His closest and dearest friends that He will disclose His secrets and His plans. This should be a sobering thought to all of us.

Life Builds

4

But unto each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ . . . And he gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ: till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. (Eph. 4.7,11-13)

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit to profit withal. For to one is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom; and to another the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit: to another faith, in the same Spirit; and to another gifts of healings, in the one Spirit; and to another workings of miracles; and to another prophecy; and to another discernings of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; and to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each one severally even as he will. (1 Cor. 12.7-11)

He that speaketh in a tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. Now I would have you all speak with tongues, but rather that ye should prophesy: and greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying. (1 Cor. 14.4,5)

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to account anything as from ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God; who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. (2 Cor. 3.5,6)

Therefore seeing we have this ministry, even as we obtained mercy, we faint not: . . . But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves; we are pressed on every side, yet not straitened; perplexed, yet not unto despair; pursued, yet not forsaken; smitten down, yet not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be

manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you. (2 Cor. 4.1,7-12)

If we have not seen the eternal *purpose* of God we will never see what the *work* of God is. All God's work is to be done in and through the church. This work has as its aim to form and to build up the body of Christ; this work is to be done by the whole body itself, and not by isolated individuals or missions, or by acting independently from the church. Such work of the church must be entirely out from God and for His Son.

To be a co-worker with God we must have revelation, otherwise we are not working *in* His eternal purpose and *unto* His eternal purpose. The beginning of all work for God is a surrendering and an offering up of ourselves that come as a result of revelation. The reason there must be revelation is because this light of God kills all that is not of Him—all that is out from man. When revelation comes we find there is no alternative, no other way by which to go. It is either to go this way or die.

Two Ways to Build Up the Body

How can we be co-workers with God and build up the body? If our work is only to save people, the worker would appear to play quite an important part. It would also seem in a sense to be a work for man. But if our work has as its purpose to build up the body, then man is completely ruled out; for the body is *Christ*. It is all for Christ, and therefore nothing of man can come in.

In 1 Corinthians 12 the many gifts of the Spirit are set forth, with Paul emphasizing both words and acts; but in 2 Corinthians 4 we have acts only. There are two different ways of building up the church. Now just what is the value of these gifts of the Spirit in building up the church? How is such value compared to the value of

the life in the Spirit? Paul in 2 Corinthians Chapters 3 through 10 is emphasizing what his New Covenant ministry is. That ministry does not lie in the gifts, but in the exceeding greatness of the treasure contained in the earthen vessel; that is, Christ in him.

2 Corinthians 4.10,12—“Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body . . . So then death worketh in us, but life in you”—is an utterly different thing from Romans 6. It means death keeps on working: the death of Christ works and works day by day in us, with the result that life flows out to others. And thus is the church built up.

Here, then, do we have the two ways by which the church is to be built up: (a) 1 Corinthians 12, by the gifts of the Spirit; and (b) 2 Corinthians 4, by death working in us that life may work in others.

Which way has built you up the most? Has your inner life been built up the most by the gifts of the Spirit, or by those whom you have known who know the cross applied to their inmost lives—who always bear about in them the dying of Jesus that the life of Jesus may be manifested? This is cross-bearing. Let death never cease to work in you and me that life may never cease to flow out to others.

We see people with a rich use of the gifts: the gift of healing, the gift of casting out demons, the gift of utterance, or the speaking in tongues. And we think how rich they are, how much blessed and used of God. But is this really so? These are the gifts of childhood. They are for the baby stage only, useful and necessary during that period; but, we must grow up.

What really edifies and helps most is not the gifts or utterances of those who have these gifts, but the life of those we come in contact with who *deeply know the cross*, who know the cross within and bear it daily. Take, for example, a company of newly-saved Christians. Now for the first few years the Lord may give them gifts

to cause them to wonder at His power and glory and to strengthen their weak faith. But once it is strong enough, He will remove the gifts and bring in the cross. There are grave dangers associated with the gifts, the greatest of which is “spiritual” pride. One can stand up in the Spirit (that is, the outpoured Spirit) and utter a few wonderful sentences that no one else can utter. “I feel I am really something!” he thinks. Yet his inner life may be infantile compared to another believer who has not the gifts but who deeply knows the cross.

God sovereignly bestows gifts upon one here and one there that they may serve as His mouth-pieces for a time when nothing else will be understood because we are babes and He cannot meet us on any other level. Indeed, He will use any mouth—even that of an ass. But it is a limited ministry of the kindergarten type, and is prone to puff up.

What God really wants and is waiting and working for are vessels in whom the words He may have given us to utter are taken up by His Spirit and inwrought into our inmost being by the cross until they become our very life; and then ours is a ministry of *life*, life that ever flows out from a death that is ever working in us. So that anyone who trusts in gifts is being foolish, for these gifts do not alter the inner man. A church which tries to build itself up by the gifts will end up being a carnal church always, since it is not God's way for the building up of the church except in the nursery stage.

His Way Is Life

God's way is life and through life. Many times you go to a meeting and some ignorant, unlearned brother prays or rises and says a few words. Perhaps there is not so much to what he says, yet you feel blessed in the deepest part of your being. “Deep calleth unto deep” (Ps. 42.7). What has happened is, that you have

touched life, and you are edified and strengthened and helped. That one has ministered *life* to you.

The ones who are “whole” or “entire” or “intact” can never minister life, for it is only the broken ones who can minister life. Only out of their brokenness can come forth life. This is God’s perfect way. May the Lord cast down every proud one; may He break, and break, and break us again. May He deal with all our natural life. May the cross be drastically and deeply applied—that life may be ministered to His needy ones.

Brokenness Releases Life

5

Love never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away. (1 Cor. 13.8)

From whom all the body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love. (Eph. 4.16)

There are two ways of serving the body: the one through the gift is objective; the other through the cross inwrought by the Spirit is subjective. In some local churches God must needs use the one, in other local churches He is able to use the other. Spiritual gift can be termed a “Divine loan”; He loans His own power and gifts to you. It is something quite outside yourself, apart from yourself. Take as an example the man Samson: he could do most unusual things, things quite unique and different from all others; yet the man himself was not at all unusual in God’s eyes. God simply loans His power to ordinary people for a time because He has a special need, but it does not mean at all that the individual is a person of any special spiritual worth or holiness; in fact, later on he may prove to be quite the reverse.

Not Doing, but Being

The organized church today emphasizes what a person says and what a person does but pays little attention to what a person *is*. Many young workers earnestly desire to be able to speak with power, long for eloquence, yearn to be able to preach brilliantly in order to move and help people. They fail to realize that this is not the vital point. The vital issue is: Who and what are *you*? The thing of value, the preeminently important matter is, not that you are given a gift and

therefore you are able to speak, but that you know the Lord and therefore you speak.

We have not gathered a company of young workers here in order to teach them doctrine or even the Bible, or in order to teach them to preach the gospel or to seek gifts or even power, but to help them to be *better men and women, to learn the cross*. There are plenty of places they can go for the gifts or to learn to preach and so forth, but not where they can learn the cross. If their hope is to acquire more knowledge and gifts in order to help people, then this is not the place.

Are the gifts needed? Yes, they are, up to a certain point; but they are not to continue beyond that point where the Lord seeks to discontinue them and to bring in the working of the cross, to bring in the breaking, the weakening, and the knowing of the Lord—wherein we need no supernatural utterances. Because of the fact that out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks, and because Christ has been inwrought by the indwelling Holy Spirit, therefore I can speak out of His life within. We may say today exactly the same thing as we said ten or fifteen years ago, but it is entirely different. Yes, I knew and believed it then, but now it has been inwrought into my very being. It is myself, that is, Christ in me.

Brokenness Produces Ministry

Isaac represents the one who had it all through gifts. For notice that everything he received came from his father. It was an objective thing with him; it was outside himself. Even when Isaac blessed his children, it was rather confused. He was almost blind and got the boys completely mixed up.

Not so with Jacob. Jacob had been broken, really shattered by the Lord; and the Spirit of God had inwrought the very life of God in him till he said, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Jehovah" (Gen. 49.18). When he blessed his children, or rather Joseph's children,

Jacob knew exactly what he was doing. He did it intelligently. Said he, “I know it, my son, I know it” (Gen. 48.19). Jacob had light, Jacob had revelation, because he had been *broken*.

People say, “Why is it that so many much used servants of God fall or end in being set aside, that is, are no longer used by God?” Who says God ever really used them? And if He did so, it was just like giving the gifts. God in His sovereign right picked out a person to grant a temporary gift to him, but only used him for a little time because the man was not inwardly worthy of any more ministry.

“But we have the treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves” (2 Cor. 4.7). The Lord leads us through fiery trials where we could not go through and which we could not bear, wherein we could not be victorious and wherein we were done for; yet it is just here that we find that that precious thing within us functions. Because of the precious thing within the vessel, because of the life of Christ within, we go through. We are victorious where we could not be victorious. We bear about in the body the dying of Jesus and consequently the life of Jesus *is* made manifest.

You can only help others in proportion to what you yourself have suffered. The greater the price, the more you can help others; the lesser the price, the less you can help others. As you go through the fiery trials, the testings, the afflictions, the persecutions, the conflicts—as you let the Holy Spirit work the dying of Jesus in you—life will flow out to others, even the life of Christ.

Prophetic Ministry

6

But we will continue steadfastly in prayer, and in the ministry of the word. (Acts 6.4)

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diverse kinds of tongues. (1 Cor. 12.28)

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers. (Acts 13.1)

Follow after love; yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. For he that speaketh in a tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God; for no man understandeth; but in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men edification, and exhortation, and consolation. He that speaketh in a tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. (1 Cor. 14.1-4)

And he gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets, and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers. (Eph. 4.11)

In relation to the gifts, God puts heavier emphasis on the gifts of utterance such as prophecy, teaching, and so forth than upon those gifts of acts like healings and miracles. But the apostles say here through the Spirit, “We will continue steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the word.”

There are two kinds of gifts to the church: one is the gifts of things—like miracles, healings, tongues, etc.; the other is the gifts of people to minister—such as prophets, teachers, pastors, and evangelists. These latter gifts—of people—have all to do with the ministry of God’s word. The gifts of healings and of miracles do not give us more of the life of Christ within. They do substantiate God’s word, but that is all; they are an outward matter, not an inward one. However, the ministry of God’s word by these gifts of prophets, teachers, and so on, build up the inner spiritual life of the church.

Prophets and Teachers

I believe the Lord would have us look particularly at the ministries of prophets and of teachers. In the Old Testament we see two varieties of prophets: (1) those who foretold future events, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel; and (2) those, like Elijah and Elisha, whose work for the most part was not to disclose future events but to explain present ones. They were to set forth what God's thought was in His present acts—why He was doing what He was doing. They were to explain God's actions, as it were, and, in view of what God was doing and what was in His mind, to exhort the people. John the Baptist was the most prominent of these prophets in the New Testament. Like the others before him, John set forth the present mind of God. Thus the prophets held a distinctive place; no others could come up to them in importance.

The teachers, on the other hand, took God's word and set it forth before the people, explaining it. Teachers are never mentioned alone, being always accompanied, when mentioned, by prophets or pastors and so on. God has not appointed men just to be teachers. God does not want any teaching of doctrine which has only academic but no spiritual value. True, He *has* used some as teachers, but this is a limited ministry since it is simply getting understanding and light on the Word and being able to clearly pass it on to others by breaking it up or fitting parts of it together. All this is objective. It is an understanding which has come from without, from the Word, and not light which has come from really knowing God and walking with Him. This understanding of the Scriptures and the giving out of it lead to many mental difficulties and to ceaseless study in order to solve them. But that is not life.

Yet there will come a day when the Lord lays hold of you and shows you that the real problem is not the Scriptures but yourself—that everything you have searched for and found has been outward, mental, worthless, in the realm of knowledge and not of life.

Prophetic Ministry

If you would be a prophet, three things are necessary:

(1) Your preparation as a vessel—the Holy Spirit breaking you, dealing with you, applying the cross, taking you down into death, and working into you the life of Christ. In other words, a secret history with God.

(2) A burden within, which God gives—a thought which becomes a burden.

(3) Utterance for that burden, expression for that thought—an interpretation and clear expression of it.

There is the gift of prophecy which may come through by way of tongues or supernatural utterances under the outpoured Spirit; but this is only God's temporary way when there are none of spiritual depth and history and maturity whom He can use as intelligent vessels for the upbuilding of the church.

Minister in Life

7

Therefore seeing we have this ministry, even as we obtained mercy, we faint not: but we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. . . . But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves; we are pressed on every side, yet not straitened; perplexed, yet not unto despair; pursued, yet not forsaken; smitten down, yet not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you. . . . Wherefore we faint not; but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day. (2 Cor. 4.1-17)

The Second Letter to the Corinthians is a very important book because it tells us what kind of person the one who serves the Lord should be. For example, Chapters 8 and 9 tell us, among other things, what the attitude of the servant of the Lord should be towards money. We see in 2 Corinthians what it means to minister *in life*.

Of all Paul's epistles 1 Corinthians is the most shallow and superficial, for it deals primarily with right and good and so is not deep. 2 Corinthians, however, is the deepest of all his epistles. (Ephesians of course is the *highest*, but 2 Corinthians is the *deepest*.) 1 Corinthians deals with many outward questions and problems, yet in the midst of all this there shines forth a number of vital inward spiritual realities which are most precious. One of these is that God has chosen the weak things of this world, the despised things, the ignorant and the foolish, the nothings and the nobodies, to put to shame them that are wise, so that no flesh should glory in His sight.

Another one is that all we have we have received from God, that no man should boast. Still another one is in Paul's speaking of the various gifts and their values. Moreover, he puts in the wonderful chapter on love. Then too, in the midst of the chapter on head covering, Paul gives us the tremendous principle that the church must come under authority according as God has arranged the order—Christ under God, man under Christ, and woman under the man. And earlier in the letter the big question of unity is dealt with, showing how all our oneness depends on the flesh being drastically dealt with.

Teachings Based on Life

Although all of 1 Corinthians is simple, easy to understand, and not too deep, God did not just plan to have this one letter written; he also planned to have 2 Corinthians added to it. For in that letter we see what kind of person it was that gave us 1 Corinthians, and that is what gives the first letter its value. 1 Corinthians is *built upon* the personal spiritual life of the one who wrote 2 Corinthians—and that makes all the difference in the world.

The teaching on money in 1 Corinthians only has its value because of what Paul's own attitude—expressed in 2 Corinthians—was towards money. He said he had never taken their money but had worked with his own hands to spare them as would a mother.

The teaching on resurrection in 1 Corinthians is of value because it was a living experience with him. He knew the resurrection life of Christ in him right then; as he said, "We also believe, and therefore also we speak; knowing that he that raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also with Jesus, and shall present us with you" (2 Cor. 4.13,14). He mentioned elsewhere, "Yea, we ourselves have had the sentence of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead" (2 Cor. 1.9) and "Knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent

from the Lord . . . and are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord” (5.6,8).

Take, too, Paul’s teaching on love. Of all the churches, that at Corinth had certainly treated him the most ungraciously. The Corinthian believers assailed him, misunderstood him, lightly esteemed him, criticized him fiercely, did him all manner of injustice, and wounded him deeply; nevertheless, in 2 Corinthians we see how Paul took it all with meekness and loveliness. Said he, “The . . . God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Cor. 1.3,4). He reacted with love, not with reproaches; with tender understanding and tears and many prayers and much forgiveness.

In 1 Corinthians Paul shows us that God has chosen the things that are weak and foolish and stupid, and that he is just as foolish and weak as they are. Yet in 2 Corinthians he says: We are indeed weak, utterly weak, but there is something to be gloried in. *Christ in us* is not weak. He is strong, He is mighty, He is all-sufficient. “My grace is sufficient for thee,” said the Lord to Paul, “for my power is made perfect in weakness.” “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses,” Paul responded, “that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor. 12.9).

Paul tells them in 1 Corinthians to be willing to be losers in financial matters and never to go to law; while in 2 Corinthians he shows himself to be one who never stands up for his own rights but accepts whatever loss or poverty or trial comes to him.

The Cross—the Basis of Ministry of Life

2 Corinthians is beyond everything else a book of suffering. We see there God’s servant—His chosen vessel—going through terrific, fiery trials and suffering such as perhaps no other apostle or servant

of the Lord has ever had to go through. We see sufferings written all through the book: some are physical, some mental, some spiritual; some are temporary while some others are continuous. But he gives the reason for these sufferings when he says, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body." This is the basis of all ministry *in life*. There *must* be suffering, there must be pain, there must be the *cross*—if there is ever going to be the life of Christ manifested. "So then death worketh in us, but life in you."

Whenever there is a shrinking from the cross, a dodging of Calvary, a refusal of the pathway of pain and suffering, an unwillingness to pay the price and to suffer pain and loss, then there will be poverty, death, and shallowness, an emptiness that can give out nothing with which to minister to God's people. "Let death never cease to work in me that life may never cease to flow out to others."^{*}

What is the reason for such appalling shallowness and poverty in ministry these days? Because the ministers have experienced so little themselves. They have managed to dodge the cross whenever God offered it to them or appointed it for them. There is very often a way out, another way that is less costly, a lower path and not the way of the cross. How few and rare are those who are truly rich spiritually. And why? Because their sufferings have not abounded.

God arranges most perfectly. He knows what kind of sufferings each one needs—whether it be physical, material, mental, or spiritual. When God in His wisdom brings it to us because He sees that we need it, let us rejoice and see the Lord in it. Let us accept it with joy, acknowledging that we are absolutely weak and unequal to it, but that He is gloriously equal to it. He indeed is, and in the

^{*} These were brother Nee's parting words as his boat pulled out of Shanghai for England in 1938.—*Editor*

circumstance we do find Him in His fullness and sufficiency. We come to really know God because we find Him doing in us and for us what we cannot do. Thus are we able to minister Him in life to others, to build up the body, to scatter life—His life—wherever we go. Whenever death is really working in us, just then and only then can life really flow out to others.

8

Priestly Ministry

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers, Barnabas, and Symeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen the foster-brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And as they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. (Acts 13.1,2)

Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men: and they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the congregation, called to the assembly, men of renown; and they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and Jehovah is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the assembly of Jehovah? . . . And Korah assembled all the congregation against them unto the door of the tent of meeting; and the glory of Jehovah appeared unto all the congregation. And Jehovah spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment. . . . So they, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into Sheol: and the earth closed upon them, and they perished from among the assembly. (Num. 16.1-3,19-21,33)

And it shall come to pass, that the rod of the man whom I shall choose shall bud: and I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against you. . . . And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses went into the tent of the testimony; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and put forth buds, and produced blossoms, and bare ripe almonds. . . . Every one that cometh near, that cometh near unto the tabernacle of Jehovah, dieth: shall we perish all of us? (Num. 17.5,8,13)

All who serve the church serve first and preeminently the Lord. Sometimes they are called ministers of Christ, sometimes ministers of God. Prophets and teachers are especially spoken of as serving or

ministering to the Lord. Serving the church or ministering to people is a different action from ministering to the Lord; and the first action without the second is of relatively little value to God. Often there is a need for the gospel, a need for workers, and so on; but God has His need too. If there is a need of work or workers and yet the meeting of that need is not a co-working with God, a meeting of God's need, or a ministering to the Lord in response to His need and His call, then there has already been a breakdown.

If there is a prophet's ministry but not a priestly ministry at the same time, then it is of no value and cannot build up the church. If my left hand wants to help my right hand because it is hurt and in pain, my left hand cannot help directly. It has to do so through the head. It can communicate with the other hand only by way of the head. The left hand comes to the aid of the other hand not for itself but for the sake of the head—that is, to meet the need of the head. Therefore, any ministry which is not performed through the Head and for the Head is useless and only gets us into trouble with other members.

All ministry which has lost its priestly emphasis over all things else has broken-down. If a person has not first of all gone into the presence of God, he cannot come forth out of the presence of God with any message or service of value. If we have not stood in the presence of God as priest, all our work, all our witnessing, all our running about, all our wearing ourselves out, will only be a ministry to man and not to the Lord.

Call and Qualification of Priest

What kind of person can come into the presence of God as a priest? The question of "priest" in the Old Testament and the New is the same. We are to be a kingdom of priests—kings and priests unto God. But although this was God's original plan, Israel failed Him in this regard. When Moses came down from the Mount with the Ten

Commandments, the Israelites were already worshiping the golden calf. So God said, “Put ye every man his sword upon his thigh, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor” (Ex. 32.27). Yet only the Levites obeyed; and hence from that time onward the priestly ministry was given to the Levites.

In the case of the sons of Korah, it was a question of who was holy and who could serve God. They claimed that all were holy and all could equally serve God. But God judged between them. The ground opened up and swallowed all the men who belonged to Korah together with all their goods, and fire came forth from the Lord and devoured the two hundred and fifty men who had offered the incense. From this we see that there is life for those who are appointed by God to serve Him; but for those who are not called of God and yet come forward on their own and attempt to serve Him because they want to or because it is good to do so, for them there is only destruction. For this is not a small matter which God can overlook; it is a very big thing—a question of life and death.

It is still true that all God’s people are priests. Hallelujah, it is indeed still true. Nevertheless, it is equally true that we cannot execute that office without special qualifications. We cannot exercise our appointed function as priests as we naturally are. Spiritually speaking, only Moses and Aaron and the Levites could execute that office. We see this principle in the case of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. When the two hundred and fifty princes of the congregation offered false fire in their incense burners, they were consumed.

Afterwards Aaron’s rod and the representative rods of the other tribes were laid up in the tabernacle. On the next day only Aaron’s rod budded. This of course means resurrection: life out of death. Only those can minister to the Lord who have been through death and have come out into resurrection life. They must have known the death of the cross.

You cannot possibly take anything of the old creation into the tabernacle, into the ministry of the Lord: neither your old mind nor your old creation brilliancy or cleverness, nor your old creation eloquence, nor your old creation strength of any kind. All this has to go right down into death and to come out into resurrection life. Unless your rod has budded, you cannot serve God. In short, you cannot serve God if you only know the blood but do not know the cross.

Through Death into Life

It is true that positionally we are all priests, but only after we have accepted the subjective working of the cross and have had our natural life absolutely and utterly dealt with can we execute that priestly office.

Resurrection has only one meaning, which is, that a person *has been through death* and received new life. The resurrection we see in Philippians 3 is the positive side of resurrection. It is not a matter of something dead going through death and coming out alive. No, resurrection is *life going into death and emerging in new life*. Whatever is good and living in us, whatever comes from the new birth, all the pure, new, born-again life that God has given us—all this *has to go down into death*, has to go *through death*, and to be purified again by death, thrice purified by three days (which typifies fullness and perfection and completeness of death) and to come out in life. That is resurrection life indeed; and life having passed through death and having had everything consumed that it had collected of self or earth can never be touched by death. That is life in which there is no death.

All which we naturally have as gifts and all which God has given us as gifts of the Spirit *must* pass through death. If we have been a gifted conversationalist or a great talker, we may find that all this disappears when we go through death. Because although it has been good and helpful and “spiritual” conversation, it has not been wholly the Spirit

of God. It has at best been a mixture; and because of this it will all be purified in going through death. Our natural strength and ability will never emerge from death. Our intellectual power must all of it go through death or else it can never minister to God. And this death is not the death of Romans 6 and Galatians 2.20; it is *something beyond this!* This death and resurrection is the basis and the only basis for priestly ministry.

Thank God, we refuse all service which is only to man. We do not serve man, we serve God; for we are first ministers of Christ, and afterwards to man, to the church. But the basis of it all is *death and resurrection* which issues in a priestly ministry Godward, and which then issues in ministry to man. May the Lord give us grace to enter into the Holy of Holies because all of self and all of man and all of mixture and all of earth has been destroyed in death but what is indestructible and what is deathless has emerged in resurrection life.

9

The Iniquity of Our Ministry

And when they came to the threshing-floor of Nacon, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God. . . . And David was afraid of Jehovah that day; and he said, How shall the ark of Jehovah come unto me? (2 Sam. 6.6,7,9)

And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It pertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to bum incense unto Jehovah, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honor from Jehovah God. Then Uzziah was wroth; and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense; and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy brake forth in his forehead before the priests in the house of Jehovah, beside the altar of incense. And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out quickly from thence; yea, himself hastened also to go out, because Jehovah had smitten him. And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a separate house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of Jehovah; and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land. (2 Chron. 26.18-21)

And Jehovah said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy fathers' house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary; and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood. And thy brethren also, the tribe of Levi, the tribe of thy father, bring thou near with thee, that they may be joined unto thee, and minister unto thee: but thou and thy sons with thee shall be before the tent of the testimony. And they shall keep thy charge, and the charge of all the Tent: only they shall not come nigh unto the vessels of the sanctuary and unto the altar, that they die not, neither they, nor ye. And they shall be joined unto thee, and keep the charge of the tent of meeting, for all the service of the Tent: and a stranger shall not come nigh unto you. And ye shall keep the charge of the sanctuary, and the charge of the altar; that there be wrath no more upon the children of Israel. . . . And thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priesthood for every

thing of the altar, and for that within the veil: and ye shall serve: I give you the priesthood as a service of gift: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death. And Jehovah spake unto Aaron, And I, behold, I have given thee the charge of my heave-offerings, even all the hallowed things of the children of Israel; unto thee have I given them by reason of the anointing, and to thy sons, as a portion for ever. (Num. 18.1-5,7,8)

Priestly ministry in the Old Testament always means ministry to the Lord. This ministry is the basis of all other ministries. If anyone has not this ministry, all other ministries are empty and useless; neither can they please the Lord or be accepted by Him. In the New Testament we find prophetic ministry to be the great ministry. Yet here too we find that this ministry is based upon priestly ministry; and that without this, prophetic ministry becomes external and empty—it being directed towards man and not towards the Lord. Let us take note that there are two kinds of service: a working *for* God and a service *to* God. Never forget that only the latter is acceptable to Him.

The Iniquity of the Sanctuary

God said to Aaron: (1) “Thou and thy sons and thy fathers’ house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary”; (2) “They [the tribe of Levi] shall keep thy charge . . . : only they shall not come nigh unto the vessels of the sanctuary and unto the altar”; and later, (3) “A stranger shall not come nigh unto you.” God shows us very clearly what He thinks of sin and goes through the whole list, yet those sins are not punished by death. But “the iniquity of the sanctuary”—the iniquity of ministry—is alone punishable by death, with no possible escape nor pardon. This kind of iniquity, unlike lying or killing or pride or breaking the law in any way, is not easy to be atoned for. This sin—the iniquity of ministry—is not to be forgiven. This sort of thing just cannot be permitted, overlooked, or forgiven. Every other sin can be cleansed and forgiven, but not this one.

What are these sins of the sanctuary? We must go back and see again what ministry is. We have seen that all ministry issues from death and resurrection. The dead rod of Aaron had to be laid up before God and to go through death. The rod had absolutely no life in itself. It was a dead thing. We have to acknowledge that we, like the rod, are dead things: useless—utterly useless, without anything whatever to give, without any hope, without the least little fragment to give to a needy world, without one atom of anything of value to God or which He can use. But when God has taken this dead rod through death, it will blossom. It simply has to be laid up before the Lord for Him to put His own life into it. Into the earthen vessel He puts that exceedingly precious treasure: His very own life which itself has been through death and resurrection. It is *His* death and *His* resurrection that He gives us to experience as is mentioned in Philippians 3. For instance, take a brilliant person who tries to serve the Lord with his brilliancy. Such a ministry as his just does not issue forth in life. On the contrary, whatever he touches issues in death because he himself has not been through the death of Philippians 3.

What then is the iniquity of the sanctuary? *It is bringing into the service of the Lord something other than resurrection life.* Many people are just naturally burning for the Lord; they bring their warm enthusiasm into His service. This is an iniquity of the sanctuary. Many servants of God bring their strong wills into the service of the Lord. This is a sin of the sanctuary. Other people have everything in the mental. They have strong clear minds and they grasp things quickly. They greatly love to be in spiritual circles and with spiritual people. They like to hear spiritual messages. But they as it were are watching it all through a window; it has never been made life to them. God has never really touched their spirits and given them revelation. They have never been through death to all that is good and strong and natural. They instead bring their natural minds and talents and whatever into the service of God. It is abhorrent to Him, and is a sin of the sanctuary.

Unless our ministry is acceptable to God, it meets with death. It was so with Uzzah when he reached out for the ark of God and took hold of it because the oxen that drew the new cart had stumbled. He touched the holy thing of God with unholy hands, and it met with immediate death. Although it was a perfectly natural reaction, it was not according to God's order. It was a service to God but *contrary to God's way*, it being done in man's way which was out from man's mind and strength. Many times we put forth the hand of flesh and try to do what only God can do. We speak before God's time; we do not wait for Him to work things out in His own time and way by His own Spirit. We try to do it for Him. But it brings forth only death. And God punishes it with death.

King Uzziah presumed to take upon himself that which God had appointed only for the priests to do; which was, to bum incense to the Lord. God met it immediately with leprosy—death.

In like manner, many today attempt to minister in His temple when actually God has not appointed them so to do. They want to serve the Lord, they love Christian work, they find great joy in it. They scurry about in ceaseless activity for God, they sacrifice for Him, and eat all kinds of bitterness in work for Him. Can this be wrong? God says it is the iniquity of the sanctuary because it is not His appointment. He has not called them to it. Either such work is done in man's strength and not God's; or else it has never met the cross and been through death. Trusting in anything of the old creation or bringing anything of the old creation into the work of the Lord—such as eloquence, brilliance, goodness, ability, and so forth—constitutes the iniquity of the ministry. Any reliance whatever upon one's own strength in serving the Lord is a sin of the sanctuary.

Of God, For God

We can only serve God with that which is *of God*. *Nothing but what comes forth from God can be used in the service of the Lord*. You

may have enthusiastic meetings where emotions are stirred, but this may all be on the natural plane and will prove to be wood, hay, and stubble that will never go through the fire. We may even look back and praise the Lord for all the blessings He has allowed us to see which were upon other lives in the past, but unless this has been ministry based on the death and resurrection of Philippians 3 it will never go through the fire.

You must be as the dead rod laid up before the Lord *for a night*. For a night, not for ten minutes. Many of us emerge too soon. God lays us up, but we ourselves are only to come out in the morning. Everyone must go through this period of death. It may be for months or it may be for longer, this period of death: gone is our ministry, our spiritual wealth is taken away, everything we once possessed and rejoiced in and knew and experienced is removed, our prayer life is gone, our witness is taken away. All indeed seems to be darkness and death; yet we are in God's hands, lying before Him in the sanctuary. We refuse to look within and examine ourselves to see where we are, as to what is self and what is God, as to what is soul and what is spirit. Because all which is within us is, and ever will be, darkness. So we simply keep our eyes on the Lord. We know that resurrection morn will come, but we keep our hands off ourselves and let the Lord do His perfect work during this whole night of death to everything.

All work ought to be service to God. If we are serving God, if we are ministering to the Lord, then we are priests indeed.