



LESSON ELEVEN

The Budding Rod and the Law of Life

Scripture Reading:

HEBREWS 13

- 13:1** Let brotherly love continue.
- 13:2** Do not forget hospitality, for through this some, without knowing it, have entertained angels.
- 13:3** Remember those who are imprisoned as bound with *them*, those who are ill-treated as being yourselves also *likewise treated* in body.
- 13:4** Let marriage *be held* in honor among all, and the bed undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.
- 13:5** Let your way of life be without the love of money, being satisfied with the things which are at hand; for He Himself has said, "I shall by no means give you up, neither by any means shall I abandon you";
- 13:6** So that being of good courage, we say, "The Lord is my Helper, and I will not fear. What shall man do to me?"
- 13:7** Remember the ones leading you, who have spoken to you the word of God; and considering the issue of their manner of life, imitate their faith.
- 13:8** Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, *yes*, even forever.
- 13:9** Do not be carried away by various strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be confirmed by grace, not by the food *of sacrifices*, by which those who walk were not profited.
- 13:10** We have an altar from which they who are serving the tabernacle have no right to eat.
- 13:11** For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the *Holy of Holies* for sin by the high priest are burned up outside the camp.
- 13:12** Therefore also Jesus, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate.
- 13:13** Let us therefore go forth unto Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.
- 13:14** For we do not have here a remaining city, but we seek after the one to come.
- 13:15** Through Him then let us offer up a sacrifice of praise continually to God, that is, the fruit of lips confessing His name.
- 13:16** But do not forget doing good and sharing *with others*, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.
- 13:17** Obey the ones leading you and submit to *them*, for they watch over your souls as those who will render an account, that they may do this with joy and not groaning; for this would be unprofitable to you.
- 13:18** Pray for us, for we are persuaded that we have a good conscience, desiring in all things to conduct ourselves honorably.
- 13:19** And I exhort *you* much more to do this that I may be restored to you more quickly.
- 13:20** Now the God of peace, He who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, in the blood of an eternal covenant,
- 13:21** Perfect you in every good work for the doing of His will, doing in us that which is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.
- 13:22** Now I beseech you, brothers, bear with the word of this exhortation, for indeed I have written to you in few words.
- 13:23** Know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you.
- 13:24** Greet all the ones leading you and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.
- 13:25** Grace be with you all. Amen.

QUESTIONS:

Section 1:

1. According to this section, what is God's purpose?
2. Why is there a need for leadership among God's people?
3. How is the proper leadership among God's people seen?

Section 2:

1. Why is ambition good in a sense?
2. How is the budding rod related to the building up of God's people?
3. How can we have the budding rod among us today?

Section 3:

1. Why was the law called the tables of the testimony and the tables of the covenant?
2. What should be the proper relationship between the law and us?
3. Explain that the law is a type of Christ.

Section 4:

1. Where is the law of life today?
2. What should be our attitude toward the law? How is this different to religion?
3. How can Christ as the reality of the law be real to us?

THE BUDDING ROD

In this message we come to the matter of the budding rod (Heb. 9:4; Num. 17:1-10). Not many Christians have realized the full significance of the budding rod. Many simply regard the record of the budding rod as an interesting Bible story of a piece of dried wood that budded, blossomed, and yielded fruit overnight. But this incident is not a small point in the divine revelation.

Many Christians pay attention to the tabernacle. We have seen that with the tabernacle there are the altar and the laver in the outer court; the showbread table, the lampstand, and the incense altar in the Holy Place; and the ark of testimony in the Holy of Holies. The ark of testimony, the unique unit in the Holy of Holies, signifies Christ as the unique testimony of God. The contents of the ark comprise three items: the hidden manna, the budding rod, and the tables of the law. In the three previous messages, we have covered the first item, the hidden manna. Many Christians can understand something of the manna, for they know that it is a heavenly food signifying Christ as the bread of life. It is difficult, however, to understand the significance of the budding rod.

THREE SYMBOLS OF EXPERIENCES

The children of Israel had many experiences in the wilderness, and the Lord commanded them to place in His presence symbols of three of the experiences through which they passed. These symbols were the tables of testimony, the manna, and the budding rod. After the Israelites had received the law at Mount Sinai, the Lord told them to put the two tables of the law into the ark (Exo. 34:1, 29; 25:21; 40:20). An omer full of manna was put in a pot and laid up before the Lord to be kept (Exo. 16:32-34). In the wilderness, the children of Israel also passed through some experiences of rebellion. Numbers 16 is an account of the most serious rebellion. Out of that rebellion came the budding rod, which was put before the testimony, which was in the ark, as a sign (Num. 17:10-11). By this we see that each of these items came out of the experiences of the Israelites. They were not teachings, but the issue, the outcome, of their experiences. Thus, if we try to understand these three items by our mentality and for the purpose of acquiring knowledge, we shall not succeed. We can only understand them in, with, and for our experiences.

THE FOCUS OF THE DIVINE REVELATION

If we would understand the budding rod, we must have a little background. God's purpose is to gain a collective people to be His corporate expression to express and represent Him that He might have a dominion, a kingdom, in which to carry out His eternal economy. Many people think that God had a partial love for the Jews, working for them and doing things for them, and that He did not care for the Gentiles. This is a religious concept; it is not the focus of the divine revelation. The focus of the divine revelation is that the eternal God has a purpose. This purpose is to gain a people as a corporate unit to contain Him, to be one with Him, and to let Him be one with them that they might be the living expression of the invisible God, and that God might have a kingdom on earth to carry out His economy for His glory and to deal with His enemy. This was God's purpose when He called the children of Israel out of Egypt, making them a chosen and a called people.

THE NEED OF LEADERSHIP FOR THE BUILDING UP OF GOD'S PEOPLE

As such a people outside of Egypt, the Israelites were walking in the wilderness toward God's goal. The children of Israel were at least a few million in number, for the male warriors alone numbered more than six hundred thousand (Num. 1:45-46). Since the number of the Israelites was so great, there was certainly the need, as there is today, for the building up of God's people. For the building up of the people of God, there was, in turn, the need for some authority. Using today's term, there was the need of leadership. As we shall see, God did not only raise up this leadership— He built it up. The leadership among the children of Israel was a corporate leadership comprising at least two men: Moses, representing the aspect of dominion and kingship, and Aaron, representing the aspect of image and priesthood.

THE REBELLION IN THE WILDERNESS

The journey through the wilderness was a test to the Israelites. When the Lord sent Moses to the children of Israel, He told him to speak to the people, saying on His behalf, "I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto...a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exo. 3:17). This was a good promise. The children of Israel were delivered out of the land of Egypt and they should have entered into the land of milk and honey. But due to their unbelief, which is recorded in Numbers 14, they could not enter in. Eventually, in Numbers 16, the rebels blamed Moses and Aaron, and not their own

unbelief, for their not entering into the good land. The rebellious ones said, "Is it not enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, but must you also lord it over us? Indeed, you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey" (Num. 16:13-14). Numbers 17:10 refers to these rebellious ones as "the rebels." The Hebrew word rendered rebels means "sons of rebellion." These sons of rebellion seemed to be saying to Moses and Aaron, "You promised to bring us into a land flowing with milk and honey, but you have not done it. Don't you know that the land out of which you brought us was a land of milk and honey? You have not fulfilled your promise." These sons of rebellion even said that Egypt was the land of milk and honey. What rebellion!

Who were these rebels? The first was Korah. Korah, who was a Levite (Num. 16:1), considered himself to be the same as Moses and Aaron, who also were Levites. Korah might have said within himself, "You two are Levites. How about me? Am I not also a Levite? Why must you take the lead, while I have no share in it?" Two of the other rebels were Dathan and Abiram, descendants of Reuben, the first son of Jacob. Considering themselves to be the tribe of the birthright, they might have said, "You Levites are number three, but we, the sons of Reuben, the first son of Jacob, are number one. Since you came after us, why should only the two of you take the lead?" Eventually, they all said to Moses and Aaron, "Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them: wherefore lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?" (Lev. 16:3). This was the subtle, devilish argument and condemnation within those rebels. What a rebellious root we see here!

THE VINDICATION OF THE PROPER LEADERSHIP

In Numbers 17 God seemed to be saying to Moses, "Those sons of rebellion were fighting with you over the leadership. Tell them that I shall do something to vindicate the leadership. I shall show them who the real leaders are, and their mouths will be shut." In Numbers 17:2 the Lord said to Moses, "Speak unto the children of Israel, and take of every one of them a rod according to the house of their fathers, of all their princes according to the house of their fathers twelve rods: write thou every man's name upon his rod." A rod is a piece of dead and dried-up wood. Its nature is that of dead wood. What is the function of a rod? It is to rule over others. A rod is different from a staff. A staff is for

helping and supporting those who are weak and crippled and who have difficulty standing or walking. But a rod is not for supporting; it is for ruling and beating. According to the book of Proverbs, a father must use a rod to discipline his children (Prov. 23:13-14).

Our God is very wise, and He had the best way to vindicate the leadership. God did not argue. Rather, He seemed to say, "Since you have been arguing about the leadership, I ask you to bring your rods in before the testimony. You thought that you had the rods and could rule over others, and that Moses and Aaron assumed too much. You said that since you are all the people of God you all have the same authority. Do you have authority? Every tribe has a rod. Bring your rods to Me and put them in front of My testimony for a night, and let us see what will come out." In Numbers 17:5 the Lord said, "And it shall come to pass, that the man's rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom: and I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you."

Twelve rods were laid up before the Lord in the tabernacle of witness (Num. 17:7). Numbers 17:8 says, "It came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds." This signifies that the real leadership, the real authority, is in the budding life. This life not only buds and blossoms; it yields fruit that we might feed others, not that we might beat them. Although the rod is for ruling, this ruling is for feeding, not for beating.

The leadership among God's people is different from that found among the Gentiles. All the Gentile kings use their rods for ruling. No rod among the Gentile leaders is useful for feeding, because none of their rods is living. Every rod is just a piece of dead wood. Only with the proper leadership among God's people is there a rod budding with resurrection life and yielding fruit to nourish others.

The almond tree is the first tree in the year to blossom, blossoming in either January or February. The first fruit which comes out of a tree is the almond. This signifies resurrection. Hence, the budding, blossoming, fruit-yielding rod signifies the resurrection life of Christ. The leadership among God's children must be Christ Himself as the resurrection life which buds, blossoms, and bears almonds to feed God's people.

THE AMBITION AND REBELLION WITHIN US

Do not consider the children of Israel in Numbers 16 as being separate from one another. We must look at them as a collective person, a corporate person, who includes Moses, Aaron, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Within us, there are both Moses and Aaron and Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Both ambition and rebellion are in our being. Sometimes we cannot help laughing at ourselves, for we are so ambitious for God, yet we are so rebellious. I believe that everyone of us has experienced being ambitious and rebellious at the same time. Unless you have no heart for God, you have experienced this. As soon as you began to have a heart for God, you found that both ambition and rebellion were within you. The first rebellion is the rebellion of the soul, the mind, against your own spirit. The second rebellion is your rebellion against those who are over you or before you.

JUDGMENT AND VINDICATION

Thank God for ambition and, in a negative sense, thank God for rebellion. The rebellion in Numbers 16 brought in God's judgment and vindication. Firstly, God judged the rebels. After judging the rebellious element, the Lord commanded that the brass censers of the rebellious ones be made into plates for the covering of the altar as a sign to the children of Israel (Num. 16:36-40). After this, God told Moses to have twelve rods laid before His testimony. This was not for judgment; it was for vindication. Out of this vindication, the budding rod came forth. God then told Moses to bring Aaron's rod before the testimony "to be kept for a sign against the rebels" (Num. 17:10). Hence, there were two signs—the brass plates covering the altar, which came as a result of God's judgment, and the budding rod before the testimony, which came through God's vindication.

Ambition and rebellion are both within us. We all have them, for we are the real Israel. Among and within the Israelites there were both ambition and rebellion. Firstly, God judged and burned the rebellious element. This judgment was then followed by God's vindication. As a result of this judgment and vindication, two signs came forth—one at the altar in the outer court and the other in the ark in the Holy of Holies. These signs indicate that our natural, rebellious nature must be judged and burned, and that resurrected ambition must be vindicated, and made to bud, blossom, and yield fruit. In this way we have the proper leadership.

In the ark in the Holy of Holies we experience Christ as the real leadership. Concerning the leadership, there are two aspects. The first is that the natural, rebellious element must be burned on the altar. The second is that in the Holy of Holies whatever has been regenerated into us and whatever belongs to the resurrected life must be enriched, strengthened, and made to bud, blossom, and bear almonds. Here is real leadership.

THE BUDDING ROD AND THE BUILDING UP OF GOD'S PEOPLE

The budding rod is related to the building up of God's people. If we only had Hebrews 9:4, we could not see this. But if we consider the first mention of the budding rod in the Old Testament, we shall see that it is fully related to the building up of God's people. In the previous message we pointed out that for the fulfillment of His purpose God had to have a people as a corporate unit. In the Old Testament, this people was the children of Israel. They were at least a few million in number and had to be built up as one. According to the record of the history of Israel, they were treated as one unit. The Bible does not say that they were saved individually. No, they were all saved corporately. They held the Passover all together as a corporate people and they all crossed the Red Sea as one unit. Moses did not cross the Red Sea alone, with Aaron following him a few days later. Even as they were wandering in the wilderness, they were a corporate people, not a group of individuals with everyone taking his own way. Moreover, among them was the tabernacle, God's unique dwelling place. There was not one tabernacle of God in Moses' backyard and another one in Aaron's yard. There was just one tabernacle which, as God's unique dwelling place, was the center for the building up of God's people. As we have seen, in order for so many to be built up together, there was the need of the leadership. The budding rod is related to this leadership and is for the building up of God's people.

When many Christians read Hebrews 9, they pay no attention to the budding rod because among them there is not the building up of God's people. I would like to address a question to those who have been Christians for many years: have you ever heard a message telling you that what God needs today is the building up of His people? Many today talk about spirituality, gifts, behavior, and speaking in tongues, but who is concerned about the building up of God's people? Without the building up of His people, there is no way for God to fulfill His purpose. God wants a people that is built up as a unique unit. As the Head, Christ

needs the Body, not many separate members. And God needs a house, not a pile of stones. This is what God is after today. If we are not for this, we have neither the standing nor the qualifications to understand the significance of the budding rod. If you have no interest in God's eternal purpose but are still for the world, everything in this message will merely be vain talk as far as you are concerned.

Consider the tabernacle. There is no building at the altar. What we see at the altar is the sacrifice for redemption. Although this is wonderful, it is not God's goal. It is the beginning, not the end. As we have seen already, the experience of the tabernacle starts with the altar and consummates with the ark. Within the ark there are three items—the hidden manna, the budding rod, and the tables of the law. At the altar we see nothing regarding the building. Neither do we have the building at the laver. The washing of the life-giving Spirit at the laver is for the building, but it is not the building itself.

From the laver we proceed to the showbread table, where there is much food for us to eat. But eating should not simply be for eating; it also must be for the building. The term hidden manna is used only once in the New Testament. It is found in Revelation 2:17 which says, "to him I will give of the hidden manna, and to him I will give a white stone." This verse indicates that eating the hidden manna transforms us into a white stone. Eating the hidden manna transforms us into an acceptable stone, and this transformation is for God's building. Eventually, as Revelation 3:12 indicates, the eating ones are built into God's temple. By this we see that eating is for the building. At the showbread table, however, we still do not see the building. Hence, we must not stop here but continue on to our destination.

From the showbread table we go to the lampstand and from there to the incense altar. At neither of these two stations do we see the building. Then we enter into the Holy of Holies, touch the ark, and find within it the budding rod. Why was the budding rod not found at the altar? If it were at the altar, you could never have any experience of the ark. If you enter into the Holy of Holies and experience the ark, you will discover that in the ark is a basic item—the budding rod. Following this, we must learn the significance of the budding rod—that it is related to God's building. If you are seeking the Lord, you must realize that God's goal is to bring you to the budding rod within the ark in the Holy of Holies.

THE WAY TO HAVE THE BUDDING ROD

Now we come to a very crucial point—the way to have the budding rod. The budding rod follows the hidden manna. This means that if we enjoy the hidden manna, we shall bud, for the issue of enjoying the hidden manna is the budding rod. How much you will bud with life depends on how much you eat of the hidden manna. We all need to exercise our spirit to contact the hidden Christ and to enjoy the topmost portion of the Christ hidden in the divine nature. The more we enjoy the hidden Christ as the highest portion in the divine nature, the more our rod will bud. There is no need for you to compete for any position, nor to care for anything. Simply enjoy the hidden manna which will nourish you and cause you to bud. As long as you are budding, you are the authority. If you bud, blossom, and yield almonds, others will know that you are the authority.

The authority among God's people today is neither capability nor position; it is the budding, the blossoming, and the fruit-bearing. We should only care for the enjoyment of the top portion of the hidden Christ, that we might be able to bud even during the dark night. Although the night is dark, we are budding, blossoming, and yielding almonds to nourish others. The one who buds, blossoms, and yields almonds is surely the authority among God's people.

In the book of Hebrews, we see that we must experience Christ at the altar, at the laver, at the showbread table, at the lampstand, at the incense altar, and at the ark in the Holy of Holies. Here in the Holy of Holies we enjoy Christ in God's presence. This enjoyment causes us to bud, not with our ability but with the resurrected life. In this way, God can exercise His authority for the building up of His people. I have the full assurance that this is exactly what God is doing among us. He is causing us all to realize the judgment of the natural element and to participate in the resurrected life that we may bud, blossom, and yield almonds.

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THE LAW BEING GOD'S TESTIMONY

In the Bible it is difficult to find the term the tables of the law. The Old Testament frequently speaks of the tables of the testimony (Exo. 31:18), and the New Testament mentions the tables of the covenant (Heb. 9:4). Why was the law called the tables of the testimony and the tables of the covenant? It is quite easy to understand why the law was called the tables of the covenant because

in the Old Testament the law was the old covenant. It is difficult, however, to understand why the law was called the tables of the testimony. When God commanded Moses to build the ark (Exo. 25:10), He said, “Thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee” (Exo. 25:16). The testimony in this verse undoubtedly denotes the law. God did not say to put the law in the ark; He said to put the testimony into it. Because the testimony was placed in the ark, the ark was called the ark of the testimony (Exo. 25:22). Furthermore, the tabernacle was called the tabernacle of the testimony (Num. 17:8, Heb.). Hence, we have the testimony, the ark of the testimony, and the tabernacle of the testimony. When the manna and the budding rod were placed before the law, they were put in front of the testimony (Exo. 16:34; Num. 17:10). Whatever was placed in front of the testimony was before God (Exo. 16:33-34), for the testimony could not be separated from Him. When something was before the testimony, it was before God, and when it was before God, it was before the testimony. What is this testimony? We have seen that the ark is called the ark of the testimony and that the tabernacle is called the tabernacle of the testimony. The law was called the testimony because it testified of God. For this reason, it was God’s testimony.

In Genesis 1:26 we are told that God created man in His own image. God’s intention is to have an expression through man. This expression is His testimony. Therefore, the testimony of God is the expression of God. It is God expressed. God’s intention has been, still is, and for eternity will be the same—to work Himself into man that He may be expressed and have a testimony. But before God accomplished this, man fell. In his fallen nature, man tried to do good in order to please God. Because of this, God gave man the law. God gave man the law because man did not know that, as a fallen being, he could neither satisfy God nor express Him. After the law was given, however, God immediately changed the term, calling it the testimony. What God gave man was the law, but it was not mainly called the law but the testimony. In Psalm 119 the word testimony is used many times to denote the law (vv. 2, 88, 168). Every time this word is used in Psalm 119 it refers to the law.

According to man’s concept, the law means the ten commandments. But God’s intention was not that the law should be some commandments, but that it should be His testimony. Although you may be able to recite the commandments, perhaps you

have never heard that the testimony in Psalm 119 is the law. In fact, in the book of the Psalms the word testimony refers to the law. I say once again that in God’s intention and according to His concept, the law is His testimony. But in the human concept, the law is the ten commandments. If you are trying to keep God’s law, it will certainly be the ten commandments to you. But if you know what life is, and if, instead of trying to keep the law, you walk with God, you will realize that the law is God’s testimony, God’s expression.

THE TWO ASPECTS OF EVERY LAW

Every law has two aspects, the aspect of the law-keeper and the aspect of the law-maker. Laws are for people to keep. As we have mentioned several times in the past, the kind of law you make reveals the kind of person you are. If bank robbers could make laws, they would legalize bank robbing. Some legislators want to legalize such an evil thing as prostitution. This reveals that they themselves are evil. Evil lawmakers will enact evil laws. That the laws we make express the kind of people we are is true not only in a nation but also in a family. If the parents in a family get up very late every day and do not clean the house, they will make family laws which allow their children to get up late and to be messy. But if the parents are strict, clean, neat, and diligent, they will have a different family law. They will require their children to arise early in the morning, to wash themselves, and then to clean their rooms. If I visit this kind of home and see this type of regulation, I shall immediately know that the parents there must be diligent and clean. But if I go into a home where everything is a mess and where the children are allowed to sleep until late in the morning, I shall also realize what kind of people the parents in that home are. Since the laws we make testify to what we are, our law becomes our testimony. On the side of the law-maker, the law is a testimony; on the side of the law-keeper, the law is a commandment or regulation. God’s law also has these two aspects. To us who attempt to keep the law, it is the ten commandments, but to God, it is His testimony.

THE LAW AS A TYPE OF CHRIST

I have read some books which say that the law is a type of Christ. For a long time, I was troubled by this. How can the law, whose position is that of the concubine (Gal. 4:24), be a type of Christ? From the aspect of the law as commandments for us to keep, its position is that of the concubine. But from

the aspect of the law as the testimony of God, it is a type of Christ. The real, living, full, and adequate testimony of God is just Christ Himself. Thus, the law typifies Christ as God's living testimony. Christ expresses God. The law was given, but Christ came to be the living expression of God (John 1:17). In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God (John 1:1). Then the Word became flesh, full of grace and reality (John 1:14), for the purpose of being the expression of God. Because God is embodied in Christ, Christ is the living, full, and adequate testimony of God.

We have seen that the law is God's testimony, God's expression. If you want to know what kind of God God is, you should read the laws He has made. If you read the ten commandments, you will see that the Maker of those laws certainly must be a holy One, a righteous One, a loving One, One who is in the light. The ten commandments prove that God is holy and righteous and that He is love and light. God is a God of light and a God of love. He Himself is light and is love (1 John 1:5; 4:8), and He is holy and righteous. The law testifies that He is such a God. But the law was merely a testimony in letters. When Christ came, the testimony of God became living. It was no longer letters, but a living Person. While Jesus was on earth, He was God's living testimony. Wherever He went, He expressed God. Whatever He did, said, and thought expressed God. Because He was the embodiment of God, He was the expression and testimony of God. If in the days of the Old Testament you wanted to know what God was like, you had to consult the law. But today if you want to know what God is like, you must come to Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament the law was God's testimony, but today Jesus Christ is His living, full, and adequate testimony.

THE ULTIMATE AND CENTRAL ITEM IN THE TABERNACLE

Holding this concept of the law as the testimony of God will help us to understand Hebrews 9. Hebrews 9:4 mentions the tables of the covenant, referring to the tables of the testimony of the law. According to Hebrews 9, the tables of the covenant were the last of the items related to the tabernacle. In the outer court were the altar and the laver; in the Holy Place were the showbread table, the lampstand, and the incense altar; and in the Holy of Holies was the ark in which were the hidden manna, the budding rod, and the tables of the covenant. In this we see that the last and ultimate item is the tables of the covenant, that is, the testimony. The three items in the ark are

deeper than those in the Holy Place. The items in the Holy Place are merely the beginning, but the items in the ark are the ultimate consummation. The ultimate consummation of the showbread is the hidden manna, the ultimate consummation of the incense altar is the budding rod, and the ultimate consummation of the lampstand is the testimony. Of all the things related to the tabernacle, the tables of the testimony are the topmost. Not only are they the top item; they are also the most central item. They are in the very center of the tabernacle.

In the tabernacle we can see a number of layers. The first layer is the curtain separating the tabernacle and the outer court from everything else, the second is the wall of the tabernacle, and the third is the veil separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. The ark of the testimony, within which is the testimony, is the fourth layer. Thus, the testimony is in the center of the tabernacle.

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LAW OF LIFE BEING IN CHRIST

As saved people, we are the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16). Our body is the outer court, our soul is the Holy Place, and our spirit is the Holy of Holies. The law of life is neither in the outer court nor in the Holy Place but in the Holy of Holies. However, it is not sufficient to say that it is only in the Holy of Holies, for it is in the ark, that is, within the fourth layer. The law of life is in the ark, the ark is in the Holy of Holies, the Holy of Holies is in the tabernacle, and the tabernacle is within the separating curtain of the outer court. We have seen that the outer court is our body, that the Holy Place is our soul, and that the Holy of Holies is our spirit. What then is the ark? It is Christ. Since Christ is the ark, we should not say that the law of life is directly in our spirit. Although we have a spirit, if we do not have Christ in it, the law of life is not in our spirit. The law of life is in our spirit because the law of life is in Christ and Christ is in our spirit.

Why did God not tell His people to put the law in the altar? Why did He command them to put it into the ark? It would have been a mistake for God to put the law in the altar, because His intention was not that man should keep the law. No, according to God's concept, the law was to be His testimony. Therefore, He put His law in the ark in the Holy of Holies.

Do you think that you can be like God? It is impossible. If you read the ten commandments every day, prayed about them, fasted concerning them, and tried your best to keep them, you would still be unable to fulfill them. You can never make yourself correspond to God's law. Neither can you express Him. God's intention is not that we try to obey the law nor attempt to express Him. Firstly, His intention is to show us what He is. However greatly we may love the law, we cannot fulfill it. What then should God do? He said, "This is the covenant which I will covenant with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will impart My laws into their mind, and on their hearts I will inscribe them, and I will be God to them, and they shall be a people to Me" (8:10). God's intention is to put His law into us, into our inward parts and even into our heart. This does not mean that we should keep the law. No, it means that the law will work itself out from within us. This reveals why God put the law into the ark and put the ark into the Holy of Holies. How can this law get into us? Only through Christ. When Christ gets into us, this law comes into us. When we received Christ, we received the law. The law is in Christ, and Christ is in our spirit. Thus, Romans 8:2 speaks of "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." Not only is this law in Christ; it is Christ. When you received Christ and accepted Him as your Savior, you received the law of life.

LETTING CHRIST LIVE OUT OF US

When God gave the law to Moses, He did not intend that His people should keep it. He gave them the law to show them what kind of God He is and to reveal to them what He wants. Because He wants man to be His expression, He wanted them to be like Him, to be the same as He is. Although God had this desire, nothing happened. Instead, man tried to imitate God, attempting to make himself the same as God. But man failed. One day the real law, the living law, Christ, the reality of God's testimony, came, and we received Him into us. As a result, this real law, the reality of the law, has been wrought into the very center of our being. Now in the innermost part of our being is something wonderful—Christ Himself as the reality of the law. We have seen that the innermost matter in the tabernacle is the law. Today, the innermost thing within us is Christ in our spirit as the reality of the law. Now that we have this law within us, it is no longer a matter of our keeping the law; it is absolutely a matter of allowing Christ to live out of us. We should not try to keep the law from without, but let Christ live Himself out from within.

Every religion, whether it is Judaism, Catholicism, or Protestantism, is the same. God's intention is to put the law into our innermost part and to have us submit ourselves to it, not to try to keep it. Although we cannot keep the law, we should submit to it and let it live itself out of us. Religion, which teaches people to keep the law, is the exact opposite of this. When Christians read the Bible, they often select verses to keep as commandments. For example, the married brothers who are not good husbands always choose the commandment which says that the wives should submit to their husbands. But the better husbands choose the commandment which says that the husbands should love their wives. These brothers say, "O Lord, I can't fulfill this commandment. Please come in to help me. Lord, in the past I have not behaved as a loving husband. Forgive me and make me the best husband." Although you may pray in this way, you will never succeed. Such a husband must realize that the real love for his wife is Christ. Since this love is in us, we need not try to love. We should simply submit to this love, that is, to Christ, and let Him come out of us.

Take the example of humility. James 4:6 says, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." After reading this verse in the past, I prayed, "Lord, I want to be humble. But You know, Lord, that it's difficult for me to be humble. I ask You to please help me." This prayer is in the darkness of religion. One day, the Lord opened my eyes, and I saw that my name is pride and that I could never be humble. How can pride be humble? I am a dog. How can a dog be a bird? It is impossible. Our eyes must be opened to see that we can never be humble and that real humility is Christ. We should simply submit ourselves to Him and say, "Lord, You do it. It is no longer I, but Christ who lives in and out of me." If you simply submit to Christ, He will live Himself out of you, and you will become the expression and testimony of God. This is God's economy.

THE WAY TO HAVE CHRIST AS THE REALITY OF THE LAW

How can Christ as the reality of the law be real to us? Consider the contents of the ark once again. The first item, the manna, is firstly followed by the budding rod and then by the testimony. This implies and even indicates that when we eat and enjoy Christ as the hidden manna, something will bud in us. The manna we eat eventually becomes the budding element in us. The more we eat and enjoy Christ, the more He becomes our budding element. When this element blossoms and yields

fruit, that is the testimony, the expression. Sometimes in the late afternoon I am exhausted and my stomach is empty. This indicates that I need to eat something. After I eat, I am filled and experience a quick transformation, for what I have eaten for dinner begins to blossom out of me, becoming my expression and testimony. In like manner, if we would experience Christ as the reality of the law, we must firstly eat the hidden manna. Once this manna gets into us, it will become the budding element, and this budding element will bring forth the fruit which is God's expression and testimony.

We should not stay at the altar, nor linger at the laver, nor even remain in the Holy Place eating the superficial food. We must come forward to the Holy of Holies, dive into the ark, and eat the hidden manna, the hidden Christ. This Christ will then become our budding element. When He buds and blossoms, He will yield the fruit which will be God's expression and testimony. This expression will correspond to and even surpass the ten commandments. Praise the Lord that now we are not in the outer court, nor even in the Holy Place, but in the Holy of Holies. Now that we are touching the ark and eating the hidden manna, we shall surely bud, blossom, and bear fruit. In this way, we shall have the testimony of God.

