

THE RECOVERY OF THE PRIESTHOOD FOR GOD'S BUILDING
(Lord's Day—Second Morning Session)

Message Eight
The Recovery of the Priesthood for God's Building

RK Hymns 837

	Scripture Reading: Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Eph. 2:21-22; 3:16-17a
Rev 1:5	And from Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and has released us from our sins by His blood
Rev 1:6	And made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be the glory and the might forever and ever. Amen.
Rev 5:9	And they sing a new song, saying: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for You were slain and have purchased for God by Your blood men out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
Rev 5:10	And have made them a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign on the earth.
1 Pet 2:5	You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
1 Pet 2:9	But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people acquired for a possession, so that you may tell out the virtues of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;
Eph 2:21	In whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord;
Eph 2:22	In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.
Eph 3:16	That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man,
Eph 3:17a	That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, ...

I. The Lord's recovery is realized by the priesthood; actually, the Lord's recovery is the recovery of the priesthood—Zech. 3:1-5; 6:12-13; Hag. 1:8, 12:

Zech 3:1	Then He showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of Jehovah and Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary.
Zech 3:2	And Jehovah said to Satan, Jehovah rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, Jehovah, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?
Zech 3:3	Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and was standing before the Angel.
Zech 3:4	And He answered and spoke to those standing before Him, saying, Remove the filthy garments from him. Then He said to him, See, I hereby make your iniquity pass from you and clothe you with stately robes.
Zech 3:5	And He said, Let them put a clean turban upon his head. And they put the clean turban upon his head and clothed him with garments while the Angel of Jehovah stood by.
Zech 6:12	And speak to him, saying, Thus speaks Jehovah of hosts, saying, Here is a man, whose name is the Shoot; and he will shoot forth from his place and will build the temple of Jehovah.
Zech 6:13	Indeed, it is He who will build the temple of Jehovah; and He will bear majesty and will sit and rule on his throne; and He will be a priest on his throne; and the counsel of peace will be between the two of them.
Hag 1:8	Go up to the mountain and bring wood and build the house, and I will take pleasure in it and will be glorified, says Jehovah.
Hag 1:12	And Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all the remnant of the people listened to the voice of Jehovah their God and to the words of Haggai the prophet, as Jehovah their God had sent him; and the people were in fear before Jehovah.

A. With the priesthood there has always been failure on the human side and continual recovery on the divine side:

1. The Lord Jesus, the Priest, has brought us into His priesthood through His redemption—Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10.

Rev 1:5 And from Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and has released us from our sins by His blood

- Rev 1:6 And made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be the glory and the might forever and ever. Amen.
- Rev 5:9 And they sing a new song, saying: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for You were slain and have purchased for God by Your blood men out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
- Rev 5:10 And have made them a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign on the earth.
2. The whole church should be the priesthood; however, this priesthood has been lost and replaced by the clergy-laity system—2:6, 15.

Rev 2:6 But this you have, that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Rev 2:15 In the same way you also have some who hold in like manner the teaching of the Nicolaitans.
 3. The recovery of the church life is the recovery of the real priesthood; we must be recovered into this priesthood, which means that we need to be brought back into the genuine fellowship with the Lord—1 Cor. 14:26; 1:9; 1 John 1:3.

1 Cor 14:26 What then, brothers? Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.

1 Cor 1:9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 John 1:3 That which we have seen and heard we report also to you that you also may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.
 4. The Lord's recovery is a matter of the priesthood, not a matter of a work, a movement, or of doing things for the Lord.
 5. Our responsibility is not to care for any kind of work; our responsibility is simply to take care of the priesthood by learning to be possessed and occupied by the Lord until we are filled, saturated, and permeated with Him—Eph. 3:16-17a, 19.

Eph 3:16 That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man,

Eph 3:17a That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, ...

Eph 3:19 And to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God.
- B. What the Lord needs today is a group of people who are brought into His presence and even into the Lord Himself until they are one with Him—Heb. 10:19; 2 Cor. 3:18; John 17:22, 24.
- Heb 10:19 Having therefore, brothers, boldness for entering the Holy of Holies in the blood of Jesus,
- 2 Cor 3:18 But we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit.
- John 17:22 And the glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, even as We are one;
- John 17:24 Father, concerning that which You have given Me, I desire that they also may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory, which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.
- C. When the Lord has such a priesthood—a kingdom of priests—He will have the freedom to flow out and work out His will for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose—Exo. 19:6a; Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10; 4:11; Eph. 1:5, 9, 11; Phil. 2:13.
- Exo 19:6a And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. ...
- Rev 1:5 And from Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and has released us from our sins by His blood
- Rev 1:6 And made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be the glory and the might forever and ever. Amen.
- Rev 5:9 And they sing a new song, saying: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for You were slain and have purchased for God by Your blood men out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,

- Rev 5:10 And have made them a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign on the earth.
- Rev 4:11 You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power, for You have created all things, and because of Your will they were, and were created.
- Eph 1:5 Predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,
- Eph 1:9 Making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself,
- Eph 1:11 In whom also we were designated as an inheritance, having been predestinated according to the purpose of the One who works all things according to the counsel of His will,
- Phil 2:13 For it is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure.

II. The building of God's house is related to the priesthood and depends on the priesthood—Exo. 19:6a; 25:8-9; Zech. 6:12-13; 1 Pet. 2:5:

- Exo 19:6a And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. ...
- Exo 25:8 And let them make a sanctuary for Me that I may dwell in their midst;
- Exo 25:9 According to all that I show you, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, even so shall you make it.
- Zech 6:12 And speak to him, saying, Thus speaks Jehovah of hosts, saying, Here is a man, whose name is the Shoot; and he will shoot forth from his place and will build the temple of Jehovah.
- Zech 6:13 Indeed, it is He who will build the temple of Jehovah; and He will bear majesty and will sit and rule on his throne; and He will be a priest on his throne; and the counsel of peace will be between the two of them.
- 1 Pet 2:5 You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
- A. The building of the church depends on whether or not the saints will bear the priesthood before God—Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10; Heb. 3:6; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 10:19.
- Rev 1:5 And from Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and has released us from our sins by His blood
- Rev 1:6 And made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be the glory and the might forever and ever. Amen.
- Rev 5:9 And they sing a new song, saying: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for You were slain and have purchased for God by Your blood men out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
- Rev 5:10 And have made them a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign on the earth.
- Heb 3:6 But Christ was faithful as a Son over His house, whose house we are if indeed we hold fast the boldness and the boast of hope firm to the end.
- Heb 6:20 Where the Forerunner, Jesus, has entered for us, having become forever a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedec.
- Heb 7:26 For such a High Priest was also fitting to us, holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners and having become higher than the heavens,
- Heb 8:1 Now in the things which are being said the chief point is this: We have such a High Priest, who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,
- Heb 10:19 Having therefore, brothers, boldness for entering the Holy of Holies in the blood of Jesus,
- B. The priesthood upholds the building of the church; without the priesthood it is impossible to build up the church.
- C. If we are willing to come forward to God, fellowship with God, live before God, and allow God to flow through us, we will enjoy the riches of Christ and express the glory of Christ in a full way; in this way we will bear the testimony of the church, and the building of the church will be realized among us—11:6; 1 John 1:3; Eph. 3:8; 2:21-22.
- Heb 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing to Him, for he who comes forward to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

- 1 John 1:3 That which we have seen and heard we report also to you that you also may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.
- Eph 3:8 To me, less than the least of all saints, was this grace given to announce to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel
- Eph 2:21 In whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord;
- Eph 2:22 In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.
- D. In order to recover the building of God, God must first recover the priesthood—Ezra 1:1-4; 7:1-5.
- Ezra 1:1 Now in the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia, so that the word of Jehovah by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, Jehovah stirred up the spirit of Cyrus the king of Persia; and he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and put it also in writing, saying,
- Ezra 1:2 Thus says Cyrus the king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth has Jehovah the God of heaven given to me; and He has charged me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.
- Ezra 1:3 Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him; and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and let him build the house of Jehovah the God of Israel—He is God—who is in Jerusalem.
- Ezra 1:4 And everyone who is left, in whatever place he sojourns, let the men of his place support him with silver and with gold and with goods and with cattle, besides the freewill offering for the house of God, which is in Jerusalem.
- Ezra 7:1 Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah,
- Ezra 7:2 The son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub,
- Ezra 7:3 The son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth,
- Ezra 7:4 The son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki,
- Ezra 7:5 The son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest;

III. The building of God's house as the dwelling place of God is the priesthood; the holy priesthood is the spiritual house—Eph. 2:21-22; 1 Pet. 2:5:

- Eph 2:21 In whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord;
- Eph 2:22 In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.
- 1 Pet 2:5 You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
- A. *Spiritual* denotes the capacity of the divine life to love and grow; *holy*, the capacity of the divine nature to separate and sanctify—v. 5:
- 1 Pet 2:5 You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
1. The house of God subsists mainly by the divine life; hence, it is spiritual.
 2. The priesthood subsists mainly by the divine nature; hence, it is holy.
- B. The Greek word for *priesthood* in verses 5 and 9, *hierateuma*, refers not to the priestly office but to the assembly of priests, a body of priests, a priesthood.
- 1 Pet 2:5 You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
- 1 Pet 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people acquired for a possession, so that you may tell out the virtues of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;
- C. The coordinated body of priests is the built-up spiritual house.
- D. In verse 5 Peter uses the terms *spiritual house* and *holy priesthood* to indicate the church life:
- 1 Pet 2:5 You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
1. It is not the spiritual life lived in an individualistic way, but the spiritual life lived in a corporate way, that can fulfill God's purpose and satisfy His desire—Eph. 1:5, 9, 11;

3:11; Gen. 1:26.

- Eph 1:5 Predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,
Eph 1:9 Making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself,
Eph 1:11 In whom also we were designated as an inheritance, having been predestinated according to the purpose of the One who works all things according to the counsel of His will,
Eph 3:11 According to the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord,
Gen 1:26 And God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of heaven and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.

2. God wants a spiritual house for His dwelling, a priestly body, a priesthood, for His service.

IV. In our ministry as priests, we need to be one with the building and build God to build God into man and man into God—Eph. 3:16-17a; John 14:2, 23:

- Eph 3:16 That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man,
Eph 3:17a That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, ...
John 14:2 In My Father's house are many abodes; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.
John 14:23 Jesus answered and said to him, If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him.

- A. “Building God and man in one / Is their [the priests’] work before the Lord”—Hymns, #849.
B. God’s New Testament economy is for the processed and consummated Triune God to be wrought into us to become our life and our being—1 Tim. 1:4; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 3:16-17a; Rom. 8:9-10, 6, 11:

- 1 Tim 1:4 Nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God's economy, which is in faith.
2 Cor 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
Eph 3:16 That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man,
Eph 3:17a That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, ...
Rom 8:9 But you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Yet if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not of Him.
Rom 8:10 But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness.
Rom 8:6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace.
Rom 8:11 And if the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you.

1. God’s economy and goal according to His heart’s desire are to build Himself into man and to build man into Him—2 Sam. 7:12-14a; Eph. 3:17a.

- 2 Sam 7:12 When your days are fulfilled and you sleep with your fathers, I will raise up your seed after you, which will come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.
2 Sam 7:13 It is he who will build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.
2 Sam 7:14a I will be his Father, and he will be My son. ...
Eph 3:17a That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, ...

2. God’s intention in His economy is to build Himself in Christ into our being—2 Sam. 7:12-14a; Eph. 3:17a; John 14:20.

- 2 Sam 7:12 When your days are fulfilled and you sleep with your fathers, I will raise up your seed after you, which will come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.

- 2 Sam 7:13 It is he who will build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.
- 2 Sam 7:14a I will be his Father, and he will be My son. ...
- Eph 3:17a That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, ...
- John 14:20 In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.
3. God in Christ is within us to build Himself into our being and to build us into His being—2 Sam. 7:12-14a; Matt. 16:18; John 14:23; Eph. 3:17a.
- 2 Sam 7:12 When your days are fulfilled and you sleep with your fathers, I will raise up your seed after you, which will come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.
- 2 Sam 7:13 It is he who will build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.
- 2 Sam 7:14a I will be his Father, and he will be My son. ...
- Matt 16:18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.
- John 14:23 Jesus answered and said to him, If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him.
- Eph 3:17a That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, ...
- C. The Christ who is built, constituted, into us is both God's house and our house; this house is a mutual abode, where God and we, we and God, are mingled together as one entity—John 14:2, 23; 15:4a.
- John 14:2 In My Father's house are many abodes; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.
- John 14:23 Jesus answered and said to him, If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him.
- John 15:4a Abide in Me and I in you. ...
- D. In every aspect of our work—preaching the gospel, feeding the believers, establishing churches, perfecting the saints—the intrinsic element must be that we minister the building and build God into others—Matt. 16:18; Eph. 3:17a:
- Matt 16:18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.
- Eph 3:17a That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, ...
1. If we realize that God desires to work Himself into His chosen people, then the goal of our work will be to minister the building and build God into others so that the Triune God may build Himself into their being—v. 17a.
- Eph 3:17a That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, ...
2. We should reconsider the work we are doing for the Lord and ask how much of Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God has been wrought into those whom we have brought to the Lord—Gal. 4:19; Col. 1:28.
- Gal 4:19 My children, with whom I travail again in birth until Christ is formed in you,
- Col 1:28 Whom we announce, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man full-grown in Christ;
3. We need to practice one thing—to minister the processed and consummated Triune God into others so that He may build Himself into their inner man; we need to pray that the Lord will teach us to work in this way—2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Cor. 3:9a, 10, 12.
- 2 Cor 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
- 1 Cor 3:9a For we are God's fellow workers; ...
- 1 Cor 3:10 According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, and another builds upon it. But let each man take heed how he builds upon it.
- 1 Cor 3:12 But if anyone builds upon the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, stubble,
4. When we build the church with the processed and consummated Triune God, it is not

actually we who are building; rather, God is building through us, using us as priests to dispense Himself into others—Acts 9:15.

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him, Go, for this man is a chosen vessel to Me, to bear My name before both the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

- E. As we work for God today, we should participate in God's building—the constitution of the divine element into the human element and of the human element into the divine element—John 14:20; 15:4a; 1 John 4:15.

John 14:20 In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

John 15:4a Abide in Me and I in you. ...

1 John 4:15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God.

- F. As we endeavor to carry out the God-ordained way in the four steps of begetting, nourishing, perfecting, and building, our work must be based upon the processed and consummated Triune God, who is building Himself into His chosen people and building them into Him—2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 3:16-17a; 4:4-6.

2 Cor 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Eph 3:16 That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man,

Eph 3:17a That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, ...

Eph 4:4 One Body and one Spirit, even as also you were called in one hope of your calling;

Eph 4:5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism;

Eph 4:6 One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

- G. If we minister the building and build God to others for their growth in the divine life, we are building up the Body of Christ, which will consummate the New Jerusalem—Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:15-16; Rev. 21:10.

Col 2:19 And not holding the Head, out from whom all the Body, being richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews, grows with the growth of God.

Eph 4:15 But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ,

Eph 4:16 Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.

Rev 21:10 And he carried me away in spirit onto a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE LORD'S RECOVERY BEING REALIZED BY THE PRIESTHOOD

In the priesthood there has always been failure on the human side and continual recovery on the divine side. Following the restored creation, Adam was put into the real position of the priesthood. When Adam failed, God came in to recover the priesthood by His redemption. Abel was brought back by redemption into the priesthood. He became a redeemed priest to enjoy and contact God, to function with God and partake of God.

Eventually, even this priesthood under redemption was lost by man. Then God came in to select Abraham out of the fallen race and bring him into the priesthood. He became a priest interceding for others. Genesis 18 reveals that God came to the tent of Abraham. That tent was the Holy of Holies. Abraham was in the Holy of Holies being one with the Lord. Therefore, he received the vision about Sodom and the Lord's plan.

Gradually, Abraham's descendants, the children of Israel, fell into Egypt. Thus, they lost the priesthood again. But the Lord redeemed them through the passover and told them that He intended to make them a kingdom of priests, or a priestly kingdom (Exo. 19). There would not be just one priest but a kingdom of priests. However, it was not long until the whole nation of Israel fell by worshipping the golden calf. Then the priesthood was turned from the whole nation to the one tribe of Levi. Later,

during the time of Eli, the situation with the priests of the tribe of Levi was very poor. They were so fallen that they lost everything of the priesthood. But God raised up the kings and the prophets to restore the priesthood. All the kings and prophets who were with God were brought into the real priesthood.

Now we come to the New Testament. As we have seen, the Lord Jesus, who is the Priest of all priests, brought us into the priesthood through His redemption. The whole church must now be the priesthood. However, this priesthood has also been lost. Therefore, the recovery of the church life is the recovery of the real priesthood. It is not a matter of service, work, or activity. It is solely a matter of the priesthood. We must be recovered into this priesthood, which means that we must be brought back into the real fellowship with the Lord.

Clearly, it is not a matter of doing something for the Lord, nor is it a movement. The Lord's recovery is entirely a matter of the priesthood. We have to be brought into the presence of the Lord. We must learn how to be possessed and occupied by the Lord until we are filled, saturated, and permeated with the Lord. Let us forget about any kind of work. That is not our responsibility—it is *His*. Our responsibility is simply to take care of the priesthood.

The record in the Bible clearly shows that none of the work of God was initiated by man's thought or activity. All His work has been initiated through the priesthood. We must forget about the work, activities, movements, methods, forms, and even the teachings and gifts. Our one unique need is the real priesthood.

We need some time to be on the "housetop," on the "island of Patmos," on the "side of the river," and in the "wilderness." This simply means that we need some time to be separated and shut up unto the Lord so that we may spend not just our time but have our very life and person in His presence. Then He will occupy us, and our whole concept will be changed to the heavenly view of the priesthood.

I must say again that the recovery of the Lord is the recovery of the priesthood. The recovery of the church life is not a movement, work, or activity, but only the recovery of the priesthood. What the Lord needs is a group of people who are brought into His presence and even into the Lord Himself until they are one with Him. Then He will have the freedom to flow out and work out His will for the fulfillment of His purpose. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1966*, vol. 1, "The Priesthood," pp. 440-441)

ALL SERVICE MUST BE PRIESTLY

All service for the Lord must be priestly, regardless of what kind of service it is. Our service to the Lord must be a kind of priestly service. The priests in the Old Testament were not only priests but also the army, so the army was a priestly army. Priests not only stand before God, ministering unto Him, but they also fight the battle. The army of the Lord is a priestly army. This means that if we are not priests, we can never fight the battle for the Lord. We must be a priesthood in order to fight the battle for God.

After the children of Israel went over the Jordan and entered the land of Canaan, the first warfare was a battle fought by the priests. It was not fought by any secular weapons, but by the Ark. The Ark was the prevailing weapon. In addition, the priests used rams' horns. They were a peculiar army, and they fought the battle in a peculiar way with a peculiar weapon. Everything was peculiar. That is not the way we would fight a battle. Later on, however, we will see that we must learn to fight the battle in this way. Basically speaking, this army was the priesthood. I do not mean the office of the priests, but an army of priests, a body of priests coordinated together under the leadership of the Ark.

As we come to the New Testament, we see that the apostles were priestly apostles. An apostle must be a priest. If we do not know how to be priests, we can never be apostles. The apostle Paul tells us that he served as a priest in preaching the gospel. It was as a priest that he offered all the Gentile believers unto God as an offering. I believe that you have read Romans many times, but have you ever noticed that Romans 15:16 tells us that Paul preached the gospel as a priest? If we are evangelists, we must be such as priests. We must be priestly evangelists. If we are not priests, we can never preach the

gospel in an adequate way. The gospel must be preached by priestly evangelists.

Then the apostle Peter tells us that he and others had to first continue steadfastly in prayer and then in the ministry of the word. This means that to minister the word, we must first be priests. As priests we must give ourselves to prayer and spend time in the presence of the Lord. This is the priestly ministry.

Before all kinds of service, we must first serve as priests in the Lord's presence. If we are elders, we must be priestly elders. If we are deacons or deaconesses, we must first be priests. Without being priests, we can never be good brothers or good sisters in the church. But even this is not all. We must be priestly husbands, priestly wives, and priestly parents. We have to be priestly in all things.

The army must be priestly; the apostle must be priestly; the evangelist must be priestly; the minister of the word must be priestly; the elder and deacon must be priestly; the brothers and sisters must be priestly; and the husbands, wives, parents, and children must be priestly. This simply means that in the Lord's service we must first open ourselves to the Lord and spend time in His presence. This will enable Him to fill, saturate, and even swallow us up so that we may be one with Him. Then He will be our content, and we will be His expression. He will be able to say something through us and to express something from within us, whether we are fighting the battle, preaching the gospel, teaching the word, or serving as elders or deacons. Whatever we are will be a channel for the Lord to flow out. This must be our way of living, our way of work, and our way of service.

ONLY THE PRIESTLY MINISTRY CAN BUILD THE CHURCH

The church is built up basically by the priestly ministry, not by the teaching ministry. All the local churches must be local bodies of priests. We do not need much speaking, but we need the priestly ministry. A strong local church is one that is full of praying people. They may not be so strong in talking or in teaching, but they are very strong in praying. Their spirit is strong in prayer because they practice the priesthood in their daily walk. They have learned to open themselves to the Lord, to go to Him and spend time in His presence. They have learned to be filled and even swallowed up by the Lord. Therefore, their spirit is so living, so active, and so aggressive. When they come to the meetings, nothing can quench them. There is something burning within their spirit.

Do not think that I am encouraging you to pray by asking the Lord to do something. This is not my point. Real prayer is not to ask the Lord to do something for you or for the church. Real prayer is to open yourself to the Lord. Do not ask Him to do anything, but simply open yourself to Him, and let Him fill and saturate you with Himself. Then He will burden you to pray, and He will give you guidance to pray. Your prayer will then be according to the inner feeling, not according to your mind.

Why do we need to pray? It is because we cannot do anything. We can never be elders, we can never be deacons, and we can never be evangelists. We just cannot do it. So we must pray, which means that we put our trust in the Lord. The second reason we need to pray is because we realize that God must do something through us. Without us, even God cannot do anything. This is quite remarkable. Without us, the Lord cannot preach the gospel. Without us, He can never save sinners. Although we need Him, He needs us even more. So we have to pray because we cannot do anything and because without us God cannot do anything. The third reason we must pray is because God wants to mingle Himself with man. Therefore, we pray to open ourselves to Him that He may mingle Himself with us. When God and man are mingled together through priestly praying, God will flow out through man to do His work.

So we see that if we are going to build up the church, we must first realize that we cannot do anything. We cannot build up the church, yet we must. This burdens us to pray. Even the Lord cannot build up the church unless we pray. The building up of the church can only be accomplished by the mingling of God with man. There must be certain ones who offer themselves to the Lord so that the Lord may mingle Himself with them. Then it will be possible for the church to be built up. This building is not by the ministry of the word, but by the ministry of the priesthood. We must simply learn to practice the priesthood; then we will see the result.

In reading the history of the church and the biographies of many spiritual persons, we found the same principle. It is not a matter of work or a matter of ministering. It is a matter of practicing the priesthood. We must have the priestly ministry. Of course, we do need people to work in the outer court, but we must know that all the activities in the outer court are under the direction of those who are in the Holy Place or the Holy of Holies. Without the priests in the Holy Place or the Holy of Holies, there is no direction for the people to work in the outer court. All the outward activities must be under the direction of the inward priesthood. We need this priestly ministry today. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee*, 1966, vol. 1, "The Priesthood," pp. 468-469, 470-472)

MINISTERING THE BUILDING GOD AND THE BUILDED GOD

Our work in the recovery today is to minister God to people. Yes, we need to save sinners and to feed the saints and perfect them. The crucial matter, however, is that we minister God to others. The God whom we minister is not just the building God—He is also the builded God. If we fail to minister God in this way, our work will be wood, grass, and stubble (1 Cor. 3:12).

I would ask you to reconsider the work you are doing for the Lord. Perhaps you have opened up a region or have brought many people to God. But I ask you this question: How much of Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God has been wrought into those whom you have brought to God? If we are sincere and genuine, we will humble ourselves and confess that not very much of the Triune God has been wrought into the ones we have brought to God. Therefore, we need to practice one thing—to minister the processed Triune God into others so that He may build Himself into their inner man. In every aspect of our work—preaching the gospel, feeding the believers, perfecting the saints—the intrinsic element must be that we minister the building and builded God to others. I would urge you to pray that the Lord would teach you to work in this way.

THE PROCESSED TRIUNE GOD BUILDING HIMSELF INTO HIS REDEEMED PEOPLE

The processed Triune God is embodied in Christ and realized as the consummated Spirit. This is the God whom we worship, preach, and minister to others. Today He is building Himself into His redeemed people in order to produce a house with Himself as the element and also with something from their redeemed and uplifted humanity. This house is the church, the Body of Christ. This house is the enlargement, the expansion, of Christ, the embodiment of the Triune God realized as the Spirit. As we carry out the God-ordained way in the four steps of begetting, nourishing, perfecting, and building, our work must be based upon the processed Triune God, who is building Himself into His chosen people. (*Life-study of 1 & 2 Samuel*, pp. 200-201)