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T. Austin-Sparks



Published as an E-book

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T. Austin-Sparks - on Restoration

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The Abiding Meaning of Pentecost

Readings: Acts 2:1-36; Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 16:28; Acts 2:34; 1 Corinthians 15:25.

Acts is pre-eminently a book of principles; and it is just here we so often go wrong in looking for the repetition of the form by which those principles were expressed; forms of expression change, but the principles abide.

Though the Lord may do a fresh thing, He will not necessarily use the same form, but He will do it on the same principles; these principles are eternal, changeless; they abide for ever.

We are so often wanting a repetition of Pentecost in the form it took then, of manifestations and demonstrations on the outside. The Lord will do a new thing; and things basic to His activity then will be basic to His activity always. Principles, and not forms, are the things for which we are to look.

The basis of everything at Pentecost centred in and related to *one thing*, the enthronement of the Lord Jesus in heaven in the full virtue of His universal triumph. So far His universal triumph has not reached its full end: "Sit thou on my right hand UNTIL..." (Ps. 110:1). He sits there in virtue of His universal triumph; and that triumph in this age is working out to its full issue; "until..."

1 Cor. 15:25,26: "For he must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet. The *last* enemy that shall be destroyed is death." "But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." He must reign until - His reign has now begun!

Everything that took place at Pentecost centred in that and related to that enthronement of the SON OF MAN.

Acts 2:22, 32-36: "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, *a Man* approved of God... this *Jesus* did God raise up... being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He hath poured forth THIS, which ye see and hear... let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made HIM both LORD and

CHRIST, *this* Jesus whom ye crucified." That is the centre, pivot and heart of all that took place at Pentecost.

Too often our attitude suggests that the Lord Jesus is hardly equal to the situation, and that principalities and powers, and the Devil have the dominion and authority, or that it is a very big fight with an almost doubtful issue!

Pentecost represents the beginning of the heavenly sovereignty of the Lord Jesus, and some of them saw the Son of Man coming into His kingdom ere they tasted of death. Jesus said unto them, "Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." (Mark 9:1).

Pentecost presents a crisis and a climax, connected with which are quite a number of things. In Acts 2 see the different connections with the Old Testament Scriptures and the climax to them; link Acts 2 with Ephesians 3:8,9: "To make all men see what is the dispensation of the MYSTERY which for ages hath been hid in God... to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Let us trace the connections and the climaxes:-

1. As to the Old Testament Scriptures;

2. As to the Lord's Person and work;

3. As to the training and preparing of His instrument - the Church.

Firstly, the climax in relation to the Old Testament. Notice how it is taken up in this record in Acts 2, and read Luke 24:26,27,44: "Behooved it not the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself... and he said unto them, These are my words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me." (A.R.V.)

Pentecost Linked with all the Old Testament Scriptures,

and was the climax to all that had been written. The Holy Spirit came with the full virtue of everything that had been written in the Old Testament concerning Christ to make them real and to fulfil them; to bring those fulfilments into the personal experience of the believer. The Holy Spirit's advent was to make all the Old Testament a manifested fulfilment in the Person of Christ Jesus.

In this record of Acts 2 there is a breaking up and opening of the meaning of the Scriptures. Joel; what was the burden of the Word to Joel? "The Day of the LORD." "But this is that which hath been spoken through the prophet Joel." "THIS is that," the day when the Lord came into His own. We speak of having our day, the Lord comes into His day. Pentecost is the Lord coming into His day, He is enthroned; and this Day of the Lord is in two parts; the former took place at Pentecost, and the latter part is in the Book of Revelation.

Pentecost was the introduction of the "Day of the Lord" on the GRACE side of His sovereignty, and in the Apocalypse it is the JUDGEMENT side of His sovereignty - ONE DAY, but in two halves; and as surely as the Lord Jesus has commenced His reign in grace, so surely He will take the rod of iron to smash the nations in judgement who resist and reject His reign in grace.

The Day of the Lord is in our hearts now, He IS SOVEREIGN LORD; and so He is offered to the nations in grace, but also we have a message of authority, and if there is a refusal of His grace, there must be an acknowledgment of that sovereignty in judgement; for everything shall confess Jesus Christ IS LORD.

"Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name... and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Phil. 2:9,11)

In another part of the same record the link is with David and Solomon. With David and Solomon you have introduced a revelation of grace, glory and wonder; it needs the two persons to illustrate the reign and work of the Lord Jesus; and you come into Pentecost where it has its fulfilment and spiritual realisation.

David and Solomon are types of the Person of the Lord Jesus, in His work and reign He is David and He is Solomon, but He transcends them both; He takes up all that is typical in them and fulfils it in His own Person; Pentecost is the climax to the Old Testament Scriptures concerning Christ.

Now as to the Person, life and teaching of the Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh.

PENTECOST WAS A RECOGNITION AND A PROOF OF ALL CHRIST CAME TO BE, AND ALL HE TAUGHT, AND ALL HE DID.

All the spiritual value of that comes by Pentecost into its full vindication.

His claim to sovereignty is established by the moral and spiritual results of the Holy Spirit coming into the life of a child of God and transforming it, by causing it to know in experience (not by intellectual argument) the life of His sovereign triumph, that inward reigning in life by Christ Jesus. All that the Lord Jesus taught and did is vindicated by the Holy Spirit inworking into the life of the believer the victory of that resurrection life of the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus was vindicated by a mighty experience of the Holy Spirit! It is the spiritual and moral value of the Person, and the bringing of the fruits of that by the Holy Spirit into the life; it is the change the Holy Spirit makes in the moral life that is the vindication of the Lord Jesus. You cannot divorce moral responsibility and spiritual experience, there is no vindication thus, but chaos and contradiction. Pentecost is the climax to the Person, work, and teaching of the Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh, as it gives spiritual and moral value to those in whom He dwells; i.e., proved in experience by the Holy Spirit.

Why did the Holy Spirit come? To make experimental in the life, by the same Holy Spirit, all that Jesus is for the believer. This is the progressive and constructive work of the Holy Spirit, the transforming of men and women.

PENTECOST WAS A CLIMAX IN RELATION TO THE TRAINING AND PREPARATION OF AN INSTRUMENT.

The first chapter ends with the presentation of that instrument; the completion of the Apostolate with the inclusion of Matthias. An instrument had been trained and prepared for the continued work of the enthroned Lord. This preparation is in three parts:

1. In the days of His flesh;

2. The forty days after His resurrection;

3. The ten days after His ascension.

The First Part of the Training - In the Days of His Flesh

One year after He started His public ministry, He called and had in training for about two years those whom He chose. What were the chief features of that period of training? First, a seeing and a hearing without understanding; a very real thing. As we read the Gospels we see it was a time of laying in of a subconscious store of not understood deeds and words. Oh! but did not the Holy Spirit work on that afterwards? What does the Holy Spirit coming into our life mean? An explaining of who Jesus is; "He shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you," and until He comes words have not that potent force; "the Spirit giveth LIFE."

Second, being allowed to participate in the works and supernatural powers, and being given flashes of spiritual revelation; "flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." Only flashes, immediately passing, but a knowing something of "the powers of the age to come."

Do get the principle of this. Very often the Lord antedates things for us, and then we find them go down into death; but this is training; and has to be in order to get us, our *flesh-hold* out of it; it is a principle of training, and so the Lord brings us into spiritual co-operation with what He is doing.

Pentecost is necessary to put things into another realm, where the "I" is utterly out and the Lord is utterly in. Pentecost is the climax to this. This was all accompanied by and headed up to a complete breakdown and personal failure on the part of the disciples, they failed Him all along the line; see them with the Syrophoenician woman, distraught with trouble, crying unto them, "Have mercy on me!" and they "besought him saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us."

Again, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times?" "Lo, we have left all, and followed thee; what then shall we have?" Bargaining to get more than they gave up! and caring not for the others, only let us be first; ambition for a place of prominence; this is not the spirit of Him who emptied Himself, and humbled Himself unto the death of the cross!

Now Pentecost comes to rule them out utterly; it is no longer themselves but HIM; now they can follow to the death, now they can forgive, the personal has gone, no longer are their interests the predominant thing even in the things of

God; but solely and utterly HIS GLORY at any cost.

Pentecost demands that ground, speaks of that ground - we are finished! There is no place for mere soul-force here; soul-force in the things of God is a denial of the Holy Spirit; He is the "Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 8:2)

It is no longer our efforts, our achievements, we are out of it, and it is henceforth, The LORD did it! That is Pentecost.

The Lord is seeking to get an Instrument, by and through which to present the Lord Jesus to the nations as "PRINCE and SAVIOUR." (Acts 5:31.) And there must first be a realisation of the absolute sovereignty of the Lord Jesus in the life before there can be such a presenting of Him to the nations.

Contradiction in life brings weakness in testimony, and there can be no ruling in prayer through being in touch with the Throne. Where there is any contradiction, authority in prayer is paralysed. All this is preparation and training to gain an instrument; an instrument for the enthroned Lord, to meet His need and to establish His sovereignty in the earth.

The Second Part of the Training - The Forty Days After the Resurrection

This is another phase of their training; note the feature of this. It was an establishing in their experience of what He said He was - Resurrection in PERSON.

In the days of His flesh, He had claimed power over His life, "no one taketh it away from me... I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from my Father" (John 10:18), and for forty days He was establishing in their experience what He said He was, and all He had claimed to be. It would have been a catastrophy without those forty days, they would have lost the realilty of the *living presence* of the Lord.

It was also the establishment to them of all He had promised in relation to His resurrection; "I will never leave you." "I am with you always - all the days." "Because I live ye shall live also." He had made many promises on the ground of resurrection, and came back and established them all; and theirs was a faith in a risen, living and present Lord, and not only in a historic Jesus.

Next, He established the fact that He is *Lord of men*; and we see the

inclusiveness of His claim. All forces that could be used of men were brought in by them to put Him out of existence; but He came back! Man cannot get rid of the Lord Jesus. He is Sovereign of men.

Back of men is the Devil, he is involved in all this, and he has exhausted himself and resorted to his last weapon, Death. The answer to that is the Resurrection: "I am... the LIVING ONE; and I became dead, and behold, I am ALIVE FOR EVERMORE, and I have the keys (authority) of death and Hades." (Rev. 1:18.)

HE HAS ESTABLISHED HIS SOVEREIGNTY OVER ALL, MEN, DEVIL AND DEATH; established it in every realm.

This was the Testimony being brought home those forty days; HIS SOVEREIGNTY in all these things. He was making them know the *literalness* of His Person in resurrection to be equal to that in the days of His flesh; He was not a spirit, but literally as real in Person as before His death. Pentecost is the climax to the literalness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Next, the emancipation from the limitation of time and space. Still training an instrument for future usefulness! He is no longer bound by limitations of time, and He is seeking to bring home to them that, though not seen, His absence is never to be taken for granted. He is there all the time, and there is no time when He is not with them!

Next, the establishment on the ground of their world commission. Forty days is the period of probation which ends in a demand to assume responsibility. After forty years in the wilderness, the Israelites were commanded to occupy the land.

The Third Part of the Training - The Ten Days After His Ascension

Probation and training issue in the taking up of responsibility. Ten is the number of responsibility. See the boards of the Tabernacle ten cubits high and covered with gold. Here you get the type and teaching concerning man's responsibility towards God; man is only able to meet that responsibility (but he is able to meet it!) on the ground of redemption and in the power of the Divine nature.

Ten days were spent in praying, entering into this thing by prayer, busy with no other burden! And oh! with all the revelation He has given us, should it not bring us to our knees in prayer? Pentecost did not come one day short of full prayer preparation; forty days of revelation and then ten days' prayer; a clear

manifestation of Himself and His new thing; and the first carrying of that responsibility in ten days of prayer.

And what was the result of that praying? A thrusting out by and in the power of the mighty Holy Spirit, resurrection revelation, a seeing the fields white unto harvest, and then a giving of themselves unto prayer, until sent forth of the Spirit. Vision, prayer, go; yes, that is the Lord's order.

Here is a threefold preparation, and Pentecost is the climax to that preparation, and the ground upon which the Holy Spirit comes.

"Ye are witnesses of these things but tarry ye... until ye be clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24:48,49.)

"He was received up, after that he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit unto the apostles whom he had chosen; to whom he also shewed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God: and, being assembled together with them, he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, said he, ye heard from me... ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence." (Acts 1:2-5.)

"Then returned they unto Jerusalem these all with one accord continued stedfastly in prayer, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren."

Aspects of the City

Transcribed from a message given by T. Austin-Sparks in March 1960.
The spoken form has been retained verbatim.

A few verses from two places, one in the Old and one in the New Testament. In the Old, the first book of the Kings, chapter 7:

"Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished all his house. For he built the House of the Forest of Lebanon; the length thereof was a hundred cubits, and the breadth thereof fifty cubits, and the height thereof thirty cubits, upon four rows of cedar pillars, with cedar beams upon the pillars. And it was covered with cedar above over the forty and five beams that were upon the pillars, fifteen in a row. And there were prospects in three rows, and light was over against light in three ranks. And all the doors and posts were square in prospect, and light was over against light in three ranks. And he made the Porch of Pillars: the length thereof was fifty cubits, and the breadth thereof thirty cubits; and the porch before them, and pillars and thick beams before them. He made the porch for the throne where he might judge, even the Porch of Judgment; and it was covered with cedar from floor to floor. And his house where he might dwell had another court within the porch, was of the like work. He made also a house for Pharaoh's daughter, whom Solomon had taken for a wife, like unto this porch. All these were of costly stones, even of hewn stones, sawed with saws, within and without, even from the foundation unto the coping, and so on the outside unto the great court. The foundation was of costly stones, even great stones, stones of ten cubits, and stones of eight cubits. And above were costly stones, even hewn stones according to measure and cedar wood. And the great court round about had three rows of hewn stone and a row of cedar beams, like as the inner court of the house of the LORD and the porch of the house."

The New Testament book of the Revelation chapter 21 verse 2:

"And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband."

Verse 10: *"And he carried me away in the spirit to a mountain great and high,*

and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, having the glory of God. And her light was like unto a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Having a wall great and high, and having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel..."

16: *"And the city lieth foursquare, and the length thereof is as great as the breadth; and he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs; the length and the breadth and the height thereof are equal."*

19: *"And the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones..."*

In both of these representations we have that which is symbolic of the place where the Lord delights and purposes to dwell. The greater than Solomon is building *His* House and a House also for *His* Bride. The King is building the City where His throne is to be.

We read carefully these descriptions of Solomon's buildings and of the new Jerusalem, the Holy City. We can clearly discern three outstanding characteristics: one, strength; the second, beauty; and the third, costliness. These *are* the three major characteristics of that in which the Lord will dwell. He is most concerned for these things and He works with deep and patient application to have them the expression of Himself, of His own thoughts.

Strength! Very evident in Solomon's building, the element of strength: those *mighty* stones, those *weighty* stones and those great cedars of Lebanon. It is all the impression of strength. It's taken a long time to secure those stones, they have a long history, indeed it might be impossible to trace the beginning of those stones. That rock-like substance goes back a long way and has a long history. Those cedars of Lebanon were not planted yesterday, they speak of many a testing storm, many a long year of growth. There's nothing superficial about these things, nothing light and fancy about them, nothing will be able to carry them away; they'll stand, they'll endure. They are the *embodiment* of the very principle of patient endurance. There's eternity in their very constitution. They have passed through many a tempestuous testing; they are here in the House because of that. The King will dwell *there* because of that. They have been exposed to the elements, they have never been coddled and covered and protected from adverse elements; they've been exposed to all the forces that

could destroy. Here we have strength.

Look at that mighty City. Twelve thousand furlongs does not convey very much to our minds until we begin to sit down and remember that this is a cube. When you sit down and think about it, and I leave it for the mathematicians to work it out; length, breadth, and height – equal. Today, day by day we are impressed, almost shocked, when we read and hear of thousands of millions of pounds or miles... You know, this City if you work it out, runs into thousands of millions of cubits; thousands of millions of cubits! I just mention it in order to emphasize this fact of weightiness, the substantial, the enduring aspect.

Dear friends, I think I need hardly say any more, your minds are interpreting and applying as I speak; isn't this the history of the true people of God? Is it not? The Lord does not put us in glass houses to grow us, to be His trees; the Lord does not protect us from the storms, the adversities; He exposes us to the bitter winds and the scorching suns of adversity and trial. The Lord is working in us that which is according to His own Nature – *eternity*, the enduring, the everlasting God – that which will not be easily or hardly carried away. He is putting substance in you. Oh, today we fear that the appeal to become Christians is so often in terms of having an easy or a good time; being happy and enjoying yourself; well, thank God for ALL divine joy, but this is true to the House, to the City, that the first thing the Lord is working toward and seeking to work into His people is that substantial, steadfast, enduring faithfulness that is according to His own nature. Substantial! Oh for substantial Christians that don't need coddling and nursing and running after all the time; being pandered to to get them to go on or stand up. Men and women like cedars of Lebanon; like the hewn stones – weighty, accountable, responsible to carry weight – and all that is meant by strength.

I can only remind you again of what a large place that has in the Word of God: be strong, *be strong* in the Lord in the strength of His might, *be strong* in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Think again. Want to understand why the winds are allowed to blow so fiercely... the storms? To get us away from that natural, easy-going-ness or cheapness, lightness, frivolousness and to make us people of weight. Strength – through testing, through adversity – strength... to endure throughout all ages.

There is much which is going to be carried away in the last great testing, and if, therefore, trial and adversity is the only way to deepen us, to put caliber into us, I

suppose we must expect more of it as the time shortens.

Beauty, not staying to say much about it but it is so evident in these representations, isn't it? Beauty. The Lord is also at work in this matter. The Lord wants that which is His dwelling place, the place that He is making for Himself for His own habitation, to be attractive, to be admirable, to be grand, to be something to be wondered at. I suppose the one word that covers this whole sphere of beauty is the word "grace". Grace! If suffering is unto strength, then grace is unto beauty.

If you and I have a true apprehension of divine grace, real heart appreciation of the meaning of divine grace, there will be something about us that is not ugly, repulsive, but something beautiful, something mellow. Beauty is not fierce. Beauty is not cruel. Beauty is not hard. Beauty is in the right sense, soft. Perhaps mellow is the best word. You and I as we go on with the Lord unto His end, ought to be losing our natural hardness of judgment, of word, of attitude, and taking on more and more of the mellowness of grace. Look again at these descriptions, perhaps particularly that of the City and see how *outstandingly* is this characteristic of beauty.

Beauty! It's a mighty thing, an almost over-awing thing in its strength, its power to resist and endure and stand, and yet it is one of those wonderful things about the Lord, the Lord Jesus, and it's one of those wonderful things about anything or anyone in whom He fulfills His purpose – is the combination of strength and beauty. The balance of strength – it's not all strength and it's not all softness – marvelous balance in the Lord Jesus, look at Him! These two things brought together... and that is what the Lord would have.

And finally, costliness. How costly was Solomon's building, the gold of Ophir! There was a great, great cost bound up with those houses that he built, with the city, the foundation of the walls; all manner of costly stones… something very precious, something very valuable to the Lord. Here there is nothing cheap, there is *nothing* cheap in what is of God. Remember that! Everything that is of God is *costly*. It has a great price attached to it. There is nothing here contemptible, mean; it is the embodiment of suffering – *costly* stones.

Notice that on these twelve foundations were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb and the first was jasper, clear as crystal. Who was the first of the apostles? Simon Peter. Jasper, clear as crystal; all the mixture has gone out –

transparent, clear – but *what suffering*! Look at him: “he went out and wept bitterly”. Peter in his letters has quite a lot to say about fiery trials to test us, to try us. Peter knew suffering. Yes, but you see it produced something very precious, valuable and costly to the Lord. Was it not Peter who used that word, “unto you that believe is the *preciousness*…”? If you again think of the Lord’s ways with us, you cannot fail to see that the Lord is prepared to use a lot of time and a lot of energy and a lot of money in order to get essential spiritual value.

Those of you who have read the life of Madam Currie, the discoverer of radium, will remember the tons and tons and tons of stuff that men would call rubbish, heaped into that backyard there; collected, collected *tons* of it, you might say mountains of it, out of which to get the *tiniest* grain of radium. When it’s all reduced, just this little fragment of radium out of tons. Ah, but look at the cost of radium in those days; look at the power, the virtue in radium! The Lord seems like that, He is prepared to use tons and tons and tons *and tons* to get one fragment of this essential nature of Himself: *preciousness*. It's intrinsic energy, there is something about the nature of the Lord that is tremendously potent; the potency of Truth, the potency of Love, of God.

Now, while the Lord wants us to be scrupulously careful about money, our use of money, our care of money, He would never for a moment be sympathetic toward carelessness in that realm, He himself sometimes seems to draw upon the resources, the material resources and the financial resources, so fully, so deeply in order to turn to account for some spiritual measure and this is what I’m trying to say to you. You and I must look at everything in the light of spiritual value; that is how He looks at it. Nothing with the Lord is of any value only in so far as it results in something of Himself. You may have your millions, I don’t suppose any of you have, but if you had your millions, that to the Lord is nothing; He says, how much does that represent of Me? You may have your little and have to look at every shilling that you spend, but there *may* be, in your use of it, something of the Lord, for the Lord and so the Lord looks upon a widow’s mite in the light of spiritual value, while He looks upon the Pharisee’s plenty without one thought or word of pleasure. It’s everything in the light of spiritual value where the Lord is concerned.

Think of the matter of time, what a lot of time the Lord takes! How we get upset over this matter of time... it is one of our big problems that the Lord is so slow, waits so long, takes so much time! That’s real trouble with us isn’t it? Always trying to hurry the Lord; no, if it requires time to get what He’s after, He will

take eternity to get it, He will take a lifetime to get it. You see, the whole thing with the Lord is just *real* value, the *cost* of things.

And we could speak much about suffering, much about suffering... how much suffering the people of God know. It's a problem, the sufferings of the Lord's people, but if Paul is right, here's the answer: "Our light affliction which is but for a moment…" and you can only talk like that if you can see the other, the rest: "that worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" *eternal weight of glory!* That is the end, the object, the goal. Our light affliction; it isn't light at all, it is very heavy affliction unless we can see what the Lord is after and then perhaps affliction will be seen in a different way.

So here we are: costliness. The Lord is after this true value and when He gets that, these characteristics, when He gets them - strength and beauty and *real* preciousness, costliness - the process will be fully justified.

At the Crossroads

"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Jeremiah 6:16).

At some point - not quite easy to fix - a false current had entered the stream of the life of the Lord's people. Small at first, it had gathered momentum, until it had taken control and was carrying everything before it.

The effect was the almost total loss of a central and controlling, integrating authority; a loss of one uniting vision and objective. Out of this there arose confusion; no one knowing what *was* right or wrong. This confusion and uncertainty became wearing and wearisome, and futility took the heart out of them. The inevitable result of all this was division.

Some wearily accepted the situation and sought to neutralize it by compromise. Some, numbed and bewildered, stood with hand on hips (metaphorically) hoping that something would come round the corner and things would improve. Others were fearful and anxious as to where it would all lead to.

To this situation God spoke in the words quoted above. It was a pointer as to the way, and a challenge to courage, faithfulness, and humility.

"Stand in the ways and see", said the Lord.

The ways were the crossroads; the place of alternatives. Go back to where you made the wrong choice, took the wrong turning, and got off the way of blessing. In the light of the unhappy present, reconsider your decisions. Ask yourselves whether 'the old paths', with all their difficulties and conflicts, were not better than this present.

"Stand". Pause, reflect, consider, relax, break the spell.

The case with Israel seems definitely to come down on the side of "the old paths". There was then an authoritative voice; a throne overhead, a vision and purpose uniting, co-ordinating; a distinctive objective, and an impact upon

peoples near and far. Those days of David and Solomon were such 'old paths'. They were days when Heaven was in evidence.

Then came that false current in the nature of tiring of the heavenly, they stooped to the earthly, the tangible, the present, the popular and less ostracized. So the realm and level began to change, until the situation in Jeremiah's time was the general. But people were weary of soul.

If it is thought that the diagnosis which we have given is strained or a mistake, look at the inclusive answer in chapter 17, verse twelve:

"A glorious throne, set on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary".

The rule of the heavenly is the sanctuary; the refuge and rest. It was the way of the opened Heaven, which is the way of God's satisfaction. Says the Lord: "And ye shall find rest for your souls". We seem to have heard words like those before.

The reconsideration at the crossroads must lead to action. Having stood, asked, and seen - "walk therein". Repent, return, decide, do! "Walk therein".

The open mind and heart. The submissive and humble will. The honest and courageous resolve and committal.

"Stand". "Ask". "Walk". "Find rest".

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Sep-Oct 1964, Vol 42-5

Beholding

"I beheld the Lord always before my face" (Acts 2:25).

The last part of that quotation could rightly define the nature and object of the ministry of this little paper.

Not to propagate a teaching as such; not to constitute a new community; not to support a particular 'movement'; but truly and solely to bring and keep the Lord Jesus in view in ever-growing fullness: that is its object. It seeks to be occupied with the far-reaching purpose of God concerning His Son, Jesus our Lord.

In this connection, and according to the above quotation from David, it is impressive and instructive to note what a great influence on life the matter of seeing, or beholding, has.

It can be truly said that a great deal of what we are, and therefore of the effect that we have in this world, is the result of our seeing. There is much truth in the saying that we become like that upon which our eyes are mainly focused. This can be seen in national characteristics. The arid, austere, hard, cold, and colourless regions of the world produce a hard, austere and matter-of-fact type of people. The colourful, verdant, soft, warm and fertile realms, where nature has not to be coerced but only guided, produce colourful and easy-going people with more artistic and sentimental natures. Small and restricted surroundings produce small minds, with limited interests and understanding. The dwellers in the spheres of far distances and massive dimensions are venturesome, bold, and generous, with enterprise almost audacious. This is a general rule with occasional and particular modifications or variations. It points to the effect on an individual or a community, consciously or unconsciously, of that which is continually before their eyes.

The Bible takes much account of this fact and carries it over to all its parallels in the spiritual life. Indeed, it puts every stage and phase of the Christian life upon the basis of seeing.

The initiation or beginning of the Christian life is the result of 'beholding the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world' (John 1:29).

There were various objects of sacrifice in the great typological system in Israel, but the lamb was the centre of all. Their history as a nation began with the Passover lamb. They were ever and always reminded of that beginning by the yearly Passover. They looked upon the lamb as bearing their sin and judgment, although itself 'without spot or blemish', and knew that it was God's lamb pointed out and provided for them to look upon.

The New Testament brings the Lamb of God into view and calls for beholding. That word means more than 'take a look', 'glance your eyes toward Him'. It means, 'fasten your gaze upon Him'. It is the gaze of need, of a quest; of desperation, if you will.

"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 45:22).

Then the Bible places upon the same basis the whole matter of our progressive transformation.

'Beholding... we are changed into the same image' (2 Cor. 3:18).

It is not an effort to form some mental picture of Jesus. In the Apostolic writings He is presented to us, and for us, from various vital standpoints, by the One who knows Him best and most fully.

In 'Romans', for instance, He is comprehensively presented as the essential righteousness of God provided where none can be found otherwise, but without which there is no hope at all for man or creation.

This is not an introduction to the books of the New Testament, but a pointer to Him and an indication as to how, as we are found looking at *Him*not at the writersan influence upon our character toward His likeness will follow.

What is true in principle regarding the beginning and the progress of the Christian life is also shown to be related to its consummation.

"Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; *for we shall see him* even as he is" (1 John 3:2).

There is more that shows that that final 'beholding' will have a consummating effect in putting the final touches to the work of 'conforming to His image'. So,

from first to last, our salvation, transformation, and glorification are vitally related to our eyes, our spiritual seeing. 'The pure in heart shall see God' (Matt.5:8).

But, when I set out to pen these lines, I had other things also in mind. Our eyes are so much confronted with conditions that are contrary to Christ, and this constitutes such a battle-ground for our eyes.

The Bible contains much that shows the deplorable results of the wrong use of the eyes. Think of Eve, of David, of the ten spies at Kadesh-barnea, of Samson (who saw a woman to his spiritual undoing, and eventually lost his physical eyes), and so on.

May it not be that much of that which is to be deplored in evangelical Christianity is due to this wrong use of the eyes? Our religious book-shops are furnished with the sour and bitter fruits of time and energy spent searching out and 'exposing' the weaknesses, flaws, or faults of so much that is otherwise of true value. This can become a predisposition, an obsession, a mania, and a menace.

We look at men, at people. We look at ministries. We look at Christian work, and in all we mark the human and faulty aspects. These become our foci, and the result is that the really valuable, andperhapsmuch fuller value, is eclipsed for us by the spot that has become everything to us.

Nothing has escaped this blighting use of the eyes, even that which has been most of God. We have known greatly used servants of God having their ministry cut off from thousands of believers just because of the focusing upon a deviationor imagined deviationin some *comparatively* small point, from common acceptance. The decline of ministry in some of our great conventions can be traced to this very thing. None would be more jealous for the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, than we are, but we are equally jealous that the standard of judgment should benot tradition, or rigid systems of men, butthe measure of Christ.

Christ is the criterion, from first to last; not the judgments of men. Do Ior rather *can* Isee the Lord, if I am really looking for Him? If so, that must be my focal point. If He is there, there is hope for the rest, and I must leave that with Him.

How easy it is to sing glibly: 'Turn your eyes upon Jesus', and forget that it is

always from 'the things of earth'.

"I beheld the Lord always before my face."

For the sake of everything precious to Him, may this be true of us!

First published as an editorial in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Sept-Oct 1959, Vol. 37-5

Christianity - A Process of Transformation

Reading: 1 Corinthians 2.

"We... are transformed into the same image"
(that is: 'We pass from one form to another')
2 Corinthians 3:18.

As I have moved about amongst Christians in many parts of this world, and in many situations, one thing has been growing upon me more and more strongly. In the presence of a great deal of confusion amongst Christians and many complications in Christianity, the feeling has become stronger and stronger that the need is for Christians really to know what Christianity is, and to know what it is that they are in as Christians. That sounds, perhaps, rather drastic, but I am quite sure that a very great deal of the trouble - and I think all agree that there is a good deal of trouble in Christianity generally - is due to a failure really to understand what Christianity is. It may seem strange that I should speak to you, mostly experienced and mature Christians, about the true nature of Christianity. Well, if you feel that it is presumptuous and hardly called for, be patient, and I think that before we get very far you will feel as I do: that although we know a good deal about Christianity as it is taught in the New Testament, we are very often in difficulty ourselves for the very simple (or profound) reason that we have not really grasped the meaning of what we are in. So often, when distressed as to some situation, and perplexed that it should have come about, I have found that that is just what the Word has said would happen.

May I say to you (and I am sure you will agree after a moment's thought) that the major part of the New Testament, by which I mean all these Letters which make up the larger section of the New Testament, is all bearing upon this one thing: to make Christians understand what Christianity is. If that is true, and all these Letters *WERE* to Christians, surely we have to conclude that even New Testament Christians needed Christianity explained to them, and even then there was this necessity of just defining the real nature of that into which they had come.

Begin with the Letter to the Romans. Was that necessary for Christians? It was written to Christians, but what was it written for? To put them right in the matter of Christianity! Apparently those people were not quite clear in their position, in their lives and in their hearts as to the implications of that into which they had come by faith in Jesus Christ.

Proceed, as we are going to do, into the Letters to the Corinthians, and what are they? Set over against a background of real confusion and contradiction in Corinth, those Letters were written really to try to make the Christians understand what Christianity really is. And so on and on through the New Testament that is the object; that we and all who believe in the Lord Jesus should really have a clear understanding of what this is, of the meaning of the name we bear, and the meaning of that which we believe and into which we have come by the grace of God. We can gather it all up in this simple statement: that the whole Christian life is an education as to what Christianity is. Is that true? Do you not sometimes stand in the presence of some situation, some difficulty, some trial, some complication, some perplexity, some experience, and say: 'What does it all mean? I am a Christian. I have put my faith and trust in the Lord Jesus. I am His, but I don't understand what it all means. Why this experience? Why am I going this way? Why has this come my way? Why is my life such as it is? These many things are so full of mystery and perplexity. What is it that I have got into? Is this Christianity? Is this really what I have to expect and accept? If so, I need understanding, and enlightenment, and I need help as a Christian, for this thing is often beyond me altogether.'

Well, that is the setting - but is that true? If there is anyone who has never been that way, who has never had a moment like that, and whose path has been so nice and smooth, with everything so right and well adjusted and without any kind of trouble, I will excuse you if you like to read no further, for I have nothing to say to you.

Well now, what is the point on which these words in 2 Corinthians 3:18 are focused? "We are transformed...", and it is the present active tense: 'We are being transformed'; 'We are in a process of transformation, passing from one form to another.' There is a sense in which that fragment, that condensed verse put into those few words, touches the heart of the whole New Testament and explains everything.

Having said that, we come back to this second chapter of the first Letter to the Corinthians. This Letter (as indeed are all the Letters, but this is a very good example) is built around two contrasted words, and they are in this second chapter. Those two contrasted words describe two different types of humanity, two different manhoods, and between the two, firmly and squarely the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ is planted. Look at the chapter again in the light of that last statement! "When I came unto you... *DETERMINED* to know nothing among *YOU* save Jesus Christ, and him crucified", and everything after that rests upon that distinction between these two types which the Cross divides and says: 'That belongs to one category of human beings and this belongs to another category of human beings.' There is a cleavage cut by the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ between those two which separates them and makes them two different species of mankind. That truth follows right through this Letter. Read it through with this in your mind. The Apostle here speaks about a foundation and a building. He says: "Let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon. For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ", and then he drives the wedge of the Cross right into the superstructure and speaks of one kind of work or works, which are the product of one type of man, or Christian, and another kind of work, or works, which are the product of another kind. The first will go up in flames and will never be found in eternity. It has gone for ever. The second will abide. It will abide the fire of judgment and the test of time, and be found in the ultimate structure, or building of God.

You see, Paul is applying this principle of the divide between two kinds of Christian people, and to the two kinds of work, or fruits, from each respectively, and the building, he says, as to its eternal value, will be determined by who is producing it, by what kind of man, or manhood, is producing it. Which of the two is producing this building? Think about this! These are not non-Christians. What an immense amount is being built upon Christ that is going up in smoke! Every man's work will be tried by fire, and its real value and its endurance will be determined by and will depend upon where it comes from, that is, from which of these two types of manhood.

Now you are wondering what the two words are which define the two types of manhood. Read the chapter: "the natural man... he that is spiritual." There are the two words: the natural and the spiritual *CHRISTIANS*. They are not unconverted people, not non-Christians. Is it necessary for me to put in all the detail to confirm and ratify what I am saying? May I remind you that the Apostle Paul had been in Corinth for two whole years with these people! I do not know what

you think, but if you had the Apostle Paul going in and out for two whole years, you would have plenty of ground for consideration! He *WAS* there amongst them for two whole years, going in and out, teaching them probably every day, and then he went away for five years. Then he heard things which were reported to him by the household of Chloe. I wish everyone would do what the Apostle did! He did not take the report without investigating it. He got the report and then immediately despatched a reliable messenger to investigate, either to find that the thing was not true or to find that it was so. The messenger sent and came back, saying: 'It is all true, and worse than the report.' The deterioration in five years!

You are perhaps startled and shocked by that, and will say: 'Can it be?' Well, remember the messages to the seven churches in Asia in the Revelation, and how all those churches began. There were wonderful things in those churches at the beginning. Read the story of the beginning of the church in Ephesus, and what a story it is! Against such tremendous antagonism and hostility those people came out clearly, and they brought all their magic books, of which the price is given (and that represented a tremendous amount in human values!), and piled them up in the open street, or it may have been the market square, or some open place, and set them all aflame. That is a thoroughgoing division! But where is that church in the Revelation? "Thou didst leave thy First love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent" (Revelation 2:4-5). What can have happened? Well, I put that in by way of emphasising this possibility, at least, of declension. Why in Corinth, why in Ephesus, and why in the others that decline? Come back to the two men, the two men instead of one man, the two men instead of each individual. It is not a dividing of a company into this category and that category, but the two things in a person. You know, we are all, if we are the Lord's, in some measure natural and spiritual. Do you agree with that? The question is not whether we are altogether perfect and there is no more of the natural in us. That is not the point. The point is: Who is dominating and governing? Which of the two, the natural or the spiritual? Here in Corinth, as we see by the Letter, the natural man was in control in the men and in the women and had taken ascendancy over the spiritual man.

The two words, then, are 'natural' - and you do not need that I should tell you that the Greek word is 'soulical' - and 'spiritual'; the man of soul and the man of spirit always in conflict. Who is going to have the upper hand, the mastery, in every one of us? The two are in each person.

INTELLECTUALISM

Now what is this natural category, this natural species? Look at the Letter again. First of all, the dominance, ascendancy, control of intellectualism, the wisdom of this world. That is the thing that is being marked and underscored as a part of the trouble in Corinth; the control of intellectualism, the natural reason, the natural mind, the idea that you are going to solve the problems of life along intellectual lines. Will you tell me that that is not a peril of Christianity today? Why, it is everywhere! It shouts at you from the religious press. You may not read so much of it, but it is my business to be familiar with what is happening in the Christian theological world, and I tell you, friends, that as I read certain theological magazines I find *DEATH*. They are wearisome to the spirit. All this terrific effort to solve the problems of Christianity by the human intellect; the research, argument, discussion and debate, theses, etc.; philosophical Christianity trying to solve spiritual problems; what a weariness it is! I have to put these papers down sometimes! I cannot finish them, for they are so dead, so utterly lifeless. And that sort of thing is everywhere. It is thought that if you go to our seats and seminaries of learning with a clever brain, able to put out a convincing argument, you are going to save souls. There never was a greater fallacy!

This Letter to the Corinthians says that. Read this second chapter again and you will find that Paul is saying that. Paul was an educated man, so much so that for two thousand years the best scholars have found him defeating them, and they have not mastered him yet! Come to the religious bookshops and look at the shelves on the exposition of the New Testament, and you will find that Paul predominates. I got a book by one of our leading professors of theology in the universities and it was called *A Portrait of Peter*. This man, with all his learning, set out to give us a portrait of Peter. I opened the book and found that the first few pages were wholly occupied with Paul! He could not get to Peter because Paul was in the way, and the issue of his attempt was: 'Well, Peter was a great man, but Paul was very much greater!' Yes, this man Paul was an educated man, an intellectual man, a learned man. You cannot discredit Paul along that line at all, for he will beat you every time in that realm - but listen! 'You Corinthians, when I came to you I came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, but in fear and in much trembling. I had determined that I would know nothing amongst you intellectual Corinthians save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.' What was Paul's conclusion? 'It is no use, however much I may have of the schools, whatever I may know, however I might be able to argue with the Corinthians or the Athenians on Mars Hill, I will get nowhere along that line with a spiritual

situation like this. I have made up my mind about that.' It is part of the natural man to think that you are going to be able to build up something by intellectual, scholastic, academic acumen. The fact is that what intellect can build up, intellect can pull down!

POWERISM

Then look at this prominent word: power. It is there in the chapter: wisdom... power; and at Corinth there was a worshipping of natural power, ability to conquer by natural strength. You can call it 'powerism', for it was an 'ism' there. Crush by your superior strength, impose something forceful, mighty, upon people, and you will win. Only be strong enough and you can solve all the problems and change all the situations. 'Powerism' is the natural man's idea of how it is going to be done.

EMOTIONALISM

Then emotionalism has a large place with these Corinthians. Going to capture, captivate and master, and gain your end by force of emotion stirring up people's feelings, playing upon them, working upon them until they make an almost hysterical response. If you do that well and thoroughly you will get some Christians! The Apostle says: 'Not at all!' It is evident that these Corinthians were very emotional people.

FOOLISHNESS

What does the Apostle put over against these three aspects of the natural man? Over against wisdom he puts 'foolishness'. In the first chapter he speaks of "the foolishness of the preaching". You find that 'foolishness' was a great thing with the Apostle Paul! "We are fools for Christ's sake" (1 Corinthians 4:10). What did he mean? Well, he did not mean: 'Be simpletons!', which is what we immediately take to be the meaning of being foolish. What Paul meant by foolishness was the denial that intellectualism could find out God. 'The princes of this world, and the wisdom of this world did not find out God', said Paul, 'and they could not find Him out. They could not find out anything to do with God.' "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: and he cannot know them." Foolishness is the denial that all the wisdom and all the philosophy of the Greeks there in Corinth, where they boasted of this thing so much, could get through the barrier to find God; and that all this power of

mind and will projected and asserted in any way whatever will come up against the barrier and not get through, will not find God, nor the things of God. It is all written off as foolishness when the quest for God is pursued along that line. How foolish it is! And Paul gives a wonderful, almost startling, example of this: "God's wisdom... which none of the rulers of this world knoweth: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." There is not much sense in that wisdom, is there? Not much logic or philosophy in that!

So Paul puts what he calls 'foolishness' over against their wisdom, meaning a positive denial registered by the Cross of the Lord Jesus that mere intellectualism can find God and the things of God. It cannot, for the natural man cannot!

WEAKNESS

Over against the powerism of this mentality of the natural man, the Apostle almost glories in using the word 'weakness'. He says even that Christ was crucified through weakness, and he is always speaking about, and glorying in, his own weakness. What does he mean? The denial that this kind of human force, assertiveness, can achieve anything in the spiritual world. What a building we are tearing down!

You know, that has been the test of man right from the beginning. Was it not the test of Abraham to let go even of what God had given him in Isaac? The test of this man's real spirituality was the ability to let go. Was it true of Jacob? Was he not a man of tenacity, of determination, a man who would get what he wanted at any price, at the cost of anyone else's convenience and wellbeing? Was that not the issue of Peniel, or Jabbok? "I will not let thee go!" That is Jacob! He had been like that all his life, holding on tenaciously to what he wanted, what he had or what he wanted to have. But the finger of God touched the hollow of his thigh, and after that you can see that he is a cringing man! See how he meets his brother Esau!

You are not, whether you are Abraham or Jacob or any of the others whom we might mention, going to get through with God fully and finally by your own natural determination and tenacity. One of the great lessons of the Christian life is to learn how to let go to God. Oh, all the exhortation to be strong in the Lord, to endure, to acquit you like men and be strong, does not mean with this natural strength. It is another kind of strength, and a very different kind, a strength

which is only seen by our ability to let other people sometimes have their way, to get what they are after and set us at nought. They hold, grip, maintain things in their hands to our disadvantage, and our real strength is in our weakness. The Apostle Paul put this into words. Read the second chapter of the Letter to the Philippians: "Christ Jesus, who, being in the form or God, counted it not a prize to be on equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bondservant... becoming obedient, even unto death, yea, the death of the cross." Well, has it proved to be the right thing? 'We are being changed...' Do you see the point now?

BALANCE

So, over against intellectualism - foolishness; over against powerism - weakness; over against emotionalism - what? The denial that the quest, the craving, the pursuit of sensationalism will get you there. For I believe that was the heart of these Corinthians' lust, their excessive desire, their outreach of soul for spiritual gifts. It is impressive that it is to the Corinthians, far more than to any other church in the New Testament, that so much is said about spiritual gifts. These demonstrations, this display, these things that you can see and glory in because you can see them, are all out of sensationalism. I am quite sure, from what we read, that if you had gone into those gatherings in Corinth you would have seen some hysterical behaviour as they made these spiritual gifts, as *THEY* thought, the ground and nature of their spirituality - and they are the most unspiritual church of all. So over against unbalance, lopsidedness in the Christian Church, there is need of balance.

Do you notice one characteristic of these Christians, one defect which is written so clearly and so largely here in the Letter? There is a lack of the power of spiritual discernment, the spiritual perception, the spiritual intuition which warns us: 'Go steady! Don't be carried away! Don't be thrown off your balance! This thing may be all right in its right place and under proper control, but be careful! There is a snare in every spiritual gift, and if you make the *GIFT* the main thing and not the spiritual meaning of the gift, that thing, which in itself may be quite right, will lead you into trouble.' I am covering a lot of history when I say that. Perhaps some of the biggest problems with which some of us have had to deal in people have been the result of this unbalanced quest for the manifestation of the sensational aspects of Christianity.

Well, perhaps some of you are not able to understand all this, but this is the

situation here in Corinth, and I am only saying this to show that there are these two orders, these two categories of what I have called species of humanity which have their residence within one shell of the human body: soul and spirit. They are there, and the Apostle writes to these same people - for the second Letter is only a continuation of the first - 'We are being changed from one form to another.' What is going on? What is the process of the Spirit of God in the believer? What is the meaning of all this that the Lord allows to come our way, this discipline, these adversities, these trials, these sufferings, these difficulties, these 'strange things' (to use Peter's words, for they are strange to us as coming from God, or being allowed by God)? What is the meaning of it all? To bring about the change, the transformation from one species to another, from one kind of humanity to another. There is something in each trial, in each adversity in the suffering, which, under the sovereignty of God, is intended by Him to make a difference in us. 'We are being transformed.'

It is certainly not wrong to have a soul! It is *THAT* which has to be saved. In the course of that salvation, the great lesson is how to keep the soul under the control of the spirit. This is what is meant by being 'spiritual'. This is truly "He that is spiritual".

From "A Witness and a Testimony" July-August 1969.

Concerning Jerusalem

Reading: Nehemiah 1:1-11

In Ezra and Nehemiah which are really two halves of a whole, and they form one narrative, there is a sense in which the whole can be gathered up in three representative and symbolic things which are found there in Jerusalem, namely, the Altar, the House and the Wall. We may say that these three things represent Jerusalem, for when you come to look at the exercise of heart in Ezra and Nehemiah, it had its outworking and its expression almost, if not entirely, in connection with those three things. There were other phases and features but they were all directed toward these three things, the altar, the house and the wall. These three occupied their attention and their energies and so we may say that that is what is meant by Jerusalem, and it was a matter of concern for Jerusalem as gathered up in those three things. And when you ask for the spiritual and New Testament meaning of Jerusalem, the answer undoubtedly is that Jerusalem represents the inclusiveness and fulness of Christ. We might trace that right through the Word to very great profit. It is not our intention to do so at the moment, but if you are in need of a little bit of work with the Word at any time, I would suggest to you that you study Jerusalem in that light: the inclusiveness and fulness of Christ. And if you want to hasten your study to a swift conclusion, start in Revelation, for there the new Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem is undoubtedly the fulness of Christ.

When Nehemiah made his enquiry he learned of the state of ruin in which Jerusalem was. The altar was gone, the house had been destroyed, and the wall was broken down, until Ezra returned, replaced the altar, rebuilt the house, but still there was an imperfect representation of Christ there, and conditions were, therefore, unsatisfactory and heartbreaking. The altar gone; that resulted in spiritual defeat, for the altar was put in its place because fear was upon the people because of the peoples round about, so that the altar became the occasion of the removal of their fear, the symbol of security, safety, deliverance, victory, but the altar gone, spiritual defeat follows. The house destroyed; then the heavenly life and fellowship and fulness of the Lord's people have gone, for the house comes in after the altar, as a heavenly thing, by way of the cross, as that in which the Lord's people have their fellowship and their fulness in heavenly life.

The wall broken down; then the testimony of the fulness of Christ to the world has gone, and Jerusalem is in ruins and the Lord's testimony in its fulness as represented thereby is non-existent. The result amongst the Lord's people is a state of servitude, of that which represents a state of subjection to world powers, dishonour, that is, a loss of dignity, shame and reproach. And further, schism and strife amongst the Lord's people, for this book reveals a good deal of that amongst the Jews at Jerusalem and round about. And then poverty; terrible poverty. You read it through again and find how it was almost impossible for them to make ends meet. These are the consequences of an altar gone, and a house destroyed, and a wall broken down. They are always the consequences of that which is typified thereby. In a word, when the cross in the fulness of its meaning, is out of place, then there is spiritual defeat amongst the Lord's people. When the house, the truth of the House of God, the church, the Body of Christ has been overlooked, or ignored, or not apprehended and applied, the result is that the heavenly life and heavenly fellowship, and heavenly fulness have gone. And when the wall, the testimony of the Lord's fulness to His people, is broken down, then there is nothing to show to the world, the testimony to the world is destroyed.

The result for the Lord's people is that they are brought into a state of servitude, and this is by far the greater condition of Christian people today than the opposite. Christianity is in servitude to the world. It is almost going on its hands and knees to the world to allow it to exist. It is doing everything it can in order to get the favour of the world; it is in servitude, it is paying its tithes to the world. Whenever you see a notice or an advertisement about a sale, a whist drive or a bazaar, or something like that, you know that there there is servitude to the world, you know that the whole thing is in bondage to the world, you know that that thing cannot maintain itself in God, it can only maintain itself by going to the world, and it is having to beg its very life from the world; so much so that many Christian people are coming to feel that it is far too expensive to belong to a church, there are so many things to pay for. Oh, the shame of that, the reproach to the Lord, the indignity, the dishonour. And what about the strife and the schism amongst the Lord's people; and the spiritual poverty; that so few have anything to give of spiritual wealth and means and riches, to others. This is because the cross, in all its meaning of full victory and deliverance is not in its place. The altar has gone. It is because the great truth, the reality of the House of God, the Body of Christ is not in operation; that leads to strife, that leads to division and schism, that leads to spiritual poverty. What is the opposite of spiritual poverty in this connection? Why, an assembly constituted on the

principles of the Body of Christ in which everybody has something to give. The opposite of that is a congregation, with only one man preparing something day after day to give to the people, and if that man should fall sick there is not a soul in the congregation who can take the service or give a message, so they must rush round to find a preacher: the whole congregation is in spiritual poverty without a fragment of food to give. That is because the truth, the great truth of the House of God is not in operation. Get that truth in and all God's people are priests, and you all have something to give. Are you in the good of the truth of the House of God? Have you got spiritual riches and wealth? That is Jerusalem as the Lord wants it to be: the fulness of Christ.

And then the wall follows, and the wall is the outward circumferential expression of what is inside. That is, within the wall is the fulness of Christ, and the testimony of Christ as full satisfaction to His people is given out to the world; this is the testimony to the world that in Christ is full satisfaction. That is Jerusalem. And that was Nehemiah's concern, and Ezra's concern for Jerusalem, as they represented the complete meaning of Jerusalem in the cross, and the house of God and the testimony to the nations of the fulness of Christ, by His cross in His House. But here it was not so; the world was in the ascendency and Jerusalem was submerged. The people of God were spiritually divided and scattered. Now what we have here is the recovery, and Ezra and Nehemiah dealt with that whole state of things to recover the fulness of the Lord's testimony in Jerusalem, and what they recovered was typically, the fulness of Christ. And that is the end time concern of the Lord which He would put into the heart of an instrument in relation to His Coming again. A real concern for the recovery of the fulness of Christ, God's testimony in Christ to His inclusiveness and fulness. What, again, is that fulness of Christ? It is the victory of His death as represented by the altar, the cross. The victory of Christ's death. We do not enlarge upon that very much at the moment but we must see that inasmuch as that altar in Jerusalem was the symbol of deliverance from, and safety in the presence of the enemies round about, the cross, the death of the Lord Jesus is the deliverance of His people from the power of darkness, the tyranny of the Devil, the forces of evil, and becomes the ground of their security even when the enemy is raging round. The death of Christ is our victory. The testimony to the cross is that in His death He triumphed. The mighty, mighty power in Christ's death to destroy death and him that had the power of death, that is the Devil. We want to let the full weight of that fall upon our hearts, "...that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage". His was a death, a Satan-

destroying death, a delivering death from the power of the Devil. That is the cross, the altar. We need to ask the Lord to give us for ourselves the true inward understanding and knowledge of the power of Christ's death as the means of deliverance from Satan and death, and the "fear of death". "...and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage". He delivered through death. That is the first aspect of the fulness of Christ as revealed in His cross.

Then the power of His resurrection as represented by the House of God, or the Body of Christ, because it is the Body of Christ and the House of God which becomes the repository of the truth and power of His resurrection. The House is the result, as we have seen, of the cross. The Body of Christ comes into being through the cross, as the immediate issue of the cross, and into that Body He comes in the power of His resurrection; in the upper room in resurrection life and power He is found immediately in the midst. "...came Jesus and stood in the midst", and that represents for all this dispensation, the nature of the church. It is that in which Christ in the power of His resurrection, is dwelling, is residing. That is Jerusalem. That is the fulness of Christ as seen in the House.

And then the testimony of His sufficiency to His people as represented by the wall. The Lord is sufficient for His people, and it was at that that Nehemiah was aiming, to bring the people within the walls and say to them that the Lord was sufficient for them. And through all the conflict, all the trial and the difficulties and the perplexities and the upsettings which are seen in the course of the reconstructing of that wall, the one continuous note of optimism, praise and glorying on the part of Nehemiah was concerning the sufficiency of the Lord for the whole situation. He inspired the people with that and so in six months the whole work was finished because the people had a mind to work. They had that mind because Nehemiah inspired them with his own confidence in the Lord's sufficiency, and all without came to recognise that those they had called "these feeble Jews" had got a resource of fulness which was more than that of men, the fulness of the Lord; and that was the testimony outward to the fulness of Christ.

So Ezra and Nehemiah recovered typically, that which represented the fulness of Christ. And we apply that of course to see that that is what the Lord is seeking to do at an end time. Always the recovery is more difficult than the original constructing. When a thing has been lost it is always more difficult to get it back than it was to originally establish it. We come to the book of the Acts and we see the thing coming in in life, spontaneously, in power. It was withstood, it was

fought against, but there it stood in all its original glory and power and splendour. But it has been lost, and to recover always represents a very much greater task. So we find this book represents the difficulty of recovery. We are coming to see what those difficulties are in a moment. And then, recovery is not only marked by difficulties which are natural to a loss of position, but the recovery is also fraught with the opposition of every conceivable satanic device. If the Devil was behind the loss of the testimony we may be quite sure he will withstand its recovery with every means at his command. These are the two things which come up so fully in the book of Nehemiah: the difficulties of recovery from the inside and the withstanding of the enemy from the outside.

Let us look at some of these difficulties, the difficulties of recovery. There is one phrase which indicates an initial difficulty for Nehemiah. As he went round in his secret personal investigation by night, having told no one, personally and secretly exercising himself over this whole matter, one phrase which is used about the situation is this: "...there is much rubbish", and that is always a characteristic of recovery. You do not have that in the same sense in the original setting up or constituting, you have more or less a clear way for your new thing, but when it is renewing a thing you find that in the meantime a good deal of rubbish has accumulated, and in the place where the wall once was, now there is much rubbish. And remember that that wall stands to represent the clear definition of what is of God and what is not of God. It defines the point where what is of God ends and what is not of God begins, but it is a clear mark by division. Now when Nehemiah came to the place which was once marked so definitely, so precisely, so clearly and you could say: "God's things end there, and the world's things begin there, and that wall divides between clearly", that very place which was once the clear mark of definition and division and separation has on it all kinds of rubbish. That is, the clear definition has gone, you do not know where what is of God's things end and what is of the world begins. There is such an overlapping and intermixture, such a confusion, such a mess that the clear definition is lost. "...much rubbish". It might be dangerous to try and apply that exhaustively - but man, even religiously, has put a very good deal upon what once represented God's clear line of demarcation that even Christian people do not know where they are today. Man has constructed his own interpretations of Christianity and of truth, brought in his own systems and has confused things so much that you really do not know unless you have clear discernment such as Nehemiah had, what is of God and what is not of God. There are multitudes of good, honest, sincere Christian people who really are in the most awful fog as to what is of God and what is not of God religiously.

Man's religious systems have brought about that confusion and multitudes of honest people believe with all their heart that the thing that they are in is of God, and it is just possible for them to get such an awakening to see the whole thing was man-made and not of God at all. "...much rubbish". Paul was one of those. Reflect upon his past life, privileges, inheritances which he at one time believed were so utterly and absolutely of God, for him, and that he really was in God's will. He came to a time and he said: "The things which were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ". "...for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ"; and yet he was so devoted to all that as a traditional religious system in which he at one time was living as out from God, which had now become merely an outward thing of forms and external laws. He believed, nevertheless, that it was all of God until the light shone, until he saw that in comparison with the fulness of Christ it was refuse. It is a strong word that he uses; the word he uses is "stuff to be flung to the dogs". Saul of Tarsus throwing his Judaism to the dogs! He did it when he saw Christ. You can never come out of the rubbish until you see Christ. Ask the Lord to reveal to you the fulness of Christ and you will find things which have gripped and held you become as mere refuse, stuff to be flung to the dogs. There was much rubbish in the place which once represented a clear line of division between what was of God and what was not of God; confusion, mixture. I shall not attempt to apply that more thoroughly. The Lord will have to show us by revelation, what the rubbish is, but there is the simple statement and it contains a truth, and you and I will really have to ask the Lord to show us even in religious matters, where man ends and God begins, or where God ends and man begins, so that we shall be delivered from everything that man has imposed or added upon what is of God, and we shall be able to get right down to foundations, the rubbish being removed: and there is a very great deal of ecclesiastical rubbish about in these days that must go. That is a real difficulty in recovering the full testimony of the Lord Jesus. It is the longstanding systems of man religiously, the traditions of men, that which man has brought into Christianity and said: "This is of God". To get a full testimony to the Lord Jesus you come up against that very truly and very severely, and you find that people are met with the great obstruction of their inheritances and their acceptances before they can get right into the fulness of the Lord Jesus. It takes a long time to clear that rubbish away - it does.

Then the second thing was their past history which would tend to be a ground of great discouragement, even despair, and throw them into a state of inertia, paralysis. They would look back over the past and they would say: "Yes, the

good old days, they will never come back, we cannot expect to have things again as they were; they are gone for ever." "What is the good of trying to recover?" You find plenty of people today who, in the face of a divinely inspired effort to recover the fulness of the testimony of Christ in His Body, will say: "Oh yes, but there have been many things like that in the past centuries, a good many people have tried that and it has always failed". "So-and-so led a movement like that, and another time there was another thing that said that was its object, and there have been plenty of attempts along that line but history shows they do not succeed and one after another they break down; what is the good?" You see there is a history, and a bad history of the church, and there are plenty of people today who fall into despair and say: "Well, the only thing is for us to live as individual believers and never have anything corporate, and try and be personally faithful to the Lord". That is a counsel of despair. It is quite contrary to the Lord, that. We are not thinking of a great world movement, of a great public thing, but if it can only be in a company of a dozen that the Lord has some real fulness of realization of His end, that is the contradiction to all these counsels of despair, and that is God's answer to the work of the Devil. And do you think that it is right for us to sit down and tell the Lord that He started to do a thing and the whole thing has been spoiled and it is no use Him trying to do it? "Lord, at the beginning Your plan, Your way was to have Your full thought and desire as represented by little companies here and there; things went wrong, Your object was spoiled, the Devil came in and upset it, and it is quite impossible for You to realize any such idea or ideal." Are you prepared to thrust that upon the Lord? Not a bit. Nehemiah will not accept that, and Nehemiah represents the spirit of an end time movement and says: "Well, if it only be in a small company here and there and somewhere else, God can have that which satisfies His heart, and if God's heart satisfaction is to be realized in that way then it is our business and we must not be discouraged by past history." We recall movements in past days which were great movements, blessed movements and represented something very rich for the Lord and then were upset and arrested and so we say: "Well, it is no use our attempting anything, the same result will follow." That is contrary to the spirit of Nehemiah. A Nehemiah instrument repudiates all such arguments and counsels, and says: "Although the thing has failed a thousand times, God is still able to do that upon which He has set His heart" - and the answer at long last to all the work of the Devil, will be that God has that which He has set His heart upon. God cannot be defeated. When you and I get to glory and we see what God has got there, we shall say: "This is that upon which the Lord set His heart; here it is..." "It seemed to us as though it had become non-existent and quite impossible; it looked to us as though the enemy had destroyed the whole thing -

but here it is." God will answer the whole works of the Devil and have finally that which He has set his heart upon. Are we with Him in that faith and confidence? What He will have at long last, He can have at least in a measure now in small representations here and there, His own desire and thought. The conditions are such that if you listen to the pessimist you will never attempt anything along that line; if you listen to those who talk of "the good old days" which can never come again, you will be paralysed.

The third difficulty - men in the flesh are so much in possession. Men in the flesh have taken possession of the Lord's territory and the Lord's things. Do we not find ourselves up against difficulties like that? The difficulty of religious vested interests of so many people; their office and their position and their reputation and their name and their a thousand other things. Man has got in God's way and in God's place, and so you find yourself up against those personal interests of so many people in the work of the Lord, that the recovery of the full testimony of the Lord Jesus is made exceedingly difficult. Nehemiah found that.

We see the conditions in this book were that there were those there who had taken possession and who had position and they arrested the activities of Nehemiah, the nobles and others. Well now, we come up against that thing. You are out to have something which is wholly of the Lord and you find people in the way, men and women in the flesh making difficulties. The necessity so often is for the Lord to break the man or to put them out. Is not that the difficulty? They have got hold, they are running this thing, this is their work, it circles round them, they were the founders of it and it lives and it dies with them. Now if you want something of the universality of Christ, the pre-eminence of Christ, which has no place for man but which place is wholly occupied by the Lord Jesus, either those men and women in the flesh have got to be smashed, ground to powder, or else the Lord has got to put them out or else He can do nothing - and that is a difficulty always in recovery.

And the fourth thing was the impoverishment of the Lord's people: the domination of the world. Nehemiah found such an impoverishment amongst the people at Jerusalem. That represented for him a very great difficulty to recover the testimony. We have referred to the domination of the world, and therefore, the resultant impoverishment of the Lord's people. These two things always go together. We know it from experience, that if the world has a place in our lives, or in what is called the church, spiritual impoverishment will be found there, spiritual poverty. When the world is ruled out absolutely and Christ is all and in

all, there are always the riches of Christ, there is always the means of God to carry on. We have often said that when we go down to Egypt the Lord lets us take the responsibility for carrying things on. When we repudiate Egypt and put our confidence in the Lord and make Him our resource He takes the responsibility for carrying on. And that is a testimony true to life. We, without any boasting at all, or rejoicing or glorying in the flesh, are able to bear our witness very, very definitely to that. There was a time in our history when we went down into Egypt, when we had to draw our resources from the world to carry on what we called the church work. There was a blessed time in our history when the Lord gave us to repudiate Egypt and to stop the whole programme of appeals to the world along any line whatever, and turn to Him and give Him His place, and from that day to this He has supported us and carried on, and we have lacked nothing; but more, we are a constant amazement to others as to where the resources come from. That is no boast in the flesh, I do not want it to sound like that; it is a testimony, and it is given to reinforce the truth of what we are saying. The ability which the Lord gives to do much more for others when He has His full place is amazing. Then you are not going cap in hand to the world, you have got something to give to the world, you have the knowledge of the fulness of Christ and your walls are up, your testimony outward is established and you need not draw from the world for anything, but you have got something to give to the world and the world is in poverty in comparison. But here was impoverishment because the Lord had not His full place and the walls were down. But that is a difficulty always.

We have not touched the satanic side of this recovery but we can leave that till later. The Lord just give us that clear perception, apprehension to see what His thought is and to have the positive note. I feel that we need to recognise the value of a positive note. We are not going to denounce this and that and have the negative note all the time, we must have that positive side of things that because we have got what we have, by sheer comparison others may be compelled to see that their position is not a right one. Not because we say they are wrong, not because we are always preaching that they are wrong but because they have to see without anything that may come from our lips, that we have got the secret. That is the way of effectiveness. We have got the secret, and the secret is the Lord Himself. May the Lord lead us into His fulness, the fulness of Christ our full satisfaction.

The Continuing Need For Adjustment

From time to time, right through the ages, those who have stood in quite a definite relationship to the things of God have either been seduced, or have drifted, or have for some reason come to fixed and systematized positions as to the ways, works, and purposes of God - which fixed ideas have come to limit Him, bind them, and result in going round in a circle instead of on a direct course of ever-enlarging and clarifying spiritual fullness and newness.

This propensity for fixedness and finality in conceptions has threatened the people of God many times with a fatal impasse. Indeed, Israel's captivity and eventual disintegration among the nations, with all the agony of centuries, very largely rests upon their fixed idea of being so right as God's elect. This same peril threatened to frustrate the real spiritual way and purpose of God with Christ's own disciples. Because of Jewish ideas interpreted by their natural minds they had prejudices and preconceptions which menaced their spiritual lives and constantly came into conflict with Christ's mind and way. Paul's life and ministry was continually opposed by this element, and he himself in his pre-conversion days is a supreme example of its danger.

So it has been through the ages since, and is one of the greatest hindrances to the quicker realization of the thought and purpose of the Lord in our times. The fact is that God must not move or do anything which does not conform to the accepted and recognized order of traditional evangelical Christianity. Anything that is outside of a prescribed circle of what has been done and how it has been done for generations is suspect and boycotted. The official bodies of organized evangelical Christianity are the final court of appeal. While there are those foundational facts which are in their essence unalterable and unchanging, there is always, in everything that comes from God, a wealth and fullness of meaning and value which is commensurate with its infinite Source and Fountainhead; and the Spirit of truth can continually make us know that God's meaning infinitely transcends our apprehension.

We must therefore never box the compass of truth or interpretation and fix our methods and framework of doctrine or work in a way that makes it impossible

for the Lord to show us that, although a certain way of outworking was all right for the time being, it was only relatively so, and fuller light means further adjustments. All this, not because the Lord is developing or changing, but because we can only move and change by life, organically, as we grow in understanding.

We venture to say that a time has begun when the old and fixed positions of traditional Christianity are losing their hold on, not only the Christian public in general, but many sincere seekers for reality... something not to be found in many of the churches; and what they are looking for is the real and true life of God.

The question which confronts us all is this: can the Lord lead us on into His fullness in Christ without continually bumping up against something in our own carryover of, not fixed truth but our fixed limit of its meaning; or something in our fixedness of position in any direction or connection? Steadfastness, unmovableness, faithfulness, etc., are to be to the Lord and to the foundation realities of the faith, and also in the purpose for which and to which He has called us in life and service; but adjustableness is an essential to growth and increase in light and fullness. At the same time, we cannot change and move on only as there is a basic work of the Cross by which the strength of nature, even as it impinges upon Divine things, is set aside.

The Lord find us such as have only one object, and that truly at any cost: "That I may know Him."

Conversion and Salvation

In the beginnings of the Church, we are told that the disciples continued in the apostles' teaching. This implies something more than conversion; so that, clearly, conversion is not everything. We must beware of confounding beginnings with ends. Conversion is but initiation, it must never be regarded as synonymous with salvation. Conversion is a crisis which may occupy but one brief moment; salvation is a process running on concurrently with life, and the end of which is not yet. It is a process, moreover, that may be hastened, retarded, or even arrested; and is a much greater and grander thing than many even Christian people suppose.

As viewed by Christ and His apostles it is no mere negative deliverance, it is rich in positive elements, the unfolding of which will demand the eternities for their field, and the infinities for their range - elements which can in no wise be shut up and exhausted within the narrow limitations of time. Who will dare to limit the possibilities enfolded in the newborn spirit? Has it not been born again for deathless and incorruptible being? and with eternal life shall there not be eternal development, and ever-growing likeness to God?

Measured by our years as children of God we ought, many of us, to be teachers; measured by our attainments we ought to be classed as spiritual defectives.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jul-Aug 1948, Vol 26-4

The Crisis of Pentecost

Christianity is built upon two great facts, the facts that God raised Jesus from the dead and the fact that the Holy Spirit makes this a reality in the life of the believer. Jesus risen; the Spirit given: these are the two foundations of our faith. There is no real knowing or living until the Holy Spirit comes, and comes in.

It is He who throws light upon Jesus, from His birth to His cross, explaining the significance of His earthly life. You will never come into the good and value of the life of the Lord Jesus until the Holy Spirit interprets, explains and applies it. You will only have an earthly story, snatches of history and biography, unless the Spirit takes up the incarnation, the walking, the teaching, the working and the dying of the Lord Jesus and imparts their true significance to you. Why did Christ come to earth at all? What was He here for? The one inclusive answer to this question is that He came to bring back man into a living, conscious union with God.

But if this was the case then all that He was and did was in vain until the Holy Spirit came from above to impart the value of His life and work to believers. He would have come in vain, taught in vain, worked in vain and died in vain if the Holy Spirit had not taken up the matter and made it real and living. It was the Lord Jesus Himself who placed this tremendous importance upon the Holy Spirit: "It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I do not go away the Comforter will not come..." (John 16:7). The meaning of the life of Christ can never be effectively realised apart from the gift and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The very first thing which the Spirit does is to make instantly real in us that which Christ came to do. "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirits that we are children of God." Quite clearly this means living, conscious relationship with God. When the Spirit comes He begins at once to take up the purpose of Christ's coming to earth and imparts it in the life of the believer. In fact there is no spiritual experience which we can have which is not directly attributable to the Holy Spirit.

Now the Bible is a book of crises. There are four major crises described in the Word of God. and of course many minor ones in between. The first of these major crises was the crisis of creation. That was a major crisis for it was nothing

less than the intervention of God in relation to purpose. God reacted to vanity, to what was void and without purpose or meaning, serving no real end - "Now the earth was without form and void". God was not prepared to tolerate this, so He acted in a crisis of intervention. The second great crisis was that of redemption. Through the coming to earth of the Son and through His death on the cross, God intervened to recover what had been lost through sin. It was the great crisis of recovery. The third crisis was that of Pentecost, the intervention of spiritual fullness as against mere figures, representations and fragments, to bring in the real and the full. By Pentecost heaven intervened to bring into human affairs and experience the full expression of divine life. Then the fourth great crisis will be that of the coming again of Christ. This will represent the intervention of God for universal restoration and restitution. It has many aspects and is still future, but it is just as certain as the other three.

Now we note that in every one of these major crises the Holy Spirit is very much in evidence. At the beginning, we are told that "the Spirit of God brooded over the face of the deep". He was the agent and energy of the first creation. Then in the crisis of redemption He was in charge from first to last. The Redeemer was born of the Spirit; He was anointed by the Spirit and did His mighty works by His agency; and finally He offered Himself without spot to God through the eternal Spirit. All the way through the work of redemption, the Holy Spirit was the energy and power, the agent, the custodian. Then of course it goes without saying that the third great crisis of Pentecost was in the hands of the Holy Spirit. That was where He took charge of everything, even as the Lord Jesus had so strongly stipulated that no attempt was to be made to preach and nothing was to be done until the Spirit had come. It was the commandment of the Lord that His disciples were to tarry until they had been endued by the Spirit, so insisting that no movement was to be attempted until the whole divine programme had been taken over by the Holy Spirit. Finally we may be sure that the matter of the coming again of the Lord Jesus will involve the activities of the Holy Spirit. It will represent the consummation of the Spirit's work. He will have brought to birth sons for manifestation with the Son. He will have effected the spiritual growth and perfection of God's people; like Abraham's servant, He will bring the bride and present her to the Bridegroom. So it is that the end of the book of the Revelation brings the call: "The Spirit and the bride say, Come".

But when we have considered these four main crises and the many minor ones in between, we still have to ask what occupies the foreground of God's eternal purpose. The answer is that right in the centre of the stage is a being called *MAN*,

a unique creation, the crown of all creation. The Bible is the story of heaven's interest in man. He is the one upon whom all attention is focussed. God's great concern is with man, and moreover the activities of all the heavenly beings are centred upon him. "Not unto angels hath he subjected the inhabited earth to come, but one in a certain place has said, What is man that thou art mindful of him?" (Hebrews 2:5-6). All heaven is occupied with the destiny of man. And all hell equally focusses its attention on the human race. The kingdom of evil is occupied in its hostility to mankind. Being divided as a kingdom - as Jesus says it is - it works in seemingly contradictory ways. On one hand it does its utmost to degrade man, to dishonour him, to make him lower than he really is, to persuade him to make human life cheap, a mere cipher to be liquidated at will, fodder for the state or for the cannon. On the other hand it tries to make man without God to be something more than he really is, to ensnare him into arrogance and self-sufficiency, to pretend that a human being has independence and authority of his own and something to be proud of. But in both cases the objective is the corruption of man and his spiritual destruction. The kingdom of evil concentrates its attention on the purposes of God for man in a never-ceasing campaign to spoil this masterpiece of God's creation.

This may seem irrelevant to the subject of the Holy Spirit, but far from being so, it forces us to recognise that only by the coming in of the Spirit can these evil purposes be averted and the grand design of God fulfilled. The purpose of creation was that man should become a son of God. As Paul explains: "...foreordained unto the adoption as sons, to be conformed to the image of his Son...". So Pentecost really takes us back to the original thought and purpose of God in the creation of man. The Holy Spirit brings that purpose up to date, so that when a believing man receives the Holy Spirit as his inner life, all God's eternal desires and intentions enter into a phase of realisation.

If this is so, then it follows that there must be a tremendous change in the person of the one who is in the good of Pentecost. We know very well that before Pentecost the men and women who were closely associated with the Lord Jesus in His walk and work by no means answered to God's original thought for mankind. When the Holy Spirit came, however, they became quite different people, so very different that we might almost say that they were another 'order' of people. They had passed from one kingdom into another. By the Spirit of sonship the Son Himself had entered into their lives, to make them veritable sons of God.

It seems to me that there can be no true understanding of the meaning of the crisis of Pentecost until we associate it with God's original purpose in creating man. Immediately we understand this, though, we have the key to the coming of the Spirit. I understand that there are some eighty-eight direct references to the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, but they are partial, symbolic or preparatory, all pointing on to the supreme objective of God which is to enjoy intimate fellowship with human sons. This explains the words in the letter to the Galatians, where Paul speaks of the promise of Abraham coming to Gentiles as well as Jews. This promise consists of the life of sonship to God through Jesus Christ. Now we note that the apostle goes on to say that this is made effective by the promised gift of the Holy Spirit who is "the Spirit of His Son" (Galatians 4:6).

The Spirit is busy making possible God's eternal desire to have His creation peopled by loving and obedient sons. We are told that the creation itself groans and travails that this holy purpose should be realised - and soon! What is more, the Holy Spirit also longs over God's people with groanings which cannot be uttered, for His supreme purpose in intervening in human history is related to the goal of sonship. He regenerates us to make us children of God. He guides us because we are the sons of God. He trains and disciplines us according to the fact that "God dealeth with you as with sons". It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the presence and working of the Holy Spirit. All the fulfilment of divine purposes in man is committed to Him. But it is possible for us to fail to realise the great objective of the crisis of Pentecost, which was to provide God with men and women who can eternally satisfy His heart and administer His will. This is not mere doctrine, it is the most wonderful prospect which has ever been revealed in God's universe. God the All-Wise and the All-Gracious has set His heart on bringing many sons to glory, and has committed to His gracious Spirit the task of transforming sinners like us so that He may have the family of sons, conformed to the image of His Son, which He planned before time was. There are many other aspects of the Spirit's working in and through us. All of these are important. Most of them, however, are related to the one all-inclusive objective which involves the transformation of our inner lives into that spiritual reality of likeness to Christ which was always God's purpose for man. "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God, and such we are. It is not yet manifested what we shall be, but we know that when He is manifested we shall be like him." That is really what Pentecost was all about.

The Crown of the Incorruptible

"*An inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you...*" (1 Peter 1:4)

The verdict of the long run, that is, what abides as incorruptible when all else has passed, is the verdict upon life and work. How much will be found afterwards to the praise and glory of God? That word 'incorruptible', then, is the word which governs all, is the standard of all.

GLORY THE CROWN OF THE INCORRUPTIBLE

The crown of the incorruptible is glory. That is the verdict upon the life of the Lord Jesus. John says, many years afterwards: "we beheld his glory" (John 1:14). That was the issue. Neither John nor any of his fellow-apostles was very much alive to it while the Lord was with them; nevertheless He was gaining on them all the time, He was overtaking them. Eventually they were left with one deep and indelible impression which stood the test of many years, many experiences, many trials, much suffering; and at last, at the end of that particular phase, the apostolic age, John, the one lonely remaining apostle of the whole group, wrote the verdict: "We beheld his glory" - the glory of the incorruptible.

Peter also, at the end of his life, when he was saying that he was about to be offered up, recorded the same verdict. Referring to that wonderful experience on the Mount of Transfiguration, he wrote: "We were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory" (2 Peter 1:16-17) - the verdict of the incorruptible.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews, whom I always suspect as being Paul, said: "We behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour" (Hebrews 2:9). Whether that was Paul or not, it was someone who passed the same verdict; but Paul did join in with the words: "Now unto the King eternal, incorruptible... be honour and glory". The verdict of the incorruptible is glory.

We have been seeing that the glory of Christ was due to certain incorruptible

characteristics. First, His union with His Father; something so deep, so real, so unshakeable, as to abide all tests and go right through, in spite of all the efforts of man and demons and the very Devil himself to part the Two, to come between them. That union with the Father was uninterrupted; it went through. And we said that the Lord Jesus made it perfectly clear that such a union as existed between Him and His Father could exist between us and Himself, and with the Father; not in Deity, but in real, living organic oneness and fellowship; by being born of God. That union is the basis of glory. It is something incorruptible.

MAN MADE FOR GLORY

'O loving wisdom of our God!
  When all was sin and shame,
A final Adam to the fight
  And to the rescue came.

'O wisest love! that flesh and blood,
  Which did in Adam fail,
Should strive afresh against the foe,
  Should strive and should prevail.'

Paul it is who calls Jesus "the second man", "the last Adam". Our hymn-writer made a little slip, and so we correct; not a second Adam but a *LAST* Adam. A second *MAN*, a last Adam. Paul indicates that God takes another step in a second man, and a final and inclusive step in a last Adam. Christ is God's next move and Christ is God's final move, but Christ comes into the place which the first Adam held as representing the intention of God concerning man. As we are thrown back, by this way in which Paul speaks of Him, to the first man Adam, we are shown by the Scriptures that God's intention for man was that he was to be glorified, to be "crowned with glory" (Hebrews 2:7). He was made for glory. That is the definite statement of Scripture.

But that glory was conditioned upon life, a peculiar life, the particular life of God. The glory was contingent upon man having that life, because the glory was the very essence of that life; that particular divine life held all the nature and potentiality of glory. So the glory depended upon his having that life, and that life was dependent upon faith and obedience - upon whether man would believe God to be true, to be honest, to be faithful, that God meant what He said: and so believing, would act accordingly, that is, be obedient to God. The life was

contingent or dependent upon that.

MAN'S FALLING SHORT OF GOD'S GLORY

But we know that man did not believe God, did not trust God, did not take the attitude that God was to be trusted. He disbelieved, and acted accordingly; he disobeyed. The result was that he brought into his own being, and into all his seed, first corruption and then death. A state of corruption entered into his moral being, and that corruption led to death. Thus, for that man, the prospect of glory ended, the intention of his being came to a full-stop. No glory for that man. Heaven is closed, the glory departs; man is excluded.

But man strangely did not accept that divine verdict. This thing had become such a positive factor in his being, this corruption was so active, that he refused to accept the verdict, and set out upon a course of making his own glory, getting glory for himself. The history of man is the history of an effort to get glory without getting it from God. That covers a very great deal. It started very early in the Bible story, and we see it going all the way through; but the glory of man, as we have said earlier, always ends in corruption. However much glory he draws to himself, however much he achieves of that which is called "the glory of man" it ends in corruption. We who are at the end of the history of this world - as it now is - are seeing how the glory of man is bringing his own undoing, the most universal corruption. That is the glory of man. Is that glory? He cannot help himself, he is energised by another power, he is not his own master. He calls it glory and the thing which is so strange is the blindness of man all the time. He wages a war and calls it 'a war to end war', and he wages a worse war and thinks and believes that this surely is the end of war, and on he goes and still it gets worse and worse; and now it is true that we are in sight of the disintegration of humanity, and the possibility of the wiping out of the human race. We understand today, more than ever it could possibly have been understood before, the meaning of our Lord's words: "except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved" (Matthew 24:22). Is that not true? That is our present condition - corruption with false glory.

CHRISTIANITY A SYSTEM OF GLORY

But another Adam came. There are three statements made regarding Him. "The Word was made flesh" - that is the Incarnation. "In him was life" - that is the incorruption. "We beheld his glory" - that is the effect of the life. Glory works

out from the life, and this final Adam, this last Adam, retrieves the loss of the first: He secures a life that was missed, secures the incorruptibility that was never known, and secures the glory. That is the story of Christ in three words - life, incorruptibility, glory. In those three words He comes to us, and says: 'Have faith in Me, believe in Me, and life, that life, is for you' and through that life offers us incorruptibility and glory. From one point of view Christianity may be described as a system of glory. God is called "the God of glory" (Acts 7:2). Christianity is a family and its Father called: "The Father of glory". Paul spoke of: "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory" (Ephesians 1:17). Christ, who brought Christianity into being, is called: "the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8). The Holy Spirit, the energy of this whole heavenly system, is called "the Spirit of glory" (1 Peter 4:14). So the three Persons of the divine Trinity are all related to glory, all interested in glory.

The Father produces the whole system of glory; it emanates from Him as Father. The Son, as the Lord of glory, is governing everything in relation to glory. What a glorious statement that is, how much is gathered into it - the Lord of glory. So we have in our Bible a whole book containing the record of the activities of the Lord of glory. Situations and positions seem at first sight all the work of the Devil, all the work of devil-inspired and energised people - situations so difficult that they look hopeless. And that book contains the verdict of the long run, that every one of those situations was turned to glory, something glorious came out of every hopeless and impossible situation. The Lord of glory was seeing to that.

The Spirit of glory, so called by Peter in a context when believers are passing through fiery trial; they are persecuted, they are misunderstood, they are slandered, they are misrepresented. And Peter says: 'It is all right, if you take this humbly, if you take this without bitterness; the Spirit of glory will rest upon you'; that is, in adversity believers find that right in the midst of persecution and opposition, something of inexplicable joy rises up, a deep and wonderful peace, The persecutors hurl their stones, or whatever else they may do, and somehow there is a glory in the heart. That is the story of many a martyr, of many a murdered servant of God - the Spirit of glory. Glory is not some place to which we are going presently, although glory may be a sphere in which everything is glorious: glory is for now. It is a part of the very life that we have now received. It is the essence of Christ in us, as the hope of glory. It is the very nature of what we have received through faith in Jesus Christ. The Lord wants us to have a life and to live according to that life, which will produce more and more glory in us. It will again be only as we live according to that incorruptible life that the glory

will be manifested.

CHRIST THE PATTERN

So we have to look again at the One who has set for us the pattern, indicated the principles of the incorruptible which result in glory; to look at what was true of Him, as this incorruptible One, that resulted in God giving Him glory. One or two things I will indicate because they are very important. Firstly, it was His inward separation from sin. There was a great gap between Him and sin. It is said of Him that He "knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21), that He was "separated from sinners" (Hebrews 7:26). That is, that in His nature He was separate from the rest of men, there was an inward separation. Now, we are not constituted as He was, as sinless, but we are told and made to understand in the New Testament that that inward separation which was so true of Him, can be made true in us. Paul has a way of putting it. He calls it: "the circumcision of Christ" (Colossians 2:11), and he says that it is a thing of the heart, an inward separating between what we are in ourselves and what we are in Christ, the putting of a gap between the two. And then the New Testament says that by the Holy Spirit's enablement, by the Holy Spirit's power, you need not live on the ground of what you are in yourself, you can live on the ground of Christ, and living on the ground of Christ you need not be the slave of yourself and your sinfulness, you are delivered. There is something that has separated inside, and if you live on the ground of what Christ is and not on the ground of what you are in yourself, you are on the ground of the incorruptible and you are on the ground of the glory.

That sounds very technical, I know, but it is very practical. We know it very well. We who are Christians know that a cleavage has been made in us, and that we are now two people. There is that side which is our new life, our new relationship, which is our Christ-connection. There is that other side which is still our old relationship with the old Adam. It is there: it is not cauterised, it is not annihilated; and we know now that it is for us to take continually the power of the Holy Spirit, in virtue of that separating cross, to keep on the Christ side, on the new side; and if we do, we know that it is glory. Very often we know more of the meaning of the glory by a touch of the other. Step over on to the other side and give way to the old Adam, and you know quite well there is no glory there.

Now that thing existed perfectly, fully and finally in the case of the Lord Jesus; but the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of that glory has come into us to make the

divide, and the Christian who has the most glory is the Christian who is walking most on the Christ side of the line. There was the divine in Him, of course; there were no two natures, there was no need for dividing between a sinful nature and a divine nature in Him; but there was a constant gap between Him and sinful man. The enemy, the great enemy of the glory, was ever seeking to contaminate Him, involve Him, pollute Him, corrupt Him. Do not let us think that He never had to resist anything, that He never had to say 'No' to another. That matter of how a sinless Man could be tempted is of course an old theological problem, but there is no doubt about it that He fought our battle in all reality. So that is the first thing - an inward separation, a divide, and on the one side the new life, the ground of the incorruptible, which is the ground of glory. "This mystery," says Paul, "which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

OUTWARD SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD

The inward separation had its outward effect or outworking in separation from the world, and no one will think for a moment that I mean physical separation from the world. No, He was here right in it, in its throng and press, in its affairs, with everything pressing upon Him; never seeking to live the life of a hermit, detached from the world, but right in it - and yet while rubbing shoulder to shoulder with the world, having all the contacts of this world in every form, there was a distinctiveness about Him. He was not a part of it, but apart from it, a wonderful outward separation. While being able to talk with the grossest and the most defiled and the people most involved in this world, He was yet by no means a part of their system, their order, their way of life, but outwardly separate from the world. The most unhappy people in this world are Christians who try to have both worlds. It is my experience that if you want to find a miserable Christian, you must find what is called 'a worldly Christian', one in whom a constant civil war goes on between two kingdoms. Yes, a Christian in this world, trying to get something out of this world is a miserable creature. I used to illustrate it by the old Border battles between Scotland and England. The people who lived in the Border country never had a day's rest all their lives. One day it would be the overrunning from one side, the next day from the other side, and these poor people on the Border line had the most miserable existence possible. It is like that. You try to live on a border-line or border-land Christian life and you will be a miserable person, without rest or peace or joy or anything else. You will never know exactly where you are, who is your master, which way you are going, to whom you belong. It is a miserable existence.

The Lord Jesus was not like that. He was on one side and absolutely on one side. The border line was a very wide one for Him. Indeed, there was no border line. He was attached to heaven, and He maintained that attachment. You and I, if we are going to know glory now and glory afterward, will have to be on the same ground as He was in this matter - no compromise with the world; in it, having to do our work here, having to meet people here, having to be friendly in a way, yet not one with their nature, their realm, their way. It is a difficult thing - not as easy to do as to say - it works out in many practical ways. The point is that Christ was wholly for God, and because of that, His Father was the Father of glory, and the Spirit of glory rested upon Him, and the Father could give Him glory.

CHRIST'S HUMANITY WAS GLORIFIABLE

Christ's humanity was a glorifiable humanity. Not all humanity, indeed no other humanity, is glorifiable. His was a unique humanity, capable of being glorified, and it was glorified. Paul speaks of His body as a glorified body. He said that we are to be "conformed to the body of his glory" (Philippians 3:21). He was capable of being glorified, and that actually took place on the Mount of Transfiguration. He had fought through all those tests and trials, all those efforts to compromise Him, to make Him let go and become involved. He had fought them right through to the pinnacle of that mount. There was nothing more for Him to do, so far as He was concerned; anything more was for us. At that point He had proved Himself worthy of being glorified, and as Peter says, on that mount God gave Him glory. In the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus, God is showing in a representative Man what He intends for you and for all - that we shall be transfigured, glorified, made like Him. His was a glorifiable humanity. His humanity as glorified is the standard in heaven to which God is working for every believer in Jesus Christ. It is a Man in glory glorified, and He is there as the last Adam, the second Man. Those very titles have no significance apart from other men of the same kind. What does 'Adam' mean? What does 'man' mean, if it is not an inclusive and comprehensive and representative designation? The Scripture states that quite clearly: "the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). This is what He was to be, as many other Scriptures confirm.

I believe that was the secret of the apostle Paul's life, from the very first day of his conversion, right up to the end when, after so many years, and after seeing and knowing so much, he was still found aspiring, still stretched out. He had seen Jesus of Nazareth glorified, and he said: 'That is the on-high calling!' This is

so much in keeping with what we have read in the letter to the Hebrews. We read: "We behold... Jesus... crowned with glory and honour" and then we read on: "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling..." (Hebrews 3:1). What is this heavenly calling? It is Jesus crowned with glory, as the Man according to God's eternal intention for man. Christ in a glorified humanity is the model, the pattern, the representation of God's intention for all who believe in the Lord Jesus.

So then, if we have received that eternal life, if Christ is in us, dwelling in our hearts through faith, this is our destiny. We have the basis of an incorruptible life, which will eventually emerge in the fullness of that glory which He, as our Representative, now knows. Faith not only believes for the forgiveness of sins, not only for pardon, not only for justification and redemption. Faith in Jesus Christ apprehends Him as the very humanity to which we are to be conformed. Faith takes hold of Him as He is now, and says: 'He is as He is because God wants me to be like that'; and, if we did but know, the Spirit of glory is operating for us on that basis every day, to make us like Him, to transform us that we may be transfigured, to conform us to His image. All the meaning of the activities and methods of the Spirit of God in our lives is to lay a foundation for glory.

And it is on these principles of the incorruptible. May the Lord teach us how to keep clear of this corrupted world, how to keep clear of that wretched, corrupt old man. You remember that magnificent, though so simple, picture that Bunyan has given us of the man with the muck rake who has a crown of glory over his head, who is so occupied with his rake and so obsessed with what is down in the mud, that he does not see the glory but misses it all. That muck is our old man, and we are always turning him over to see if we can find something good in him, some glory. We are seemingly incapable of learning this one lesson, that there is no glory in that realm. We should finish all these investigations and lift up our eyes to the Lord of glory. This is how we will find the way of glory. Let us keep on the glory line.

The Curse of the Earth Touch

In searching for a sentence that will serve as a window through which what we have in view can be seen the one that seems most potent is

The Curse of the Earth Touch.

To understand what is meant by those last three words is to have an explanation of an immense amount of history, spiritual and temporal.

We must begin by re-emphasizing the fact that *this earth lies under a curse*. This is emphatically stated both in Genesis 3:18,19, and Romans 8:20-23.

Although Christ effected redemption by His Cross, that is but potential as to the creation and only spiritual in the case of those who are "In Christ". Both the "creation itself" and "our body" await "the manifestation of the sons of God", the consummation of the redemptive work. Believers alone are delivered from the "curse". Meantime, the creation groans under it.

This earth is to be destroyed and purged by fire 2 Peter 3:7,10-13. These words of so many centuries ago are so much more easily understood now by all men than they were when written. The rapidity of progress toward this consummation in less than our lifetime surely cries "the day of the Lord is at hand". So, the curse is present; it is rapidly gathering momentum, and very few - if any - parts of the earth are escaping from its closing in for the final phase and climax.

The nature and features of the curse, as the Bible everywhere reveals, are frustration, thwarting, bafflement, discontent, abortion, confusion, travail, breakdown, and an ever-defeated struggle against despair and death.

There are three realms in which these elements are clearly discernible.

Firstly, these elements are plain to be seen in the world. Call it what you will; explain it as you may try to do; the fact remains that chaos deepens and extends so that the accumulated brains and highest training in national and international councils are out of their depth in the solution of the problems confronting them. This is so obvious that we need not use time and space to argue and prove it. We

are no more pessimistic than the Bible is with regard to the later phases of this world's history, and never was there a time when its description of things at the end could be agreed with more than now - "Men fainting for fear, and for expectation of the things which are coming on the inhabited earth; for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken" (Luke 21:26). We do not need this first aspect of the situation to be put into writing. We are reading it every day in our newspapers and in the happenings in all the nations.

The second realm is that of Christendom in general. Here again we are confronted with a situation which is extending all the 'World Councils' to their limits. It would be far from profitable to gather up the things being said and done in the realm of 'Christianity' which clearly indicate that 'Christianity' is in the casualty ward in a critical condition, needing every expedient, appliance, measure, mechanism, and recourse to justify its existence. Some 'Christian' leaders go as far as to speak of this as 'the post-Christian age'. This is all very horrible and terrible, but the common language of 'our unhappy divisions', 'our man-made divisions', etc., etc., and all the feverish efforts to patch up by compromise; the sacrifice of that which cost so much, and so forth, only evidence the fact that things are not all well in Christendom; far from it!

But, for us, the saddest and most grievous aspect of this situation is to be found in that realm which can be called 'Evangelical'. It is not too strong a thing to say that we have come to a time when the atmosphere is saturated with a spirit of suspicion, fear, skepticism, discrediting, distrust, misgiving, loss of confidence, etc. There is literally nothing which escapes the lash of criticism, the paralysing touch of reservation or question. It is positively amazing how quickly and easily good people will accept what Paul called *(as to himself)* "evil report", and in accepting it without investigating and "proving all things", repeat it and warn others of those concerned. A famous preacher once said to the writer about a certain Christian leader that 'the grapes of Eshcol would turn to raisins in his hands.' This spirit of suspicion and criticism withers the fairest blossoms and dries up the most beautiful fruit of the Spirit's producing. Many a ministry of Christ has been ruined by it, and the hand of the Lord withholds bread and wealth because of it, so that a characteristic of evangelicalism in our time is superficiality. There is "a famine of hearing the Word", and this is a judgment upon the spirit which treats the Word so cheaply as not to regard it as something worthy of the most jealous concern.

But we have to press on to our conclusion, and in doing so we have to observe

and ask further questions.

Why is it that so many things which have greatly served the purpose of God have eventually fallen apart; broken up; and have little more than a great past to live upon? Why is it that the Lord Himself has not circumvented this and preserved intact these instruments and vessels that He has used?

Why is it that division upon division follows almost endlessly the course of many things which have been very jealous for an utter position as to Bible truth? These and many such questions have but one answer. That answer is THE EARTH TOUCH.

Somewhere, somehow, that blighting contact has been made. There has been a gesture toward this earth. *Man* has put his hand on heavenly things and tried to bring them on to this earth. It might be a 'New Testament Church' of a composite nature: certain things taught, enacted, and done in conformity to the record in the New Testament; a certain order, technique, and construction; these things have been drawn together for a creed, a form of procedure, and made the 'basis', the form and standard, the 'constitution' of a body, an institution, a society: man's mind and man's hand defining, controlling, holding. The verdict of history is that God will just not commit Himself to any such thing.

When the Church first actually came into being, it was "born from above", composed of such as had had a tremendous - we might almost say, a terrific - crisis, a devastating crisis in relation to the Cross of Christ. When the churches came into being, in every case, it was a local repetition of this inward upheaval and revolution. The churches were never made by man or men, be they the greatest Apostles. The Apostles did not take a 'Blue Print' of New Testament churches wherever they went. The outcome of their work was a crisis, a climax to an old creation and the fiat of the new. What followed of order and knowledge was organic, not organized; spontaneous, not imposed; life, not legality; and - above all - heavenly, not earthly. It was only when man pulled this down on to the earth that things went wrong.

God has many times made a new move with something heavenly, but invariably there has been a tremendous impact of Heaven upon those first brought into it. There was such a fundamental severance between earth and Heaven in them, in which 'all things were new'; an inward break that - for them - set two worlds apart and irreconcilable. If tragedy came later it can be seen to have been on two

counts.

1. Those first-ones violated the very principle of their own history by seeking to crystallize that history into a form and framework for others. They presented or imposed a set form instead of keeping in full view the meaning of "Christ crucified" and *travailing for the crisis* in others.

2. Then others have come in, but on either false or inadequate ground. They have felt the life, seen the good (objectively), and have wanted the values. But all has been without the cost and the crisis: no brokenness, no shattering crisis, no open Heaven, no travail; just the blessing, and - perhaps - place. Their former mentalities, traditions, ambitions, were untouched; their natural judgments intact. The earth touch has thus been made and the character of things has changed. A story of confusion, contradiction, and loss of measure, impact, and heavenly glory has slowly, almost imperceptibly begun, and only at some later crisis has it broken upon that people that a change has come about which spells decline.

Oh, this earth touch! How deadly it is! When will the Lord's people understand the essential meaning of their union with Christ *in Heaven!*

Our premise is that this earth and all in it lies under a curse and judgment, but that those "born from above" are fundamentally separated by the Cross of Christ from this earth, in a spiritual way. But most of the troubles in Christianity are due to some *spiritual* contact with, and involvement in that realm of death where the Divine ban operates. We are going to illustrate this with very vivid instances in the Bible. Most of our illustrations will be the cases of servants or people of God, which will give just the point that we are trying to make. It is when *the Lord's people* touch this earth (in a spiritual way) that trouble ensues.

We begin with Abraham. As to his fundamental separation there is no question. That he was a committed man of God allows of no doubt. But at a point when faith was sorely tried in view of seeming impossibilities - actual impossibilities *naturally* - he resorted to a natural way through, and tried to resolve the situation by natural means. He came down from his heavenly position of "with God all things are possible" and touched earth when he resorted to Hagar as the solution.

We need not enlarge upon the entail of shame, regret, and tragedy, not only in his own life and that of Hagar, but right up to date in Ishmael. That earth-touch has

indeed stood as a mighty warning to all such. It is the earth-touch of an *alternative* to faith when the natural can offer us nothing.

From there we move on to Jacob. Rebecca had been precisely told that of the two sons about to be born "the elder shall serve the younger". In her obvious favouritism for Jacob it is unlikely that she had said nothing of this to him. But together they connived at securing the birthright by cunning, deceptive, and lying ways. It was undoubtedly an earth-touch. Coming down to a low and carnal way of trying to effect the purpose of God. The result - twenty years of dishonour; deceiving and being deceived; extending the doubtful way of success (?); policy, not principle. Success has no law - the end justifies the means, and all such specious arguments. But Jabbok and Peniel are God's verdict and appraisal, and even one chosen in the sovereignty of God will not get away with an earth-touch.

Joseph stands very high in the verdict of history and the noble of Bible biographies. But, undoubtedly, one definite aspect of the long years of the prison - being forgotten, and "the iron entering his soul" - was the discipline of that earth-touch of pride, conceit, and vanity which led him to tell his dreams to his brethren. Dreams which came true, yes, but when personal self-importance obtrudes itself even into the Divine intentions the whole thing can go down into death and suspense.

We leap the years and arrive at Moses. Here again we are in the presence of Divine sovereign intention and purpose, both as to the object and the instrument: the object - to fulfil the promise to Abraham, to bring his seed as a great nation out of bondage to possess the covenanted land; the instrument - a babe miraculously preserved and a man richly trained. But in manhood - the earth-touch; putting his own hands on the purpose and work of God, and by his own zeal, strength, and prestige essaying to effect that which was to be for ever one of the greatest testimonies in history to the power and glory of God *alone*. The result - forty desolating years at the back side of the desert; a scholar, trained leader, prince of Egypt eating his heart out while tending a few sheep. His feet had touched the *earth* in more than a physical way, and there was more than a physical meaning in the Lord's words at long last "Take off thy shoes from off thy feet". There is no earth-touch with God.

It is another long leap to Joshua and Ai. What a lot of Divine history and sovereignty, to say nothing of patience and faithfulness, lie behind the eventual

arrival of the people in the Land. Surely all the assurances and encouragements given to Joshua will not permit of a single wrong threatening the whole issue with disaster! But so it was! "Achan... took of the accursed thing", and the surge forward was brought to an untimely stop with no small consternation to Joshua and Israel. The earth-touch of personal ambition, covetousness, and lust for personal gain.

We conclude the survey by reminding ourselves of the disastrous results of David's counting of Israel. It is possible to make even the great blessings of God the ground and occasion of self-gratification; to point to that which is just of His grace, His mercy, and His faithfulness, and draw some satisfaction and congratulation to our own souls. It cost David the loss of many thousands of his people, shame and remorse to himself, and a stain upon his story. Yes, God in sovereign grace never cast him off but still brought the site of the Temple out of the chastisement of David's flesh.

What a story this earth-touch is! We have by no means covered all the ground. We could add many more instances from Old Testament and New Testament, but this is enough to underline the essential heavenly life, position, and government of the people - and servants - of the Lord, and to make us reach out to see if there be any leaven in our house. The Lord help us ever to keep disentangled from the realm and things of death. How we need to

> *"Dwell in the secret place of the Most High"*, and so *"Abide under the shadow of the Almighty"*.

Surely this gives point and meaning to our Lord's words: "Abide in me".

So help us God.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jul-Aug 1962

The Danger of Coming Short

"Lest any one of you should seem to have come short" (Hebrews 4:1).

For those who, like the New Testament writers, have a real burden and sense of responsibility for the spiritual life of God's people, one of the most heart-breaking things is the way in which so many who gave promise of going right on with the Lord are caught in some side-track and turn to something other or less than He meant for them. Not necessarily to sin or to the world, but to something which, while it brings them a great deal of gratification for a time, eventually proves to be a diversion resulting in arrested spiritual growth, and they are found in a backwater, a cul-de-sac, occupied with an alternative to "the whole counsel of God". Their 'new discovery', or 'light', or 'guidance', as they speak of it, by reason of the let-up of some tension, solution to some problems, promise of release into self-realisation, and escape from pressure, when the novelty and glamour have worn off is found to have been "deceitful waters", producing Jericho's fruits which fall before they are ripe.

The pathway of God's eternal purpose is strewn with such tragedies. The Bible, in both its Testaments, records the sad story of many who have missed the way, turned aside, and - to use the language and fear of Paul - not attained 'unto the prize of the high calling'. The New Testament is predominantly occupied with warnings, admonitions, exhortations and entreaties, because of this possibility, and with the tragic contingency as the ever-lurking peril and threat.

There is a pathway from eternity to eternity marked out in the Divine councils which is beset by numerous and various perils, ever waiting for the feet of the saints; always with a view to turning them aside, tripping them up, impeding their progress, or frustrating their intended destiny in the full thought of God.

The little word "lest", with its sevenfold context in the Letter to the Hebrews, links on with some of the most terrible things in spiritual experience, and compasses a long history. It is not our intention to trace that history or attempt the impossible task of enumerating its many-sided context. What we shall do is, firstly, enunciate a general principle of safety, and then instance the peril in one or two connections.

The Principle of Safety

Whenever we are being faced with some new and different course, some fresh proposition or position, there is one all-governing question that we should ask, and which we should take ample time to ponder and pray over seriously. That question is - Does this thing before me stand in direct line with the full purpose of God, as revealed - not in a fragment - but in the fulness of His Word? God has left us in no doubt that He has a clearly defined purpose in view as the ultimate object of all His dealings. He has also made it abundantly clear what that purpose is. Further, it is distinctly shown that believers are "called according to his purpose", and that they are to 'make their calling and election sure'. One who was an aged and advanced believer, and a greatly used servant of God, said - *toward the end of his course* - that his great concern was that he 'might apprehend that for which he had been apprehended by Christ Jesus'.

It is the business and duty of every true Christian so to study as to be quite clear as to what that 'Eternal Purpose' is. Having done so, *everything* that arises to engage us must be brought to the judgment bar of that purpose, and interrogated in its light. God will not cut across our path, or give us particular light at any fork in the road, if we have not been diligent in this quest, or faithful to the light given. It just will not do to allow ourselves to be influenced by questions of comparative right or wrong, good or bad, permissibility, desirability, expediency, or policy. Nor must ambition, soul-gratification, enlarged prospects 'for the Lord', wider acceptance in Christianity, or any such thing, colour our judgment or affect our decision. Advantage and cost are ruled out here as deciding factors. One question, and one alone, will decide tragedy or glory: Does this that is before me stand directly in line with the full purpose of God? When the end is reached, the full story told, the sum taken, how much that is bound up with this will be stripped off, as having no real substance with what is Christ, and therefore fail to be carried over into the eternal? What will the River carry away, and what will emerge on the other side? This was the big question that Paul put to the Corinthians.

In all the generations of this dispensation God is at work, seeking to secure a maximum of *eternal* value in accordance with *eternal* purpose in His elect. His discipline is to sift out the chaff, the merely perishable, and store up the imperishable. When He has secured - *in heaven* - an adequate and commensurate measure of that which is His Son out of all these generations, the terminus of the age will be brought about, the world purged by fire, and that accumulated eternal

value be brought in with the elect, to be the governing character of "the ages of the ages". Because so much hangs upon this issue, the course of the Purpose is beset by every means and effort for its frustration.

The peril or snare will be cunningly and ingeniously adapted to the 'prey'. What would capture some would make no appeal to others. The most spiritual will be presented with what *appears to be* most spiritual. Our particular temperament will be our peculiar danger. We shall have to, ever and always, be governed by principle, and not by feelings, preferences, arguments, or natural appeal. Intellectual palliatives, emotional ecstasies, activity-gratifications must be suspected or challenged. The one question must be paramount - Where does this lead? Does it essentially and intrinsically relate to the one supreme purpose of God?

Having enunciated the principle of safety, we proceed to touch upon the nature of the peril. Firstly, and in general, there is the ever-present snare of -

Mixture of Truth and Error

It does not require a great deal of intelligence in order to recognise that, throughout the history of God's work, the master-stroke of the great perverter has been confusion. God is not the God of confusion, but of order. Satan is the god of confusion. To get order out of chaos, God said: "Let there be light". To get chaos out of order, Satan says 'Let there be confusion'. His it is to confuse issues and elements. To do this, he must - as the word suggests - fuse (or try to fuse) elements which are constitutionally different and do not belong to each other. Thus there is a constitutional contradiction and inconsistency. It is only when his master-method runs amok that we have utter and unmitigated wickedness. His main work is deception by mixture.

It is just here that the place, meaning, and sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in the life of the child of God has its meaning and importance. He is 'The Spirit of Truth'. He alone knows where truth ends and falsehood begins. Only as we truly "walk in the Spirit" shall we know the truth and be made free from error. A walk in the Spirit demands a 'circumcised heart', a heart in which the severance has been made between flesh and spirit, Christ and self.

There has never been a heresy that has not had in it sufficient truth to deceive very good people. Likewise, there has never been anything wholly of God but

the strategy of the Evil One has been to fasten on to it some implication, insinuation, interpretation, or suggestion, that would make it questionable or 'dangerous'. He even did this with the Lord Jesus Himself. He did it with Paul all through his life. Let a demon-possessed girl in Philippi sponsor the preaching of Paul and Silas, and it is damned and discredited.

So, we come to this. A good thing can be made its own enemy, by being either confused, or taken out of its true meaning. Take, for instance, the doctrine of -

'Predestination' - 'Foreordination' - 'Election'.

Before we go on to illustrate our main object in this particular connection, one or two things must be said with emphasis. Firstly, let it be understood that we have no question as to whether 'predestination' is a true scriptural doctrine. When we speak of perils and side-tracks we do not include this doctrine in them essentially. *Rightly interpreted and understood,* the doctrine of election is of very great importance and value. Wrongly interpreted and related, because it is so great, there are few things more calculated to create confusion and spiritual arrest. Secondly, in what we say we do not claim to have any new revelation or special authority. Indeed, we only put forward our thought as a suggestion and in the form of a question. There may be more in it than that, but, whether we are wrong or right, we are determined to pursue the note of warning, because we have no small experience of many people of God being brought into limitation and division by this very thing. The thing itself may be right, but it must not be *everything.* If it is made that, then it can defeat its own purpose.

There has been more recently a considerable revival of what is called 'Reformed Doctrine' (or 'Theology'); that is, the teaching of the Reformers. Foremost (or almost so) among these is that which is especially associated with the name of Calvin. Indeed, it has become generally known as 'Calvinism'. It is the doctrine of predestination. There are very few subjects which have resulted in more controversy, divided teachers and followers, and led to greater confusion and perplexity.

We are not taking up the controversy on one side or the other, but we do suggest, by way of question, that one consideration may not have been given sufficient place. It may have escaped the eye of the exponents, or, if it has been facing them, they may have refused it adequate attention. The fact is that this matter of predestination has issued in very strong controversy, and not a little resentment

or bitterness, for one reason. The reason is that it has been so much - if not entirely - related to, and confined to, salvation. Is it not possible that predestination, and its kindred terms, has nothing more to do with salvation than a relative connection? Supposing that it was taken out of that association, in its main conception, and put into relationship with Divine *Purpose* - i.e. Predestination to a Divine Purpose, the Purpose being the governing everything? Supposing, further, that salvation and purpose are, respectively, the way and the end, but that the purpose is much more than salvation, so that it is possible to have salvation but miss the full purpose? Would not this solve many problems and explain much of the teaching of the Bible?

Look at several contexts in the Bible, especially in the New Testament, where the words "predestinated", foreordained", "elect" are definitely used.

1. This matter is almost, if not entirely, related to Christians after they have become such. All the instruction, exhortations, warnings, provisional 'ifs', and so on, are directed, not toward salvation or its conservation, but toward purpose, and that at the end or hereafter. It is all focused upon 'making the calling and election sure'. It is bound to an all-governing statement: 'foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son'.

2. Then note how closely this is connected with the Church as a corporate Body, and only to individuals as related to that Body. It is the Church that explains and answers election. Indeed, the designation "elect" is a collective-singular word; that is, the individuals are looked upon as one corporate entity - 'The Elect'. 'Chosen in Christ' relates to the Church. If we discern the particular *function* and vocation of the Church in the coming ages as governmental and administrative, implying the supreme place with Christ and His throne, and therefore implying that there will be other categories and ranks in the eternal Kingdom, we get beyond redemption and salvation to their full meaning. It is the purpose that gives meaning to election. Believers are "the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

3. The New Testament is very largely built upon the possibility of a great loss, even after justification by faith. Paul himself was deeply concerned about this "prize of the on-high calling", and that he might apprehend that for which he had been apprehended. Was he fearful of losing his salvation? Or was it what he called "the prize"?

4. Lest anyone should introduce here the argument of grace and works, let us hasten to point out that in Ephesians, where 'predestination' and the Church are most fully mentioned, and exhortations, urgings, and 'walking worthy of the calling' are so characteristic, grace is mentioned no fewer than twelve times. Grace is far more wonderful in relation to the immense and glorious Purpose than it is in basic salvation. Works and merit do not come into it. The greater the glory the greater the grace.

In the Old Testament, which is the book of foreshadowings of heavenly things in earthly matters, we read of the 'portion of the firstborn' in families. Israel was the firstborn in the family of nations. Their vocation was to be related to the nations, a sign and covenant to the peoples. For that, not merely for their own salvation, they were an elect nation. To them was given the portion of the firstborn, particularly in connection with the purpose. This they despised and lost by reason of pride, exclusiveness, and self-centredness.

The Church is 'the church of the firstborn ones, whose names are, written *in heaven'* (Heb. 12:23). It is not earthly, but heavenly. To the Church belongs the peculiar "calling", position, and vocation of an eternal and heavenly sort. This is what is called 'partnership in a heavenly calling', and "the on high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Heb. 3:1; Phil. 3:14).

To the Church as such, and in relation to her function in the ages to come, belongs the election; but to allow election to set aside perseverance (Phil. 3:12-15, etc.) is to make nonsense of all that teaching and admonition that is represented by such words as: "Give... diligence to make your calling and election sure", or "Walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called" (2 Pet. 1:10, Eph. 4:1).

There is a salvation which is "so as by fire", with the inheritance lost. There is a reigning with Christ with which a big provisional 'if' is connected.

We know only too well that the great and complicated subject of predestination cannot be solved or dismissed by a simple formula, but we have no doubt that election is governed by inheritance, to which salvation is relative and but the beginning. True, salvation is essential to the inheritance, but the inheritance is more than salvation - it is 'The Purpose' itself.

For want of space we must break off here. We may take up this governing issue

in relation to other 'perils' later. In the meantime let us re-emphasize that the thing that matters is that no 'truth', 'doctrine', theory or teaching, whether it be good or doubtful, must ever be allowed to become either an end in itself, or a sidetrack. It must never be taken out of the essential context of God's full purpose.

First published as an Editorial in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, March-April 1960, Vol 38-2

"Do It Yourself"

Readers in England will recognise that the heading is borrowed from that popular creative enterprise which has been growing so extensively in recent years. Behind the title there seem to be a number of implied questions, such as: Why not have all the interest, pleasure and satisfaction of making things yourself? Why pay all the extra cost of having others do for you what you can do for yourself? Why live only on the creativeness, skill and ingenuity of others when these very abilities may be lying latent in yourself? Why be solely objective in your possessions when, having 'done it yourself', you can have the inward joy and knowledge that comes from originality? Why live a secondhand life, when a whole realm of reality may remain in yourself, unexploited? Why not 'Do it yourself'? If you do 'Do it yourself' you will, at least, know the genuineness, the value, of the article, and how much it can be depended upon.

All this opens a door to very much real thought and possibility, and if we transfer the idea to the life of the Christian, it at once presents us with some very vital considerations. May I suggest some of these to you?

Is it not true that a vast amount of our Christianity is secondhand, in the wrong sense? Of course, we know quite well that, in the matter of our redemption and all that goes with the grace of God, there is nothing that we can do; it is received as God's gift, made by Him. But it is not of that that we are thinking. The substance and form of Christianity for very many is not the original, deep, heart-relatedness but is a tradition, a creation by men, a product of history, a crystallized system. It may be the work - even hard work - of our preachers, teachers, parents, churches, schools, but - in the deepest and most vital sense - it is not *ours*; it has not been wrought in the travail, the 'sweat and tears', of our own souls. Shaped by others, we have taken it ready made. We have taken it for granted, as a matter of course. There is a challenge which, sooner or later, will be a life-or-death issue as to our spiritual life. That challenge is: 'How much of what you have is really your own? How much of your faith, *i.e.* belief, is really yours? How much of your position stands true to that historic declaration: 'Here I am - I can do no other. God help me!' - in other words, 'I have no alternative; this is my very life!'?

There are other aspects of this 'Do it yourself' matter. When Jesus challenged

Pilate with the interrogation: "Sayest thou this of thyself, or did others tell it thee...?" (John 18:34), He touched a key to a vast amount bound up with the same issue. The issue was that Christ was being handed over to crucifixion on the uncertain and dangerous ground of mere report. We know that the whole case was false. It rested upon the words of suborned false witnesses, upon distortion and misrepresentation of things that He had said, upon fear of the consequences of allegiance to Him, upon policy, upon *prejudice.* Jesus was an inconvenience to their way of life, to their religious system, to their ambitions. So, Jesus must be got out of the way, and 'the end justifies the means'. But Pilate was offered this ready-made report, and, finding it a convenient way out of a predicament or embarrassment, he was ready to use it. His retort only shows how it pierced his armour and stung him. He only confirmed the truth and genuineness of the implied charge: "Thine own nation..." (v. 35). So Jesus went to the Cross because (at least in this particular) Pilate did not 'do it himself' - track this thing to its source and ascertain its real nature and cause.

Is it not true that our Lord is suffering shame, reproach, and rejection now because of an immense amount of falsehood and misrepresentation in Christianity itself? If Christianity, rather than being a mere 'religion', were really a *life* - that is, Christ as an indwelling reality checking us up on our behaviour, conduct, manners, speech, appearance, influence, courtesies or discourtesies - would He not be saved from the hands of many who want a case against Him and find it too easily in those who bear His name? This kind of life is not to be purchased in religious stores. It is not procured cheaply and from others. It is not something 'put on'. It is wrought in the very souls of those concerned, so that others are able to say - 'Something has *been done* in that one'; and to this we have to give ourselves. There is infinite value in a firsthand knowledge of the Lord.

We venture to press our point into another realm, and here it is a venture indeed. But its importance calls for boldness.

Is it not true that a very great amount of the weakness, shame, dishonour, and even disgrace, characterizing Christianity, is due to the ease with which Christians can take up and retail rumours, reports, insinuations, suspicions, and the like? 'Information' is passed on, and, without investigation, substantiation, or verification, it is accepted as true and repeated.

Is it not true that the ever increasing number of divisions and alienations among

Christians can be laid to the account of this failure to verify at first hand the criticisms and judgments that are current? Surely we are being forced to realise that this whole world - secular and otherwise - is wrapped around with a growingly dense blanket of suspicions, misrepresentations, distortions, insinuations, and lies! Confidence is well-nigh obliterated. Loyalty and mutual trust have almost entirely disappeared. The last precious thing in fellowship is assailed. Unless we constantly draw our breath from Heaven, this evil atmosphere gets into our own spiritual lungs, and we too breathe it out. Scepticism, mistrust, suspicion, from which very little indeed escapes, is the evil ether of this world. It wrapped itself around Jesus when He was here, so that He could only live and do anything at all by constantly resorting to the pure atmosphere of Heaven. The same spirit of prejudice and discrediting dogged the steps of Paul wherever he went. Attach a question-mark to anything, and the object is at once suspect.

The most poignant and tragic aspect of this sinister campaign of the evil powers is the facility with which Christians sponsor it. That destructive and blighting 'But' is the common pitfall. 'Yes, there is a lot of good in it (or him); *but* - you know...' That 'But' does not rest upon the solid ground of investigated and verified proof, but upon mere hearsay, or, at best, the prejudiced judgment of someone who has some private interest to protect.

We are zealous for the inspiration of the Scriptures, but we are not allowed to be selective in this. Not only are the glorious Scriptures of our salvation and the grace of God inspired, but equally such other Scriptures as: "Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that slandereth not with his tongue... nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour" (Psalm 15:1,3). Or: "Prove all things" (1 Thess. 5:21). Satan's workshop is kept busy night and day making what Paul calls "evil report" (2 Cor. 6:8), and his business is thriving. The Lord save us all from being accessories to that prosperity.

Here is a realm where we should not be cheated with the cheap words of this nefarious business, but, in the matter of being sure and 'knowing the truth' - 'Do it ourselves'.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jul-Aug 1960, Vol 38-4

The Earthly Man and the Heavenly Man

"Jesus... said... Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born from above (R.V.M.), he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

These words and nearby verses are used almost exclusively in speaking to the unsaved, and, of course, originally they so applied. But I am remembering that John wrote this many decades after the incident. The aged apostle, who outlived all the other apostles, went right back to that early time and wrote this, not for the unsaved but for the Church. John's writings are undoubtedly for the Church, and he wrote for the Church, *"Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* I do not mean, of course, that he said to the Church that it had to be born again, but he was laying down something of primary importance for Christians. You will notice that I have quoted the marginal rendering of the Revised Version, "born from above," because the original Greek word used here is the same as in verse 31 - "He that cometh from above is above all." It is an unusual thing to speak to Christians on that text, but the fact is that, in one way or another and in varying degrees, the whole of the New Testament is about that which is born from above - the nature of it, what it is, what it does, how it should behave, and everything else. That is a sweeping statement, but it will stand investigation.

Let us read a section of the Word, ignoring the very unfortunate chapter division, which of course was not in the original documents. We go back to what is verse 24 of chapter 2 and on to verse 13 of chapter 3.

"Jesus did not trust himself unto them, for that he knew all men, and because he needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man; for he himself knew what was in man. Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came unto him, by night, and said to him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born from above he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be

born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born from above. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou the teacher of Israel, and understandest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and bear witness of that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things? And no man hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven."

Two Men - The Earthly and The Heavenly

Now, in that section, we have two persons face to face, an earthly and a heavenly. One word is used of them both, the word 'man.' "Jesus did not trust himself ("commit himself" A.V.) unto them, for that he knew all men, and because he needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man; for he himself knew what was in man. Now there was a man..." I do not want to pass over anything without its force striking you. That John put in that word 'now' is tremendously significant. For some time I puzzled over the place of Nicodemus in the Gospel by John. John in his summary said he had written his Gospel with the one object of showing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:31), and I could not see how Nicodemus fitted into that, but that little word 'now,' linking with what had just been said and what follows, is a key. "Now there was a man..." Then as we go on we find that this word 'man' is used of Christ, the "Son of man." That title occurs some eighty-eight times in the New Testament, eighty-four of which are found in the Gospels, and eleven of these in this Gospel by John. Forgive this detail, but it is important. Thus John wrote, "Now there was a man," and then later he began to speak about Jesus as the Son of man, or to record His sayings concerning Himself as the Son of man. You will see something very important in that connection in a minute or two. This title is used of others besides Christ in the Bible, but whenever it is used of anyone else it is always without the article - 'son of man'; but when it refers to Christ, it has the definite article - "*the* Son of man."

The Earthly Man Represented by Nicodemus

You have, then, two people called 'man,' and they are facing one another. On this side is the earthly man. Jesus does not commit Himself unto him. He knew all men in that category, knew what was in that kind of man, what he was made of, how he was constituted, what he was capable of. It is to that earthly man that these other words relate, "There was a man...", and John is really saying and meaning, 'Now there was an earthly man named Nicodemus.' "That which is born of the flesh is flesh"; that is the earthly man. So in verse 13 again, "No man hath ascended into heaven" - that is the earthly man. Perhaps you say, 'Well now, that is doubtful; Elijah did and Enoch did.' But the exactness of the Greek here has this force - 'No man of himself hath ascended into heaven.' Elijah did not of himself, nor did Enoch of himself; but this One, this heavenly Man, ascended Himself. Not so the earthly man - 'no man of himself.' Verse 19 - "This is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness." This again shows us the earthly man. Verse 27 - "A man can receive nothing, except it have been given him from heaven." The earthly man 'cannot' - he has no capacity for heavenly things. Thus we note some of the features of the earthly man - what he is made of, how he is not going to be trusted by heaven, what his limitations are, what he cannot do of himself, what he cannot receive of himself. 'There was an earthly man.'

The Lord Jesus, The Heavenly Man

On the other side, there is the heavenly Man. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." "Born from above." Verse 12 - "If I told you earthly things, and ye believe not how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things? And no man hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven, even the Son of man, *which is in heaven."* Here is the heavenly Man. Verses 16 and 17 - "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" - the heavenly Man, given from heaven. "God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world" - God *sent His* Son. Verse 31 - "He that cometh from above is above all." Then, of course, you want to read all those other passages which are recorded later on. Take chapter 6, for example. "I am come down from heaven" (verse 38); "I am the bread which came down out of heaven" (verses 41 and 51). You know how much there is of it there, and especially verse 62 - "What then if ye should behold the Son of man ascending *where he was before?"*

The Earthly Man at His Best

An earthly man and the heavenly Man standing face to face - two representative men. Look at Nicodemus. There is a touch of genius (speaking naturally) about this thing in John's selecting Nicodemus and putting him in here - let us say rather there is the genius of the Holy Spirit. Here we have Nicodemus, a representative earthly man. As to his nation, he belongs to the nation that was chosen of God out of all the nations, to whom belonged the oracles and the covenant, a nation peculiarly and particularly related to God (Rom. 3:2; 9:4-5). As to his sect, he is a Pharisee. 'Pharisee' is a Hebrew word which means separated by specific beliefs and practices. Within the chosen and particular nation, the Pharisees were a particularly religious people or sect - you may say the very core of the elect nation; very strict, as we know, in their tithing, in their eating and drinking, their washings and rites; and they held very strictly to the belief in the natural immortality of the soul; yet Jesus says to this representative Pharisee, "Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." As to his position, he is a ruler of the Jews, that is, a member of the National Council, the Sanhedrin. As to his character, he is not a man to be despised. He is a man to be honoured, a perfectly honest man. He is mentioned three times by John. The second occasion is when he raises the question of right procedure in the Council - "Doth our law judge a man, except it first hear from himself and know what he doeth?" (John 7:51). The third time is when beloved friends were bringing their spices to the tomb, and it says, "And there came also Nicodemus, he who at the first came to him by night, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight" (John 19:39). He is out in the open now, in plain honesty. Yet as to his spiritual condition, he is blind, ignorant and helpless. "Art thou the teacher of Israel, and understandest not these things? ...We speak that we do know, and bear witness of that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things?" Blind, ignorant, helpless - that is this representative man, the earthly man at his best in every way.

Features of the Heavenly Man

Then by contrast we have the heavenly Man. His nationality is from heaven. "He that cometh from above is above all" - above all sects, above all laws and regulations, above all ritual; that is what John is bearing out throughout the whole Gospel. His position is one of Divine authority; "the Father... hath given all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22). "As the Father raiseth the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son also quickeneth whom he will" (John 5:21). His character also is Divine. With regard to His spiritual condition as over

against that of Nicodemus, there is one word that sums up so much - "knowing." Nicodemus was blind, ignorant, helpless. Here is the Lord Jesus just the opposite - knowing, and, because knowing, never being at a loss, never in a quandary, never brought to an impasse. He knew all men, He Himself knew what was in man. "If I tell you heavenly things...", meaning that He could, He knew them. "We speak that which we do know."

Now for the real point of this, we must go back to chapter 1:48-49. "Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? ....Thou art the Son of God." In the Bible this attribute of knowing man is restricted to God alone. It is attributed only to Jehovah. You remember the words of Jeremiah - "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins (Jer. 17:10); 'I, the Lord, know.' It is an attribute of God alone, to know man in this way. "Whence knowest thou me? ...Thou art the Son of God."

Now you see what I meant when I said John puts two things together. Jesus is the Son of God; Jesus is the Son of man. The Son of man is the Son of God. Because He has Divine attributes. He knew all men. You notice that this knowledge is both universal and individual. He knew all men, and knew what was in man (or "the man" - R.V. margin); "all men," universal, and "the man," individual. This characteristic of Deity was the thing which was constantly manifesting itself, for in this Gospel by John this word 'to know' in this sense occurs more than fifty times. It was constantly coming out - this that men would call His uncanny knowledge, His supernatural insight. He was never at a loss for want of knowing what to do. He would test His disciples on this very thing. "This he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would, do" (John 6:6). He was always precipitating impossible situations, and pushing them on to His disciples, and saying in effect, 'What are you going to do about that?' 'We cannot do anything. Two hundred pennyworth of bread will not go very far in a crowd like this!' It was ever a discovery of helplessness because they did not know. And then He would do what was needed, for He knew. Here is the heavenly Man over against the earthly.

The Two Men - Irreconcilable Differences

Now, how are we going to bring this together for a present application? We are brought face to face with these two persons, one representative of the earthly at its best, the other God's only acceptable Man - the only One Who stands with God, yet representative of that new race in Himself which God could receive

with favour. He is alone with God, and all other men stand apart. Therefore, except you be born from above, you can neither see nor enter the kingdom of God. There is a great divide between these two men, and it cannot be bridged by argument, by discussion, nor by any kind of explanations sought by Nicodemus. It is a great divide caused by irreconcilable differences, and you cannot bridge it. There is the man who 'cannot.' That word 'cannot' is final - "he cannot see." That man is the earthly man. But there is the Man Who 'can', the heavenly Man. John is showing all the way through this Gospel that when no one else can, Jesus can!

The Two Men in the Individual Christian

Now our point is not just the fact of the difference, nor the fact that we must be born from above, but it is the nature of the difference. At that point, everything begins for the Christian. There is nothing at all for you until you have been born from above; but that is only the beginning. I doubt whether any of us has got very far yet in the recognition and understanding of the difference between these two men, and until we do understand that and mark the differences, we shall get nowhere in the Christian life. You and I are still far more earthly and far less heavenly as Christians than we ought to be. The great divide between our natural and our spiritual life is not nearly so clearly marked as it should be; and that opens the place for the understanding of God's strange ways with us.

When we get into the realm of the Holy Spirit's activities through being born of the Spirit, we get into the realm of the greatest reality. Let us make no mistake about this, it is terrible reality. You cannot play with flesh, you cannot tolerate the natural life, if you have come into the realm of the Spirit's activity. Carelessly, knowingly, persistently, habitually, admit there any of the earthly, and you meet no other than very God Himself. That is the reality of this difference. You at once begin to discover that you cannot get on. There is a wall, there is a barrier, you are brought to a standstill when you admit any of the earthly into what is essentially the heavenly. These two are so utterly put asunder in God's sight, that, as far as He is concerned, this natural 'cannot,' may not; there is no playing with it. The very first thing is to recognise the impossibility of the natural being brought into the spiritual, the earthly into the heavenly. That will explain all the confoundings. Nicodemus is confounded when he comes face to face with the heavenly Man, and if we are on natural, earthly ground in any respect, we are going to be confounded in that respect by reason of our relationship with the Lord Jesus.

The Earthly Man to Diminish

Hence the strange dealings of God with us. What are they all about? What do they mean? We have to recognize there is reality, we cannot get away from it. Sometimes we would like to run away from the reality, it is so real; God is so real, things are so real. They are working out according to principle. By His strange, mysterious ways with us, His deep dealings, God is winding up the earthly, bringing it to an end, in order to make us those who are heavenly. "Born from above," not only as a necessary beginning, but with a view to going on to fulness of growth and manhood, conformed to the image of His Son; and the course of God's dealings with us is, on the one hand, to confound us in our natural earthly life, and write over it, Impossible! We are made to know that in spirit, in soul, in body, we have no power of ourselves, no attributes, no qualifications, for knowing or doing heavenly things. At our best, we are helpless, blind and in the dark. But that is the negative side.

On the positive side, God is working mysteriously and strangely to bring us into heavenly things, in knowledge and understanding. If you cannot say that is true about you as a Christian, well, look into it, there is something seriously wrong. But it is true that we as children of God do know things that others do not know. We do know - even though it be only in a small measure - what the natural man does not know, and our knowledge of things spiritual and heavenly is growing, very gradually perhaps, but none the less growing. By deep, dark, mysterious, painful ways, we are moving through into a realm where we are coming to see what we never could have seen and what no one could ever see but by a passage through death and being born from above. Oh, we cannot explain all God's methods, we cannot give an answer to all the why's of God's Ways, but what we do know is that we are passing through into a realm that is altogether new in the matter of knowledge, a realm that is different, that is other. All the values of God are of this kind. We cannot bring our natural mind to the things of God and give them interpretation with any spiritual value. However much we study the Bible, it is closed for real spiritual value to every one who has not gone through death to a heavenly new birth. Spiritual knowledge waits upon that. But we must understand this great divide - that these two men are totally different, and there is no companionship, no fraternising between Nicodemus and Jesus: there is no fellowship, there is no understanding: they belong to two worlds, they cannot speak one another's language. Even when One from heaven gives heavenly meanings into earthly things, the earthly man cannot see the heavenly meanings.

The Heavenly Man The Only Real Testimony

Now the Lord is going to get rid of the difference where we are concerned. "Ye must be born from above", and then the differences begin to go. The things which lock us up, which limit us, will go; things which are impossible are even now becoming the very things of our normal life. We are learning; but oh, it is a deep way, because this earthly man is so deeply rooted, he is always cropping up in some way or other. Understand what God is doing. He is so working in us that, as we move on through this life and then leave it behind, the one remaining impress will be, not how much we have done or said, nor what our activities have been, but that a heavenly man, a heavenly woman, has been here. The value of that is inestimable. That is the explanation of God's dealings with us. If you forget all else that I have said, do not forget that. The one consequence that God is after is to leave such an impress by our having been on this earth - something has come from heaven and registered its heavenliness here in this world. Oh, it may have been rejected, the reactions to it may have been violent: the more heavenly it is, perhaps the more violent will be the reactions to it. That is what John says about the Lord Jesus, but that does not alter the fact that Jesus passed through this world and left the impress of a heavenly Man; and that is the whole argument of the New Testament in every part - that believers are to be here, not for this or that or some other incidental thing, but to leave the impress of heaven here: that God should have a witness here: that heavenly things, things of eternity, things of the Spirit, are the things which matter. Do not think that it is a matter of how much preaching or teaching you do or Christian work in which you engage. Those things may be accompaniments, but if there is not the presence of Christ, the heavenly Man, in those concerned, and in what they do and in what they say, and if the one remaining thing when they have passed on is not, 'We recognised the Lord in that man, that woman': if that is not the result, we have missed the meaning of Christianity. Christianity is that. Therefore you must be born from above, because that alone brings in what is of heaven.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, May-June 1951, Vol 29-3

"The Flame of a Sword"

"He placed at the East of the Garden... the flame of a sword which turned every way..." Genesis 3:24.

A glance at the context will show that this deliberate act of God was a precautionary measure against fallen Adam and his race as now "flesh," attempting or assaying to touch or appropriate that which symbolises the holy Divine Life of the ages. Ultimately it points to Christ as the Life, The Way of Life, and The Source of Life. Trees are always symbols of men, and man is always the symbol of representation.

The principle here so early established is then clearly that for "flesh" or man in his "flesh" to presume into the realm of what is wholly and utterly of God is to be cut down. This is not only true when the flesh would advance directly in proud self-sufficiency, or in ignorant and immodest presumption, but this "flame of a sword turned *every way*." Every kind and direction of the advance of the flesh is met in the same way. Who shall ever tabulate or define the ways of fleshly activity and projectings of itself in relation to that which is of God?

The Scriptures, however, give a great number of instances; too many for our consideration here, but we may note some as typical and suggestive. Let us first, albeit, realise that the Scriptures establish abiding principles by powerful and drastic methods, and if at a post-scripture age (that is, after the canon of Scripture is closed as to content), the Lord does not invariably come out in the same flaming expression or form, the principle remains, and there is no departure from what He has laid down in His Word.

It would be well if we recognised the great law of "Holiness unto the Lord"; consecration to God; and upon what this law rests. The two great factors in this relationship to God are

The Blood and The Spirit.

Where these are the holiness of God appertains and is involved. That which had its being in virtue of these is touched by the flesh at its peril. Hence in the great symbolic system of the Old Testament the most scrupulous care is taken that

nothing which is a type or suggestion of flesh shall ever appear uncovered before God or in relation to His things.

Egypt, which means fleshly strength in the realm of will often came into *assertive* relation to what was of God, but never without judgment. Pharaoh represents the "I will" of God's adversary, and as that eventually reaches out its hand to take hold of what had been consecrated by the Blood of the Lamb and had come under the regime of the "Pillar" - the Spirit - it is smashed with a terrible judgment; through entrapping and confusion and overwhelming. The flame of the sword came round *that* way.

This fleshly will is not all at once eradicated from the servants of God. It limits the Lord and brings much suffering upon them often through many years of their lives. So often the best and greatest work is accomplished through them in a comparatively brief period when the "Natural force" in Spiritual things is abated, and they had learnt that only God can do His own work (in the Old Testament natural force in God's servants, i.e., preservation of faculties and health, is only a *type* of spiritual energy. See Moses, Caleb etc.). Eventually it will have to be recognised that the Lord has not been working sympathetically with the self-strength of the will of His servants, however good may have been their motive and object. If the Lord Jesus is an example of anything, He is more than anything else an example of dependence. The staves of His journey were very long and can be clearly seen. His serenity and confidence, His tranquility and possession are the issue of a life lived in secret with His Father, to Whom He is seen to resort continually. "Nothing of myself" is a watchword of His.

One of the most damaging things in the realm of God's work; a thing which eventually leads to shame and confusion and much sorrow is

Natural Soul Force

projected by strong-willed, determined, aggressive Christians, who have not come to a spiritual state where they are able to discriminate between stubborn indomitableness, and personal determination and resolution, and which is altogether another thing - spiritual grace in endurance, perseverance, Divine in-strengthening.

The Lord has often to break the former to make place for the latter. Do not talk about Paul's wonderful will to go through. Let Paul talk to you about the Lord's

wonderful grace to continue.

Whenever a man or a woman really recognising the truth that Calvary means the end of "I" commits himself or herself to the Lord to work it out, the flame of the sword will come round to the point where that "flesh" would seek to enter into the realm where the first Adam no longer has any standing.

The features of a personal strength of will are hardness, coldness, death, resentment of interference, suspicion of rivals, intolerance of obstructers, detachment, independence, secretiveness, heat, etc. While spiritual strength is always marked by love, warmth, life, fellowship, openness, confidence, and trust in the Lord.

If the Lord at any time of old desired to refer to and give an illustration of His exceeding great power, He brought Israel's deliverance from Egypt and Pharaoh to mind. Egypt was the great world-power, and Egypt held out against God to the last ounce. But what was the instrument of the overthrow of this power? It was the Lamb and its shed blood. At the end, in the Revelation, the dragon, the whole power of Satan is overthrown by the Lamb. The Lamb is the synonym for weakness and yieldingness. If the weakness of God can do this mighty destruction, what can His strength not do?

Paul says of Christ that "He was crucified through weakness," and, he adds, "we also are weak with Him." Yes, but he also says, "by the Cross he triumphed." Triumphed through weakness!

One of the the most difficult lessons that the Lord's children have to learn is how to

Let Go to God.

Even in a matter that is right and in the purpose of God there has to be the lessons which Abraham had to learn through Isaac. It is not in our personal clinging to a God-given *thing*, whether it be a promise or a possession, but faith's restful and fear-free holding on to the Lord Himself. If we had a thing from the Lord Himself we can rest assured that what He gives He will not take again without some larger purpose in view; and on the other hand, none can take from us what He has determined for us. But there are many dangers which arise from our own will in relation to a Divine gift or purpose.

The first is of making that thing ours instead of holding it in and for the Lord. This leads to fierceness and personal uprisings. Then jealousy will not be long in showing its ugly head, and jealousy with its twin - suspicion - soon destroy fellowship and spontaneity of communion. Does not jealousy declare most loudly the fact of personal possession, personal interest? If we realised how privileged we are to have even a very small part in the things of God, and how it is all of His Grace, surely we should be very grateful that we could just have the remotest connection with Him.

Then further, when we hold things received or as promised or believed to be for us as only unto the Lord, in restful trust, we make it possible for the Lord to save us from being mistaken in the matter. It is not an unusual thing for a child of God to come to see that a thing which he or she most strongly believed to be God's will or way for them was not so, and it had to be surrendered. If there was any personal element of will in it the experience has proved terrible, and has left works of bitterness and mistrust. Yet once again, a strong personal mind and will in relation to things of God too often makes us a law unto ourselves. That is, we get into an attitude which implies that we *only* know the will of God in the matter. We do not trust that others also may be led of the Lord in this thing, and so the corporateness of guidance so necessary to the house of God is destroyed or paralysed.

It is true that when a thing is really of God, in His will, by gift or by promise, and we begin to try and work it, realise it, use it, make it effectual by our own strength, or wisdom, then it seems to harden and become dead. Then through a battle in which all sorts of questions, fears, heats and chills are mixed up, we have to come to the place where we say, "Well Lord, if this thing is from You, I trust You to realise it; if it is not, then I let it go." That is victory! The Lord's way is clear! "The good, and perfect, and acceptable will of God" is only known when we - our bodies - have come unto the altar. Let us be sure that what we believe to be a strong faith-stand and fight for something which we are convinced is of God, is not fraught with those baneful elements which spring from a natural determination, and a constitutional or temperamental dislike for letting go or giving in. It depends on whether we let go in unbelief or weakness, or whether it is *faith's glorious victory of letting go to God.*

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, July-August 1930, Vol 8-4

The Food Question

In times of national emergency one of the most vital considerations, and one that very largely governs the issue, is that of the food supply. To conserve it is a primary feature of both defence and aggression. To keep it from falling into the enemy's hands is a tactic of victory. If this is true in the natural and earthly realm, it certainly is true in the spiritual and heavenly. It is not always realized by Christians that they are born (at new birth) into conditions which are such as mark an emergency. That is to say, a state of war has existed from the day that Adam sinned, and that warfare is becoming more intense as the end of the dispensation approaches. A feature of this warfare is the food question, and the final issue in the case of each believer depends to a very serious degree upon spiritual food. As in the time of Gideon, so now. The Midianites then sought to spoil and steal all the crops, Gideon was marked by God as one to be taken up and used as a deliverer because secretly he gave himself up to conserve food for his brethren, and so defeat the enemy.

But to consider the matter of food generally: there are some quite simple analogies between the natural and the spiritual.

Firstly, then, is the matter of

APPETITE

A first question asked of a patient by a doctor is, How is your appetite? showing that this is closely related to sickness or health, and may be a symptom. Now a fact to be recognized is that in the Christian there is an "inner man", which is altogether other and distinct from the outer man, and has a whole set of definite faculties and functions. This inner man is capable of growth; of being in sickness or in health; of being weak or strong; of being able to do spiritual exploits, or being impotent in the fight. No matter how full of natural vim and energy a Christian may be, he cannot by any natural strength effect even one iota of spiritual value. There will, sooner or later, be a terrible breakdown both in the worker and the work, and any emergency will quickly precipitate this, if there is no real spiritual constitution. This depends upon spiritual food. But inasmuch as it is so easy to go on in natural energy and activity and fail to realize that it is not really spiritual power, we should apply the test of spiritual life and health. How

is your appetite? What kind of an appetite have you for spiritual food, Is it poor? Is it easily satisfied? Is it faddy, or fussy? Do you have to have your spiritual food prepared and served up in such a pleasant and tasty way as to make you feel that you are eating and yet not eating? What can you eat? is a question for the delicate and invalid.

For the truly healthy and sound, the demand is for 'something that you can put your teeth into'; 'something solid'; 'something to live and work on'! This is a fairly sound test of our spiritual life, and Paul, the Apostle, has left us in no doubt about it. "I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but... as unto babes. I fed you with milk, not with meat: for... ye were not able to bear it" (1 Cor. 3:1,2).

A SELF-DECEIVING PRACTICE

One of the most treacherous and disastrous features of the feeding side of life in recent years is the confectionery side. Pleasant to the taste, nullifying the sense of hunger *FOR THE MOMENT,* anything more substantial is destroyed. But it is quick to be taken, the sense of need or desire for a false world, treacherous in that it fails to make for constitution, and when the rigid test comes; when epidemics are rife, and germs are abroad; when for any reason endurance is called for or a crisis has to be passed, then the fatal lack of constitution is revealed.

This all has a tragic counterpart or parallel in the spiritual life. There is a distressing tendency to serve up spiritual things in the way that will make the least demand. Attractiveness is a primary consideration. The solid classics of a generation or two ago have been supplanted by that which can be read in a few minutes, and then is done with. It is said that this is what is demanded, and there is little demand for anything more substantial. Is this a symptom of the spiritual state of the majority of Christians today? We cannot but foresee a terrible 'fainting in the day of adversity'.

The perils of this condition are many and great. One of them is a predisposition to error. Errors usually gain their advantage by presenting something which offers the line of least resistance. That is to say, they seem easily to solve some difficult problem, or offer a quick way to a desired end. There is something pleasant and fascinating about every substitute which Satan produces for the pure truth. People who are not prepared to take or accept the way of the Cross in

all its implications are carried away as by a flood when some beautiful lie is offered as a way to reach the same end. The Word of God makes it unmistakably clear that the Cross demands or postulates the setting aside of the whole race in Adam, and of man by nature; and that there is no hope for any, except as they are of the new creation in Christ Jesus.

DISCRIMINATION AND SERIOUSNESS OF PURPOSE

A predisposition in the physical realm to any malady is often overcome by constitutional means. So it is in the spiritual.

In the physical body there is a wonderful system of testing (accepting or rejecting) food properties. The bloodstream performs the double function of bringing nourishment to each and every part of the body, and taking from it its waste products for elimination. Everything that is taken into the body is carried to the little doors, so to speak, or cells, and there it is challenged by the action of certain secretions. Such of the food as is found to have nutritive qualities is accepted, broken down, and transmuted into vital tissue and nerve fuel. If there are useless or poisonous elements, they are - in a healthy body - rejected. A battle may ensue for their ejection, and some consciousness of this battle may be registered in the person concerned. The point for the moment is, that in the matter of food there is required a basic vitality by which values are discerned, determined, and turned into the thought, the speech, the action, and the nature of the individual. On the other hand, the harmful elements, and that which is lacking in value, will be perceived and rejected. Thus in the case of the believer, how important it is that for building up there should be a real vitality in relation to food.

So then, real life means appetite and discrimination, leading to strength and capability. But it is also necessary to take an initial serious attitude toward the food question. We can through carelessness fail to give the inner man what he needs, and just allow him to be served up with mere pleasantries in spiritual truth. Let us recognize that he *MUST HAVE* wholesome and really nutritious food, and we should give ourselves definitely to seeking this out. The essence of nourishment is Christ Himself. Therefore the test of everything is whether it really ministers Christ to us. Not, How much more do we know? or, Have a pleasant sensation, but How is it possible to grow in the measure of Christ?

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Nov-Dec 1936.

Foundation Truths

"*Ye turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus.*" 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10.

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians has been divided into five short chapters which can all be read in about ten minutes. Certain things emerge even as we are reading. The first is that this was written to comparatively new converts so that we can learn something about how they started and had been progressing so far. It is a message about the beginnings of the Christian life. Then we are impressed by the exemplary character of these young Christians. The apostle had no fault to find with them, but everything to commend. He wrote that he gave thanks to God always for them all; and he went on to say that they had become an example to all that believed. Best of all we can find here some definition of the gospel which produced such Christians. Paul called it "our gospel" and recalled that it came to them in the power of the Holy Spirit. In the last two verses of the first chapter he made a few concise statements which represent an epitome of this gospel. It needed a master hand to gather such majestic truth into the compass of four simple clauses, but here they are:

1. "Ye turned unto God from idols to serve a living and true God".

That is the first stage of the Christian life. It might be argued that these had been pagans in a pagan world with its system of idol worship, so the comparison cannot fairly be made between them and people of our own 'Christian' society. My answer is that it is quite right in principle and in fact to class all unsaved people together. The principle is that the idea behind the word 'serve' is that of worship, which is really 'worth-ship'. These people had devoted themselves to other objects than God, and wrongly imagined that these were the things of real worth. What belongs to God and is not given to Him but to some other object is really idolatry. And what all men do, in many forms and in different ways is to give their lives in service to false gods.

So the first stage of a true Christian life is this - the realisation and recognition that God is worth your giving everything to Him. He is worthy to have the

worth-ship of your life, to have all that you have and are laid at His feet. So when Paul and his companions (for he wrote in the plural) came to this people, he set forth in the first place the worthiness of God to have all their lives, and to have them altogether. As he spoke of the living and true God the Holy Spirit made them realise how different they had been and how unworthy had been the course hitherto. We can only see the worthiness of God in Christ, and it is to Him that the Spirit testifies:

'Marvel not that Christ is glory
All my inmost heart has won.'

That is where it all begins. Anything less than that, anything other than that as a beginning will find us out sooner or later. He is One who, by reason of His self-manifestation and of the great work He has done for our redemption, is worthy to have everything that we count worthwhile in life.

As we go on in the Christian life, it is upon that very thing - our foundational beginnings - that we are tested again and again. It comes up repeatedly - Is Jesus Christ worthy of this? Is God worthy of this? Is this something which is too valuable to give up to Him or for Him? What place does He have in comparison with this? And if at the beginning there is any faultiness or weakness about that, we shall find ourselves sooner or later held up until we have got through on the sheer and direct question of whether He is worthy.

These Thessalonians made such a good start, and then went on to become such exemplary Christians because they settled it very thoroughly in their hearts at the beginning that there was nothing in the world worth receiving their worship compared with Him. It indicates the deep and large place which they gave to the Lord Jesus from the very start. All along the way we have to face this test - 'is the Lord worthy of this? Is He big enough even for this?' So it comes back to the simple question - which often is not so simple - as to whether He has captured and captivated our hearts and been given first place there. You can go bounding on in your Christian life if this is settled. You will make little or no progress if you have questions and controversies in this connection. If we harbour reserves, if we want our own way, if we want to serve our personal interests, then we do not go on but are held up.

These Christians made swift progress because there was no division of heart between them and the Lord about anything. Through the Scriptures the Lord

brings us the challenge as to whether this is foundational in our walk with Him. After all the Lord is not satisfied for us just to have head knowledge about Himself and His truth. He does not accept our informed minds, even though they hold orthodox views as to His cross, His church and whatever. The Lord looks right down into our hearts to enquire what place is given there to Him. He is less concerned about the spiritual information which we hold in our minds and much more desirous of being given the full worship of our hearts. From the first moment the Thessalonians determined to worship God. That matter was fully settled, and so it was possible for Paul to thank God always for them. He saw that they had no personal interests and no wishes of their own. They were devoted to the Lord without reserve and were right out for Him. Such people always provoke praise to God.

"A living and true God." That is why He is worthy of worship. If we give our lives and pour them out in any other direction than for God, we are pouring treasure into the sand. There is going to be no return. That will be an end in itself, and will produce a death from which there is no return. God, however, is living and true. Everything else will prove false and empty. If there is one thing about Christian life it is the absolute reality of God. For our flesh it is not always quite pleasant to face that reality, but it is at least reality. Far better to come up against God as reality even in a painful way, than not to know who God is and where. Far better to have a living God who checks you up, if necessary who chastens you, than to have a god who is no God at all.

2. "...to wait for his Son from heaven..."

Many people have failed to recognise that this waiting for the return of Christ is part of the foundation of Christian life, and part of the gospel by which we are saved. To wait for His Son from heaven. What did this mean to the Thessalonians? In this brief letter Paul had much to say to them about the coming again of the Lord Jesus. Amongst a great many other things, it means that all our personal hopes and our hope for the world is bound up with the kingdom of Christ. Apart from His coming and bringing in His kingdom there is no hope at all. So it was that the Thessalonians realised that until they knew Christ they had been wearing themselves out for things which offered no solid hope. Life had been an enigma, a tragedy, until they were able to expect this eternal kingdom of God's Son.

When they came to the Lord they did so on this basis, namely that God's Son is

coming again and will put everything right. The one hope for mankind is the coming kingdom. It is one of the strange enigmas that the world still has false hopes of putting itself right. Someone has said that 'all we have learned from history is that we have learned nothing from history', and that is just what is happening. Men are getting into deeper and deeper mire and perplexity, not seeing any way through, and yet all the time they are seeking for expedients to save the situation and rescue the world. But it is a counsel of despair. The Word of God makes it perfectly clear that there is no hope for humanity apart from Jesus Christ being in the place of absolute Lordship in His kingdom. The Thessalonians came to believe that. They did learn something from history. What they learned was that it gets you nowhere - except into more and more trouble, more perplexity and final despair. Then they saw that God's Son is coming from heaven to set up His kingdom and they knew that when that happened all would be well with God's redeemed humanity.

This is fundamental. Let us get it settled right at the beginning, not as a mere study of prophecy about the Second Coming, but as a fundamental conviction that our hopes do not rest on any prospect in this world, but only on the sure and certain expectation of the personal role of Christ. He is coming, and when He comes all will be well. We shall be lifted above that which now limits us. Is it not remarkable that when we Christians sing a hymn about the coming of the Lord something seems to be released? It is not just that we have a lovely idea, sing about it and so feel better, but rather that the Holy Spirit comes to us in full measure as we concentrate on the coming Lord. After all the Spirit is working everything in the light of that day, and when He finds the people of God in harmony with Him, He gives a wonderful sense of uplift and life. How many people in sufferings and trials have been lifted clean out and up just by being reminded that Jesus is coming again?

Many years ago I used to visit an old couple who were so poor that they lived in one room. The old man had not moved out of his armchair for twenty years, and as he could not be left alone, his wife rarely went out of the house. They had nothing in this world. Were they unhappy and depressed? Not a bit of it! I used to pay them a regular visit every week and they were always a rebuke to me. They always gave me a smiling welcome and wanted to know what I had been preaching about. And their hope? The coming of the Lord. Right to the end they lived rejoicing in this expectation. Now it was no false hope in their case, even though the Lord did not return in their lifetime. The hope is valid to us all and the Holy Spirit bears witness that this is the goal to which He is leading us - the

coming kingdom. If you read on in this letter you will find that the Thessalonians knew quite a bit about adversity - they "received the word in much affliction". They knew ostracism, they knew persecution, they knew what it was to be frustrated in their business life by reason of their faith. They knew physical suffering and inward distress, but they went on. They were examples to others. Why? Just because they were looking for God's Son from heaven. It was a basic part of their faith in Christ.

3. "...whom he raised from the dead..."

The one they were waiting for, the one in whom they were trusting, was the one who had been raised from the dead. What did that mean for them? There is only one who can raise from the dead, and that is God. So if God raised Jesus from the dead it is a clear proof that in His opinion the work for which He came into the world had been perfectly completed. We know that Jesus had died in order to accomplish full redemption for sinful mankind. He died to deal with the whole sin question and to take away condemnation from believing men. This work had been completed to God's own satisfaction, as He attested by His act of raising Christ from the dead. The debt had been fully paid. The condemnation had been wholly taken away. This is the meaning of the resurrection.

This was a key point in Paul's preaching. It had been received by the Thessalonians who now knew that the whole sin question was for them a settled matter. Forgiveness is secured; salvation is established; God is satisfied. How important it is that we should all have this great truth built into our spiritual foundations. So many Christians suffer from a sense of accusation and condemnation which completely undermines this fundamental fact of the finished work of Christ. It is true that we still make mistakes, we blunder, we default, we err, we sin, but we must never allow satanic forces to rush in with their persistent suggestion that the work of the cross is not enough and that we can again be brought back on to the ground of condemnation. If we do give any ground to the accuser we shall never make the kind of spiritual progress which was evident in the Thessalonian believers. On the contrary we shall find ourselves living a very jerky kind of Christian life, going on for a bit, then pausing, coming up only to fall down again. Those who get into that kind of repeated condemnation become a playground for the Devil, never going on steadily in the way that makes it possible for God's servants who labour among them to say that they thank God on every remembrance of them. God raised His Son from the dead! This is a basic truth which will bring us deliverance.

Moreover we are told that He "raised us up with him" (Ephesians 2:6). Therefore we have no right to be downcast. We need not reason or argue about the matter but just rejoice, as the Thessalonians did, that it has all been fully and finally settled by the resurrection from the dead of our crucified Saviour.

4. "...even Jesus, who delivereth us from the wrath to come."

This clause brings a shadow into our thinking, a shadow which we would much rather avoid, but which is nevertheless a part of the foundation of our faith. For the Word of God declares again and again that wrath is coming. It is coming. Paul's words carry no vagueness or doubt but declare quite clearly and definitely that there is coming a day of God's wrath. If we ask why it has to be, the answer is that it was never originally appointed for man but was intended for Satan and his angels. We are back to our original words about idols. There are only two gods in this universe. One is the true God whom we serve and the other may have various forms and representations but is really the god of this world, Satan. It is true that the number of those who would actually claim to be Satan-worshippers is comparatively small, but this does not alter the fact that man is a worshipping creature and either worships the true and living God or allows His rival to take His rightful place in the life, and so gives the 'worth-ship' to the Devil. Satan's first approach to man is always the attractive one. He started as the most beautiful of all God's creatures (Ezekiel 28:12-15). "Even Satan" says the apostle Paul, "fashioneth himself into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). It is in this guise that he seeks to capture men's hearts and obtain their worship, and when he gets it, then he drags his followers into the same condemnation which God has prepared for him. That is the terror of the gospel. It is real but it is not for the believer, for God delivers us from it, because we accept the redemption so freely provided in the Lord Jesus.

This was the fourth element in the foundation of the exemplary Christian experience of the Thessalonians. They knew of the wrath to come, but they also knew that it was not for them. And they were able to proclaim a similar deliverance for all who would receive their testimony. God's people are free people. They do not dread the future; they do not live under the shadow of judgment. There are no dark clouds of condemnation on their horizon but only the bright Morning Star of their coming Lord. However much progress we make in the Christian life we must never forget these basic facts. Indeed it is on such a foundation that we can make the kind of progress which provoked such glad recognition by the apostle Paul in regard to the church of God in Thessalonica.

The Foundations of an Exemplary Christian Life

"Ye turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 1:9,10).

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, divided into five short chapters, can be read entirely in about ten minutes. As we take it up, we find ourselves in the presence of two or three quite clearly defined things. First of all, we find ourselves in the presence of Christians at the beginning of their Christian life. These Thessalonians were comparatively new converts, and the apostle speaks much about their beginnings - how they started, and how they had got on so far - and so it is a message about the beginnings of the Christian life.

Then we find ourselves in the presence of the apostle saying that these comparatively young Christians were most exemplary. He had no fault to find with them, but everything to commend. He said that he gave thanks to God *always* for them all; and he went on to say that they had become an example to all that believed (1:2,7).

And then we find that the apostle is defining the Gospel that he preached, which produced such Christians. He uses the word "our" Gospel, "the gospel which we preach", speaking about "his" Gospel; and then he gives us an epitome of his Gospel, his great Gospel, in a few concise statements. It is a good thing to be able to have the whole wonderful Gospel, in all its great range and content and potentiality, gathered into the compass of about four clauses. It needs a master hand to do that. We are going to look at them quite simply and briefly. They occur, as you see, at the end of the first chapter.

Turning to God from Idols

"Ye turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God." That is the first stage of the Christian life. Now, although they were pagans formerly, in a pagan world with all its system of idol worship, and you might think that it is not quite right and hardly fair to compare people of a 'Christian' country with those

pagans and to class them all together, I want to point out that in principle and in fact the classing of all unsaved people with those pagans is quite right. “Ye turned unto God from idols to serve” - or “to worship”, for that is what the word here means - “a living and true God”. Now, the principle here, a principle which has many forms in many different times and ages and parts of the world, is just the same. These people had been giving the “worth-ship” - for that is the meaning of worship - of their lives to other objects than God. Who is getting the worth-ship of your life - God, or... whatever else it might be? If you are not giving it to God, then you are giving it somewhere else, to something else, and that is idolatry. So the first stage of a true Christian life is this - the realisation and recognition that God is worth your giving everything to Him. He is worthy of having the worth-ship of your life, of having laid at His feet all that you have and are.

Now, when Paul and his companions - you notice he speaks in the plural, “*we* give thanks” - came to these people, he set forth in the first place the worthiness of God to have their lives, and to have them and their all; and as he set forth the true and living God, they perhaps suddenly came to realise - “Oh, how different from what we have been doing! How unworthy has been the way that we have been going in comparison with this!” It is the seeing of the worthiness of God in Christ. We sometimes sing, as we seek to emphasize and reiterate the all-captivating worthiness of the Lord Jesus -

“Marvel not that Christ in glory
All my inmost heart hath won.”

That is where it begins. Anything less than that, anything other than that as a beginning will find us out sooner or later. Here is One who, by reason of His self-manifestation and of the great work that He has done for our redemption and salvation, is worthy to have everything that we count worthwhile in life. That is very fundamental.

As we go on in the Christian life, it is upon that very thing - our foundation, our beginning - that we are tested again and again. It comes up repeatedly - Is Jesus Christ worthy of this? Is God worthy of this? Is this something that is too valuable to give up to Him, for Him? What place does He have in comparison with this? And if at the beginning there is any faultiness or weakness about that, we shall find ourselves sooner or later held up, until we have got through on the sheer and pure question of whether He is worthy.

These people made such a good start, and went on so splendidly, and became the kind of exemplary, praiseworthy Christians that they did become, because they settled it very thoroughly in their hearts at the beginning - “There is nothing in all the world worth feeding with our worship in comparison with this One.” It indicates the deep and large place that the Lord took with them from the start. And that is the ground of testing all the way along: How large a place has the Lord got in our hearts? Some of us know that, even after many years of the Christian life, we are challenged - Is the Lord worthy of this? Is He big enough even for this? Can we stand up to this test as to His worth-ship?

And so it all comes back - I was going to say, to the simple question, but it is not a very simple question sometimes - Has He got us, has He got us captured and captivated, has He taken the full place in our hearts? You go bounding on if it is like that. You do not bound on if it is not like that. When we have controversies and questions, any kind of reserve, wanting our own way and our own interests, to serve our own ends and do our own wills, and we are up against the Lord, we do not go on; we are held up. You will see people going right on when there is no division of heart between the Lord, themselves, and other things; when He has got them altogether. The Lord would make an appeal to us to look to the very foundation of our lives.

After all, the Lord does not accept our head knowledge of Christianity and all its aspects. The Lord does not accept all our informed mind about the church and the cross and what not. The Lord looks right into our hearts, and says, “How much have I got of you? How much are you still holding on to your own way and your own will, your own course and your own programme and your own interests? I do not ask how much you have got into your head, but how much have I got of your heart?” That was very precisely settled by these Thessalonians; and so it was possible for the apostle to say about them: “I thank God always for you.” How good it would be if those who are concerned for our spiritual lives, and have us on their hearts, could look at us and say: “Thank God there is no reserve in that life, there is no hold-up there; they are going right on. The Lord has got His hand on them, they are right out for the Lord.”

“A living and true God”. That is only a little qualification or characterization. After all, if we give our lives and pour them out in any other direction than for God, we are pouring our lives into the sand. There is going to be no return. It is death, from which there is no coming back. It is an end. Sooner or later we shall find that out, that that kind of thing leads nowhere but to a dead end. We shall

see something more of the meaning of that in a moment. “The living and true God”. That is the appraisal of God. He is the *living* and the *true* God, and everything else to which we might give our lives is false - it will prove itself to be empty. He is the living God, He is the true God, and we shall find that to be so. If there is one thing about true Christian life, it is the absolute reality of God. Sometimes that reality is not a pleasant thing to come up against, but it is at least reality, and we would sooner come up against God, in reality, in an unpleasant way, than not know where God is or is not. Far better to have a living God who checks you up, who deals with you and chastens, than to have no God at all, or to be in question or doubt as to whether God takes any notice. No, to a true Christian, God is very living and very true, very real.

Waiting for His Son From Heaven

“Ye turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God, *and to wait for his Son from heaven.*” Many people have failed to recognise that that is a part of the foundation of the Christian life, and that it is a part of the Gospel of our salvation, and it is fundamental to a really right kind of Christian life, such as is here. “To wait for his Son from heaven.” What did that mean for them? We know what Paul has to say about the coming again of the Lord Jesus. Amongst a great many other things, it means this one thing, that everything of hope for us and for this world is bound up with the *kingdom* of our Lord Jesus Christ. Apart from His coming and bringing in His kingdom, there is no hope. For the Thessalonians it implied that all the natural pouring out of their lives had been a hopeless thing; that they had no future really for which to live; that life and the world was a great enigma.

But when they came to the Lord they did so on this basis: God’s Son is coming again, and that will put everything right. Everything is bound up with Christ’s kingdom which is coming. It is, of course, one of those strange enigmas that the world still has false hopes of putting itself right. Someone has said that “all that we have learned from history is that we have learned nothing from history”, and that is just what is happening. We are learning that we have not learned anything, and yet men hold on for a better world. They are getting into deeper and deeper mire and perplexity, they do not see any way through, and yet all the time they are seeking expedients to save the situation and save the world, but it is a counsel of despair. The Word of God makes it perfectly clear that there is no hope for humanity and for this world apart from Jesus Christ being in the place of absolute Lordship in His kingdom. And these Thessalonian believers came to

see that. They did learn something from history. What they learned was that it gets you nowhere - except into more and more trouble, more perplexity, more and more despair. Then they saw that God's Son is coming from the Heavens to set up His kingdom, introduce His reign, and all will be well.

That is fundamental. Let us get it settled right at the beginning - not as something further on in the Christian life, and not as merely the study of prophecy about the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus - that the foundation that our hope does not rest upon anything of prospect in this world. We have no hope at all for this world as it is, apart from Jesus Christ, but we have a solid and firm hope and confidence that He is coming, and when He comes all will be well. We shall be lifted above all that which keeps us back, holds us up, makes the going so hard. He is coming! We have often said something like this: Is it not remarkable that, when we Christians sing a hymn about the coming of the Lord, something happens? It is not just that we have a lovely idea, and as we think about our lovely idea we feel better. No, it seems that the Holy Spirit comes in on it, and when we sing about Jesus coming again, we go home feeling better just for having been reminded of that, just for having entered into the spirit of that. I believe that this is true to law. The Holy Spirit is managing everything in the light of that day, and when He sees the people of God occupied with that glorious day, He says, "That is what I am after", and we feel in ourselves a wonderful sense of uplift and life and deliverance. How many poor souls in their sufferings and afflictions and trials have been lifted clean out and up by just being reminded - The Lord is coming - it will be all right when the Lord comes!

Many years ago I used to visit an old couple, poor as church mice so far as this world is concerned, living in one room. The old man had never moved out of his armchair for twenty years. He could not be left, and his wife was with him, pottering about, very rarely going out. They had nothing in this world. Twenty years, you know, is a long time to sit, in weakness and limitation, in an armchair in one room - the same old scene, surroundings, pictures, ornaments and everything else every day for twenty years. Were they very, very unhappy, miserable people? No, not a bit. I used to pay them a regular visit every week, and they were always a rebuke to me. A smiling welcome: "Come in, Mr. Sparks, and talk to us about the Lord! We heard what you were preaching about last Sunday, and we have been enjoying it so much", and so on, and so on. They were just above it all. And what was their hope? To the end their hope was - The Lord is coming! It was their sustenance. Now, it was no false hope with them. He did not come in their lifetime, but it was not therefore a false idea, a

misplaced expectation. No, the Holy Spirit bore witness in them, in their lives and in those circumstances, that, whether they lived to see it or not, the coming of the Lord Jesus would put everything right. It was a mighty inspiration to them.

These Thessalonians, if you read the little letter again, knew something of adversity. “You received the word in much affliction”, the apostle says. They knew ostracism, they knew persecution, they knew what it was to be frustrated in business transactions because they had become Christians. They knew physical suffering and temporal suffering, but they went on. They were examples. Why? Simply because they knew - The Lord is coming! “To wait for his Son from heaven” was something settled right in their very foundations.

Faith in Christ Raised from the Dead

And thirdly - “his Son from heaven, *whom he raised from the dead*”. What did that mean for them? The only One, after all, who can raise the dead is God. Now if God, who alone can do it, raised Jesus from the dead, that implies - nay, that declares and attests - that the purpose for which He died has been accomplished. Jesus died. Why did He die? In His death He accomplished a perfect salvation, a perfect redemption. He died to deal with the whole sin question, the whole question of condemnation. It was a finished work, and God, who would never have raised from the dead otherwise, raised Him, and in so doing attested the work for which He died as being a completed and perfected thing.

Now the Thessalonians saw that. We know that from Paul’s teaching. “He raised Him from the dead.” Therefore the whole sin question is a settled thing: forgiveness is secured, salvation is established, God is satisfied. Oh, that we got that into our foundations! The thing that we are constantly up against in Christian lives is condemnation, accusation - this undermining of the fundamental fact that God is satisfied in Christ for us. There is no meaning in justification by faith if that is not what it means. We make mistakes, it is true, we blunder, we default, we err, we sin. Then all the forces of hell rush in, with their ever-determinate purpose, to say that Christ’s death was unavailing, it has not accomplished the work that is claimed for it, you are still a sinner under condemnation.

What awful devastation these evil forces make when we let them have ground. What is the result? Ours is a very jerky kind of Christian life. We go on for a

little while perhaps fairly well, and then down we go. We come up and go on. A little further on, down we go again under some further condemnation, because of some fault, real or imaginary. We make ourselves the playground of the devil. Now the settling of all this is right in the very foundation of our Christian life: that Jesus was raised from the dead by God as the universal declaration that this whole matter of sin and condemnation has been settled in His cross. Until you have got that, you will never go on steadily and become exemplary, and those who are concerned for you will not be able to look at you and say, "Thank God for them." But even there, if you have been like that, do not let what I have said become the very occasion of condemnation. If you have been like that, get out of it. God has not only raised Him from the dead, but also, says the apostle, "raised us up with him" (Eph. 2:6). Therefore we have no right to be down. Don't you argue with the devil or let him talk to you. Our place is up there, because God has set His seal to the mighty death of Jesus Christ. No wonder there can be such Christians as these Thessalonians, if there is a foundation like that.

Delivered from the Wrath to Come

And then finally, "whom he raised from the dead, *even Jesus, who delivereth us from the wrath to come*". Now here, a shadow steals in, a shadow we do not like even to take account of; but we should be unfaithful if we did not look at this other side, this dark side, and face it fairly and squarely. For the Word of God declares again and again that wrath is coming: there is a day of wrath, what Paul here calls "the coming wrath"; something quite precise, quite definite. It is *the* coming wrath. There is a thing which is on its way, and that is what is called "wrath". It is something clearly defined, clear-cut, settled, unavoidable. It is coming, and it cannot be escaped, except by one way.

Let us look into this. What is that day for? Why does it exist? Why has it been appointed and settled and defined? Let us be clear as to one thing. It was never, never appointed for man. It was appointed for Satan and his whole kingdom. After all, in this universe there are only two gods. The one may have many representations, in the countless forms of idol worship, but behind them all there is only one person: it is Satan, and Satan's object from the beginning has been to displace God in the worship of man, to set God's Son aside, put him out of His place. Satan's determination is to be in the place of God.

The number of those in this world who would deliberately claim to be Satan-worshippers is probably comparatively small. But it does not matter how we put

it. There are two gods, there are two objects of worship, one of which is receiving the “worth-ship” of our lives. One of them is this rival to God, who would take God’s place, who would supplant the place of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, as Lord. He has many, many subtle and beautiful ways as well as many awful ways. Satan’s first way is always the beautiful - do not forget that. He was more beautiful than all the creatures that God had created (Ezek. 28:12-15). “Even Satan”, says the apostle, “fashioneth himself into an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). That is how he comes to capture God’s place. It is hardly believable, but he does. Satan does not come in the first place in the traditional form, with the tail and horns and pitchfork, and horrible leer, and belching fire. He can get your life very much more easily and quickly by offering you his baits - prizes in this world, and so on, as substitutes for Jesus Christ. If you repudiate him, if you do not take that way, then he will try to force himself upon you by cruelty and destroy you.

Now, for that one, be he the horned, tailed monster, the awful dragon, or be he the angel of light - he is the same being, the same person - for him, and for all his hosts who are with him in his foul work, God has stored up wrath, the day of wrath. If that one is receiving our “worth-ship” and not God, then the day of wrath will find us, will include us. That is the terror of the Gospel. God never meant it for us. For this is the wonderful, wonderful fact: that every man, woman and child in God’s creation is redeemed - not has got to be redeemed, but *is* redeemed. *You* are redeemed. You may not have accepted your redemption, you may not have entered into the blessings of your redemption; but Christ’s work on the cross was for all men, His redemption was for all. God has not got to redeem you, He has not got to do anything more for your redemption; He has done it all and offered it to you. But if you spurn it, do not accept it, refuse what God has done, you are tacitly taking sides with the other one, you are involved with him and with his object of not giving God his place. And so the day of wrath will overtake us - not only Satan and his angels, but us - unless we have come to this One, Jesus, God’s Son, “who delivereth us from the wrath to come”.

These Thessalonians were delivered from all fear of the future, all dread of the day of wrath. Those terrors had no meaning for them. Their faith in Jesus Christ meant complete deliverance from anything like that in the future. No day of wrath for them! All wrath, all judgment, all condemnation, all death, all punishment had been emptied out for them on God’s Son, and they had come to accept that. They were free people. They did not dread the future, they did not fear the afterward. Upon their horizon there was no dark cloud of coming

judgment. “Jesus, who delivereth us from the wrath to come.”

If we can get settled on these four things, we shall have a very sound foundation, and, blessed be God, we shall have a very exemplary Christian life. It remains for us to decide where we are. No child of God, however advanced they may be, should be displeased at having had this brought before them. All the way along we need to see exactly where we stand: what is our position and what is our hope, and to keep it always in view. For any who do not know the Lord, it is an immense challenge, with immense consequences involved. The Lord help us to do what the Thessalonians did: “turn to God” ... “to wait for his Son... whom he raised from the dead... who delivereth us from the wrath to come.”

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jul-Aug 1955, Vol 33-4

From Heaven or From Men?

(Matthew 21:25)

We do not propose to discuss the subject raised by the Lord in connection with this interrogation; that is, "the baptism of John". Nor do we concern ourselves here with the dilemma which He created for those interrogated. It is this alternative with which we are concerned - "From heaven, or of men?" It is something which arises definitely on more than this occasion in the New Testament. On one occasion the Lord rendered a sound rebuke to Peter, saying: "Thou art a stumbling-block unto me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men" (Matthew 16:23). The wise and astute Gamaliel warned the Council that "If this counsel or this work be of men, it will be overthrown: but if it is of God, ye will not be able to overthrow them; lest haply ye be found even to be fighting against God" (Acts 5:38,39).

In handling the complicated, confused, and carnal situation at Corinth, the Apostle Paul attributed the divisions to this very thing: "...for whereas there are among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal, and do ye not walk after *THE MANNER OF MEN?"* (1 Cor. 3:3). It is quite clear from these passages alone that what is of men is forbidden in the things of God, and this is of very wide and varied application.

The two things are not complementary, they are inimical. They are two sources and natures set over against each other. They belong to two worlds. The springs are totally different.

1. They represent two systems of thought and mentality. It is not only in specific instances when a mistake is made, a wrong judgment is given, a questionable decision or course is followed. It is the very constitution, basic and fundamental, which governs those concerned. The natural - just what we are by nature - is set over against the spiritual, that is, what God is, and what we are basically by being born of the Spirit.

2. This represents two governments. Heaven's standard of values is quite different from that of this world. This world governs entirely horizontally. It is just flat, earthly. Christ's government in His life was wholly vertical; always

upward. He judged "not after the seeing of his eyes", neither reproved "after the hearing of his ears". Too close a touch with this earth involves in its contradictions, and confusions. Never was He in confusion. "Of heaven" was the watchword of His life. "Of man" is too often the realm and nature of our judgments.

3. The divide between the two is the basic effect of the Cross. The Cross cuts clean between the natural and the spiritual. We have only to mark this fundamental difference in the disciples before and after the devastating experience of the Cross and the Heaven-opening experience of the Resurrection and Pentecost.

It is because we men, in what we are naturally - not necessarily viciously, or of evil intent, but just plain nature - have insinuated ourselves with our judgments, ideas, standing, conceptions, strengths, etc., into the things of Heaven, that there is so much confusion and frustration in Christianity. In Paris there is a pair of scientific balances so delicately poised and finely balanced that even the warmth of a human body near the glass case in which they are kept sets them oscillating. We get too near to the sensitive things of the Spirit. With our heat we often disturb the spiritual balance.

Our great lesson is to learn how to stand back in the flesh from the things of the Spirit.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jul-Aug 1964, Vol 42-4

God's Answer to a State of Declension

We have observed that, when the Divine thought as represented by the temple and Jerusalem was forsaken and lost and the glory had departed, Ezekiel was given and caused to write the vision of a new heavenly house, a house in every detail measured and defined from above. In the same way, when the Church of New Testament times had lost its purity and truth and power, and its heavenly character and order, and the primal glory of those early New Testament days was departing, then John was caused by the Spirit to bring into view the new, wonderful, heavenly, spiritual presentation, the Person of the Lord Jesus - that new heavenly presentation of Christ which we have in John's Gospel, his letters, and the Revelation - and we must remember that the Gospel written by John is, in point of time, practically the last writing of the New Testament. Perhaps the real significance of this has not fallen upon us with due power and impressiveness. We take up the Gospels as we have them in the New Testament arrangement of books, and immediately we are put by them back into the days of our Lord's life on the earth, and from the point of time that is where we are when reading the Gospels. For us all the rest of the New Testament has yet to be when we are in the Gospels, both as to the writings and the history that followed; all is in prospect. That, of course, is almost inevitable - perhaps almost unavoidable, but we must try to extricate ourselves from that position.

Why was the Gospel by John written? Was it written just as a record of the life of the Lord Jesus here on earth to go alongside of two or three other records, that there might be a history of the earthly life of the Lord Jesus preserved? Is that it? That is practically the sole result for a great many. The Gospels are read with a view to studying the life of Jesus while He was on the earth. That may be very good, but I do want to emphasize very strongly that this is not the Holy Spirit's primary intention in inspiring the writing of those Gospels. And this is particularly seen in the case of John's Gospel, written so long after everything else, right at the end of everything; for when John wrote his final writings the other apostles were in glory. John's Gospel was written when the New Testament Church, as we have said, had lost its original form and power and spiritual life, its heavenly character and Divine order - written in the midst of such conditions as are outlined in the messages to the churches in Asia at the beginning of the Apocalypse; and that can be so clearly inferred from his letters.

What was the object in view? Well, just this: as John writes things are not as they were, not as God meant them to be, they no longer represent God's thought in and for His people. The order, the heavenly order, has broken down and is breaking down yet more. The heavenly nature has been forfeited and an earthly thing is taking shape in Christianity; the true life is being lost and the glory is departing. To that situation God reacts with a new presentation of His Son in a heavenly and spiritual way (for the features or characteristics of John are heavenliness and spirituality). Is that not true? Oh yes, here is a new bringing into view of His Son. But what a bringing into view! Not just and only as Jesus of Nazareth, but as the Son of Man, Son of God, God revealed and manifested in man, out from eternity with all the fullness of Divine essence, that His people might see.

So we must get to the Holy Spirit's standpoint in the Gospel by John, and in his other writings, and just see this: that God's way of recovery, when His full and original thought has been lost and that heavenly revelation has departed and the heavenly glory has been withdrawn, is to bring His Son anew into view; not to bring you back to the technique of the Church or the Gospel or the doctrine, but to bring His Son into view - to bring Christ again in the tremendousness of His heavenly and spiritual meaning before the heart eyes of His people.

That is the answer that is found in John to these conditions that we meet with in the New Testament, which so plainly show that the Church was losing its heavenly position, and all sorts of things were coming in, and the whole thing was becoming earthly. What will God do? In what way will He save His purpose, which seems to be so dangerously near being lost? He will bring His Son into view again. Remember, God's answer to every movement is always in His Son. Whether that movement be in the world as it heads up to Antichrist (God's answer to Antichrist will be Christ in the full blaze of His Divine glory), or whether it be in the Church in declension and apostasy, God's answer will be in His Son.

That is the meaning of the opening words of the book of the Revelation. The Church has lost her place, the glory has departed, but God breaks in with a presentation of His Son.

"I am He that liveth; I became dead, and behold, I am alive unto the ages of the ages, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."

Christ is presented, and then everything is measured and judged in the light of that heavenly Man with the measuring reed in His hand. Everything for God and for us is bound up with a heart revelation of the Lord Jesus. Oh, beloved, it will not be, as I have said, in trying to recover the New Testament technique. It will not be in a restoration of New Testament order. It will not even be in the re-affirmation of New Testament truth and doctrine. These are things, and they can be used to form a framework, but they can never guarantee the life, the power, the glory. There are plenty here on this earth who have the New Testament doctrine and technique and order, but it is a cold, dead framework. The life, the glory, is not there; the rapture is not there. Now God's way of the glory is in His Son; God's way of the life is in His Son; God's way of the power is in His Son; God's way of the heavenly nature is in His Son.

God's Instrument in a Day of Declension

"And it came to pass, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-oni: but his father called him Benjamin" (Genesis 35:18).

"And he lifted up his eyes, and saw Benjamin his brother, his mother's son, and said, Is this your youngest brother, of whom ye spake unto me? And he said, God be gracious unto thee. my son. And Joseph made haste; for his heart yearned over his brother: and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there" (Genesis 43:29-30, Am. R.V.).

"And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I poured out my soul before the Lord... And it came to pass, when the time was come about, that Hannah conceived, and bare a son; and she called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord" (1 Samuel 1:15,20).

"And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no frequent vision. And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place (now his eyes had begun to wax dim, so that he could not see), and the lamp of God was not yet gone out, and Samuel was laid down to sleep, in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was; that the Lord called Samuel: and he said, Here am I" (1 Samuel 3:1-4).

There are three things about which it is very necessary for us to be quite clear and certain. I will state them briefly and concisely without comment or enlargement.

The first is that God never gives up His original decision to bring His people to spiritual fulness.

The second is that, if His people, in general, move away from His intention, He raises up vessels and ministries both to bring that intention into view, and, as far as possible, to recover His people to it.

And the third thing is that those vessels and ministries have a peculiar and particular history under His hand. They are in a peculiar way governed by the purpose for which they are raised up.

There are two subsidiary factors in that connection. One is that such vessels and ministries must not compare or judge themselves by other standards, by other ministries, by other things that the Lord may be doing. Neither should they be judged by others. God is dealing with them in a particular way, for a particular purpose, not necessarily saying that they are more important than others, but the fact is that they are called to a particular work.

The second thing is that if the purpose of God is corporate, the corporate factor will govern the instrument that He raises up. That is a very important thing to remember. Now this means that each individual within the compass of that ministry and its purpose will himself or herself be governed by the corporate law. Each individual will be a part of something much more than himself or herself, a part of a corporate whole, and will therefore have his or her experience under God's hand in a related way. It will not be just something personal and private. I would that you could remember that and follow it out. For the present we shall not do more than seek some help which we may find in these two of whom we have read - Benjamin and Samuel.

Features Common To Benjamin And Samuel

You probably recognize that there are a number of features common to Benjamin and Samuel. Firstly, they were both sons in a peculiar way. Benjamin was distinguished from his brethren, and, as we read, Joseph took special account of Benjamin, just as Benjamin's father had done. He stood in a particular and peculiar relationship both to the father and to his brethren. Samuel was the same. The sonship of Samuel was quite distinctive, of a different kind from others. We will not stay with it - we note the fact.

The second thing about them was that they were both born of peculiar travail. Rachel died at the birth of Benjamin, and named him Ben-oni, 'Son of my sorrow', born out of sorrow. And we know well of Hannah's distress and sorrow and trial and travail unto Samuel.

Then they both came out of a state of death. That is perfectly clear with Benjamin. Rachel died; Benjamin lived out of her death. Samuel had a

background of death, for that was the state of Hannah, and the state of Hannah was only a reflection of the spiritual state of the Lord's people, and out of that grave, that death, Samuel was born.

Again, they both came in at a time of spiritual declension. The days of Benjamin were the days when those brothers, indeed the whole family, Joseph excepted, were in a very poor state spiritually. The selling of Joseph and all that bad conduct and behaviour is the unveiling of a very poor state in the sons of Israel. We know what a state the Lord's people were in in Samuel's days. That needs no further comment.

And then they both represented a turning-point. Benjamin clearly was that - the turning-point in this whole wonderful story. It was upon Benjamin, "little Benjamin", that the whole thing turned. The verse that we picked out from the story, the coming of the brothers to Joseph in Egypt and Joseph lighting upon his youngest brother, is the turning-point. You look at it again. And how true that was of Samuel. He was a turning-point in Israel; so much turned upon him.

A Peculiar History Under God's Hand

Well, these two clearly set forth a vessel such as that of which we spoke at the beginning - the vessel by which God moves into a state of spiritual decline to bring His own full thought into view, and, as far as possible, to recover His people unto it, and such a vessel, as I have said, will have a peculiar kind of history under God's hand, and it is just that history that I want to touch upon here.

(1) A Clear-Cut Beginning

It is very simple in its presentation; not so simple when you come to go through it. In the first place, such a vessel has to begin at the beginning. When the Lord was going to move in at those times, He did not move in through a full-grown man with a lot of history. He moved in through Benjamin, the youngest - you might call him the infant amongst them. With Samuel He started right back there at his birth. In this dispensation, the vessel that is going to bring into view God's full thought, and recover to it as far as can be, will have to be taken right back behind tradition, right back behind a lot of history, right back behind much that has been built up and become common and accepted. It will have to be taken back to start at the beginning. It may have had a Christian life, a Christian

upbringing; it may have had behind it much of Christianity; but there will come a crisis when it will seem as though there had been nothing before at all. 'This is the beginning: we are starting all over again now!' There must be that clear-cut beginning which is not just the carry-over of history, the carry-over of form and formalism, but something tremendous, as though there had never been any Christianity before until now. 'This is a break in history!' It will have to be like that with such a vessel: so, if you are not prepared for the Lord to do something with you that will make all that is less than His full thought as nothing, to bring you to a place where you know that all else is as nothing compared with what the Lord now reveals to you and makes known to you and is seeking to bring you into: if you are not prepared for such a work, you cannot be such a vessel in the Lord's hand, or part of such a vessel. It must be like that. And when I say that, I am speaking true to the experience of many. There has come a point when they have realized that all their past Christianity has been almost as nothing, compared with that with which the Lord has now broken in upon them. It is like beginning all over again with a new conception - some have said a new Bible; beginning at the beginning.

(2) A Difference

The second thing about all such instrumentalities is that they must not be a part of the existing spiritual condition. How separate were Hannah and Samuel from the existing condition. Whatever had settled down on Israel, Hannah was not a part of that; she was in revolt against it, she was in travail over it, she was different. As to Samuel, it is so perfectly clear that he was apart. The same was true of Benjamin. There was something different. He was not one of those brothers, those ten brothers. There was a difference. I mention it, and you think about it - that, if we are going to be useful to the Lord in any greater purpose of His heart, we shall have to be no part of that which is content and satisfied with something less, and certainly no part of that which is contrary to His mind. There is to be a difference about us.

(3) The Voice Of The Lord Known Personally

The third thing here is that such have to learn the voice of the Lord for themselves. That comes out very clearly in Samuel. To learn the voice of the Lord for himself was essential to his future ministry. He could be put in the way of learning it, but he had to learn it for himself. The Lord never came to Eli and told Eli what He wanted Samuel to know. He had to come to Samuel himself,

and right there from the beginning Samuel had to learn to recognize and discern and understand the voice of the Lord for himself, directly and personally - and how important that is! That may explain a great deal of the Lord's work with us, with some of you. Why is the Lord dealing with you as He is, and why is it that you can get so little help in your deepest problem at second hand? The Lord is seeking to make you know Him personally at first hand; not to make you independent, but to make you useful. That is very important.

The Need For Faithfulness

Further, such an instrument has to be faithful, even though it seems presumptuous. Naturally it would appear very presumptuous for little Samuel, the child Samuel, to go to Eli and point out where he was wrong. The Lord did not commission Samuel to go and rebuke his elder; but when Eli pressed the point - 'What is it that the Lord has said? hide it not from me' - and, so to speak, put Samuel in the corner and would not let him out, Samuel realized that he had to be faithful. He had to put aside other considerations - even this, that it seemed a presumptuous thing for him to tell the old man Eli all that was wrong about him and his house, and about the nation. Sometimes we are called upon to be faithful when it just seems like presumption, like putting other people right. It must be done in a spirit of meekness, but, as the Apostle says, in all faithfulness. Such a vessel must be faithful, that is the point - faithful to what the Lord has said and has shown.

And as we advance, the difficulties seem to increase and become more acute. In Samuel's case, the next thing was that he had to do what the strange ways of God required, even though his own heart rebelled against it. I am thinking of Saul. Samuel's heart rebelled against making Saul king. He knew why the people had brought Saul forward. He knew that they were giving up the government of the Lord in having a king like unto the nations. His heart rebelled, but the Lord said, 'Do it!' In effect, - 'Trust My wisdom - I know what I am doing; you do it!' Faithfulness to the Lord sometimes requires that we do many things in those sovereign orderings of God with which we ourselves naturally do not agree. That is pressing things very closely, but it is like that sometimes. The Lord took that strange way. The Lord said to Samuel, "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me" (1 Samuel 8:7); 'Nevertheless, you have to go and anoint that man'; and, with all his soul revolting, Samuel had to do the thing that the strange ways of God required.

A Prayer Ministry

Now, that would require quite a lot of time to analyze and apply. But what are we getting at? We are getting to the final thing and the inclusive thing with Samuel. Samuel's whole life-ministry was fulfilled through prayer. The Lord singled out Samuel as one of two who, if any could possibly prevail with God, then they would. "Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind would not be toward this people" (Jeremiah 15:1). If anybody can prevail with God it is Samuel; and you know the life of Samuel - what a prayer life it was, how the people took account of it. "Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us" (1 Sam. 7:8). "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (1 Sam. 12:23). His ministry was mainly a ministry of prayer, which meant that he had to have a place with God so complete and utter that his own reasonings did not come in, his own feelings did not come in, nothing about himself came in. He was right there with God, and although God told him to do things which seemed altogether contrary to God, and certainly contrary to his own best judgment, he obeyed. He knew it would work out. He could not understand why the Lord was doing it: it was going to be disaster, it seemed to be a contradiction; but he obeyed. We cannot have power with God unless God has got us into a place like that.

A Peculiar Corporate History

I would like to say very much more about this, but I want to close with an extra emphasis, an emphasis upon the point which I made a little while ago: namely, the character of a corporate collective vessel which God may raise up for the purpose of recovering amongst His people His own full thought concerning them and concerning His Son. Such a vessel, based upon and governed by the corporate principle, will have a peculiar corporate history. There is something about such a work and such a ministry and such a purpose which is different.

In the whole range of His sovereign purpose to bring to a knowledge or to a fuller knowledge of Christ, God raises up and uses many particular instrumentalities and ministries. It may be distinctive preachers and preaching places. He has done this, and is still doing it. Or it may be a ministry for the deepening of the spiritual life, and special gifts may be given for this. There are various other particular aspects of God's activity toward His one end, and each is to be recognized, honoured, and respected. We are here concerned with one of these, and our point is that each is dealt with by God in a way which is peculiar

and essential to its particular function and purpose in the whole. This ministry of which we are here speaking is different from many others, and being so, it is dealt with by God in a peculiar way. A preaching gift, ministry, and place has its particular purpose, but it does not mean that it necessarily brings into being a corporate organic expression of Christ, and while the material for the House of God may be gathered and instructed by it, it does not always follow that a really related organism such as that referred to above is brought into being. The same may be said of Convention ministry, or a ministry for the deepening of the spiritual life of individual Christians.

When the Lord is concerned with this corporate factor, as He most certainly is, He deals with the vessel and ministry in a particular way; their history is different. The matter of relatedness is a very great factor in spiritual fulness. The matter of dependence upon one another is a very great factor in spiritual enlargement. We are going to learn a very great deal more, and reach a very great deal more fulness in Christ, in a related way, than we should do as individuals under the best ministry. Do believe that; it is very true. Therefore the Lord deals with those who constitute such a vessel, not just as individuals. They are required, every one of them, to take this attitude: 'God is dealing with me in relation to a number of people, all of whom constitute for Him a vessel for a particular purpose, and the only explanation of His ways with me is that related principle. If I were an individual by myself, I should not have to have many of the experiences that I have, and if I had my way, I would get away from all these people as soon as I could and get on on my own and know the Lord for myself without all this business of relatedness!' To take such a course would be to lose the main thing that God is after - you would just get right out of the way of that thing which is nearest to His heart: because for a corporate purpose He must have a corporate instrument, and so He must deal with us on that basis of relationship - and everything is related. Therefore in this realm the enemy will make the breakdown of fellowship his chief object.

Do not take your trying and difficult experiences, your sufferings, as merely personal. Paul was so emphatic and clear about that principle. "I... fill up... that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ... for His body's sake, which is the church" (Col. 1:24). He could have put it in another way and said - 'The sufferings that come upon me are not my personal sufferings in relation to my own separate spiritual life and growth. It is not just an individual and separate thing that I am going through, that God wants to bring me personally and alone into some greater fulness of spiritual life. It is related to His whole Body.'

Believe that and it will be a help, because we are part of some larger thing, to serve a larger purpose than we as individuals, however much we might know of the Lord, could serve. There is a far greater value to the Lord in having an organic vessel in the greater fulness of Christ than in having a number of separate individuals going on with Him. So that He deals with such in a particular and peculiar way. They have experiences under His hand which are different.

Put yourself into Benjamin's place, in that history that is gathered around the bringing of the father and Joseph and all the brethren together in one family in the good of the Lord's purpose. It was a disrupted family, a family in spiritual decline. It was in a bad way. God had called that family through Abraham that it should be the family representing His full thought in the nations, and now it was like this. How is it going to be brought together in the land of Goshen, how is it going to be formed into the spiritual Israel? 'Little Benjamin' is the key. But look at his experiences. When at last under Joseph's insistence they brought him, tore him from his father's heart and brought him - and then Joseph sent them away and kept Benjamin! Put yourself in Benjamin's place. He is going through a pretty hard time. And when Joseph's cup was found in the sack of Benjamin! - Joseph, acting a part, sent his messenger after them, saying he had missed his cup - and he had deliberately had it put in that sack! This is strange Providence, these are mysterious ways, for Benjamin. Everything seems to be against him. He could have said, 'I am not responsible for this, it is all going against me, I am involved in a trick'. So he was brought back as under a shadow. That lad is going through a difficult time because he is the link.

Samuel, likewise, had no easy time. It was something different. We cannot here work it out in fulness. But this is the peculiar nature of a vessel that is to meet a peculiar need, and this is the particular kind of history that every part of that instrument will have, which is different from all else. So we cannot judge others, nor can we judge our own position in the light of others; and others should not judge us. The Lord Himself knows what He is doing.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, May-Jun 1962, Vol 40-3

God's Jealousy for Principles

Reading: 1 Sam. 7:1-2; 1 Chron. 13:1-14.

Though God has no favourites among men, and is not prejudiced against people as such, yet He is very jealous for principles, and perhaps in the Old Testament there is no incident which more emphatically demonstrates that truth than the one contained in 1 Chron. 13. Again and again, in what looked like real severity, the Lord dealt with His greatest servants on the point of principle. His severity with Moses over the second smiting of the rock, in not allowing him to go over into the land, is so marked that often our hearts have failed as we have thought about it. And here again we are almost shocked to note His severity with David, when all the intentions were so good and it did seem that there was a movement in accordance with the purpose of God. There is no question as to real, whole-hearted devotion to the Lord, and yet we have this severe reaction of God to something which, though not at the moment clearly recognised as such by those concerned, was a violation of principle.

God Cannot Overlook Principles

Of course, the explanation must lie in the direction that where precedents are concerned, that is, the laying down of foundations for all time, God shows in particularly obvious ways what His attitude is toward principles. These things were to be written in the Bible, and God knew it. The Bible was to be the book which contained the revelation of God's mind for all the coming generations of human history, and it would not do for God to overlook violations of vital principles and let them pass, lest at any time His people should begin to build something upon a wrong foundation. So, of necessity, correction had to be very severe when provision was being made for the guidance of His people in all generations. That is the explanation of the seeming severity of God in such instances as we have cited.

God's End Must Be Reached in God's Way

But when we look into it to see what is the nature of it all, we find this, that disaster can only overtake if there is the holding of a testimony in substance - the truth, the ideas, the doctrine, the form - without the principles of that testimony

being observed. It is easily possible for this to happen, with the result that there is a fundamental contradiction to the very position which is taken. David was quite right in his conclusion that the ark was in the wrong place and that it should be moved, because God's purpose for it was not being realised. So he acted upon a broad conclusion as to God's will and purpose, but without the underlying principles of that purpose being discerned. Thus, while he moved toward the right end, he moved in a wrong way, and he involved something that was of most sacred concern to God in the matter of Divine principle. This is a very solemn lesson to our hearts - that we may be in the terms, the substance, the doctrine, of the testimony of Jesus, with the best intentions and in undoubted devotion to the Lord, and yet there may be real arrest and delay because there is something hidden from our view which the Lord cannot recognise and accept; and disaster may come upon all our efforts and undertakings, and upon the whole movement, for that very reason. God does not desire simply that certain decrees and truths shall be executed. His desire is that there shall be spiritual discernment and faithfulness in relation to spiritual principles. The two things must go together. Ways and means to God's end are just as important as the ends themselves.

That is clearly what comes out here. Uzza and Ahio were the wrong people. They had no right whatever to have been put in that position. That is the first thing that is wrong in principle. It is made perfectly clear by the sequel. The cart was an altogether wrong idea. It was originally suggested by Philistine diviners who were in league with demons that had subtly, secretly, crept into this whole movement. Oh, how subtly and deeply laid are the intrigues of Satan, that even a man like David can be blind to them and caught! The ark had been in the house of Abinadab for years, and these two sons of Abinadab, Uzza and Ahio, had grown up with it and apparently had never studied its history and God's clearly prescribed word about the manner in which it should be moved. They had never gone to what they had of Scripture to see the meaning and nature of the thing that was in their home. Familiarity had bred contempt, and the ark had become like some personal possession of theirs and they took it in charge. It was all wrong. The Lord Jesus, Who is here typified by the ark, though calling men into fellowship with Himself in a Divinely ordained way, never has committed Himself into the hands of men, to be taken charge of by them. His testimony in that sense will look after itself: God Almighty is in it. He does not need the custodianship of familiar men who have themselves taken possession of His things. Everything was in a superficial state, and because of that the deep principles were not discerned - hence disaster.

The Enmity of Satan Against Christ Involved

What does it mean? What does it all amount to when you put it in its full setting? Here the throne has come fully into view. This is all a part of a movement for bringing the throne into its full place. In the Bible, David is God's supreme type of His Son in kingship, so that it is not so much the throne of David that is in view as the throne of God or of Christ. It is Christ on the throne of supreme authority that is being typified here.

Now, from a long way back and a long way down, there creeps up something sinister, coming hiddenly up through this device of the Philistine diviners - an insinuation of Satan which, in the light of all that we know now with all the Bible in our hands, works out in this way. Satan is in some way going to interfere, if he can, with Christ's coming to absolute authority, and to do it he must insinuate something of himself that will of necessity bring the judgment of God upon the whole thing. It is subtle, clever, far-sighted; for what you have here is the ark in relation to David and full kingship, and then disaster arresting that whole movement simply because God's eye saw in it the insinuation of something of the devil that had come in to corrupt this whole testimony; and God could not accept it. If we were to take things like this as things in themselves we might think that such severe dealings are hardly justified, that God might let pass such faults and failures; but God sees the whole and how it affects the ultimate question of the place which He has appointed for His Son, and He says, 'No! That relates to the greatest issue in this universe and it cannot therefore be allowed to pass.' God is not establishing the throne of His Son upon anything of Satan. That is what it amounts to. It is tremendous.

So we have to get a sufficient reason for such severe action of God; we have to justify Him. We must not simply say, 'Here is a man whose heart is all out for the Lord, who is sincerely seeking to serve Him, and then the Lord smites it all. It does not seem fair; it seems cruel and unkind.' We must justify God. He is only justified when you can see that something which touches the ultimate issues of His eternal purpose is involved, and that He could not let that pass in the light of the greatness of the issues. And that is just what was happening here.

Natural Man's Hand the Hand of Satan

So we turn to ourselves and ask, how does this apply to us? It means this, that we must always seek that our devotion to the Lord is instructed devotion, that it

is zeal which is according to knowledge. It was otherwise with David. Not that he could not know; he could have known. The exercise which followed this incident shows that he had the knowledge at his disposal, but he was carried away at the time by all that was happening, he became in some measure superficial and emotional, and overlooked a vital principle. How easy that is! We can see a good deal of this in history. This was what you might call a revival movement in Israel. There were all the marks of revival, in a way. The ark had been in the house of Abinadab all those years. The people "lamented after the Lord"; and here is movement, and their mourning is turned into joy. All seems to be going well - and then the whole thing is arrested. That has happened again and again in Christian history. A revival; yes, undoubtedly a movement from the dead state, from the state of utter arrest; people began to think things were going at last; and then arrest. The Reformation was arrested. There came a point at which those great reformers were held up. They did not go right through to God's full end, they stopped somewhere. When you look to see why, you find at a certain point that the hand of natural man came upon the work, and that hand is the hand of the enemy. There is something behind the natural man's taking hold of the things of God which is the insinuation of Satan; and God stands back, removes His hand of blessing, the whole thing comes to an untimely end and does not go through. There must be not only apprehension of the truth but deep-rooted consistency with Divine principles if the movement is to go through to fullness, if the end which God has in view is to be reached without interruption and tragedy. It is a big lesson for some of us who have responsibility, but it is a lesson for all who are related to the Lord's interests. We must see that, while the Lord wants zeal and utterness and wholeheartedness and desires His ends to be reached, it is very necessary for us to have spiritual discernment, that we do not overlook some principle which is essential to God in the reaching of His ends. A close walk with the Lord and prayerful attention to His Word under the illumination of the Holy Spirit can alone bring us that discernment.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Sep-Oct 1949, Vol 27-5

God's Present Purpose

It would be helpful for us to be reminded of the special nature of this dispensation, which embraces the period from the ascension of the Lord Jesus to His coming again; and it is well for us to be reminded (since it is a tragedy that the Lord's people have not been continually reminded through the dispensation) that in this age - in this dispensation - God's main concern with this world is to take something out of it... and not to do anything with it nor to have anything in it as of it.

Until we have become clear on that matter, we shall be confused on all other matters in relation to the Lord: as to His work, His purpose, and our life in fellowship with Him.

The Lord is pre-eminently occupied with the taking of something out of this world. All the rest is but a preparation of this world for judgment. When that activity of God is finished in the taking out of the earth, then the judgment of this world will take place. So that all the ideas about improving this world and setting up something of God in it as of it - establishing something here for God - are false ideas and will lead into a great deal of error... and, in the long run, to disappointment.

In connection with that primary activity of God in the dispensation the next thing to remember is that this extraction from the earth is mainly spiritual. Of course, the Lord is taking His people literally out of the world from generation to generation, and there will be - at the end - a mighty, literal taking out of the residue of those who look for His appearing; but mainly the taking out through the dispensation is a spiritual thing. The literal, or physical, is but the end of a phase.

That taking out spiritually is, firstly, by a crisis - the crisis of new birth - in which we become aware that we have been born out from another realm and that we are no longer belonging to this one - that in the deepest reality of our beings through new birth we are not of this earth but from above. That is the crisis of our extraction from the world. Then, secondly, the crisis once passed, the extraction, the redemption, or the emancipation (whichever word you prefer) is a progressive thing. It is, in a sense, a pilgrimage - a moving away; and as we walk

with the Lord in a true way, we are getting further and further away from this world in a spiritual sense. These are simple and elementary truths, new to no one but necessary of emphasis by way of laying the foundation.

That which remains of God in this world is here for three purposes. We are now referring to that which has come through the crisis and is in the process... but is still here - here and yet not of this earth. While it remains, it remains for three purposes, which are in three different directions: firstly, toward God; secondly, toward itself; thirdly, toward the world.

The Godward purpose of being here is the representing of God's rights in the earth. Just as David, when driven out of his kingdom away from Jerusalem, sent back into Jerusalem Zadok the priest with the Ark as a testimony to the fact that that was his place and he would come back into it one day; so the Lord, who has been driven out of this world, strategically puts His people here as in relation to Himself, representing His rights here. Thus we are called upon deliberately to stand here on this earth against the claims of the usurper, as a challenge to the Devil's claim to be the prince of this world, for the rights of Him whose right it is to reign. We simply stand here toward Him for that purpose.

As to the aspect of this purpose which is toward the thing of God itself which is here, that is for the purpose of its learning the true nature of what is of God. We are left on this earth for the time of our sojourn amongst these other things for the purpose of education, and our education is in the direction of learning what the nature of a thing of God is. We have many lessons to learn - many things to know as to the difference between what is of man and what is of God, what is of Adam and what is of Christ, what is of earth and what is of heaven, what is of the flesh and what is of the Spirit... and our education lies in that direction.

It is a very experimental and practical thing. If you and I were suddenly taken to heaven; that is, if immediately we were saved we were transplanted to heaven, we should know the nature of all that is of God fully, immediately; but we should know it in a way in which we do not know it now. To put that the other way, we are knowing it now in a way which we should not know it if that were the case. We should then know it as objective - as something which obtained all around us... and into which we came in that way; but being left here in the conflicting elements, we are learning it in an experimental way-it is being wrought into us through sufferings, through contradictions, through discipline,

through a great deal of inner history. It is being wrought into our very being, and that is God's way of teaching His people. It is the most profitable way; otherwise, He would have adopted another method.

Then as to the manward aspect of that which is here of God, that is a matter of testimony and witness. Those two words do not mean the same thing. The witness is the instrument itself; the testimony is that which is given by the witness. The Lord must have something here which is the embodiment of the truth; and being the embodiment it gives forth the truth. That is the difference between witness and testimony, and we are here on the earth manward, worldward, for that purpose - to be the embodiment and the expression of the truth. So you see that, while the Lord leaves that which is essential and strictly of Himself here for a time, He does not mean that it is to settle in - to consolidate itself here - to become a part of things here; it is here only for Divine purposes. When those purposes have reached that point where the Lord, in His own wisdom and sovereignty, sees that it would be better that the vessel should be transplanted to heaven, then He takes action accordingly.

All this is gathered up in two features of Christ's life.

(a) As in the world, yet not of it. Into that short sojourn there were packed all the laws of a life which is lived as in relation to heaven, and not in relation to this earth. His position, while here, was in the bosom of the Father - with God, not of this world. He lived by the laws of such a relationship, and He lived thus in order to show forth the fact that man is called to live by God. It is true that He was God. That is not the question for the moment, but we emphasize the other side in order to see why it was necessary for Him to live here; and that is to set forth the fact that man can live on the earth and yet be governed by laws which, if obeyed, make him something other than a man of this world. That may sound complicated, but it can be resolved into one simple fact. He lived a Man in this world, yet not of it; and in order to do so, He had to move as governed by laws which were not the laws of this world but the laws of heaven. That is one phase of His life in which what we have been saying is gathered up.

(b) As in heaven, yet expressing His heavenly life in the Church by the Holy Spirit. All is gathered into that. The Holy Spirit is sent for the main object of "re-living" Christ in the Church and thus constituting the Church one Heavenly Man according to Christ. Thus it becomes necessary for us to know what the life in the Spirit is - what the life governed by the Spirit is. What the Lord is seeking

pre-eminently in this age is a spiritual people possessed of a knowledge, an understanding, a perception of Himself which is something altogether different from that possessed by the natural man... and which is, therefore, the thing that is going to abide when all else goes - to endure throughout all testings, all trials. It is the inward knowledge of God in an ever-growing way.

The Lord's concern for us at this time is that we should know what God's mind is as to a spiritual mind, as constituted according to Christ in heaven by the Holy Spirit - the Spirit reproducing in us the life, the mind, the intelligence of the Lord Jesus as God's Heavenly Man. If the great feature of spirituality is spiritual intelligence, which is knowing the Lord in the inner way of His thought, of His purpose, that is what God is after because it is that which is going to outlast everything else. That is what is meant by being in the pre-eminent, the supreme, activity of God in this dispensation. This world and everything related to it is not going to last; therefore, we will not get our roots into it; we will not lay deep foundations in it; we will not build in union with it - with the name of God on it - not even in a religious way. You and I must come into God's supreme activity in this dispensation, which is to get out from this world, in association with Himself, that which, will abide eternally when all else is gone.

Golden Snuffers

Reading: Exodus 37:17-24.

"And he made the lamps thereof, seven, and the snuffers thereof, and the snuff-dishes thereof, of pure gold."

We have here the great vessel of light and testimony in the candlestick, which quite clearly is Christ in corporate expression, but Christ pre-eminently; and we have the oil for the light, which is the Holy Spirit: the two Members of the Godhead in co-operation for bringing the light of God into this world amongst men. But when we have said all that we can say about Christ Himself and about the Holy Spirit, there is something else necessary to God for the carrying out of the Divine intention in the coming of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit, and that something else is represented by the wicks of the lamp. These wicks are never prescribed; nothing is said about them, no provision is made. We do not read anywhere that the Lord said, 'Make wicks: this is how the wicks should be made'. There is nothing like that at all. They are simply there by indication. The fact that there are snuffers indicates that there must have been wicks, or it can be taken for granted that the oil would not burn by itself without a medium, and although there is so little notice of the wicks themselves, they are indispensable to the Lord Himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for Their purpose in this world.

And the wicks, of course, are the children of God - 'Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail'. The Lord needs wicks, and cannot fulfil His purpose without them. You and I are in the capacity of the wicks of the great Lamp of testimony, the Lord Jesus; the great power of testimony, the Holy Spirit. There are one or two very simple thoughts then in connection with wicks that I will pass on to you.

THE LORD'S DESIRE FOR FRESHNESS

The first is that the provision of snuffers for the wicks implies and carries with it the Divine desire and thought to keep things fresh in the matter of His testimony. These lamps, these wicks, were to be trimmed regularly morning and evening; and, although it may seem strange, yet the fact remains, and we know it all too well, that the human element does creep in even where there is the presence of

the Holy Spirit. It might be thought that if you are in living touch with Christ and if the Holy Spirit, like the oil, is really flowing through you, the human element would be eliminated and there would be nothing of that which speaks of staleness coming in at all. There would be no need for snuffers, surely. But the fact remains that the snuffers are still necessary. The human element does persist and the Lord has taken account of it.

And the Lord has constantly to take steps with us in order to keep things fresh, to keep things alive. We are the element that would arrest the full fresh blaze of the testimony. We often cause an obscuring of the light. It is not due to the Lord; it is not due to the Holy Spirit. It is this human element coming in all the time. It comes in in many ways, and the fact that the Lord has said that morning and evening continually the snuffers must come into operation, the wick must be trimmed, indicates that even as to our experience of Himself, even as to our union with the Lord, even as to the Holy Spirit flowing through us, it must not be something of yesterday or of last week or of ten years ago, twenty, thirty, forty years ago. It must be something fresh today. It is so easy to live in a past experience and to be always talking about something that the Lord did long ago. The Lord's thought is that there must be a freshness and livingness for today. Our life in the Lord, our experience of the Lord, our testimony to the Lord, has got to be renewed day by day. So, as a safeguard against living upon something of the past, snuffers need to be brought into operation. The Lord says, 'No; living in a past spiritual experience can be like charred wick. It was quite true - yes, it was the Holy Spirit - but it belongs to the past'. We have to bring things up to date; things have to be kept alive and fresh today. So we get rid of mere past history, "forgetting the things which are behind". Even though they were of the Lord, things must be renewed.

There is another way, of course, in which the human element can come in. It is in connection with those words of Paul - "Though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). Now, if we live on the outward man, we shall be like a charred wick and it will be a smoky testimony, the light will be dim. There is to be a renewing day by day of the inward man. Well, we know the day by day principle of the Lord for daily bread from above, for inward renewal from above. We have got to get rid of everything that, although once good, has now become something of the past and lost its freshness. The snuffers speak of the Lord's thought for keeping everything up to date, up to the hour; and if that is the Lord's thought, then it surely must be possible, surely it is His intention that we shall never exhaust things, never

exhaust the freshness of our life with Him; that there shall always be something more - and there is.

But something has to be done in order to preserve that freshness, and that is by constant trimming - the work of the snuffers. The Lord has many ways of trimming, and I expect some of us know quite well that the Lord does do this - how He causes the greatest and best things of the past to seem as though they never had been, to lose their strength and their grip upon us. Great experiences they were in our history, but unless the Lord does a new thing now, they are as nothing. They were tremendous things in our spiritual history, and we thought that nothing could ever be greater - yet now they are as nothing, because we have been brought to a position where the Lord must exceed all that has been. The snuffers are at work. They are cutting off the past, cutting off that which is not right up to date, and seeking to trim us for something fresh today.

In many other matters which we could mention, the Lord operates in this way. But whether we enumerate the ways in which the Lord uses the snuffers or not, let us look at the fact that the Lord prunes or trims, cuts off, deals with, the human element; makes necessary by various ways and means the freshness of His life, the new experience, a new leaping up of life. We come into the way and the Lord has to deal with us in the way; this human element, this charred wick, has to be got out of the way - and how prone we are to be charred, how easy it is for us to be charred. We all know that. We are every day troubled with this tendency of ours to be like a charred wick. We get so stale and so earthy. The Lord is always out for the maintenance of life up to date in freshness, and in order to do that, He has to do a lot of trimming.

I think Paul in Asia fits into that so well. He had known many resurrections. He could say, "God... who delivered", and he knew many deliverances. He had at length to say: "We despaired... of life... we... had the sentence of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead" (2 Cor. 1:8,9). A new resurrection was necessary, something beyond anything that had ever been: and the Lord trimmed him for that. So He would trim us continually for new experiences of His life, fresh manifestations of Himself, right up to date.

PRIESTLY MINISTRY

Then another thing is that trimming is priestly ministry. It was given to the

priests to do this and no one else dared to do it. It is priestly ministry to trim. Of course, we have spoken almost entirely of the Lord doing this trimming, and it must be the Lord who does it in the first place; but the Lord has priests. There are priests with the High Priest, and to them is given this secret ministry of working together with Him in using the golden snuffers. Galatians 6:1 is just the using of the golden snuffers. "Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted!" "Ye who are spiritual": that surely answers to priesthood, surely that is what priesthood is amongst believers. Priesthood and priestly ministry are bound up with spiritual men and women. I will not go back to show from the Old Testament how priesthood was based upon spirituality, or to point out all that is there represented of spirituality in the matter of priesthood. I think we can take it for granted that spiritual men and women are His priests, and priestliness now is a matter of spirituality. "If a man be overtaken in a fault" - there is the wick charred and the testimony a bit blurred and dim and smoky; then the golden snuffers come into play, and "ye which are spiritual" are to use them, to restore such a one. It is priestly ministry in restoring.

SNUFFERS OF PURE GOLD

But remember that these snuffers are of pure gold. That is the Divine nature by which this ministry is to function. "Restore such a one in a spirit of meekness" or "gentleness". Is that not Divine nature? They are *GOLDEN* snuffers, pure gold. "A spirit of meekness" - that is Christ. "Considering thyself lest thou also be tempted" - that is humility, meekness. Oh, it is so easy to use the snuffers in such a way that you snuff people out, snuff out their life. It is said of Him, "A bruised reed will he not break, and a dimly burning wick will he not quench" (Isa. 42:3). No, the Lord's idea, even with a smoky wick, is not to quench the testimony, by coming down upon the poor vessel; but the true spirit of priesthood will seek to deal with that which is wrong, the fault, the trespass, the evil, with the positive object of reviving, refreshing, restoring.

It is so easy to discuss and criticize and speak of the fault and wrong - and do nothing. 'Look at So-and-so. Their testimony is not very bright. Look at this and that and the other thing about them.' Yes, the dimly smoking wick to be talked about, the faults indicated and pointed out and taken note of. That is not good enough for priestliness. The priestly ministry of spiritual men and women is, while recognizing the need, to help to meet the need in a true spirit of service, to get rid of the difficulty.

Well, that is all very simple, but it has a deep meaning. We are wicks; we may have the Holy Spirit, we may be joined to Christ, we may be bound up with the great testimony of God, to be for Him vessels of light on this earth; but with all that, given union with Christ, given Divine purpose, given the Holy Spirit, something is needed in us continually. We have to be kept in a condition day by day which makes it possible for the Lord to be seen, and the Lord is just continually renewing His testimony in us by keeping away things that seek to come in - sin and self and the world and other things that char the wick. The Lord wants His testimony kept fresh and living continually, right up to date, and then He wants us to help Him in this - but in a spirit of meekness. Oh, it is no use our trying to take the mote out of our brother's eye if we have a beam in our own.

The Lord give us much grace and much wisdom in fulfilling this ministry. It is an important one, to help the Lord's people to maintain freshness and fullness. And if the Lord uses the snuffers, let us remember that He is seeking not to lessen but to increase, not to quench but to make greater His light through us. It may be cutting off, it may seem to be sometimes reduction, but the Lord intends enlargement and purification by His using of these instruments, which seem often to be destructive but are intended by Him to be just the opposite. So much, then, for the golden snuffers. The Lord make us those who can be used as snuffers: not to limit, crush, quench, but to help, restore, revive, increase.

From "The Work of the Ministry" Volume 1.

"The Gospel Which We Preach"

"The Power of His Resurrection"

"I make known unto you, brethren, the gospel which I preached unto you, which ye also received, wherein also ye stand, by which also ye are saved... The word which I preached unto you." (1 Corinthians 15:1,2).

"I make known unto you, brethren, the gospel which was preached by me." (Galatians 1:11).

As it was in Paul's case, from time to time, it becomes necessary to restate in precise and definite terms what the New Testament Gospel really is. What it was that the Apostles preached; what it was that the first believers received; what it was wherein they stood; and what it was by which they were saved. As then - so soon - so since, the Gospel may lose its distinctiveness; may be whittled down; may be confused by additions; may be subverted by distortions; may be sterilized by tradition; may be killed by misrepresentation.

We shall therefore embark upon a consideration of the original gospel; the gospel as it was in the beginning. One thing that we shall discover, or rediscover, in this consideration is that the gospel of the Apostles was an infinitely greater thing than is associated with the word or term today. That immense word needs redeeming from the limitation which common usage so much conveys. When such a phrase as 'to preach the gospel' is used, the idea limits the preaching to certain basic elements or features by which unsaved people can be brought to put their trust in Christ as their Saviour. It is sometimes called 'the simple gospel'. The very use of such a phrase carries with it a fear and a precaution. Perhaps herein lies one of the surest explanations of the poor type of Christian that much evangelism produces, and why so many go no further than a first step, and then go back.

If we examine the preaching, the gospel preaching, of the Apostles, we shall see that it presented the most immense and humanly inexplicable and ununderstandable realities; and such presentation was based upon two essential factors: one, the preacher being endued and endowed with the mighty Spirit of God; and, two, complete dependence and faith that that same Spirit would give

to the hearers ability to receive the truth. Apart from these two things the preaching was indeed 'foolishness'. We shall come on this again as we proceed.

Of the many humanly inexplicable and ununderstandable factors, the all-inclusive one - in Apostolic preaching - was the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. As an example (and do note that this is what Paul specifically called his gospel) take 1 Corinthians 15. Having made the statement that this is what he preached as his gospel, he proceeded to this long, long discourse on resurrection. Read it carefully in detail and say to yourself: 'This is the *gospel.'* It is not some extra, detached, advanced teaching. It is not an 'ology'; that is 'Christ-ology', 'Church-ology', 'Theology', etc.; it is the *gospel!* It is all gathered into and based upon resurrection, beginning with Christ and expanding and advancing until *all* believers are in a state of immortal glory for all eternity.

In the New Testament the resurrection of Christ is shown to proceed along many lines, touch many issues, and affect all situations, conditions, and needs of the individual believer's life; the Church universal; the churches local, and so on. We are going to pursue some of these lines and issues.

In all the varied and many aspects and effects of Christ's resurrection it will and must be recognized that, while it was an historic fact, it was more than that: it was, and is, a permanent and many-sided power and experience. Were this not the case there would be absent the essential of verification. It would be but a statement in history books, and something remotely in the past. The truth is that Christianity - the individual Christian, the local company of believers, the Church universal - has as the justification of their existence this alone: that they were intended by the Risen Lord to be the *abiding, positive, effective* vessels of "the *power* of his resurrection". Not the doctrine alone, and not alone the historic (past) fact as a tenet of the creed. This is exactly as it was after Pentecost, and it is the only adequate explanation of Pentecost. So we begin there.

Pentecost and the Resurrection

Pentecost was *the* baptism of the Holy Spirit, prophesied and promised in the Old Testament and by Christ Himself. But that baptism has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. Its accompaniments have been made *it,* in part or in whole. The result is that we have statements and teaching - often categorical - that this or that particular accompaniment of Pentecost is *the* essential and indispensable proof and sign of the baptism in or with the Holy Spirit. In this, what may be

incidental, related to a time, a situation, a phase in growth, a pointer to something which, when reached, will mean that the pointer fades away - these incidentals, we repeat, are made the whole and are detached from the *inclusive* meaning. While we do not brush aside the accompaniments as of small meaning, we do say very definitely that not any one of them is *the* evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the absence of which particular feature is to constitute a verdict that the baptism itself is absent. "Whether there be tongues, they shall (sooner or later) cease." The same with other *sign* gifts. So says the Scripture. But there is one thing which is basic to all, inclusive of all, everywhere, at all times, and beyond time, which is *the* seal, sign, and evidence of the advent and presence and work of the Holy Spirit, and that is "the power of his resurrection". This may be independent of tongues, healings, etc. But *nothing* can be a substitute for, or alternative to, the power of His resurrection, and all other things depend upon it. This surely is the summing up of the Day of Pentecost. Peter's address out of the baptism definitely affirmed that the accompaniments, the signs, pointed to one inclusive explanation - God had raised Jesus from the dead. Other things came out of that and would have no meaning apart from that. That power was going to work in *many* more and other ways in days ahead, as we shall see. We should never put the mighty power of resurrection into the limited box of particular and partial manifestations, however valuable and necessary they may be for the time and circumstance. In doing so, we limit the Holy Spirit.

That is a comprehensive view and statement as to resurrection in Christ. Let us pursue it along some specific lines of outworking. Firstly:

The Power of Resurrection in Morale and Character

In this connection let us place in parallel columns some relevant passages of Scripture.

"Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended in me this night... Peter answered, If all shall be offended in thee, I will never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter saith unto him, Even if I must die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples" (Matthew 26:31-35).

"Jesus answered them... Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone" (John 16:31-32).

"Then all the disciples left him and fled."

"But Peter followed him afar off." "...a maid came unto him (Peter) saying, Thou also wast with Jesus the Galilaean. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest... another saw him and saith... This man also was with Jesus the Nazarene. And again he denied with an oath, I know not the man. After a little while they that stood by came and said to Peter, Of a truth thou also art one of them... Then began he to curse and to swear, I know not the man. And straightway the cock crew." (Matthew 26:56,58,69-74).

"And they all forsook him, and fled" (Mark 14:50).

Now for the other side of the dark story:

"Peter, standing up with the eleven, ...spake forth... saying... Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know... ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay: whom God raised... Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified" (Acts 2:14,22,24,36).

"And... Peter... answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel... The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob... hath glorified his Servant Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied before the face of Pilate... Ye denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the Prince of life; whom God raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses" (Acts 3:12...).

"...their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; and Annas the high priest... and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest... Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said unto them... be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, in him doth this man stand here before you whole. He is the stone which was set at nought of you the builders, which was made the head of the corner. And in none other is there salvation... Now when they beheld the boldness of Peter and John... they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus... Peter and John answered and said unto them,

Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard... And with great power gave the apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 4:5...).

That is enough, although much more could be added. It has been said that, of all the miracles of Pentecost, Peter himself was the greatest. It is impossible to read the passages above without being deeply impressed with the immense change in morale which the resurrection, sealed and attested by the Holy Spirit, effected in these men.

We have to allow that the forces against them were very great and terrible. There is, of course, a great difference between physical and moral courage. Peter was a man who had battled with many a storm on the lake, and come through many a perilous tempest. Physically he would not have been without courage. But, however much there was of that, both physical and moral courage failed at the time of the trial of Jesus, and he, with the rest, was reduced to cowardice, fear, timidity and escapism. If we follow this Judaistic antagonism through the Gospels, the life, trial and crucifixion of Jesus, into the Acts, and right through the life of Paul, and note how murderous and venomous it was and what it could do, we are left with two impressions: how inhuman and diabolical were the forces against these men, and how devastating those forces could be to the best natural morale; and then, correspondingly, how great was the change in the same men later. Those forces were reduced to sheer impotence and weakness by what had happened in the erstwhile terror-stricken people.

You will have noticed in the records how they related everything to resurrection. For Peter, the resurrection meant deliverance from the torment of shame, self-reproach, and remorse over the weakness and failure which marked his former life. It meant deliverance from Satan's power. Jesus had said to him: "Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you that he might sift you as wheat" - more accurately: "Satan has obtained you by asking" (Luke 22:31). (We are back in the Book of Job here.) So, Simon's fall, though based upon pride and self-confidence, was a shaking and sifting by Satan. Christ's assured intercession secured Simon's salvation in and by the resurrection. No wonder Peter, and the others, made everything of the resurrection. To them it was not *only* an historic event, but an abiding and continuous power and personal experience. As such, it went on throughout the Book of Acts, and that Book was never completed. The testimony has gone on in numerous lives since. That word 'testimony' in the

original language means more than verbal statements and declarations. It is the same as our word 'Martyr', which carries with it a life, and a life committed. The testimony of Jesus is the fact and the power of His resurrection. This testimony is first seen in the changed morale of those who took the first fierce onslaught of all evil powers, and Satanically-energised men and systems against that testimony. That will be *the* comprehensive evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and it will be called for more than all other features as the end of the age develops.

We shall pursue this testimony along other lines in subsequent chapters.

[No subsequent chapters were published]

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jan-Feb 1965, Vol 43-1

The Greatest Need of the Times

If we were asked what we feel to be the greatest need of the time, in the light of our far-flung travels this year, first as far East as India, and then over U.S.A. and Canada, we should say with strength: the greatest need of the times is a movement of God to bring His people to know the fullness of Christ! Only as the Church is brought into the good of that will the world be adequately touched and the spiritual forces in this universe be shaken from their hold upon men and things. The evangelism of our times needs much more behind it than it has. The Church is very busy, but very ineffective. It is fighting to have itself recognized, but it has little impact upon the powers of darkness; therefore little also upon the world.

We have often pointed out that the things which have become the greatest evangelical and missionary forces have always been movements or ministries which brought God's own people or new converts into a far greater measure of Christ and spiritual life than is usual and fairly general. We could easily prove this by mentioning names, but it is not necessary. Our grief is that in so many of these cases the enemy has succeeded in making them other than they were at their beginnings. This is the present need, and nothing but this will counter the vitiating, dissipating, diluting, and cheapening course of things in these days and make the Church able to complete her testimony on the earth in power and triumph.

It is time for all who have spiritual responsibility to get down, as far as possible together, to consider the spiritual state of the Church and to be willing, whatever it costs, to take the way by which the lost fullness of Christ may be recovered!

There is no doubt that a situation exists today which corresponds to that which is found in the Book of Esther; and the need is for an intercessory instrument coming to the Kingdom "for such a time as this."

The Greatness and Glory of God's Name

There are certain truths and concepts which dominate the whole Bible, and which are gathered into a single word. They are like a bunch of keys which, if you possess them, unlock the entire revelation of the mind of God. The most inclusive of these is the word 'Name' as relating to God. You have only to look at the pages of a concordance where the word occurs and you will feel overwhelmed by the number of occurrences in every book. And not just the number of occurrences, but the immense associations and connections of the Name. I wonder how many books would be needed to write something on all these statements about the Name! Here is indeed a theme that would keep preachers going for years! It is not only the titles of the Lord; that is wonderful enough; but it is what is meant by the Name of the Lord. We can do no more than approach it; never exhaust it.

WHAT IS THE NAME OF THE LORD?

1. The Name of the Lord is the full content of His character. It is what He is by nature and constitution.

This has always been an idea in naming. Sometimes it is prophetic. The Lord led to the giving of a name because the named would be what the name meant or implied. The Bible has much on that line, both as to people and places. Sometimes He changed names with the implication of a changed nature. Without giving a specific designation, such as Jehovah, El Shaddai, etc., on numerous occasions it is just: "the name of the Lord", "My name", "My great name", "My holy name", and so on, meaning just what and who God is.

Allied to this concept God is shown to be exceedingly jealous for His Name. Indeed, the great things which God is on record as having done for or against those concerned are said to have been acts of jealousy for His Name. The effectual ground of appeal to God for intervention and help has been that of His Name, His very character. God *MUST* be true to His character. To 'take the Name of the Lord in vain' is to use it out of harmony with His character. God has

a reputation and He cannot allow that reputation to be injured. He called a people out of the nations for His Name, which meant showing forth what God is like. When that people, in character and conduct, violated the principle of the Name, He flung them from Him and no more called them "My people".

This was the one and sole burden of the Prophets. They were raised up and anointed for the sole purpose of dealing with what was contrary to the Name - the character of God. The Name of the Lord is a solemn and glorious trust, a trust to be guarded and honoured. But we must remember that it is not only the *TITLE* of a Person, but the very character of the Person, which is to be guarded as a most sacred deposit or entrustment!

This is the clue to Jesus Christ. Note His jealousy over His Father's Name! Note how that affected His own walk in this world. He came in and for His Father's Name, reputation, honour, glory and rights. His life and His work had His Father's vindication as all-governing. God has taken two thousand years to answer the discrediting of His Name as embodied in His Son. Israel has been, and is, God's terrible example of God's jealousy over this fact: that Jesus Christ bore, lived, died and wrought for the Name of God. He was a revelation of what God is like and *THEY SLEW HIM*! This is a clue to Christianity. Christians are said to be "baptized into His Name", and to have His Name called upon them. (Matthew 28:19 James 2:7). Hence, God is jealous over those who *TRULY* bear His Name. To touch them is to touch Him!

But this is a trust and it should be an incentive to life and conduct worthy of Him. It should be the motive in our attitude toward *ANY* situation which involves His honour. A proof of this principle of the Christian life is that *ANY TRUE* Christian cannot hurt the Lord's Name and character without the Holy Spirit giving a sense of grief. The Holy Spirit is the present custodian of the Lord's Name and honour, and He is *VERY* sensitive to His trust. A mark of spiritual maturity is an increasing sensitiveness to the pleasure or displeasure of the Lord; just as a mark of immaturity is that things contrary to the Lord - in speech, act, conduct, dress, appearance, discourtesy, vulgarity, rudeness, etc. - can be indulged in and repeated without that inward sense of shame. To bear the Name of the Lord means a jealousy on our part for the honour of the Lord, and "They that honour me, I will honour, saith the Lord". As Christians who carry the Name of the Lord, to be true to that Name we ought to be progressively taking on the character of the Lord. Paul said: "And they glorified God in me." The Name, therefore, is a challenge to character.

It must be ever remembered that the one greatest object of the great adversary is to dishonour the Lord's Name, and this brings the Lord's people into the great battle of the ages.

Both the individual Christian and the Christian Church are the trustees of the Lord's Name. What a lot of history of suffering and adversity is associated with this truth! It explains a whole mass of the troubles which the assemblies experience. If Christians were more awake to what is involved in their troubles - individually and collectively - how much more would their jealousy for the Lord's honour make them act and react differently! Their motive would be: "For the Lord's sake!"

2. The Name of the Lord is the embodiment of His work.

For the sake of His Name He has worked and does work. He makes Himself a Name by His works, and we can count on Him to work for His Name's sake. His works are many: He saves for His Name's sake; He keeps; He gives grace; He sanctifies; He corrects; He delivers; He chastens; He leads in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake'.

What a Rock of confidence, assurance, comfort, is the Name of the Lord when we view it in this light! What a ground of appeal we have when we really hold an issue to His Name! "What will you do for your great name?" was the appeal in a very difficult and threatening situation long ago (Joshua 7:9).

"I wrought for my great name", said the Lord (Ezekiel 20:9).

All the mighty work of Christ by His Cross is now gathered into His Name. All the power and ability to work by His servants is in virtue of His Name. (See the book of Acts.) All the ultimate overthrow of the adversary's kingdom, and the bowing of every knee will be in His Name. His Name is called... because He *SAVES*! Effectual work is when the workers correspond to, and stand upon the Name.

3. The Name of the Lord is the embodiment of His Purpose.

God is the God of eternal purpose. To that purpose He has committed Himself. Being Who and What He is, He could never undertake anything that He could

not finally accomplish. To be defeated in, or cheated of His purpose would mean losing His Name, His reputation, His character. This can never be! Hence, infinite persistence, patience, pains, are components of His Name, and if He is finally resisted by an instrument and vessel of His purpose, He will make another vessel. The first generation that came out of Egypt resisted Him unto death - their death - but He raised up another generation and realized His purpose through them. He is the God of Hope because He cannot be *ULTIMATELY* defeated. The valley may be full of bones, very many, very dry, and very scattered; God holds the key of hope in the power of resurrection. Resurrection is God's unique answer to otherwise utterly hopeless situations. Hence He is called "the God who raiseth the dead". He will eventually stand possessed of His purpose for His Name demands it.

For the weakest soul who pleads His Name He will show His jealousy, if only and truly it is for His Name's sake! His Name stands or falls with such, and it cannot fall!

We are very deeply conscious of how utterly inadequate our effort to extol the Name has been and we can only hope that, as a part of this ministry, it will serve to make some impression. Our common and familiar language and phraseology concerning the Name of the Lord needs redeeming from the commonplace. To say: "hallowed be thy name", and "In the name of the Lord Jesus" to every prayer needs to have the immense significance of what we say restored and recovered. Indeed, the numerous mentions of the Name in Scripture need to have a new impact and meaning as we come on them.

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth in and is raised above" (Proverbs 18:10).

"They that know thy name will put their trust in thee" (Psalm 9:10).

"In the name of our God we will set up our banners" (Psalm 20:5).

"I will set him on high, because he hath known my name" (Psalm 91:14).

"Dear Name! The rock on which I build,
My shield and hiding-place;
My never-failing treasury, filled
With boundless stores of grace."

From "A Witness and a Testimony" May-June 1969.

A Heart for God's Testimony

That little romance - the Book of Ruth - stands as a link between the terrible spiritual tragedy - "Judges" - and God's reaction thereto in David. "Ruth" ends with "Boaz begat Obed; and Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David." The beginning of 1 Samuel sees the terrible hang-over of "Judges" and reveals the unspeakably low state that things were in spiritually. This cannot go on, and although a long time may elapse before the glory returns, God takes the vital step that will lead to the glory. That step is taken in the heart of a woman: a woman who in every way embodies the principle of Divine Sovereignty. There is so much in likeness between Hannah's song and the "Magnificat" of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Read them both, and you will feel that Mary has been occupied with Hannah's "Magnificat".

It is in the heart of this woman, Hannah, that God moves to His highest peak in the Old Testament. It is not easy in reading those early chapters of 1 Samuel to get away from the impression that Hannah had a passionate and heart-broken concern for the Lord's testimony. They went up to the Temple from year to year and must have seen and been involved in the conditions and practices described in chapter two, verses 12-17, etc.

That Hannah should later trust her so young child to live amidst such conditions needs some explanation. We would think that such would be the very last place in which any mother who cared for her child would have him live. However, it proved to be right whatever her judgment may have been. The point is that frustration of motherhood only made that mother instinct unbearable, and led her out to God in such a way that if God undertook in such an impossible situation, God should have the fruit of her travail. The mother instinct was God's way of moving in relation to the recovery of His testimony in glory.

In this case - and it has often been so - the masculine strength, the principle of authority and government, while being very necessary, was not enough; indeed, it would fail by itself. The need was of a mother heart of sorrow, pain, travail, and distress. It was not all personal and self-centred. It was toward the Lord, and sacrifice entered into it very deeply. It was indeed a costly way. To have that passion beaten up to breaking-point meant reproach. Hannah was laughed at, ridiculed, despised, and discredited. She was misunderstood and maligned even

by the religious head of the people, Eli. Hers was a lonely path. Her husband gave her *things,* but he could not really help her. This was the vessel which, by such a history, God was preparing a long way ahead for His recovery of purpose.

Lest it should be thought that we are being sentimental and fanciful, let us at once say that we are not thinking in terms of male and female necessarily. The Apostle Paul combined the strength of masculine authority and government in his own person and ministry with the tenderness of motherhood. He said: "My little children, of whom I am again in travail" (Galatians 4:19). It is a disposition, a heart, a capacity for suffering and sorrow born of love.

Such is God's need and way. There can be no loss of Divine values without suffering resulting. It is the law of travail instituted and established when man first forfeited the best that God provided. We shall look in vain for any instance of letting go of Divine values which did not result in a train of suffering. But there is that which we may call vicarious suffering; that is, an entering into God's loss with a heart of distress, a 'filling up of that which is lacking of the sufferings of Christ for His body's sake, which is the church'. That is what, in figure, Hannah did.

Samuel was the birth of the prophetic spirit when there was "no open vision". He inherited the travailing spirit of his mother. It was his unhappy lot to spend much of his life in suffering the knowledge that an alternative to God's best had been chosen by the people, and his counsel and warning were rejected and flouted. His judgment and leadership were discounted and ignored until the inevitable troubles arose. But he did bring in the "man after God's heart", who in his turn shared the sorrow and suffering of God during the reign of Saul, man's choice.

What we have desired to indicate is that to bridge the gap between spiritual declension and loss, on the one side, and God's fullest possible purpose, on the other, God has always had to find that which Hannah so beautifully and effectively represents, that is, a vessel with a heart well-nigh broken for His testimony.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Nov-Dec 1965, Vol 43-6

The Heavens Do Rule

"The heavens do rule." (Dan. 4:26).

The Gospels were written many years after the things recorded in them had taken place; there had been a considerable lapse of time. It is important to note *why* they were written. The Apostles had been witnessing a long time to the things here recorded, and had brought those things also among men, and had sought to establish the spiritual truth behind those things. Thus having borne witness to those things and brought them amongst men, and having sought to establish the spiritual truth in the hearts of men, they now write by way of confirming that to which they have borne testimony; that is the meaning of having these records.

The great thing is this, GOD had broken into this world in the Person of His Son, the Lord Jesus. He had intervened in the course of the history of this world with one main intentionto assert the fact of His rights, to bring in His prerogatives in this world; these had been disputed, challenged and refused.

Israel had been raised up to be an embodiment of these rights, and Israel as a whole had failed; failed as an instrument through whom God's rights were testified to and maintained on the earth; Israel did not represent in any concrete public way the Divine rights and prerogatives; although there were still those faithful ones here and there, secret for the most part.

That intervention of God to bring in His rights was fourfold:1, His rights in the matter of Sovereignty, as seen in the Gospel of Matthew; 2, His rights in the matter of Service, as seen in the Gospel of Mark; 3, His rights in the matter of Grace, as seen in the Gospel of Luke; 4, His rights in the matter of Love, as seen in the Gospel of John. Those four Gospels represent one breaking-in of God in Christ Jesus. They represent ONE PERSON with one object: to manifest the rights of God and secure those rights for Him; and the Gospels were written to confirm by permanent record in permanent form that to which the Apostles had been bearing witness: 1, SovereigntyGod's rights in sovereignty and the nature of that sovereignty made known; 2, ServiceGod's rights in service, and what is the nature of the servant and the service; 3-4, Grace and LoveGod's rights and prerogatives in these.

These were the things by which they called men to recognise the claim's and rights of God and to respond to them; and wherever they went proclaiming this Gospel of His Son, there were added to them those who came to accept the rights of God and so become living witnesses to those rights and prerogatives.

The Gospels bring in four aspects of the rule of the Heavens; Matthew introduces the King and the Kingdom of the Sovereignty; "The genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David" (Matt. 1:1 marg. A.R.V.) And it is most striking and worthy of note how Matthew finishes his Gospel "And Jesus came to them... saying all authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth, go ye therefore and make disciples of (out of) all nations" (Matt. 28:18-20). Matthew's Gospel finishes with "*All nations"*.

Mark's Gospel ends with the whole creation: "He was manifested as they sat at meat... and He said unto them, go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the *whole creation"* (Mark 16:14,15). Hence servant and service.

Luke had *the race of men* in view, the context clearly shows this. The key word of his gospel is "Son of Man." He is writing to the race of men. "All things must be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms concerning Me... Ye are witnesses of these things." (Luke 24:44-48). Hence the grace of God to all men.

And in John's Gospel, it is not all nations, neither is it the whole creation, nor the race of men, but it is the testimony to *the world.* "God so loved the world that He gave His Son" (John 3:10). "For God sent the Son... that the world might be saved through Him." (17). "This is indeed the Saviour of the world" (4:42). Hence the message of love.

Each of those four Gospels have their own great importance, a vital rich and significant importance to the ONE GOSPEL in its fourfold aspect.

For real adequate effectiveness in the preaching of the Gospel the first supreme need is the absolute assurance of the sovereignty of the Lord in government; that is basic, lf you have not got that you have not got your foundation; *you must* know that the sovereignty is in the hands of the Lord Jesus *now.* It is the Gospel of His Son"For God is my witness whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son" (Rom. 1:9). And to serve in the Gospel of His Son you have got to have full assurance of the sovereignty of that Son in the matter of government. He

HIMSELF has declared "All authority... has been given unto ME"*it is now* in the hands of the Lord Jesus.

In Matthew's Gospel the Church is introduced in the New Testament, and introduced in relation to the sovereignty of the heavens;Jesus asked"Who do men say that I the Son of Man am? (A.R.V. marg.). Who say ye that I am? ...Thou art the Christ the Son of the Living God! ...Blessed art thou Simon... for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee but My Father who is in heaven.... and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it... whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matt. 16).

Here are several important and significant features in this first introduction of the Church in the New Testament. The Lord is the Builder of His Church; "I will build my Church" (Zech. 6). Hell is against this building of the Church but the Sovereign Lord says: "The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." This implies that there is conflict. The binding and loosing in His name on earth and in heaven speaks of sovereign authority, and makes the Church to be the administrative instrument on earth of that sovereignty as it [the Church] is in touch with the throne in heaven: and this in relation to government.

The vital and all embracing fact is that the Church is built on the *revelation of who the Lord Jesus is*: He asks "Who say ye that I am?" "Thou art the Christ the Son of the Living God"; "On this rock I will build." The Church is the administrative instrument of that sovereignty.

It is striking that the Church is introduced as the Lord Jesus turns from Caesarea with set purpose towards the Cross, by which He will secure the Church and the consummation of the purpose of God. Link Matt. 16 with Rev. 1, and there we see the Lord Jesus with the sovereignty in His hands, and there it is connected with the Church; why? Because the Church is intended to be the Administrative Instrument of that sovereignty. "I saw in the midst of the candlesticks ONE like unto the Son of Man... when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as one dead... He laid His right hand upon me, saying fear not... I am alive for evermore and I have the keys of Death and Hades, write therefore... and send to the seven churches." (Rev. 1:13,17,18,10,11).

All the political divisions of this earth come under the hand of Christ, for nations represent the political divisions of this world, and His authoritative commission

is "therefore go ye to all the nations." He does not say they will not kill the messenger, or that evil does not exist; but the issue is secured and revealed as already possessed. The book of the Revelation sees it already in being, for Revelations is the issue of Matt. 16, "I will build My Church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." "All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on the earth" (Matt. 28:18) "Therefore go to the nations, I have all authority, and I send you unto them; Hell shall not prevail against you."

Pass to the Epistle to the Ephesians, and we see that God the Father hath made the Lord Jesus to "sit at His right hand in the heavenlies, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named... and He *hath* put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the Church, which is His body." (Eph. 1:20). "God being rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us... made us alive together with Christ... and raised us up with Him, and made us sit with Him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:4,6). He is seen far above all authority and every name that is named: now we have to see the link between Him and ourselves in this; it is necessary and vital. We have always got to see the instrument of governmentthe Church in relation to its spiritual elevation, as seen in the Ephesian letter, "far above all". It is very significant that the rule of the Heavens is so emphasised in Matthew and brought out in various ways; and Matthew is the Gospel that introduces the Church in the New Testament.

Symbols of Spiritual Ascendancy

1. Mountains

Mountains have an important place in Matthew's Gospel, and this is significant in the Gospel which introduces the Church: for the Church has got to be seen in spiritual altitude, out of the world in spirit, and out of the world as to voluntary connection with it: for a true seeing of the Church it must be seen from the standpoint of its altitude, which is"with Christ far above all," that is how God sees it, and only so is it the instrument of the administration of that sovereignty invested in the Sovereign Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus.

Mountains are mentioned fourteen times in Matthew, and mountains in the Scriptures represent spiritual ascendancy. The Lord is governing things from the mountains in Matthew; we read of Him spending nights of prayer in the mountains. He appoints a place in a mountain to meet them when risen from the

dead, and He, risen, has put His Church in the mountains: "The disciples went... unto the mountain where Jesus had appointed them... and Jesus came to them... saying, all authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth... go ye therefore... lo, I am with you all the day even unto the consummation of the age." (Matt. 28:16-20, A.R.V.)

"And it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills and all nations shall flow into it," (Isa. 2:2). The Church in its administrative position is always related to the heavens, and the Lord meets the Church and commissions it in the mountains before He passes up in glory. Judgment is also from the mountains: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often would I have gathered thy children together... and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matt. 23:37-38).

The end of Matthew's Gospel sees Jerusalem set aside, ignored"The eleven disciples went into Galilee unto the mountain where Jesus had appointed them" (Matt. 28:16). Here the Lord is speaking to them of sovereignty: but sovereignty as related to the nations. Galilee is a question of sovereignty, not grace: it is grace that takes Jerusalem in"He led them out until over against Bethany, and lifted up His hands and blessed them, and was carried up into Heaven, and they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy." (Luke 24:50-53). Only grace takes Jerusalem in, sovereignty sets authority aside as to having its base in Jerusalem, and brings all sovereignty into the Person of the Lord Jesus; and He in a mountain in Galilee away from Jerusalem. It is the authority of the Person of Christ, the authority is not in Jerusalem but in HIM and HE is universal, not merely local.

Luke begins at Jerusalem, and grace continued in Jerusalem until they slew Stephen, when they committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, and the Lord moved out from Jerusalem to the Gentiles, i.e. the nations: but first He gained a company out of Jerusalem at Pentecost in relation to all nations. Wonderful grace to those who crucified Him. He could have cast them off, but no! He got His representative nucleus out from Jerusalem; here is sovereign grace at work!

Again He did the same thing in a member of Christ, thereby showing who touches a member of the Body of Christ, directly touches Christ HIMSELF: "Saul, Saul, why persecuted thou Me?" Saul was persecuting Him in the person of Stephen and sinning against the Holy Ghost; and the Lord moved out from

heaven. Grace strove with Saul until he became Paul.

The Lord does not recognise authority as having its seat in Jerusalem, but in dealing with authority to all nations He moves into Galilee. Matthew brings in authority as invested in the Person of our Lord Jesus, then brings in the Church as the administrative instrument of that authority, and lifts it out as of the earth, bringing it into the heavenlies and the universal. A Remnant, an Elect Company, an Overcomer Vessel, a Called out People, or whatever you like to name them, has to be brought into the position of spiritual altitude and ascendancy, and so have administrative government in the nations; but it is the *sovereignty in Grace*; in this age it is a *Throne of Grace.* And the sovereign grace of God in Christ Jesus is being proclaimed to the nations and calling out from them a people for His name.

2. Heavens

Seventy-five times the "Heavens" are mentioned in Matthew's Gospel, which is the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaventhe rule or the sovereignty of the heavens.

The heavens are seen ruling at the birth of the Lord of Glory, the star seen in the East was the one star which ruled the heavens at that time, and was governing things on the earth; bringing Wisdom from the East to worship at the feet of the Lord Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem. The heavens are sovereignly ruling in relation to the coming of the Son, for the "Greater than Solomon" is here; and a new day has dawned for the world with the coming of Jesus Christ. The "East" signifies the dawning of a new day. Herod tried to break in, but the heavens ruled. That one star was ruling in the heavens and governing things on earth, at that time it was THE STAR in the heavens.

3. Angels

Take another heavenly aspect of this Gospel: seventeen times "angels" come into this book. Angels are related to the administrative government of God in relation to "heirs of salvation." (Heb. 1:13-14). "An angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it" (Matt. 28:1). One angel in resurrection sovereignty. One angel was quite sufficient for world governments and all hell's force and counsels; Oh! the comfort and assurance this brings; yes, here is seen the rule of the heavens nullifying both hell's might and earth's greatest government, for Rome at that time was the chief world

government, so representative of all the governments of the world. It is blessed to know that all sovereignty and authority are in the hands of the Lord Jesus, and angels are an administrative government of God in relation to the "Heirs of Salvation." And in Matthew we have *one* angel in relation to the government of the Lord Jesus in the nations; what strength and power this implies.

In Mark"And entering into the tomb, they saw a young man sitting... arrayed in a white robe"; here we have purity, service in relation to the whole creation on the basis of holiness: an angel in administrative government in the matter of moral character; holiness as to a whole creation.

Luke"Behold two men stood by them in dazzling apparel... why seek ye the Living among the dead?" Two angels, two *men.* Two in the scriptures is the number of witness: testimony in adequate measure to the whole race of men. A full witness and testimony to be borne to the race of mankind concerning the sovereignty and government of the Lord Jesus.

John"Two angels *sitting* one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain." John's gospel has peculiarly the emphasis on Love. "God so loved the world." In love He gave His Son to be the sin-bearer and to carry away the sin of the world. What is there above the LOVE of GOD? These angels are in an attitude of repose in that love of God, for the love of God has triumphed. When you have got a true appreciation of that love of God, then you can sit and are able to rest. It is a testimony of His love to the world, a reposing in the love of God - and that love as manifested in the sending of His Son and in the raising of Him from the dead. A heavenly intervention in relation to the sovereignty of His love in the nations. The angels are busy in administrative government in relation to the love of God.

All these heavenly elements are related to the Lord Jesus and His church in His sovereignty among the nations: sovereignty into which we have been brought by a living relationship and experience. God's order is never isolated units. He called and sent His disciples forth two by two; two being the testimony to the Church, as a representative number. We have got to recognise "Body" principles and spiritually understand and faithfully observe God's own order; for if you act in independence you take yourself out from under the covering of the Sovereign Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus"God gave Him to be Head over all things to the Church which is His body" (Eph. 1:22). Throne prayer is a matter of the Church, and it is absolutely necessary as you go out into the nations with the

Testimony of the Gospel of the Sovereignty to have the covering of that Throne-prayer in the Body of Christ, if there is to be realised the end of God, the impact of the Sovereignty upon the kingdom of Satan; it has got to be a going forth not as isolated, saved individuals, but in a right spiritual relationship to the Head and members ONE BODY.

In Ezra 7, we have the bringing in of the "House of the Lord" and immediately the link with the heavens: "Whatsoever is commanded by *the God of Heaven* let it be done exactly for the House of the God of Heaven" (23). It is a marvellous decree of Artaxerxes"And whosoever will not do the law of thy God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed upon him with all diligence, whether it be unto death or to banishment or to confiscation of his goods or to imprisonment." (26). This is to come upon the man who dares to oppose the building of the House of the Lord. Artaxerxes seems to go to the utmost to hasten and ensure the building of this house for God. Three times it is said, "The God of the Heavens"; sovereignty that cannot be overruled is in operation and related to the building of the House of the Lord, the rule of the heavens is seen here.

In Luke's Gospel you have the same fact of the rule of the Heavens being linked with the House of the LordHis Church: thus emphasising the Church as the administrative instrument of that sovereignty of the heavens. "The *seventy* returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject unto us in thy name." "And He said unto them... behold I have given you authority... over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall in any wise hurt you..." "In the same hour He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, *Lord of Heaven* and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding and didst reveal them unto babes, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." (Luke 10:17). (Seventy is the number of representation).

And so it is seen to be the "gates of heaven" over against the "gates of hades" and the "counsels of heaven" over against the "counsels of hades": and the House of the Sovereignty over which all the counsels of hell cannot prevail: for the counsels of the Godhead were back in Eternity past unto the securing of that company desiring and determining His will.

The Kingdom of Heaven, or the rule or reign of Heaven, is a sphere in which the sovereignty of God operates but in which everything not suitable is going to be eliminated, and only that which is according to God will remain: see the parables of the "Dragnet" and the "Tares" (Matt. 13). The true will be separated from the

false and the Lord secures His "called out ones" from the nations of the world; His redeemed ones, His church, the City of God as seen in the book of Revelation.

"After these things I saw and behold a great multitude, which no man can number, *out of* every nation and tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb... saying, salvation unto our God who sitteth on the throne and unto the Lamb." (Rev. 7:9,10).

"And he carried me away in the Spirit, to a mountain great and high and showed me the holy city, new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, her light was like unto a stone most precious... clear as crystal. The bride the wife of the Lamb." (Rev. 21:9-11).

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Feb-Mar 1931 Vol. 9-2

Hindrances to Fullness of Life

While it is true that every spiritual blessing is a gift of grace and not something to be merited, it is equally true that no blessing is entered into without a real challenge, demanding a genuine and honest proof that we mean business with God. The history of Israel's entering into the inheritance of the land covenanted to them is a great illustration of how spiritual fullness is withstood by foes of many kinds. The New Testament is one continuous revelation of how spiritual fullness for the Lord's people is withstood. It is an education to read the Word with this in mind and to recognize the many forms which this obstructing and frustrating activity takes. Both outside and inside of the Church, and often inside believers themselves, the enemy of spiritual fullness is shown to have his ground of vantage. The fact is, beloved of God, that only "men of violence" will really secure the Kingdom (Matt. 11:12), and this violence will often have to be done to some of our own positions, mentalities, prejudices, fears, reservations, antipathies, etc. We may settle it once for all that for the fullness of the Lord's life and blessing we must be on the Lord's ground. This is a law which will apply to many particular matters.

Christian Fellowship

For instance, there is the matter of our relationship to, and fellowship with, all other children of God. Fellowship with the Lord's people is an established law of spiritual fullness, and there can be no fullness apart from it. This question of Christian fellowship will have to be taken in both hands and settled finally. We shall - if we are going to have an "open heaven" - have to sit right down with this matter and do some honest and energetic thinking and deciding. What is the Lord's ground in this matter? It is absolutely nothing other, more, nor less, than Christ Himself and our common sharing of His life through new birth and utter yieldedness to Him as our Sovereign Head and Lord! Get down on to any other ground and we forsake the place of fullness. If we get on to the ground of a teaching, an interpretation, a particular and specific doctrine, or even emphasis, as something in itself, we at once set up standards or draw lines between ourselves and others, and even unconsciously we divide and give out an implication of division.

Or again; if we get on the ground of a denomination, a sect, a mission, a society,

a "movement", or anything crystallized as to an association of the Lord's people, with an enterprise binding together those concerned - though it may be for the Lord - we open the door to every divisive thing, and we close it to fulness. On the one hand we very soon become governed by false and unsound judgments. Jealousies and rivalries can never see the light of day if the one concern is the Lord. They are born of concern for a thing. "Sheep stealing" is a common charge that needs to be looked at again in the light of Christ. *Whose* sheep are they? Are they His, or are they the property of a certain Christian enterprise or society? Unto what have they been "stolen"? Have they moved in a certain direction because they have found a larger measure of Christ there, or is it because they have *really* been enticed to swell the ranks of something less of Christ?

Are we really only too anxious to let "our" converts or members go, if they are going after the Lord? Do we want to keep some *thing* together? Is the essence of division in the leaving of one association or connection because a greater measure of spiritual life has been found in other directions? Some thing exists which fails continually to meet spiritual need. That which does meet the hunger and longing of years comes along and from the old dead and barren connections the hungry move to the spiritual provision. Instead of Christians being glad if a genuine spiritual move takes place, the cry is not long in being heard: "Dividing the Lord's people." Are we sure that behind much of this sort of thing there are not vested interests, sentimentalities, men's traditions, or *our own* fears?

There is all the difference between the course represented above and the divisions between the Lord's people on the basis of doctrinal hair-splitting, or on the ground of technicalities in procedure, to say nothing of adherence to personalities, however much they may have been instruments of blessing. Anything that draws a line of fellowship narrower than the mutual love of the Holy Spirit is a departure from the Lord's ground of fullness of life. We are thinking of spiritual relationship and fellowship, not of public or "official" co-operation with what is unscriptural in doctrine and practice.

If the children of God will only make Christ their ground of fellowship, so much that hinders spiritual fullness and accounts for the present weakness, limitation, and defeat will be ruled out, and the great hinderer will be despoiled of his ground.

Then there is another direction in which this law of fullness operates and in which some serious adjustment is necessary. It is that of leaving room for

The Sovereignty of the Holy Spirit.

It was on this very matter that the book of "The Acts" was founded. The Lord Jesus enunciated the law when He said to Nicodemus, "The wind bloweth where it listeth... so is every one that is born of the Spirit." On the day of Pentecost there was "a sound as of a mighty rushing wind." Have you ever been in a really mighty rushing wind? The thing about a real windstorm is that it takes the government out of all other hands and proceeds to do as it chooses without reference or deference to conventions, traditions, common acceptances, inclinations, or fixed ideas. While it lasts, it is sovereign. That is how it was then; but there were those who were offended, shocked, scandalized, and who said in effect that such a way could never be of God. A little later Peter himself came flat up against this basic law of the Spirit and had a controversy with the Lord. The Lord showed him that a way of enlargement (although he did not see at the moment that that was what it was) lay in the direction of transcending or even violating all his traditions and established religious rules. The Lord knew that for Peter to go in unto the Gentiles would be like a most orthodox and conservative Jew being asked to eat unclean meat - "all manner of four-footed beasts, and creeping things... and fowls of the heaven" - even apparently to take a place superior to Moses and Leviticus 11; but He asked him to do it. Peter said, "Not so, Lord", a contradiction in terms; but the Lord insisted, and Peter, in explaining himself to those who suspected him, said, "Who was I that I could withstand God?" Now what we have here is that, over against the sovereignty of the Spirit, was the fixed tradition of Peter in the one case, and the same in the case of those at Jerusalem who "contended with him" for doing what he did. On a later occasion Peter fell into the same old traditional snare and Paul had to contend with him very strongly about it. The point is that the Lord was making for spiritual increase, but an obstacle encountered was this unpreparedness to leave room for the sovereignty of the Spirit. If a child or servant of God in his or her secret walk and history with God is led to move in a way that is not according to the recognized and established system, but new and different, and seemingly in violation of all the accepted and fixed conventions or associations, there is all too often a repetition of what took place in Jerusalem; a suspicion, a contention, and an opposition.

Now, dear friends, look here: we have got to take ourselves honestly in hand over this or we may be found to be "withstanding God" and "limiting the Holy One". Read the Gospels and the Acts again, and ask the question as you proceed, "How can *this*, and *that*, and *that* be interpreted or construed as doing violence to

an accepted and long established Divine order?" You will not get far before you are in the company of those who opposed Christ at every step, and of the Judaizers who pursued Paul across the world with the one object of making his ministry impossible. They were very jealous and zealous for the divinely established order - as they believed it to be. Do you not recognize that every movement of God down the ages has been in conflict with something that men believed to be the Divine order, and those concerned have been regarded as doing the Devil's work? It was so with Christ, and it was so with the apostles. It has been so again and again when God has moved to enlarge His people by ignoring their fixed framework of custom. It is so easy to use thoughtless and misapplied slogans, or apply fragments of Scripture wrongly (such as, "By their fruits ye shall know them"). Very often such damaging dagger-thrusts are only because of a failure to give the Lord room and right to take some of His children by a way that is new, unusual, or very strange. Philip leaves a center and scene of great revival activity; he is suddenly missed, and is - for a time - isolated to one man in a desert. But it was under the sovereignty of the Spirit, and we must wait until the whole story is written years afterward before we pass judgment and say that Philip went wrong. So we see that for all enlargement and increase we must leave room for God to do *new* things, strange things, things that we cannot understand for the moment. We only put ourselves outside of His intention to enlarge spiritually if we bind Him to our own fixed judgments.

"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth" was a popular prejudice from which a good man did not altogether keep free, and it fell upon One no less than the Lord Himself.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Nov-Dec 1941, Vol 19-6

A Holy Nation

Transcribed from a message given by T. Austin-Sparks in May 1960.
The spoken form has been retained verbatim.

In the Gospel by Matthew, chapter 21, at verse 42:
"Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner: this was from the Lord, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And he that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust."

The first letter of Peter, second chapter, verse seven:
"For you therefore which believe is the preciousness: but for such as disbelieve, the stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, for they stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession; that ye may shew forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light; which in time past were no people, but now are the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy."

These passages belong, as you see, to that very solemn (in some respects or on one side, tragic thing) the truth that all that could and should have been the inheritance and the vocation of Israel was lost by them and to them because of their unbelief and was transferred to the Church, "the holy nation" as the Church is here designated by Peter. It is Peter who has taken those Old Testament words and the word which the Lord Jesus Himself took from the Old Testament and transferred to Himself; it is Peter who has done that.

Peter has a peculiar place in this transition, an interesting place, a very instructive place. The Lord had said to Peter, "Thou art Peter, a piece of rock; upon this rock, (of Peter's testimony, undoubtedly) I will build My Church". There's no doubt about it that in Peter's mind the Stone which was rejected of the builders and became the head of the corner was identical with the Rock upon

which the Church would be built. Peter was the one who heard that statement from the Lord and it is Peter who, so many years afterward, has taken up the thought here in his letter: "the Stone, the Rock, the building of the Church thereupon, there around, I will build". The Lord had in that very connection of the rejected Stone becoming the head of the corner, said “the kingdom shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruit thereof”. To Peter He had said “and I will give you the keys of the kingdom”. And here is Peter using this very phrase, “a holy nation” answering to that which was in the declaration of the Lord Jesus, taken from Israel as they were set aside, “I, the kingdom of heaven shall be taken from you and given to a nation”. Now Peter is here speaking of a holy nation to show forth the excellencies, corresponding to bringing forth the fruit thereof.

Now, Peter opens this letter, as you see, by indicating that he is addressing the scattered of the dispersion over the world; the saints of the dispersion in all these many nations, in all these many nations and places or parts of the earth. And he says, “Ye, ye saints scattered in the nations, dispersed over the earth, *ye are* a holy nation”, not you’re going to be, but now, as scattered everywhere, you’re just a nation in the nations but you are different from the nations. Now our present emphasis this morning is upon this one word, “Ye are a HOLY nation”. A *holy* nation. Upon that word “holy” the tragedy of Israel took place; the transference of all the divine intention was effected. Upon that one word the Church inherits all that.

You see, the whole change-over, the terrible tragedy and loss of Israel and the glorious inheritance of the Church just hangs upon one word: holy. Holy; everything rests upon that. If Israel’s loss of the divine intentions for that people as a nation is all due to this one thing: failure in what God means by holiness, and if the Church comes in *only* on that ground, then it’s a very governing thing isn’t it, this matter of what the Lord means by holiness. And we could go as far as to say there is no guarantee of the Church retaining its inheritance and vocation beyond its holiness. It could very well be said of people, even in this dispensation, the Christian dispensation: "it shall be taken from you and given to those bringing forth the fruits thereof". That’s the only ground. You, no more than Israel, can claim to stand and abide on mere tradition, on mere history, on mere externals of practice and teaching. The basis with God is holiness and what He means by holiness.

No one can contemplate the awfulness of Israel’s tragedy over these two

thousand years without feeling that here is the presence of something very, very great, important - and in a sense something very terrible - this matter of holiness. And you know that there are other words into which this one word is translated. It simply means, as we often say: sanctified, separated, set apart for God; many ways of expressing it, but that's what it is. This is something which belongs to God solely and wholly and belonging to God it is *sacred*, it is *holy*, it is *sanctified*, it is *separated* from all that is contrary to God. That is holiness.

Now, for light on this matter we, of course, do have to go back to the Old Testament and we begin with the realization that after man's disobedience at the beginning (and that's the heart of the trouble of all unholiness as is here stated) the whole world, to use the phrase of an apostle, fell into the arms of the wicked one. The *whole world* lieth in the wicked one. The *whole* world lieth in the wicked one. That is the revelation of the early chapters of the Bible isn't it? We need not stay to emphasize or to illustrate or to cite; there it is. God beheld, God looked down and saw that *all* men had gone astray; the whole world lieth in the wicked one. Then God moved to extricate from that world in the lap of the wicked one, a people of a different kind.

We have His move with Abraham, and here, dear friends, with all your interest in the life of Abraham and the incidents in his life and all your study and reading of that life, remember that the *heart* of everything where Abraham was concerned was this one thing: to separate from this world. So the Word came to Abraham "*Get thee out* of thy country, from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, get thee *out!*" Now this is a literal geographical movement but contains a spiritual principle: a *getting out* of that realm lying in the wicked one.

So Abraham went out from Ur of the Chaldees, in a typical sense he went out from this world in the wicked one. And then God promised him a son. He made promise of Isaac and went away and left him, as He so often seems to do after He's made a promise - He leaves for a long time. But, you notice, with one object; *why* did God promise and then not fulfil His promise for so long and leave Abraham so tested and tried by His promise, by His Word? Why? For this one thing only: that that son had got to be different from all other sons. That son could not come the natural way. That son could not be like all other sons of this world. He *must* be God's act. And so God saw to it that although He promised, the natural way was impossible, simply closed down; no hope along that line. And when at length Isaac was born, he was God's miracle, something *not* of this world but of God.

But even so, God is going to ratify that and confirm that principle. The day came when the lad had grown to youth, the Lord said to Abraham “take now thy son, thy only, only son whom thou lovest and offer him” and so to death Isaac must go, in which all the *natural* ties were severed and broken. And Isaac being brought back as, in figure, by resurrection from the dead, was simply put on supernatural ground again, the heavenly, divine, supernatural ground of things was confirmed by God in that event. See what God is doing? Putting everything on *holy* ground.

You know, God can give us things that are undoubtedly given us by God and we know it at the time, and then *we* lay hold and impinge upon them and hold them to ourselves and so our natural life comes right in on this matter to take hold. The Lord takes us through drastic experiences to sever our natural selves from divine things, to keep them *holy*; because even our affections are not always pure, not always holy. God put everything on *that* ground, outside of this corrupt, devil-ridden, devil-governed world. And who will not say that that is the state of the world today. He did it with Abraham - that’s where He made His start toward a *holy* nation. A holy nation… He laid the foundation in holiness.

When His promise and covenant with Abraham had reached the stage of a nation being in existence and Israel is in Egypt, in the world, no doubt about it - in the lap of the devil, the evil one, if Pharaoh is a type of the prince of this world. You see, the Lord takes pains to show what a tyrant he is; takes pains to show us how evil he is. I venture to say there is no one in this place this morning and there are few people in this world, who would put up with half of what Pharaoh put up with without letting those people go. And so God went through plague after plague, right up to the tenth in death itself, for one purpose: on the one side He is showing the nature of the evil one, how *evil* he is. On the other, well, He met Moses as you know, out there in the desert at the bush alive with fire but never consumed, and this is the man who is going to bring that people out of the power of darkness, out of the bondage of the prince of this world, out of this evil kingdom. And God meets him there and what does God say? “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet for the ground and place whereon thou standest is holy” is *holy*. The instrument must in figure, in type, be separated from the evil ground, the evil act, the evil kingdom. No one can lead another soul out of bondage who is still in bondage himself. No one can help other people into a life in God who is not separated from this world. So the very instrument, Moses himself, has to come onto holy ground, consecrated ground, separated ground, with what? Fire!

Fire between this world and that. Between God and the evil one there is a fire which never dies. A fire which draws the line of distinction between what is holy and what is not holy.

To Egypt he goes with his commission and we know the story, he's there in a kingdom, in a world which is repudiated and got to be brought out but it is by virtue of precious blood, the blood of the Lamb, the blood of the Passover; by the mighty efficacious blood of a Lamb without spot or blemish. Separated… by precious, holy, blood. This is Peter speaking again, "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things of silver and gold but with precious blood, as of a Lamb without spot and blemish". And then, you would think that that had effected it.

Forty years there in the wilderness and what is the one thing that comes out so clearly during those forty years? That, although they are out of Egypt, Egypt is not out of them. For though they are geographically separated, spiritually their hearts are still back in Egypt, they're talking about Egypt, hankering for Egypt after all. And so we come to Jordan, the mighty overflowing Jordan, lying between them and that life as a nation which is to satisfy God, fulfill a holy vocation. And the Jordan flows deep and strong between. Their heart's in Egypt and at last their heart's out of Egypt. You see the principle is working all the time. God is carrying this thing very deep.

And you pass on to later history in that nation when they go into captivity and exile, and a remnant comes back. You remember that crisis in the book of Ezra when they've come back and the house is being restored, beautified; a crisis arose. It was over one thing: the people had married foreign wives and the whole thing was spoiled, came under arrest. It was as though God said, We are not going on with this. And you read again what Ezra did over that, brought everything up short on this question of mixed marriages. All again a figure of the spiritual mixture which God will not have. Unholiness… the mark and line of distinctiveness between what is of God and what is not of God, drawn fast and hard.

Well, what are we going to say to all this? That's a very brief, imperfect survey, but dear friends, do you see that the very beginning of the Christian life, the very beginning of the Christian life, rests upon this one historic law of God right through the ages which He cannot overlook. The beginning of the Christian life is called being born anew, or more correctly, born from above. What does it mean? It means *all* that Isaac's birth and resurrection meant in figure; it means

this, that by our very new birth we are translated out of the authority of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God's love. By our very new birth, our conversion - call it what you will - the very beginning of the Christian life is an *absolute separation of two kingdoms*; a transference from one into another. One is an unholy realm into which we are born and to which we belong by nature. The other is a holy realm, "You are a *holy* nation", a nation separated from this world unto God. New birth means that, oh, that that was made clear to all right there at the beginning how utter this thing is.

The Lord Jesus left people in no doubt about this; a cleavage utter and absolute. He would take risks with people, you would say probably: oh, why put them off, why run the risk of offending them, why discourage them saying "Except, except, except" all the time? Ah, He was taking all the risks necessary about this because the reality, the awful reality of this: you CANNOT, you *cannot* inherit the kingdom of heaven while you cling to this kingdom inimical to God, in any way. The two things cannot go together. One is unholy. The other is holy. And by new birth we cross a line which is a very broad line, as broad as the Red Sea and as the Jordan, as broad as the cross of the Lord Jesus. New birth… it's a life of holiness that we have taken up or entered into; a life of holiness, separation unto God. Complete separation unto God. It's to be a walk in holiness. How much the New Testament has to say about this, a walk in holiness that is separate unto God in heart, in spirit, in life, from this world. And if we knew it, a very large degree of our education, our spiritual education and our discipline in the Christian life under the hand of the HOLY Spirit, has to do with those things in us which are mixed up, are mixed up; we're trying to make the best of two worlds. We are trying to keep together, in compromise, things which before God do not belong and are going to spell disaster for us, mark you, disaster for us as truly as ever it spelt disaster for Israel: going to lose the kingdom. It's a tremendous thing.

The Lord calls for distinctiveness of life and testimony, real distinctiveness of life and testimony. Is our life, dear friends, is your life and my life in this world in our connections and associations and so on, quite distinct, no mistaking to what realm we belong, to Whom we belong? No mistaking it? Or are we mixed in, compromising, keeping on good terms with this world and its people under the devil's hand? If so, we stand to lose terribly. We do. What sort of a testimony have you got where you work in your business and its associations? What sort of a testimony have we got in the church? Are we really registering and making our mark in the church, do we count in the church or are we passengers? Is there something quite distinctive about our lives that says that man, that woman, that

young man, that young woman is utter for God, there's no doubt about it, you see it all the time, they are *utter* for God; they are not playing at things, there's no compromise with them. Now this sounds hard, but it's necessary.

Do you see what's involved? Dear friends, the secret of power is holiness! It is. The secret of power is holiness. If our lives are powerless it may be due to this lack somewhere, somehow, of this utterness for God, this separation unto God, of some kind of compromise somehow, somewhere, with the prince of this world who's robbing us of our spiritual power and vitality on his own ground. The secret of power is holiness; whatever you forget, remember that!

The secret of a testimony that counts is a holy life. It is not our teaching, our truth, our practice, religious ordinances and so on, our forms; it is nothing of that. In the first place our real testimony is the testimony of a holy life. It counts far more than all our words, it really does. And remember, this being true, this is the secret of divine support. The Lord will commit Himself to His own ground: holiness. The Lord will stand by those who stand for Him in His nature. The Lord will look after such. And whatever we may have in this life, in this world, we may have a lot but mark you, if we haven't got the Lord with us at last, it's no gain. It's no gain, it's a terrible loss. Israel had the ordinances and the oracles and the tradition and all that; a mighty lot that they had, but at last they lost the kingdom. They lost the kingdom; it was no gain was it?

Well now, what are we concerned about? What are you concerned about, what am I concerned about? I can focus it all down to this one thing: I'm concerned about the Lord being with us and the Lord committing Himself to us and I'm concerned about a testimony in power, a life that counts for God, leaving a mark for God, being remembered for what was of God. This is the only justification of our having come this way at all. And as I see it, all that depends upon this utter separation unto God, gathered into this word: holiness. "Ye are a *holy* nation". May we answer to the description and to us will be the preciousness.

In God or Outside of God?

(A message given at a conference in Switzerland in 1964)

Reading: John 15:1,2,4; 1 Peter 3:18.

There are two words to be underlined in the fifteenth chapter of John. The one word is 'true' - "I am the true vine" - and the other is 'abide'. which occurs eleven times in the chapter.

If you look at these three chapters in John's Gospel, chapters 14, 15 and 16, you will be impressed with one thing. (This is one way of obtaining the real message of any part of the Bible: try to sense the atmosphere of what is being said.) How do these chapters impress you? In them there is an atmosphere of crisis and uncertainty. There are questions in the atmosphere, and there is doubt and there is fear. Look back in chapter fourteen and you hear Thomas saying: 'Lord, we do not know where You are going. How can we know the way?' Philip says: 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be sufficient'. You see, there are questions in the air. The disciples are uncertain, not knowing the meaning of things. They want to know what it is all about. In their hearts they are saying: 'Where is it all leading us?' There is the feeling that a great upheaval is about to take place and that everything is about to be shaken. And they were right. In a few minutes the Lord Jesus will be saying: *"They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he offereth service unto God"* (John 16:2). 'They will put you out of their whole religious system, and when they have done that they will kill you. Having killed you, they will think they have done a good thing for God.' Of course, that was their way of looking at it, but there was another way of looking at it, and it was this that was really causing the tension in the air.

What Jesus was really pointing to was the repudiation of that whole historic religious system. That whole system of Judaism was about to be put away. These disciples had already begun to lose faith in that system, but their trouble was: What is going to take its place? Judaism may be a poor thing, but perhaps a poor thing is better than nothing, and here is Jesus saying that He is going away and leaving us. What shall we have left? It is rather impressive, is it not, that Jesus says: 'I am going away; yet abide in Me.' The disciples were asking: How can we

abide in someone who has gone away and left us? That will be worse than our Judaism!

That, you see, is the setting of these chapters, and chapter sixteen is the answer to those questions and doubts.

Before we go on with this, may we not say that there is something very much like that in the atmosphere today? If you were living in any other part of the world than Switzerland, you would be full of questions as to what is going to happen next. The whole world is full of that question, and even Christians feel that we are coming to a great crisis. Many Christians have already lost faith in the religious system. Much that they were brought up in, much that they believed in and hoped in, and much that they thought for a long time was the true thing, has disappointed them. There are very many Christians who are disappointed with Christianity, and they are seeing that it is something that is going to be shaken and perhaps removed. The big question that is in the heart of many Christians is: Where are we going to? What is it all leading to? What really are we going to have in the end?

That is exactly how these disciples were feeling. Israel had been called 'God's vine'. The Psalmist said of God: *"Thou broughtest a vine out of Egypt"* (Psalm 80:8), and at the time that the Lord Jesus was speaking to His disciples, that vine had proved false. It was not giving fruit to God or to man. It was disappointing everyone. It only had the name of being a vine, and was not a true vine. Jesus said: "I am the true vine". Everyone was asking: What is truth? The common people were asking that, and Pontius Pilate will presently say: *"What is truth"* (John 18:38). The answer of Jesus is: "I am the *true* vine". 'Abide in Me and all your questions will be answered and all your uncertainty will be removed. Abide in Me and you will know what is true.' That is the immediate setting of these words.

But there is a much bigger context to these words than perhaps you recognize. And here is another thing that you must always try to discover when you are reading any words of the Lord Jesus. Anything that He says is not just something for an immediate local situation. What Jesus says, even though it just be one thing, has the whole counsels of God in it. It comprehends all the ages. I venture to suggest that you never saw that in these three simple words: "Abide in Me"! When Jesus said that, He was getting right back behind everything to the great eternal factor, and in those simple words He was taking up the one thing for

which He came into this world. It is the question with which the whole Bible is occupied from beginning to end, and the one question which comprehends everything that Jesus came to answer. The question: In God or outside of God? That sounds very simple, but it comprehends all the ages. It is the question of all time and eternity.

We must open that up a little more. In the beginning, when everything came fresh from the hands of God, the whole creation, including man, was in God. God was the sphere of everything. He was man's sphere - man lived and moved and had his being in God. I often wish that we had a fuller account in the Book of Genesis of what things were like at that time, but we have to draw our conclusions about that by seeing what they were like afterward. We have enough there, however, to show us that it had been a very blessed condition. God was man's environment - and that is a very blessed condition. It is like a beautiful garden, the Bible says. Man walked in a beautiful garden with God, and there were no weeds or thorns there. Man did not have to fight adverse things in that garden. You know, there are some gardeners who are very particular. You take them to gardens that you think are wonderful, and they are not a bit excited about them. They have such a high standard that they are bound to find some fault somewhere. Jesus says here: *"My Father is the husbandman"*, and God is a very particular gardener. If He says 'It is *very* good', then it *must* be *very* good. We are told: *"God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good"* (Genesis 1:31), and that is how it was when all things were in God. We do not know how long it was like that, but while all was abiding in God, it was all very good.

But then came the tragedy: Man and the creation fell out of God. We speak about 'the fall', but have we ever realised what a terrible thing that fall was? Man and the creation fell out of God - and they fell into Satan. So, the New Testament says, *"the whole world lieth in the evil one"* (1 John 5:19). In God? Or outside of God? In God? Or, not just out in a vacuum, but in Satan?

Now that is the great question that Jesus came to answer in His own Person, and that is why we read that little fragment from Peter's letter: *"Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God"...* back into God!

We have pointed out that there are two sides to the Person and work of the Lord Jesus. There is the one side of the Man in God. Jesus lived His life on this earth

in the Father - He said: *"I and the Father are one"* (John 10:30). He always abode in God, and that was a lifelong battle for Him, for Satan and all his kingdom set themselves to drive a wedge in between Christ and His Father. We will not stop to look at all the ways which Satan employed, but the whole earthly life of Jesus was one continuous battle to prevent a gap coming in between Him and His Father. Satan did not trust this business to his demons - I don't think he *could* trust any of them to do this. I think Satan had said: I must do this, so it was always Satan who was mentioned in this connection. No doubt he drew upon all his forces for this, but he set himself personally at the head of them to try to open this gap between Christ and His Father.

Jesus triumphed in this battle. On the one side, as the Man in God, Satan could not separate Him from His Father. I do want you to recognize that this is something that you and I have to know about, for there is just one thing that Satan wants to do with you and me. It is to separate us from God, to get us away from Him, and he will use anything in our lives to do that. On the one side he will use our sufferings and our adversities. When we are going through a bad time he is always very near to whisper: 'You see, God does not love you. He is not with you - He is against you. You have evidence that He is against you, for if He loved you you would not have to suffer like this.' If we allow a doubt about God to come into our hearts when we are having a bad time, we shall find ourselves away from the Lord, and it is much easier to get away from the Lord than it is to come back to Him. It is a lifelong battle to keep our fellowship with the Lord unbroken. If Satan cannot break it in our sufferings he will sometimes try it in our prosperity and blessings. He offered Jesus all the kingdoms of this world and said, in effect, 'I can make you great and prosperous in this world.'

But we must get over to the other side of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus - the Man out of God. When Jesus was 'made sin for us' - and He was made sin for us in the end - He went out from God. I never fail to be more and more impressed with that terrible thing that happened. Here is this Man who had fought a lifelong battle to abide in God. It had been His one great object never to be separated from His Father, and He had won that battle in Himself, but here at the end He is crying: 'My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? I am where I have fought the battle so that I should never be. I am outside. I am forsaken of God. I am separated from My Father. I am like that scapegoat away back in Israel, upon whose head the priest laid his hands and transferred the sin of all the people. He then led the goat far outside the camp, away until it had gone right out of sight. Then the priest drove it away and it was alone in the wilderness, where it died in

its loneliness. I am like that now. I am not only forsaken of men, but I am forsaken of God.'

But that is where all men would be but for Jesus Christ. He suffered, *"the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God"*.

When Jesus was crucified all His disciples were scattered abroad everywhere. You might have had great difficulty in finding them if you had tried to. Two of them went down to Emmaus. Where poor Thomas was hiding himself we do not know, nor where Peter had gone to after denying His Lord. They were all broken and scattered.

Do you notice what happened after the Cross, when Jesus was raised from the dead? He knew where every one of them was and He brought them all back together. He reunited them in Himself and the last picture we have of them is that they are all together in Christ. They would agree that it is nothing but desolation to go out from God. It is not a garden, but a wilderness. Peter would agree with that, and so would Thomas. When the Prodigal Son went out from his father's house, he went out to bankruptcy, from a garden to a wilderness. When he came home he came to a life of fruitfulness and of rest.

Do you see something of what the Lord Jesus meant when He said "Abide in me"? 'Outside of Me it is just a wilderness. There is no fruit there. If you abide in Me you bring forth much fruit'... *"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit"* (John 15:8). God's satisfaction is the one great thing through all the Bible. His satisfaction is now in His Son, and if we abide in Christ we abide in God's good pleasure and shall bring forth much fruit. If we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us - as we are supposed to have - we shall know in our hearts whether we are out of fellowship with the Lord or whether we are abiding in the Lord and we shall know because we shall feel that we are in the wilderness when we are out, and that we are in the garden when we are in. Jesus was very emphatic about this. He knew what a tremendous thing it was and so, eleven times in a short chapter, He said "Abide... abide... abide in Me."

May the Lord keep us abiding in Christ! All other things will prove to be false and only what is true will stand us in good stead to the end. "I am the *true* vine... Abide in *Me*".

That is only one way of saying: 'We must know the Lord and our place in the

Lord'. What are you abiding in? Are you abiding in people? Are you abiding in conferences? Are you abiding in a religious system? Well, all these things will pass, and the time will be when there will not be any more conferences and when you will not be able to depend upon any people. The whole religious system will disappoint you, but if you know and abide in the Lord Jesus, it will be all right to the end.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Nov-Dec 1964, Vol 42-6

"In Spirit and In Truth"

John 4:23

It is no exaggeration to say that the briefest phrase from the lips of Jesus Christ contains a depth, wealth and cruciality of significance that is inexhaustible. The above clause is an example of this. In the first place it - with its context - was used to mark the change in a long and powerful tradition. A system and tradition so strong and deep-rooted as, in any questioning of it, to rouse the most vehement and deadly wrath and antagonism of a whole nation, dispersed throughout the whole world. The book of the Bible in which this phrase occurs is just full of this so terrible antagonism. The words not only indicate the transition from one long dispensation to another, altogether different but they go right to the very heart of the situation which is stirring and troubling Christendom today as it has never before done. Christendom, which means everything bearing the name of Christianity, is moved in our time in every one of its many and varied circles by an enforced necessity - to save its very life - to find a way of unity.

Never before in the Christian era has the word 'Church' been so much, so often, and so seriously upon the lips of those included in the word 'Christianity'. From the biggest to the smallest communities within its compass this word 'Church' and its unity is the subject of convocations, conferences, councils, committees and conclaves. All this betrays a deep and serious concern, and when that is true of anything it implies that things are not right. What is called 'Christianity', and what has come to be called 'the Church', has become a tradition, an institution, and a system quite as fixed, rooted and established as ever Judaism was, and it will be no less costly to *fundamentally* change it than was the case with Judaism. Superficial adjustments may be made, and *are* being made, but a very heavy price is attached to the change which is necessary to really solve the great problem. It may very well be, as in the time of the Lord, that the essential light will not be given to very many because God knows that they would never pay the price. It may only be a "Remnant" - as of old - who will be led into God's answer because they will meet the demands at all costs. Therefore we cannot be too hopeful in regard to all that is going on in this connection. It may be that this so widespread stirring is in the sovereignty of God intended for "the sifting of the hearts of men".

The sifting may very well be in the direction of a winnowing of the variety of conceptions of what the Church is.

Somehow, in the course of time, the word 'Church' has become associated with a kind of building or architecture, for that is now the common word for such places. Or again, it is used of congregations and assemblies of people, physical bodies. Sometimes it is employed to define a worldwide body of people comprehensively called 'Christians'. Within that widest circle there are all the many denominational 'churches', too numerous to tabulate. The sifting may mean that we have to recognize that the true Church is not the aggregate of human physical bodies. It is not a society tied together by either a title or a creed, i.e. a set of beliefs. It is not constituted by a certain procedure called 'New Testament Order' or practice. All these externalities, physical, temporal, material, etc., will go, as they have done in numerous places in history, and are doing under the stresses of persecution in wide areas of the world.

But with the passing of the material, the places, the physical, the *true* Church is unaffected and it is *one;* not divided and not many. It is here that, in the words of John 4:23 (and context), Jesus has made more than a statement, He has defined the Church for this whole dispensation. He has peremptorily dismissed Jerusalem and its Temple and Gerizim in Samaria, and with them everything of the same type and order, and has enunciated the principle which defines and designates the alone true Church. If we are to take Jesus seriously, as we hear Him in this Gospel by John, then buildings however ornate and magnificent, and congregations of religious people however great, and ancient traditions and systems however they may have been *sovereignly* used by God, are *not* the true Church! There are *many* things within this compass which are thought to go to make up and belong to the Church, but really do not do so. It is significant how, when a man or people walk with God, the road leads from the outward to the inward, and how so much of that which was before thought to be so important, just falls off, and spiritual reality dispenses with so much ecclesiastical paraphernalia and trapping. What, then, was that essential and ultimate to which Christ reduced and sifted everything on the basis and essence of the Church? In finding that we shall find the answer to all divisions, and the secret of true and eternal unity.

When Jesus reduced everything - as in John 4:23 - to "In spirit and in truth" (and note - it was the whole matter of "worship", related to places and ancient systems, that was being dealt with), what really did He mean? If we use a term

which sounds difficult, what follows will explain it, we trust, quite amply. The Church is the unity of spiritual personalities.

This, purely, is just what Jesus had been saying with such emphasis and imperativeness to Nicodemus. "Verily, verily" - "Most truly" - "I say." Remembering who Nicodemus was, and what he represented, Jesus emphatically told him that not only was he outside of the Kingdom of Heaven, but that, as he was, with all his religion, tradition, and sincerity, there was a positive embargo upon his entering; the door was fast closed to his kind. The demand and requirement, Jesus categorically stated, was that something should happen which would be a starting of life all over again, and that as a born member of a new and altogether different race, sphere, and nation. In elucidating Nicodemus's perplexity, Jesus made it clear that this is not a physical-body matter, for, as stated elsewhere, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of Heaven." So, basically, the Kingdom or the Church is not so many religious physical bodies. What, then, is this "you" that has to be "born from above", "born of the Spirit", in contrast to "that which is born of the flesh"? What is it that - in God's and Heaven's realm - has no existence or place until it is reborn? What is it that, as to union with God, has no life until life is given as by a new birth? The answer of Jesus, and of the New Testament as a whole (which only is Christianity), is that the spirit of man, the "inner man of the heart", "our inward man" *as an entity*, has to have this rebirth. When the spirit of man is referred to, it is not just what is meant when we say of a person: 'He - or she - has a nice, a pleasant spirit', or 'is nice-spirited'. That is abstract. The spirit in man is the essential personality of that order which belongs to the Kingdom of Heaven: it is a different order from all others. It is, as Jesus said, the alone and direct result of the action of the Spirit of God, and it is essentially different from every other religious order.

The Church, we repeat, is the organic unity of such spiritual personalities, and such alone. The Church will never be anything or anywhere more in existence, greater or smaller, than the spiritual personalities and spiritual measure of such as have come into being - *with God* - by this definite operation of the Holy Spirit; not by means of sacraments, or any other *outward* means, but by a Divine fiat, an *act* of God. Sacraments are not spiritual, they are temporal and symbolic. The context of our governing words is: "God is Spirit". That is *nature*, not firstly disposition. It is a kind of being, the essential order of being. Then Jesus went on to emphasize that relationship, intercourse, oneness with God, is only possible when man becomes - by Divine act - basically and essentially a spiritually reborn creation; what Paul termed: "He that is spiritual". The Church will never

be - locally or universally - more perfect than are the spiritual personalities which comprise it. The buildings and the old human bodies will go. The "spirits of just men made perfect" will be clothed upon with a body "not made with hands", but, like the newborn spirit, "a body which is from above". (See Hebrews 12:24 and 1 Corinthians 15.)

Hence, the focus of God's training and "chastening" is as by "the Father of *our spirits"* (Hebrews 12:9).

The Church begins with spiritual birth. It grows by *(a)* the multiplication of spiritual births, and *(b)* the growth of the spiritual personalities.

The only *seen* Church is the character of Christ in persons. Bodies are an essential media. We are not thinking of unembodied or disembodied spirits. We are not in the realm of mysticism. Spiritual life is essentially practical because we are spiritually developed by all the practical experiences of bodily life. While our bodies are but the 'vessels' of ourselves, they *are* the vessels, and 'in these we do groan'. We do not accept the 'Christian Science' tenet that "matter is an illusion, and at most evil".

We *must* take time to be very clear on this side of this great matter, because it will be so easy for us to be misunderstood; and it would be so likely that it would be said that we are just spiritualizing away the Church. The human, physical bodies of Christians are as essential to the Church as they are to man himself as the vehicle of self-expression and presence in this world for practical purposes. This should not need saying, for it would be so absurd to think of the Church as so many spirits without bodies. The same is true of locations. The Church is not an omnipresent spirit, even if governed by the Holy Spirit who is omnipresent. What we are saying - as we believe the New Testament teaches - is that *within* and behind the needed physical and bodily 'temples' the Church is constituted by the regenerated spirits of men and women, in whose spirits the Divine gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus dwells by new birth. This is the *eternal* Church. Physical bodies may pass away and give place to the bodies "like unto his glorious body". Localizations may cease, as they have done from New Testament times onwards. Temporal housings of the Church may - and will - go, sooner or later; but that true Church of "the spirits of just men" is eternal. To see and understand this true nature of the Church is to have several vital effects. It will show the fallacy of much of the common and prevailing phraseology in relation to the Church - such as 'joining the Church" whether by invitation,

constraint, attractions, or any other outward means. The fallacy in our Church mentality and talk is largely responsible for the fallacy that the historic 'church' is in the eyes and minds of so many people today. It is something very misleading. The Church is *not* a composite thing which can be 'joined', any more than is a true family. It is a *spiritual* entity into which we have to be *born* by a begetting of the Father God and born by the Holy Spirit.

Another effect of knowing what the Church truly is will be to solve the whole problem of unity. Unity, according to the New Testament, is not firstly and basically intellectual; neither is it emotional. It is unity of spirit - "One Spirit". The mind may not grasp all the truth as stated, but the spirit can know with assurance that it is the truth. The mind may not be capable of defining error, but the spirit - indwelt by the Holy Spirit - can register that there is something false in the statement. This is how the true Church is safeguarded and preserved.

Then, in what we are pointing to, there is the explanation of an otherwise very puzzling thing. Both Peter, John and Paul lived to see a great decline setting in where the churches were concerned. All in Asia turned from Paul. Peter saw much that made him write strong and faithful words. John saw all those elements of declension about which he wrote in the Revelation. All of these men also knew that their death at the hands of the enemies of Christ was imminent. The outlook was grim and deeply disappointing from every natural standpoint. Apparently the Church was being devastated, and their life work was being desolated. Apparently, we say. Yet all of these men were in spiritual triumph and ascendancy to the end. Why? Just because they knew that the Church and the work, and the deepest truth about believers, was not the outward, but the spiritual and inward, and therefore indestructible. What is truly definable as "Spirit and truth" cannot be prevailed against by the gates (councils) of hades. Deeper than nationalities, temperaments, traditions, 'birth', training, intellect, is God's work in the renewed and indwelt spirit of man, and the bond of spiritual unity can stand heavy strains and stresses.

May the Spirit of Truth use what has been written here to open our eyes to the so much more that the New Testament has to say as to spirit and truth. Call it 'mystical' if you like; or describe it as 'spiritualizing', if you choose; but still the truth is that Christianity has become a religion, a concept, a form, a system, a name. What the one and only authority for the name "Christian" solidly lays down and teaches is that it is a Person; a Person in abiding individual reality, but expanded and reproduced by His own Spirit through new birth to an "elect

according to the foreknowledge of God the Father". The Church and unity are no more and no less or other than the spiritual presence and measure of Christ. One of the very onerous and exacting obligations thrust upon us by the developments of 'Christianity' is to look *through* its accretions and adoptions, such as adornments, vestments, clericalisms, forms, etc., or the absence of these, and seek for Christ. It may be hard work; it may require the very strong handling of our own likes or dislikes; but it has got to be done, for the Church and unity are not *any one* of these complexions, neither can we *make* the perfect church by composing a complexion. It is that that the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote what is in 2 Corinthians 5, particularly: "...if one died for all, then all died (in Him)... I therefore, from henceforth, view no man carnally..." (Conybeare). Although not here in actual words, but in other places, the Apostle contrasts 'carnal' with 'spiritual', and we should take it that that is what he meant here. He says that he no longer views or knows Christ carnally, i.e. after the flesh, and implies that Christ has now to be known spiritually, so also with Christian men. God help us to keep our carnal selves hidden behind Christ! Also, God help us to - at least - seek to find Christ in others, however little. You will agree that the very effort demanded for this makes the *spiritual* life intensely practical.

This, then, is the Church, and this alone true unity. No wonder that it is a case of "giving diligence (*striving* to maintain) the unity of the Spirit". It demands "striving". If we project ourselves, our natural selves, or carnal selves, in front of Christ we - at least - injure the unity and the Body of Christ.

Here we must stop for the present. But surely we have begun to verify and prove our statement at the beginning: 'Any brief phrase from the lips of the Lord Jesus contains an inexhaustible fullness.' So it is with "In spirit and in truth".

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Mar-Apr 1967, Vol 45-2

The Increase of Spiritual Capacity

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit..." (John 16:12).

"I could not speak unto you as spiritual... I fed you with milk, not with meat... not even now are ye able" (1 Corinthians 3:1-2).

"Ye are straitened in your own affections... Be ye enlarged" (2 Corinthians 6:12-13).

"...we have many things to say, and hard of interpretation, seeing ye are become dull of hearing... Ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you the rudiments" (Hebrews 5:11,12).

In the light of a wide and long knowledge, from far East to far West, of Christians and Christian work, were I asked what I most strongly feel to be the greatest - or one of the greatest - needs of our time, I should not hesitate to say: An increase of spiritual capacity. Note - I say *SPIRITUAL*. Not intellectual. The desire, pursuit of, and provision for education and knowledge outbounds all that has ever been. The range of the intellectual and scientific was never so great. Nor is there lacking anything in the realm of the emotional. This is an excessively emotional and passionate age, both in quest and provision. The world is living on its emotions and passions, and in Christianity everything is done and provided to gratify the emotional senses.

Further, there is no straitness and limitation in the area of activity, of doing. The programme of Christian works, movements, enterprises, occupations, is so full as to leave no time for quiet thought and meditation. All of these three realms make up the soul, the ego - mind, emotion, will - and this is an age of the immense and intense assertion of the ego, the soul of man; Christians not excepted.

But in all this, and what an all it is, we repeat our conviction that a paramount need is of the increase of spiritual capacity. The shallowness and superficiality of spiritual capacity is nothing less than tragic and pathetic. The cheap, the easy, the quick, the glamorous, the popular; these are the features of our time which

characterize so much of Christianity. It is the way of the world, and it has invaded the Church and organized Christianity. Depth and stamina, painstaking endurance, are a lost dimension. The passages of Scripture with which we introduce this consideration indicate that this lack of spiritual capacity has been a problem from the time when Jesus was on earth. He was handicapped and limited by it. It was necessary for Him to keep in reserve "many things" that He had, and wanted to say. The lack of spiritual capacity imposed a "cannot" upon His ministry. At another time He expressed this sense of frustration in a spontaneous ejaculation: "And, oh, how am I straitened!" (Luke 12:50). The Scriptures mentioned also show that the same problem distressed the Apostles. Said Paul: "I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual", implying that he longed for a breakthrough into the realm of the "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man... but God hath revealed unto us..." What great and potent things were withheld because of lack of capacity! Whoever wrote the Letter to the Hebrews was deeply troubled because of that arrested or retarded development which made him say with a touch of bitterness: "We have many things to say, but...", and then explained that he could not go beyond the "rudiments". The fact that this was a malady even in apostolic times surely does not condone or excuse it in our days. The most that such a reflection can do is to relieve us of some of the surprise. But we shall feel the same limitation and frustration if we know that the Lord has given us something which has no free way because of limited capacity on the part of God's people. It makes the going so hard and wearing! It will not do, however, to sit down with the fact, whether it be then or now. We have to uncover

The Causes of Limited Capacity

Of course, when children are children, and rightly so, we have no greater requirement than to speak to them as such, and not to expect more of them than is right and proper. But our Scriptures relate to an un-normal, sub-normal, or even abnormal state. Behind them is an expectation that creates an element of shame, reproach, and even scandal. There *OUGHT* to be capacity, and there is not. The greater fullnesses are available, but the channel is blocked, or the vessel is not empty or open. Do our Scriptures throw any light on the causes of this limitation, which is spiritual tragedy? In both our Lord's case and in the Letter to the Hebrews the cause is similar. It is

(1) The Blockage of a Fixed Tradition

In both cases it was the impassable barrier of Judaism. But let us at once understand that Judaism is not exclusively Judaistic, it is an incorrigible propensity, tendency, disposition, or habit. There is as much Judaism in principle in Christianity as ever there was in Israel. God has never done a new thing but in time men have crystallized it into a set form of teaching and practice. Sooner or later a label, a tag, a name is taken or given to it, and that is that! It becomes a tradition, and the tradition reigns supreme, until God exposes it. That tradition makes its victims incapable of accepting and adjusting to any new light, any Holy Spirit innovations. The real nature and cause of such a situation is a misapprehension of God's ways. It was true that God chose Israel to be His "Peculiar people", and separated them from all the nations. But Israel misunderstood this sovereign act of God. They reasoned that, in so doing, God had chosen them *ALONE* unto salvation, and thus had for ever closed the door firmly against all other people. The truth was that God's act was with the intention of showing to all men what is His way, basis, and provision for salvation. Israel should have been a missionary nation, *BRINGING* God to the ungodly! How God laboured, through His servants, to make Israel know that *THEY WERE NO BETTER* than other peoples, but rather needed as much mercy as any on earth. This was not only said to them, but demonstrated in their own history. Theirs should have been the servant spirit marked by deep humility and indebtedness. But it became just the opposite in extreme. They lost everything! Now, the disciples of Christ inherited that superior nature and set the fixed bounds of God's grace. "The Kingdom to Israel" was the 'be all and end all' of their traditional horizon. They just could not accept a larger purpose.

If there is one thing being emphasized by God in our time it is that He must be given an open way to lead beyond even that which may have been of Himself in a provisional way, to say nothing of the necessity to let go our finalities as to the means and methods which He employs.

The New Testament makes plain that the warfare for the *FULL* inheritance takes on its most intense and fierce form in relation to deliverance from bondage to tradition.

(2) The Embargo on "Flesh and Blood"

This may sound a strange heading, but it is not strange in the New Testament. It occurs more than once in that form, but it has a considerable contextual enlargement. It is a phrase which relates to and embraces all that man is apart

from regeneration and the new creation. A classic example is Nicodemus in John chapter 3. It is still more fully explained and defined in the First Letter to the Corinthians, and, in particular, chapters 2 and 3. It is man in the old creation, sometimes referred to as "Natural" (Greek: soulical); sometimes as carnal, i.e. 'fleshly'. Its first occurrence is in Matthew 16:17. Wherever the actual words are used, or their meaning enlarged upon, there is always the embargo which says "cannot". So Paul said: "The natural man cannot..." He might just as well have said: "Flesh and blood cannot", because he did actually use the phrase in 1 Corinthians 15:15: "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."

Jesus drew the line of demarcation and distinction, as well as incapacity, when He said to Peter: "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17).

Now the fact and the force of this embargo is seen so fully in the case of the Corinthians. They - or a large number of them - were living on that side of their human nature which was not regenerated; their "old man"; the other-than-Christ side. On that side their judgments, their behaviour, their disposition, were those of this world and its ways. Hence their spiritual immaturity, arrested growth, sub-normal capacity. It all speaks for itself and needs very little enlarging upon.

From all this failure and tragedy in the case of both Israel and Corinth, the truth is clearly and strongly written that such painful history is the result of an unnecessary limitation of spiritual capacity.

But when we have said all that, we must go deeper and find what the record shows to be causes and the remedy.

The Secret of Enlarged Capacity

The turning-point upon which the Lord laid the release from the disability was in a single word: "Howbeit" ... "Many things to say, but ye cannot bear it now. Howbeit..." "Howbeit, when the Spirit of truth is come." Incapacity gives way to capacity by the advent of the Holy Spirit. That, of course, is a statement which we all believe as a doctrine, and as evidenced in the life of the disciples. There is no mistaking it where they were concerned. But that is not all of the truth. The Holy Spirit *HAD* come in the time of the Corinthians, and they had received Him. But still their spiritual capacity was limited. The explanation is found in the ground demanded by the Holy Spirit for His work of enlargement. In the case

of the disciples the Cross meant a devastating work in *THEM*. That crisis gave the Holy Spirit the way to that tremendously enlarged capacity which we see in them on, and after, the Day of Pentecost. But the principle of the Cross had to apply even after that. They were Jews, and the Jewish tradition was not thrown off easily. Peter had a battle over the Gentile Cornelius, but the Spirit won on the basis of the Cross. The Corinthians were Gentiles and had their own battleground. They had had a crisis, but had understood the Cross in only a limited way. This is implied by Paul when he said: "When I came unto you... I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:1,2).

The issue, then, is that increase of spiritual capacity can only come by way of suffering. That is - the Cross. The suffering may be disillusionment as to our own ability, as with Peter. It may be parting from some very strong religious ideas, associations and sentiments. It may be the breaking of our own natural selves, the strong self-life. Be what and how it may, in no realm of creation is there enlargement and increase without suffering. This is most true in the Christian life. It is only those who have suffered who have most to give, and who have capacity for more.

This, then, surely explains God's sovereignty in allowing us suffering. Suffering is not meant by God to be loss and deprivation. Satan says that it is. God means suffering to result in increased spiritual capacity, and spiritual capacity is the basis of added responsibility, trust, and fruitful ministry.

The branch of the Vine may bleed from the drastic pruning and feel stripped of much glory; but more and better fruit is the Divine Vinedresser's vindication.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, May-June 1967, Vol 45-3

Jonathan's Arrow

An arrow has often been the symbol or instrument of a crisis in Bible times. In Elisha's time it symbolized deliverance from Syria (2 Kings 13). It symbolized God's judgment of Ahab in the days of Jehu (2 Kings 9). These were turning-points in history. So it was in the case of Jonathan's arrow.

The people had rejected God's best and refused every appeal and warning of Samuel as to what their decision and choice would eventually result in. But their hearts were hardened and they chose Saul. It was man's choice, not God's. It was like everything else, the common and popular thing: "Like unto the nations". The seeds of disruption were in the way of their own choosing. God had long patience and did what He could to win them back to His way. They took His goodness and patience, and the blessings that He gave as arguing for His agreement. But deep down and like a haunting shadow there was a doubt and a growing discontent. At a given point the real nature of that mistake sprang up and showed itself for what it really was. Secretly God moved with His reaction in the choice of David. But for a long time this reaction of God was not recognized and David was not in God's place for him. It is a strange and complicated situation and is difficult to piece together in a straightforward sequence. Saul was evidently so confused by his pride and self-interest, and so dominated by an evil spirit, that his course was full of contradictions. He seems to have had a split personality and was like two contrary persons. But the initial mistake was becoming more and more manifest and Saul was losing balance. The issue was becoming increasingly emphatic; God's choice or man's choice. A crisis was reached on the day of the arrow of Jonathan, Saul's son. Poor Jonathan; the tragic victim of divided loyalty!

The arrow was the sign and symbol. "Is not the arrow beyond you?" That fateful word "beyond". It marked a crisis. It signified the near end of one regime. It pointed to beyond Saul and his kingdom. It introduced the fierce and malignant phase which, while so painful for the instrument of God's full purpose, would be the travail which makes the true Kingdom come. What a lot of prophecy, dispensation-truth, and ultimate issue in the battle of the ages this story holds! This arrow of Jonathan was an arrow of Divine Sovereignty, which works so strangely and inscrutably in the history of the elect. For David it was indeed an

arrow, for an arrow is a piercing, wounding and painful thing. But its piercing was a "dividing asunder". David had become involved in a relationship with Saul which would demand an utter emancipation and absolute separation. His spirit and behaviour were magnificent, but with all his loyalty there was no hope for that union. So the arrow marked the point of a complete break. God had finished with one order. There could be no patching up or compromise. The ways of men and the ways of God must part for ever in the pain of the Cross.

This, then, in what seemed to be a simple incident in the boy and the arrows, contains, firstly, the story and history of man's mistake, fatal mistake. It dates back to the beginning of the Bible. A choice was offered between two ways - God's and man's. Warning and shown consequences were given. But man made his choice against the known will of God. The seeds of disruption and death were in that choice, and the tragedy of Saul's death on the battleground was foreshadowed. But God had already His Man, after His own heart, and after a long history, in which the sin of man's disobedience was brought home to him, God's greater David came to His place as "A Prince and A Saviour".

The same drama and tragedy were enacted by Israel's rejection of God's Best when they said: "WE WILL NOT have this man to reign over us." As God said to Samuel about Saul, "I have rejected him", so two thousand years have seen the terrible rejection by Israel of "the Son of David".

The story does not end there. It goes on wherever and whenever God's offer is rejected and man puts his own choice before God's. It works out in a lesser degree, but still with tragedy, where a choice for the lesser rather than for the fuller purpose of God is made by His people.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Nov-Dec 1965, Vol 43-6

The Law of the House

Reading: Ezekiel 43:1-12

At a time when the temple in Jerusalem was in ruins, Ezekiel the prophet was shown a spiritual temple, measured out by a man with a golden measuring rod. The measurements were all exact; the prophet was led in, led through, led round, led up, set down, so that he could see it from every side. From every angle and every aspect this spiritual house, which was God's mind accurately expressed, was shown to him. For Ezekiel it was a spiritual temple, and it remains so until now. Then the command was given to him to show it to the house of Israel, so that they should be thoroughly ashamed - presumably at their own short-comings.

It was not only a prophecy: it was also a figure. It spoke of God's people who were meant to form His dwelling place. In a sense it pointed right back to Adam, the man who was originally intended to be indwelt by God and filled with His glory. If, as we look backwards to Adam, we have any doubts about this intention, these doubts are dispelled immediately we take the forward look to Christ, for we see Him as the Man on the mount of transfiguration crowned with glory and honour. We are given to understand that He is the first of the new humanity, and that He is bringing many sons to glory. We are to be joined with Him, as members of His body, and so to share His glory. God's true temple is not an earthly edifice, but a people. Israel's temple was but a type of the intention for Adam to be indwelt by God and filled with His glory. The first man, Adam, failed. Israel, with its typical temple failed, and the key to their failure is found in the matter of heart fellowship with God by faith.

This is really the key to so much, this matter of heart fellowship by faith. For lack of this Adam never became a temple of God, and because of failure in this respect the Jewish temple became a ruin. When it lay in ruins, the word of the Lord came by Haggai: "Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? ...The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, saith the Lord of hosts" (Haggai 2:3 and 9). Now the fact is that there has never yet been a literal temple on this earth with greater glory than that of Solomon. Whether there is still to be such a temple on this earth does not concern us very much, for

we look higher, and see the veil drawn away for a new temple to come down from heaven with the proclamation: "The tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them". Only a spiritual temple can come down out of heaven, so Haggai's words are prophetic, pointing on to Christ. He alone can transcend all that has gone before, so that the last Adam is greater than the first, just as the last temple is greater than the former. Christ is God's eternal reality, not a type or a pattern, but the fulfilment of them all. Adam was a type of Him that was to come, and the temple was a type of Him who said: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again". The types have broken down. Christ is the reality. He is the temple in whom God truly dwells, the Amen, the final conclusive realisation of God's desire to live with men.

Ezekiel spoke of "the law of the house". In His life on earth, Christ was governed by spiritual laws, and we can discover one of these by considering the cause of the breakdown of the types. Where did the ruin begin? It began before it affected this creation and overtook Adam. We understand that the original cause of the ruin was pride of heart: "For thou saidst in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God... I will be like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:13-14). Adam fell by succumbing to this same temptation, and his pride revealed itself in a threefold way - independence, possessiveness and self-centredness. The same features were thus found in Adam's pride of heart as had been expressed by Satan's fall to ruin. Adam's fall meant that from then onwards he had to take responsibility for making his own way. He had to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. Up to that point, God had taken responsibility and provided everything for him; life was a very simple matter, with no cause for anxious thoughts about anything. From the moment of yielding to heart pride, however, he had to accept responsibility for his own affairs and maintain his existence on earth.

We see the great contrast in the case of the last Adam. If pride of heart caused ruin, then humility of heart was basic to recovery. If pride of heart found expression in independence, then humility delighted in dependence. From His birth onwards, everything about the Lord Jesus spoke of lowliness and humility. With Him there was no self-importance; even as the king He came: "...meek, and riding upon an ass". It was by virtue of His life of utter dependence that He provided a home in which the Father could live. It was to this that Stephen was leading up when he was so brutally interrupted. His full quotation would have been: "...what manner of house will ye build unto me? and what place shall be my rest? ...but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite

spirit, and that trembleth at my word" (Isaiah 66:1-2).

If ruin came by pride, and pride showed itself in possessiveness, then humility will be revealed by self-emptying. Certainly Christ emptied Himself, and so became a fit home for God. There is a power about this divine humility which is capable of bringing the pride of Satan to the dust, destroying all the devil's works. It might be thought that when we speak of humility we are simply emphasising one of the common virtues of the Christian life, but in fact we are dealing with a much bigger issue, even the desire of God to dwell in man. The whole intention of the incarnation is "God with us", and for that purpose Christ was God manifest in the flesh so that He could recover a home for God in the hearts of men. He was "crucified through weakness", but what a complete transformation has been made possible in the whole universe on the basis of that crucifixion! The pride which made it impossible for God to dwell in Adam, and which made it necessary to withdraw His presence from the earthly temple, has now been challenged and defeated by the humility of the Lamb.

Now the outcome of the cross is the Church as the house of God, and we notice that this spiritual house must be governed by the same laws as ruled the life of the Lord Jesus. The perfect humility which made Him a fit dwelling place for the Father must also be found in the redeemed who represent Christ's recovery of a home for God. It is notable that Paul, who was especially called to reveal that house, is a man who speaks a great deal about himself. No apostle used the first personal pronoun so much as he. We believe that it was the Holy Spirit's intention that this should be so, for a man who spoke so much about the house of God needed himself to be an object lesson of the true nature of that house. Paul was taken hold of in relation to his revelation, and made an expression of his message as well as being the appointed messenger. So we are entitled to look for the outworking of the principles of the house in the man Paul.

Now Paul - or Saul of Tarsus - was in himself the very opposite of a humble man. Before he met Christ he had been assertive and aggressive, a man of great independence and forcefulness of will. From time to time, even after his conversion, little glimpses of his natural self-strength emerged. But the outstanding impression we get is of one whose pride had been broken, and who displayed a beautiful humility. He was always deeply dependent on his Lord for guidance and strength. Moreover he was careful to lay down the principle of dependence - mutual dependence - as the basis of the house of God, insisting that the body consists of many different but interdependent members, who will

spoil God's purposes if they abandon the humility of the need for one another and begin, in pride, to act out of harmony with the rest.

As we have said, pride is shown in possessiveness, and so often the ruin which can be seen in the churches has been caused by this tendency of their members. It is a mark of the home of God that it offers no rights of possession, no place for personal power or mastery. The Lord Jesus wanted nothing for Himself, being content to leave it to the Father to decide what should come to Him. He refused to strive, to strain, to manipulate or scheme for His own interests, but committed everything to the Father. That was how the living Foundation of the Church was laid, and that is how the whole structure must be built. We must be very careful that natural possessiveness does not arise in the things of God. It can do so unconsciously, even in our desire for spiritual blessing. Even a desire for holiness may have a subtle snare about it, if it means that we want to be noticed or praised for our holy living.

The first great law of the house of God must be the humility of Christ in all its aspects of dependence, emptiness and God-centredness. There is a tremendous significance about the victory of the humility of Christ. Satan had robbed God of His desire to dwell with Adam and then with Israel, by inducing them to adopt an attitude of pride. Then Christ came, and challenged this whole satanic principle, overcoming it by being the Lamb. He repudiated independence, possessiveness and self-centredness and by so doing brought God into His own. In His case men thought that they were dealing with a poor weak Man, but they found that in fact they had come up against the mighty God. This is to be repeated in the experience of the Church. It may look like a poor remnant of humanity, weak, persecuted, helpless, but as God makes His dwelling there, the opposing forces of evil will find that they have to reckon with the Almighty and so meet with utter defeat. Humility is one of the greatest forces in God's universe. In the case of the Lord Jesus humility did not begin when He took man-form. Of Him we are told: "...who, subsisting in the form of God, counted it not as something to be grasped at to be on equality with God..." (Philippians 2:6). We may consider this in contrast to Satan, who did grasp at equality with God and who infected Adam with the same proud ambition. There was no personal self-glorying in the attitude of the incarnate Son of God; but on the contrary He was willing to empty Himself to become Man. This makes it clear that humility is not just something required of the human race, but it is a divine feature, an attribute of the Godhead. Humiliation and humility are two different things. The humiliation of the Lord Jesus was one thing; His humility is another.

This humility is eternal; it is an expression of our glorious God, who is no vaunting, proud, Self-glorifying Being.

So, from His place in glory, Jesus emptied Himself and "being found in fashion as a man He humbled himself...". As God He emptied Himself and as Man He humbled Himself. What a marvellous Lord we have! Satan and Adam sought to exalt themselves to be equal with God, but here was One, eternally equal with the Father, who did not grasp at this equality but was willing to relinquish all His rights in order to ensure that the will of God was done on earth as it is done in heaven. And He is the One to whom all glory is given. We are told that Christ has been exalted as a direct result of His perfect humility. In the Word of God various reasons are given for the exaltation of Christ. He has been exalted because of His sufferings in death. He has been glorified because He glorified the Father here on earth. Now in Philippians 2 it is specifically stated that God has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name because He carried a life of humility through to its full and final self-emptying. So His humility is the explanation of His power. And humility is the basis upon which the Church can know the presence and power of almighty God. In the humility wrought by the cross we are brought into oneness with our exalted Lord, and we enjoy a practical experience of the spiritual reality of the house of God. God dwells and God makes known His power when the law of the house is observed and the true humility of Christ is allowed to govern in all things.

The Living God

"*And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you... Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into the Jordan." Josh. 3:10-11.*

"For they themselves report... how ye turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God" 1 Thess. 1:9.

"How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Heb. 9:14.

"And it shall be, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, There shall they be called sons of the living God." Rom. 9:26.

"...ye are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in tables that are hearts of flesh... And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols? for we are a temple of the living God..." 2 Cor. 3:3; 6:16.

"For to this end we labor and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of them that believe." 1 Tim. 4:10.

"Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Matt. 16:16.

"...that thou mayest know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." 1 Tim. 3:15.

"But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels... Take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God." Heb. 12:22; 3:12.

Without attempting to touch in detail on all these passages, every one of which

deals with a different aspect of practical relationship with the living God, we shall seek to gather the whole matter up into a small compass, and bring it down to some simple, direct, precise application.

The Living One

In the first place we recognise the fact that *the God with whom we have to do is a living God.* Perhaps that does not sound very wonderful, very fresh, but I believe that with regard to that, as to everything else, it is possible to wake up to the realisation of a meaning from which we have been very largely estranged.

The God with whom we have to do is a living God! As these passages indicate, and as perhaps most of us have had reason to know, that fact has two sides and conveys two meanings. On the one side it is a fact of infinite comfort to the honest in heart. To begin with, when we turn to Him in honesty of heart it is perhaps the greatest thing to know that we are turning to a living and true God. Of the Thessalonians we read that they turned from idols "to serve a living and true God". The Apostle was glorying in what that meant amongst those believers, for these letters to the Thessalonians are nothing if they are not letters of life. Read them with that thought in mind alone, and you will find that they throb with life. There are all the marks of a living experience, a joyous experience, an overflowing experience - yes, overflowing! so much so that the overflow reached far, far afield, and their faith was spoken of in all the churches. It was not necessary for the Apostle to refer to them, and that because through them the word went out far and wide. It meant something to them to discover that it was not to another religion, not to another system of teaching, not to another association of people, but to a living God that they were turning; not to things, but to a living Person.

It entirely depends upon our apprehension of the Lord as to what our testimony is. If we are turning to teaching, to tradition, to interpretations, to human associations, to Christianity, we are going to miss something, but if we are turning to the living God, in the realisation that He is the living God, we are going to come into life; everything is going to be all living in our experience right from the beginning.

It is not unnecessary to say a thing like that. We said at the outset we wake up, and some of us awoke too late. The thing that kept us asleep - though we did not know we were asleep, except that there was a restlessness, a sense of

dissatisfaction, a turning from side to side, and a sighing and groaning - was the fact that we had been associated with Christianity and the things of the people of God from so early in our lives. Our Christianity and our relationship with the Lord was something into which we were brought in infancy, and it had all become a matter of a system of the things of the Lord around us, with which we were quite familiar. We had been taught to say prayers, and go to meetings, and so on. One day we awoke to the fact that this God was a living God. We had been associated with Him in a way for a long time, but He was not personal to us, not a living God.

Forgive me for going back to such an elementary stage, if it is necessary to ask forgiveness, for it is just possible there are some among us whose relationship is of that kind. Maybe you are associated with things related to the Lord, but what about this question of your own personal, inward enjoyment of the living God, of His really being to you a living Person? We must begin back there, and all this is nothing to you unless the Holy Spirit has made it real, or does make it real, in your experience. I do know that it is true to fact in the life of a great many, that the day comes when, though they have been associated with the things of the Lord for a long time, they suddenly wake up to the fact that the Lord is a living Person. That contains so much for us as we come to realise it. It means everything to us from every point of view. We are the Lord's now! We know the Lord! But, oh, we pass into experiences, and into times which are so difficult, so mysterious, so full of shadows and clouds. We go through periods of deep trial, when everything seems to be in eclipse, and it is all so long-drawn-out; the demand for patience is so great; so much time is being taken, that very often we draw near to the point where we almost feel that, so far as we are concerned, the Lord is not the living God.

The Purpose of Trial

So I want to say to those who are tried, to those who are under a cloud, to those who may be tested at this time in that way, that the God with whom you have to do is a living God. He knows exactly what He is doing. You have to do with a living God, and that living God has you in hand, although you do not know it, do not realise it at the moment. You are not forgotten. If this is a living God with whom we have come into relation in Jesus Christ, then He knows all about us, and has His eye upon us; and, what is more, He has a direct interest in us and concern for us; He is not dead to our interests, but very much alive to us. What we are passing through is not an indication of His having forgotten us,

abandoned us, or of His having ceased to be, so far as we are concerned; He is dealing with us in the way which is most of all calculated to reach His end. He is the living God.

That can be said on more than one basis of authority. You can go through the Word of God and follow the life story of many of His servants and see that they had good opportunity, had they so desired, to consider that God was not; that if God was, then they had been abandoned by Him; everything in their experience, in their life, in their affairs seemed to say that they had been abandoned, or that God was dead. But you follow through the story, and you find that the sequel always shows that at the time when it seemed to them that God was most far off, outside of their world, He was most active in what He was doing, most directly bound up with their affairs, securing some state, some condition, some position in them which was fitting them for a position of trust, and of honour, and of fruitfulness. Although to them it seemed just the opposite, all the time in their very history He was the living God in truth. You have that made perfectly clear in the Word of God.

There are those of us who also know that in our experience there are times when it seems that God - to use the words of one in the Word of God - "had forgotten to be gracious". But we are able to look back upon those very times to see that, although we knew it not, God was very active indeed, doing something very deep, and today we are living in the value of that. God had not left us. We had to do with the living God, and the living God had to do with us. That is simple again, but let us store it up against a time of need. In so many ways this fact should be of infinite comfort to the honest in heart. The living God is the One with whom we have to do.

The Note of Warning

But there is the other aspect, and we must not leave it on one side in a desire not to touch on unpleasant things; we must be faithful. This statement occurs in the Word of God accompanied, as you notice, by a shadow on more than one occasion. "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in turning away from the living God". Take heed! It is a word of warning.

Now notice the connection. If you look at the third chapter of the letter to the Hebrews you will see that the point in view was that full purpose of God which

He had fixed for His people. The illustration was taken from the life of Israel in the wilderness in view of the land. God's purpose for Israel was their coming to the land, with all its fulness, all its riches and its wealth, and its blessing, but through unbelief they fell short of the land and died in the wilderness. You see the designation "the living God" is used in that connection, which surely means, if it means anything at all, that the very fact that He is the living God signifies that His purpose and desire for His own is all that He can give - fulness! That is what is bound up with a living God. These other gods are always taking away, always robbing, always impoverishing. The gods of the heathen, the gods of the world are robber gods, they would rob you of everything. This living God is supremely characterised by His giving, and ever giving. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son..."; He "who delivered him up for us all, shall he not also with him freely give us all things". The mark of the living God is beneficence, fulness of thought, and desire, and Purpose, and will for His own, to bring them in. To fall away from the living God means to fall away from all that He has purposed, designed and desired for us, and hence the word of warning.

But let us note this. The Word does not say, Take heed, brethren, lest you fall away from the blessing, lest you miss the good. The words used are "turning away from the living God". All our blessing is bound up with Himself. He is our blessing. In other words, to know Him as the living God is life eternal. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou didst send". To know Him as the living God is fulness of blessing. So the warning is lest we, through unbelief, turn away from the living God. It is the question as to God that arises in the heart, the question, the doubt as to God, that robs us. Then the blessing is gone, because in doubting God we rear a fence between Him and ourselves.

Ah, but there is a still more solemn word in this connection. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God". That is the second passage with a shadow upon it. Now let us be solemn and quite frank. You and I have not to deal with men in the final issue. We have not to reckon with people, with teaching, as such, with places, with any *thing;* if you or I refuse truth, refuse light, withhold obedience, hide something from the Lord; if you and I are in any way unfaithful, it is with the living God that we have to do. It was a startling thing to Achan when his hidden, secret sin was tracked right down in that amazing way. Look at the hundreds of thousands in Israel, and one man among the hundreds of thousands does something which God had to uncover. That man

sees an inquiry set up, and watches it being narrowed down from the multitude to the tribe, from the tribe to one of the families in the tribe, until his own personal tent is reached, and he, one man in hundreds of thousands, comes under the finger of God. Achan perhaps thought that he could default in the midst of so big a crowd and it would not be noticed, that he could deceive the elders of Israel and not be discovered. Achan had forgotten that it was the living God with whom he had to do. Such a thing becomes an occasion for that solemn warning, that we should be reminded that "it is an awful thing to fall into the hands of the living God".

You and I, if we are honest, need never fall into the hands of the living God in that way, but the point is that anything and everything that is secret in our lives, which represents sin, disobedience, refusal of light, anything that is not of God, brings us into the hands of the living God; it is with Him that we have to do sooner or later. Oh no, you have not even to reckon in the first or last place with those who are in authority over you in the Lord. The most blessed relief comes to such to recognise this, and it is a relief to us all to know it, that the responsibility in the final issue is with God, and that every one has to reckon with God. It is a terrible and yet a helpful thing, a thing which is a strength to us even when we give the Lord's message, to know that people have not to answer to us. They may take an attitude over that message toward the one who gives it, and say, Oh, that is only so-and-so's interpretation, it is only what he says! Well, you do not get away with it like that. If that should happen to be the truth of God, it is not with the preacher that you have to reckon, it is with the living God.

That brings a terrible responsibility upon us all. Let us remember that for all that the Lord gives us, it is to a living God that we have to answer. Oh, the Lord is looking right into our hearts, and He knows. It is impossible for us to deceive Him. It cannot be done. He knows our inward hearts. He knows our home and what is going on there. He knows us in our business life. He knows us in our relationships with one another, just what we are and what is make believe. Sooner or later we are going to come up against the Lord on every point of hypocrisy, deception, sin.

Now it entirely depends upon our attitude toward the Lord whether the fact that He with whom we have to do, is a living God, is one which brings us comfort, or whether it strikes terror into our hearts. This word must be said. The Lord knows who it is for. You and I are dealing with the living God. That is a blessed fact, but it is also an awful fact. So let us always remember that there is nothing

secret, nothing hidden, nothing that we can cover from Him. We cannot take a false position. There is a living God on the spot all the time, who sees right through it all, and presently He will say: Now, let us have that mask off; let us have that attempt at self-deception put aside; let us face this thing out. I know all about it! I have known about it all along; you have never been able to cover it from Me for a moment! He is the living God. That word "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" is a terrible word for those who fight God, and I think it is especially meant for such as oppose themselves to God.

Think of what is going on in this world today. I have been reading a book called "The War Against God". The whole history of long centuries of war against God is given, and it shows how that is developing today to such a tremendous extent that whole nations are making it their one object to throw God out of the world, to get rid of God, to have nothing of God in their national life. Well, that is one side of this thing, and it does not apply to us; but we can say it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; not an imaginary God, not a traditional God, not the God of the religious systems, however hoary their history, but the living God. The fact is going to come back upon such. He holds the nations in His hand.

It might be that there is someone resisting God, fighting God, rebelling against God, who imagines - though perhaps it has never been put into words, into clear thinking - that he can get the better of God. Oh no, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"; and that is where we are all to come sooner or later.

Can you rejoice that you are in the hands of the living God? There is no need to be afraid of that. It may be the most blessed thing that ever can be enjoyed, to be in the hands of the living God. On the other hand, it may be the most terrible thing, a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. For the unbelieving and the unfaithful it is neither a welcome thing nor a blessed thing to know that the God with whom we have to do, and who has to do with us, is a living God.

The Living Relationship

Now there is one other thing bound up with this oft-repeated designation "the living God". The fact that He is the living God is intended to make for a living state of things amongst His own people; they are to take character from Him in this very sense and truth that He is the living God. That means that relationship

with Him is intended to be a living relationship. Relationship with God today in so many directions, and over such a wide range, is not a living relationship. There is an acknowledgment of God, there is a form of worship of God, there are rites connected with God; yes, there is a recognition in a greater or lesser measure of a kind of devotion to God, worship of God, acknowledgment of God, perhaps desire for God, but all short of a living relationship with God. Yet that He is the living God means that those who are related to Him should live. He would say, "Because I live ye shall live also". A living relationship with God is possible.

I have no doubt that probably nine out of every ten of those who read this have this knowledge of a living relationship with the living God; He is to them in their own experience, enjoyment, and knowledge as alive as any today, in this world at least. Some of us can say that He is more alive to us, because He comes into closer touch with our innermost being, than anyone else we know. He is the living God. It is not a relationship with some dead order of things, but with a living Person. But I must ask, Have you that living relationship? Are you following a system, an order, or are you in living fellowship with a living God? The Lord desires that such relationship with Him shall be living all the way along. It is a great thing to know that you have access to the living God. You do not know whether a thing is right or wrong? Well, you have the living God, ask Him; He is open, He is accessible, He is alive; you can have dealings with Him. Just to enjoy living relationship with a living God is how He wills it to be. The desire of His heart is that you should treat Him as being a living God. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him". We must believe, when we come, that He is; not feeling out into the universe, the vacant, empty universe. No, we are coming to a living Person; we believe that He is! There is nothing vague about that.

But more than that, He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek. Every time you come to Him do you believe that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek? How far does your belief carry you? Does it enable you right on the spot where you are to thank Him when you seek Him, because you believe that He has answered? O Lord, I thank You that You do not deny me that which is in accord with Thy will; I have it. To give thanks with request is His order. "In everything by prayer... with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." That is faith. That is not imagining, making yourself believe that you have it. It is faith taking this position: He is a living God, and He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek, and if this request is inspired by His Spirit, in line with

His will, whether I actually enter into possession of it at this moment or not, I know that He hears and answers, and I shall come into it. Faith may be tested. Many of us have asked the Lord for that which is revealed as His will for us in His Word, and we have been kept waiting a long time, but the day has come when we have found ourselves in possession of the answer. There was no noise about it, it just happened. He proved Himself faithful. By such experiences we have learned to thank the Lord on the spot. Whether our prayer is immediately answered in our experience, or whether the possession is postponed for a year or two, our confidence is that we are coming into the answer, and so we give thanks. That is faith that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. God loves that ground, that attitude, that kind of living relationship. It is a relationship which is taking its character from Him, the living God.

If He is the living God, then our knowledge of Him ought to be living, and where life is in the ascendant there is always increase. It is only when life is fading that there is decrease. When life is in the ascendant - and this life may always be in the ascendant, there need be no winter time in the life of the Spirit - there is increase in the knowledge of the Lord, living knowledge of the Lord. It is altogether different from book knowledge, altogether different from information about the Lord; it is living, personal knowledge of the Lord, and knowledge that is ever growing. We have to do with the living God, and He would that our knowledge of Him should be living knowledge, a knowledge in which there is life.

So we could go on touching upon point after point as to what it means to be related to a living God, but in this comprehensive word it is that everything is living where you have the living God.

The Supreme Testimony

Now we come to the closing word, which has to do with the pre-eminent evidences of the presence of the living God. If you have felt that all that has been said so far has hardly touched you, or has hardly had an application in your case, I have no question about the last word. I am quite sure you will get something now. The pre-eminent evidence that the living God is with us, what is it? "Hereby", said Joshua, "ye shall know the living God is among you... Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into the Jordan." Some of you will want that explained, and others will not. "Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into

the Jordan." First of all, Jordan is always a type of death, and at the time when those words were spoken Jordan was at the flood, overflowing all its banks. It was, in type, death at the flood-tide, the mighty flood of death overflowing all banks. Then, secondly, the ark of the covenant is the Lord Jesus Christ in type. He is typified in that ark of the covenant.

Now then, Jesus Christ goes right over into the flood-tide of Jordan, and immediately that ark comes into touch with that flood-tide, the flood gives way, and is forced back. The waters are made to stand up and give a passage to the people of faith. What is the supreme evidence of the living God being amongst us? It is that we know Jesus Christ as triumphant over the power of death in our experience: for, having met death in its full power, its full force, its flood-tide, He triumphed. It was the flood-tide of death that was encountered at Calvary; death, in all that death means, something far beyond mere physical death, even all the terrible, wicked power of spiritual death. The Lord Jesus went into the flood of iniquitous death, and death's power was taken from it, and it could not overflow. He broke the power of death and its curse, and made death stand back. "He tasted death in the behalf of every man". He has delivered us in His own victory over death. He stands for the testimony of a life which is incapable of being swallowed up by death. Thus the cry is, "O death, where is thy victory; O death where is thy sting?" "Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." What is the supreme evidence that the living God is amongst us? That we are enjoying the power of a deathless life, or in other words, are living in the blessing of Christ's victory over the power of death. You have a life in your heart, in your spirit which cannot be overwhelmed and overpowered by death. When death is all around there is life. "Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you."

The testimony, then, to all the world, to the universe, is that the Lord of life is in the midst of us, and is making Himself manifest in that very nature, in that very character, in that very designation "the Lord of Life". Hereby you shall know, not that your doctrine is correct, not that you are sound, not that you are orthodox, not that you are true to the conditions, but that the living God is among you in the power of His triumphant life in Jesus Christ over death. You and I may know the living God amongst us like that all the time.

The enemy would destroy that testimony, because it is the pre-eminent evidence of the presence of the living Lord. The assault, therefore, is always upon that testimony of life. God has been manifested to us as the living God in Jesus

Christ, who says, "I am he that liveth; I became dead, but I am alive unto the ages of the ages, and have the keys of death and of hades", the authority over all.

So may we remember the fact which governs everything: that our God is a living God; He lives.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jan-Feb 1938, Vol 16-1

"Loose Him, and Let Him Go!"

Reading: John 11:38-44

It is that last verse that we shall be considering especially:

"He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him and let him go."

I would just like to place alongside of that a fragment from the tenth chapter:

"I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

We have said more than once that we are here in the presence of God manifested in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, His Son, and, being in the presence of God, we are being made aware of God's mind concerning man. What Jesus says is the expression of the mind of God for man.

THE FULLNESS OF THE GOSPEL BY JOHN

I think that you have learned that what is written in this whole Gospel by John is more than an earthly story, or a collection of sayings and doings on the part of Jesus Christ. There is in every one of those sayings and doings, and in every part of the story, a setting forth in one way or another of some eternal and unfathomable truth because it comes from God. God is unfathomable, unsearchable, incomprehensible, profound beyond our understanding. He has a depth and a fullness never, never to be exhausted, either in time or in eternity, and anything that emanates from God in word or deed carries with it that significance. It is not just human language. These are not just the words and works of a man. Every fragment contains the profound depth of God, and this chapter, which is marked out in the organization of the matter for our convenience as chapter eleven, is a wonderful example of what we have just said. Every bit of it goes far beyond the thing that is said or done. It is so comprehensive, so far-reaching, so full of depth and meaning. I have been reading the Gospel by John, and, of course, this chapter, for over sixty years, and

I have spoken on it many times, but I am still in the presence of that which is far beyond me. I am not just giving you something that has been said before. The whole Gospel is *ALWAYS* divulging that which we have not seen or known before. Now that does not mean that you have never seen what I am going to say at this time, but what I am saying is that there is a fullness here, and that, whatever and however much you have seen, there is more yet that God means in the fragments of this chapter.

We are always wrestling with our limitations both to understand and grasp, and certainly to utter what is herein contained. Some of us are very poor at this business, and we know it. A little grandson of mine heard I was going to America and he asked his mother: 'What is Grandpa going to America for?' She said: 'Well, to preach.' He said: 'To preach? He is not very good at that, is he?' And Grandpa fully agrees! So now you know what you have to put up with! Well, that is just how we feel when we come into the presence of the divine stature of God's words.

I think you all realize something of the vastness of this chapter, but I trust that we shall yet see a little more, though by no means the fullness of what is in the passage which we have just read, and especially the fragment in verse 44.

THE ASPECTS OF THE GOSPEL BY JOHN

Now, before we come to that, let me just say this word that is necessary, I think, and leads up to it. We must recognize the aspects of this Gospel. First of all, it is a backward aspect. That is, John wrote this Gospel long years after all that is in it was completed. The whole thing was finished, as to the actuality of the content of this record, and the Lord Jesus had left this earth. All that is here lay in the past when John wrote it. It was something completed as to history. John was writing it from that standpoint, with the backward aspect. But you will notice that the Gospel itself is written on the forward aspect. That is, it was all written in the light of the day that was to come. Jesus is here saying repeatedly: "In that day... in that day... when... when..." and that relates to the day of the advent of the Holy Spirit. "When He is come... in that day." This Gospel was written for a coming day, and we are living in that day, that is, in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was making it perfectly clear that what He was saying and doing in the flesh related to that day which was yet to be, the day when the Holy Spirit inaugurated the present dispensation. This Gospel, therefore, is written to us precisely because we live in that day.

You, perhaps, are asking: 'Why is he saying this? It is simple and obvious. We know it'. Well, do we? I have said all that in order that we might recognize that this verse 44 belongs to us. It was written for us. In the day in which we live, this very dispensation day, this verse belongs to us.

One other word about that. The backward aspect of this Gospel, written after it was all actually accomplished in history, was the objective side, when everything was outward. All that Jesus was doing was outward. His meanings were put into outward things, ways and means. The day for which all that objective was done and said is the day of the subjective, when it is taken from history without and made history within, when it is no longer something just outside of us, but something to be planted inside of us. That is the real meaning of the coming of the Holy Spirit - to lay hold of everything in the Scripture which is there objectively and place it right within the centre of the life of the believer, so that it becomes a part of the very inwardness of the believer's life.

If we do not recognize these things we may miss our way in reading the stories, and just think of them as wonderful stories of what Jesus did, particularly this one of the raising of this man Lazarus from the dead. It was done and recorded in order that it might become our inward experience, a very part of our own being. That is the foundation upon which we build what we have to say as to this whole Gospel.

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE GOSPELS AND EPISTLES

May I add another word, which I hope will have some value to you? It is always necessary, in the light of what we have said, and important to take account of the correspondence between the Epistles in the New Testament and the Gospels, because the Epistles are, after all, only the subjective expression of the objective Gospels. How can I put that to help you? Well, you read your Gospels. If you like, read this chapter. There is the story, the account of what happened; all the parts, the phases and the stages of it. That is very wonderful, but when you come to the Epistles you are told what all that means. It is there that you get the explanation for your own life of what is in the Gospels. The Gospels will remain the history of two thousand years ago until you come to see what God meant them to be in your own life, and you find that out in the Epistles. Always read the Gospels in this twofold way, and remember that this in the Gospels is explained somewhere in the Epistles. Read the Epistles and you will say: 'This is

explaining what is in the Gospels.' So read your New Testament in that way. We have to look at the Book of the Acts and the Epistles for the real meaning of the Gospels, and before we can get the real inward value of the Gospels.

Now we have said all that, we come to this verse in the eleventh chapter of John: "He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go." Do you know that you have the vast amount of the remainder of the New Testament (after John) that is exactly in keeping with that? It tells you what that means for us. Here in this chapter is what it meant for Lazarus and his sisters, but what did that mean in God's mind for us?

LIFE, BUT LIMITATION

First of all, it is possible for us to have life by the word of Jesus Christ, resurrection life, divine life, that which is called eternal life; it is possible for us to have that life by which we have been brought from the death of our natural state into this newness of life by the fiat of the Son of God, and yet be limited in every way while we have it. Limited in ministry - 'his hands bound'; limited in progress - 'his feet bound'; limited in understanding - 'a napkin around his head and over his eyes'. Those three things are three of the major things in the teaching of the Apostles.

Let me repeat that, for it is so true, and it is true of multitudes today. It is one of the problems in Christianity that, while through simple response to the Word of the Lord Jesus, many have been born again and are His people, are children of God and have divine life, it is so possible - and is actually so in numerous cases - to be limited in almost every way as to that life, and that life is so limited in them. Here the symbolism is bound hand, bound foot and bound head. The hands are the symbols of ministry, or fruitfulness of life, and are there not many Christians whom believe in the Lord Jesus and have that saving faith in Him, yet whose ministration and fruitfulness of life are exceedingly limited, bound and tied up? Oh, how many Christians are just tied up in this matter of real fruitfulness, real ministry - and when I use that word 'ministry' I am not just talking about platforms, or Bible preaching, but the ministration of the Lord Jesus. In the next chapter we read that Jesus came back to Bethany and they made Him a feast. Martha served and Lazarus was one of those who sat at meat. It would have been a poor lookout for that whole occasion if Lazarus had been tied up in his grave clothes! But, no, he is able to share with the others in this

experience, and if you think I am trying to make something of nothing, look again, because it was at that point that the Jewish rulers took counsel to put Lazarus to death also, because by reason of *HIM* many believed. That is what I meant by loosed hands, ministry, fruitfulness: "By reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus." Is it not true that multitudes of Christians are not in that release of life where many believe because of them? They remain isolated, tied up, bound. They are Christians, but in the meaning of hands of fruitfulness, of service, of the ministration of Christ, of the testimony of Jesus, they are still in the grave clothes. And that is why Jesus said: "I came that they might have life", but, more than that, "have it abundantly". And Lazarus had the life, but not abundantly until he was loosed.

Now you get into the Epistles with that fragment only, and see how much there is about the life of the believer being an effective life, a fruitful life, and a responsible life, a life that is really producing something. Indeed, we could say that one of the major purposes of all the Letters that the Apostles wrote was to get these Christians (and need I remind you again that more than ninety per cent of the New Testament was written to Christians? That is impressive and challenging!) who had the life to have it more abundantly, that is, to be loosed in this matter of their newness of life.

Well, perhaps that is enough for the moment on that.

LIFE, BUT NO PROGRESS

And what is true of the meaning of the hands is true of the feet. Lazarus was "bound hand and foot". Again, is it not true that many, many Christians, born-again believers, are making no progress in the spiritual life, are not going on? You meet them once, and three, six and ten years afterwards they are just where they were when you first met them. They have not gone on, for their feet are bound. They are not going on, not making spiritual progress, not gaining ground, not overtaking the course, not - to use Paul's phrase - "attaining". They are in a state of spiritual stagnation, spiritual arrest. Their feet are bound, and that is not God's idea. Jesus, God incarnate said: 'Loose him, and let him go. Release those feet that he may walk, that he may run in the way of My commandments.' That is God's idea for us. That is not only a statement of truth, but a challenge as to where we are.

LIFE, BUT NO SPIRITUAL SIGHT

What about this head, wrapped in a napkin about the eyes and about the mouth? We mention the eyes in particular for our purpose at the moment. Again, is it not true that there are many who are the Lord's people but who are not really seeing more and more, and ever more of what He has for them and through them? Many Christians see no further than their hand before their eyes. It is a little world in which they live, a very short horizon of spiritual perception and understanding, apprehension and spiritual knowledge. Their heads are wrapped around and their eyes are covered over. They have life, but that is all.

Having said these things, in order to indicate what we mean by the great fullness that there is here, even in a verse, let us look at it again.

THE GRAVE TOUCH

Lazarus came forth and he had life, but at that moment when he came forth he was still in contact with the grave. There was still that about him which spoke of that sepulchre, and the limitations of that sepulchre. Again, what are these limitations? Well, we come over to the Epistles. I am not going right through them all, but I will give you just enough to indicate what is meant.

LOOSING FROM THE NATURAL LIFE

If you turn to the first Letter to the Corinthians, and have any knowledge of what is in that Letter, you will know what we mean by the grave touch still upon born-again Christians. Paul opens that Letter by addressing the Corinthians as "saints", which means those who are the Lord's, but as he writes on and on an awful situation is unfolded, is it not? They have life, but you cannot say that they have it abundantly. The grave clothes are on them, that is, the grave touch is still there, and in the first Letter to the Corinthians it is the grave touch of the limitations of the natural life. They are Christians, yes, but they are bound and limited by the ties of the natural life. That is the word which the Apostle uses specifically: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God... and he cannot know them" (1 Corinthians 2:14). That is limitation, is it not? You proceed into the Letter and you find that these people are behaving as worldly people behave. In their behaviour, their conduct, their procedure, they go on just exactly as do worldly people. Someone has done a wrong to another believer, and apparently that happened in more than one case at Corinth, and the result was that this believer against whom the wrong was done thought this was criminal and should be set right in the court of law in the world. So he hauled his

fellow-believer before the judge in the worldly court to get his rights. That is exactly what the world does, and that is an instance of a whole handful of things that were going on at Corinth. Some were worse than that. 'There are divisions among you, and when there are divisions among you are ye not carnal?' Not spiritual, but carnal.

Well, gather up the whole of that Letter and it is a terrible story of those who are the Lord's and who have the life just behaving as other people do, living in the way that the world does. You find the women behaving as worldly women did in their dress, in their demeanour, in their behaviour, and even in the assembly. I do not want to pick out the women particularly, but I am indicating that there is the spirit of the world amongst believers in Corinth, and (read the Letter again in the light of this) that is keeping them still in this bondage, in this limitation of their spiritual life. It is grave clothes, and you are not surprised that at Corinth the world is not feeling the impact of their testimony, that the church at Corinth is not counting in the world, because the world has got into the church, and into its members individually. In this sense the grave clothes are still on them, by reason of the limitations which come upon the spiritual life when the natural takes charge and governs, controls and directs. It is terrible spiritual limitation. There is life, yes, but not 'life abundantly'. Do you see what I mean? Their testimony is bound. There is still something of the grave, and that Letter to the Corinthians was written in the same spirit and with the same idea, intention and object as the Lord had when He said: "Loose him and let him go". Paul is striving to get these Corinthians loosed as Christians loosed, liberated, set free into the fullness of the life which they had.

LOOSING FROM TRADITION AND LEGALISM

We pass from Corinthians into Galatians, and no one who knows that Letter will dispute the statement that here you are in touch with the grave very truly. You know all that the Letter to the Galatians is about, and you know the two prominent words - Liberty - "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Galatians 4:1 - A.V.) - and sonship. Not servanthood, nor slavery, but sonship; the liberty of sons. They are the two great words of that Letter, but what are the grave bands there in Galatia? They are the grave bands of tradition, of legalism, and all such things. You know, dear friends, it is very easy to get tied up with these grave clothes! The persistent peril through the ages of Christianity is to crystallize itself into something set, something fixed. You have some light, some

revelation, something of the immensity of truth, just a fragment of it, and it is not long before you begin to form that into a set system and make it the limit, saying that this is what people must believe, they must come within this horizon, and they must behave like this. It becomes a system again: 'You must... you must not!', and there is no difference between that and the Old Testament 'Thou shalt... thou shalt not!' Christianity has fallen into that peril, and is continually doing it, circumscribing the great revelation, making Christ smaller than He is, crystallizing truth into something fixed and set: 'This is how...', and the meaning of that is: 'This is the ultimate'.

Now you notice that when the Spirit did come, as we have the record in the Book of the Acts, the one thing that these old Jewish disciples experienced was a marvellous emancipation from that bondage of Judaism; and how the Holy Spirit was working all along against any fixed barriers! Peter will argue that he is a Jew, born, bred and dyed-in-the-wool, and that never has anything unclean entered *HIS* mouth, according to Leviticus chapter 11. All right, Peter. You are just putting your interpretation upon the Scriptures, and you are putting your limits upon what Christ has done by His Cross, and so he is told: "What God hath cleansed make not thou common" (Acts 10:15). The Holy Spirit reacted to Peter's traditionalism, legalism, limitation and bondage, and made him go and do what he would never have done otherwise. Again and again, right to his death, the words of the Lord Jesus to him, in the last chapter of this Gospel, were made good: "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not" (John 21:18). That principle was being applied over Cornelius and his house, and Caesarea and the Gentiles. He was made to go whither he would not. He was saying: 'No, Lord', and the Lord was saying: 'Yes, Peter'. "Whither thou wouldest not" is heaven's reaction to this legalistic limitation, these grave clothes on an Apostle. And that was not the only battle that Peter had, but we will not stay with it.

Then John says that when the Lord Jesus said those words to Peter He was signifying "by what manner of death he should *GLORIFY* God". Years afterwards Peter wrote: "Knowing that the putting off of my tabernacle cometh swiftly, even as our Lord Jesus Christ signified unto me" (2 Peter 1:14). We do not know the manner of his death, but tradition says that Peter was crucified. Only Jews could be crucified by Gentiles, for Gentiles dared not crucify one of their own. So Peter went that way, but because Paul had Roman citizenship they could not crucify him, so they beheaded him. Peter was selected for the same

kind of death as His Lord's, and he knew it for he said: "As our Lord Jesus Christ signified unto me." He was girded by another and carried the way he would not choose to go, but the way of the Spirit is the way that goes against our limitations, our grave clothes, and takes us along ways of which we would never have thought. Indeed, our theology would not accept that way, our doctrine might be against it, our tradition would forbid it, but the Holy Spirit says: 'This is the way. Loose him, and let him go.' That is Galatians, is it not? I said that we need the Epistles to explain the Gospels, and just one verse in the Gospel by John contains all this!

LOOSING UNTO FULL SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE

I close with one other thing. Look into the Letter to the Ephesians, and you, having come through the loosing of the hands in Corinth, and the loosing of the feet in Galatia to walk in the Spirit and stand fast in liberty, now move to the head. In Ephesians Paul takes the napkin from the head and does it thoroughly. Ephesians has to do with the napkin around the head. What do we mean? Well, Paul hardly begins that Letter before he says: 'I bow my knees unto the Father of glory, that He would grant unto you Ephesian Christians that you should have the whole counsel of God given to you, to grant unto *YOU* a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, Christ, that the eyes of your heart be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of His calling, the riches of His inheritance in the saints, the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe.' 'That you may *KNOW*... the eyes of your heart being enlightened' - there is the napkin off the head! This Letter to the Ephesians is a wonderful revelation as to the eyes of the heart being unveiled, unbound, as to the greatness of our calling and vocation, as to the immensity of that for which we have been brought into union with His Son. How great it is! Beyond all our grasping, dear friends. Believe me, it is no exaggeration, and Paul says: "that you may *KNOW*".

There is one little prefix missing in our translation which is the key to the whole thing. The Apostle says: 'That you may know... that you may know', and in the New Testament we have that word given to us in part and in whole. It is not given to us in our translation, but it is just this: Knowing, in itself, is applied to our beginning knowledge of the Lord. To quote John again: "And this is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). That is the entering into life, the receiving of divine life but when Paul speaks here about 'knowing', he is using a compound Greek word which we do not have in our translation. It is '*epignosis*',

FULL knowledge. 'You know', he says to these Ephesians, 'that in the space of two years I ceased not to preach unto you the whole counsel of God.' They knew, and on that initial knowledge they had come to the Lord, but now he is praying, at the end of his life from his prison: 'that you may come unto full knowledge.' It is more than life; it is life abundant. It is more than seeing; it is seeing with a great range of divine purpose and meaning for our calling and our having life.

Will you tell me that all Christians are like that? Are there not many around whose heads there is a napkin, which obscures their spiritual vision, limits their spiritual sight, and narrows down the range of their comprehension of the great purpose of their calling? Real revelation, dear friends, is not just information. It is liberation. To see fully, and more fully, is to be released.

We have often said about this man Paul that there was nothing on earth or in hell, or in a combination of both, that would have changed the rabid, fanatical Pharisee into the greatest friend that ever Jesus Christ had except light from heaven. Nothing could have done it - but light from heaven did it. The napkin was taken off and the man was set free to walk up and down in the greatness of Jesus Christ.

I think we can see that that one verse in the whole of John's Gospel contains the Bible. Is it not true that God's mind for man, God's thought for His people, is: 'Loose him. He has got life, but loose him and let him go!'? "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly."

From "A Witness and A Testimony" November-December 1971 based on a spoken message given in March 1966.

The Lord's Recovery Movement

On the whole today, the Lord’s full thought and conception is not the general thing among His people. The testimony of the Lord has largely broken down, and the great multitude called by His name are governed and manipulated and controlled by something that is religiously of the earth and not of the heavens - of man and not of the Holy Ghost; and there needs to be seen the impossibility of accepting that state of things. It is one thing to recognize that... and quite another thing to be in relation with the Lord’s movement to recover for Himself that which is according to His mind.

One can be occupied all the time with the bad state of things, bemoan it, make people feel miserable... yet never get anywhere. That is not sufficient. It is quite easy to do that and to be, in a sense, religious malcontents; but that is not being active in the Lord’s recovery movement. The Lord would act in relation to this thing... and He is acting. God must have a vessel - an instrument brought into such sympathetic fellowship with HIM that the conditions around of breakdown and failure become acute suffering - an agony. Paul knew something of that "suffering for His Body’s sake"... "filling up that which was lacking of the sufferings of Christ." We must face that! The thing that is going to count for God is the sharing in His travail.

There is all the romance of Christian work, but that is mere glamour... all the enthusiasm and interest of organized Christian activity - all that. But it is not what we are before men in this matter, but what we are before God in the secret place - having heart concern for the Lord’s testimony. We shall never get anywhere till in measure we enter into His travail. Ministry in its real, abiding, eternal value will depend upon the measure in which the travail is entered into.

This is a day for travail. Whether it be a travail for unsaved or for the Lord’s people, every true spiritual activity is born out of travail; and those who have been most used of God in every time have been men and women who had this travail in their soul - in their secret life with God, who carried on their hearts a burden which led them to a point where their interests became quite secondary... and they took their life in their hand and held everything in relation to the Lord’s own interest and His testimony, willing to let all go for God. This becomes a

heart burden... to be carried all the time, not merely a ministry burden. This is necessary to any real ministry.

The Lord must have an instrument - a Daniel instrument - whether personal or collective, that moves out toward God for His testimony. He must have a Nehemiah with a heartache over the people because of the breakdown of the testimony. He must have an Ezra who is not for a moment compromising with anything contrary to the mind of God; and the Esther instrument who flings fear to the winds and goes, taking life in hand, to besiege the throne for the life of her people - for the deliverance of the people of God from the threat of the enemy. And, beloved, the burden of the Lord has got to come on our heart in like manner if we are to be effective instruments for the Lord in His End-time activities; we have got to be exercised in a very deep way with the interests of God. We must hold back nothing that will count for the Lord and His interests. You would be surprised how the Lord would come through if you gave Him a chance.

The whole thing begins with a recognition of the need... and the burden of those things upon our hearts. When we are really in it by the urge of the Holy Spirit, the common features found in these Old Testament instruments will be found inwrought in us... and we shall be found a people abandoned unto this ONE THING - the Lord's burden and heart concern for His testimony in His people. Then when you get into it, you find you are in a realm of opposition... and that you are really in a battle. If we are going to stand with God for that which wholly represents His mind, we have got to meet the most fierce antagonism, conflict, and pressure from every quarter; there is going to be no method overlooked by the enemy for frustrating the end in view. Why so much antagonism? Why so much pressure? Each time when something is in view which is to count for God in relation to His End-time purpose, there it is - you meet it all the time.

We meet this pressure from within and without when we are in the thing that is counting for God. When it comes, you must recognize that it is related to something which is to count for God. It will come through people; and if we blame the people and focus our attention on them, we have missed the point. We begin to fight people, and all the time it is something deeper than that: "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies."

People get cross with one another, and that gets on top of us; and we begin to direct our attention to them. We get out with them and there is a situation and a mess... and we see afterwards how silly we are in allowing the devil to swing us off into a human track when it is a spiritual issue. It has not really been the fault of persons... or just inconsequential happenings; there has been a spiritual issue at stake. And all these other things were brought about by... and used of... the enemy to occupy us with the lesser and to blind us to the real issue, thus keeping us out of prayer and out of standing with the Lord for His rights which were at some point or other being challenged. It is the realm of unceasing conflict; and we have, it would seem, come into that part of the age when the enemy takes no rest... and we find we can take no off-times. Anything you do must be done deliberately with God, and you must never act out of, or apart from, God: such an exposed movement has been watched for by the enemy, and you have to pay for it.

Deliverance from oneself comes along the line of being concerned for the Lord's interests. You can become tied up with your own spiritual problems, and the way out is to have the burden of all God's people on your heart. It is that that creates ministry, that means strength, that means praying. It is an emancipating thing to have the Lord's burden. Things today are terrible spiritually; but there are those who are reaching out for more of God... and asking where they can find spiritual food. The Lord would, I believe, do something in our day - a day of small things - and He will begin by having an instrument with a burden - an instrument with whom is deposited the full-orbed revelation of the Lord Jesus, who would step out in faith and trust the Lord... and give the Lord a chance to vindicate Himself.

Are you dabbling with things - toying with pebbles on the beach - instead of being out in the deep with God in His big thing? Are you just interested... or desperately concerned; just having a nice pleasant time, or really carrying God's need in His people on your heart? Ask the Lord to bring you into His concern; stretch yourself out before God to be brought into His burden for the time in which you live. Ask the Lord about this matter; and, if it is true, ask Him to lay it on your heart and bring you into fellowship with HIMSELF in what He would do today.

Man's Alternative to God's Best

Transcribed from a message given by T. Austin-Sparks in Los Angeles, March 1962.
The spoken form has been retained verbatim.

When I left New York to come here, I had a very strong sense that sometime while I was here, the Lord would have me speak on a certain matter. So far and up till now, He has not underlined that but in waiting upon Him it seems that He has brought it up again. And so, I just commit myself to Him for what it is that He wants us to understand at this time. May we have just a word of prayer.

Lord, Thou art the Master, we are the servants and it is for us to receive our orders from Thee and to obey them and not to do our own will or speak our own words, and so we would have it now, that we may only give at this time what Thou doest give to us, so that it may be receiving from the Lord and not from man. By the Holy Spirit make it like that we pray, in the name of the Lord Jesus, amen.

In the first book of Samuel, chapter eight, at verse four: “Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together and came to Samuel unto Ramah and they said unto him, Behold, thou art old and thy sons walk not in thy ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said give us a king to judge us. Samuel prayed unto the Lord and the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee, for they have not rejected thee but they have rejected me that I should not be king over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them out of Egypt even unto this day, in that they have forsaken me and served other gods and so do they also unto thee. Now therefore, hearken unto their voice howbeit thou shalt protest solemnly unto them and shalt show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.”

Verse 19: “But the people refused to hearken unto the voice of Samuel and they said, Nay, but we will have a king over us that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles. Samuel heard all the words of the people and he rehearsed them in the ears of the Lord and the Lord said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice and make them a

king. Samuel said unto all the men of Israel, Go ye every man unto his city."

In the prophecies of Hosea, chapter thirteen, verse ten: "Where now is thy king that he may save thee in all thy cities and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? I have given thee a king in mine anger and have taken him away in my wrath."

In the book of the Acts chapter thirteen, at verse twenty one: "Afterward they asked for a king and God gave unto them Saul, the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin for the space of forty years and when He had removed him, he raised up David…"

This episode in the history of Israel, the episode of Saul the king, while it has some elements which may perplex and be difficult to understand, contains some very instructive things for the people of God at all times. For it is not just a bit of Old Testament history. What is here in principle has arisen again and again in the history of the people of God and become, as in this case, *the* point upon which there is a return very often to tragedy.

What lies here at the heart of this incident or episode, is man's alternative to God's best. And in stating that you will immediately recognize that that is an issue which is constantly arising. It arises in our lives, as it has arisen in the history of the church all through these centuries. The issue of man's alternative to God's best.

The thing which is all-governing in this matter is that of the continued presence of the Lord in life and power right on to the end. You notice that that is the matter which Hosea brings out so forcefully: "You asked for a king and you got what you insisted upon having; where is he today? What's the good of him today? In so insisting, you lost the Lord! You chose an alternative to the immediate presence and government of the Lord and your alternative has let you down. Where are you today? Without both your alternative and the Lord."

So we repeat: the all-governing question is that of the continued presence of the Lord in power with His people, not for a time, but right on to the end. The Lord has been able to abide, to remain, to stay and go right on to the end; there has not come a time in which it could be said the Lord is no longer amongst us. That is a big issue isn't it? A very big one indeed. And I have said that this episode is not just a bit of Old Testament history, it is set in a very large context in Christian

history and it must be therefore carefully examined and analyzed to discover the causes on the one side of the disaster, the tragedy of losing the Lord; and on the other side the ground on which the Lord is going to abide with His people to the end. We must therefore look into this to lift out the principles governing this whole question.

The Lord's verdict is written clear: "They have not rejected you," He said to Samuel, "they have rejected Me." That's what the Lord thought about it. They would not have accepted that. If it had been put to them quite boldly in that way, "You are this day casting out the Lord, repudiating the Lord!" they would have been very angry indeed. But nevertheless the Lord said that was what they were doing whether they would accept it or not. It can be done, you see, while we even protest that that is not what we mean or intend; we can just be doing it.

Now right at the heart of this story, one fragment of two words only, is the clue to the whole great mistake. The whole phrase is: "Make us a king like unto the nations". And the fragment is: "like unto," like unto. Whenever the people of God fall out of the immediate and direct government of the Holy Spirit, invariably they proceed to imitate, reproduce something that they have seen objectively - not by revelation, not spiritually, but something that they have seen - and we'll have it like that, we'll make it like that, we'll reproduce that, we will duplicate that. Very often it comes down to this: "We'll have a New Testament order"; something studied, something objectively apprehended, but it's an imitation. It's a seeking to reproduce something that already exists in some form; some settled established form and order. And let it be said at once dear friends, that as in this case in Samuel, which is a continuation for a time of the book of Judges, so in every other case when this happens, it's always the mark of spiritual decline when you do that, it is not a mark of spiritual maturity to do that, of spiritual progress, it's a time of spiritual declension when you've got to imitate something.

There is a very big principle involved in this. Imitation, duplication, reproduction, by *making*: "make us", by making. All this is the incorrigible habit of the natural man. The incorrigible habit of natural man: to *make* something *like* something… That was the terrible tendency and the tragic tendency of the church at Corinth, to make the Church according to the wisdom of this world, on the principles of this world. And Paul said "You're carnal; are you not carnal?" Wisdom... the wisdom of this world, no not that, but to form the Church on the principles of this world as they had seen the world - bringing it into the Church.

It was a disastrous thing for Corinth, it was the great peril which was threatening the churches in Galatia which drew the apostle Paul out in such vehement anger as you find nowhere else in all his writings, repeatedly he uses the word: anathema. Anathema! And what was the tendency? Oh, this whole Judaistic set up which the Judaizers have brought down to impose as a fixed, settled, historical, traditional system upon something spiritual, creating this terrible crisis that the believers in Galatia were being influenced to the point of turning away from that which had come in by the Spirit, as Paul says, having begun in the Spirit, turning away from that direct government of the Spirit to some thing and imitate it; the whole system of Judaism.

And so we could follow this thing through history but it's coming up again and again, and here it is in this story as a great example of the tragedy of that. Let us look at the real implications of this story. What was it that they were doing? What was it that was happening? And in noting these things we have our lesson, we have our warning and we have our instruction. Note, it was a break with their right position; the position which was their *right* position before God. What was their right position, the right position of the people of God? It was *absolute separation from the nations*. It began with Abraham did they not? Look at God's dealings with Abraham; lifted him clean out, separated him, kept him separated, let him know that if he interfered with that separation, as he did on one or two occasions, it came back, it reacted upon him in such a state of lost fellowship with God that he had to get his altar up again and recover. But on the whole his is a life where he's completely separated from the nations, from the world and his seed Israel are an elect nation taken out of the nations. Their forty years in the wilderness had primarily this object: to show them how utterly, *utterly*, they were an *unworldly* people. Or on the other side, so utterly a heavenly people; to have everything from heaven: their government, their provision and sustenance, their guidance, their strength, their continuance, right out from heaven because a wilderness can't provide you with very much for the life here of nature. Separated, unto God. We see why in a moment, but this was their right position. All through their history it was just a battle over this, the maintaining of this position.

They were called a holy people, sanctified. What is holiness; what is sanctification? It'd be as well if you get this thing settled, [there's] lots of ideas about holiness and sanctification. Do remember dear friends, that this whole world, this whole world lieth in the wicked one. That's the word of God. It lies under a curse. And if it were the occasion and I had the time, and I'm being

beaten right up now over this matter before I started, I could show you and you would see very clearly how we are living in the part of the dispensation which is showing beyond any doubt or question that this creation lies under a curse, that every thing that man thinks to be progress and development brings him into more trouble. And all his efforts after power, after strength, only bring him more fear and fear is becoming the universal thing in this whole realm. Fear, fear, fear! The greatest achievement of man is the splitting of the atom or the making of the atomic bomb. And what has it done? Brought more fear into the very creators of it than ever was in this world, and into the whole world. Is there a curse on all men's works? That is only a hint, it's only a hint, but it's like that!

Every fresh discovery and invention creates a new problem; some new problem, and we go from problem to problem and they get bigger and bigger until men today are just completely bewildered as to how to contend with the forces of this universe. Well, I didn't intend to say that, only to emphasize that there's no doubt about it, what the Bible taught at the beginning and all the way through is that this world lies under a curse. And its ruler is the accursed ruler! Touch it, touch it spiritually, become linked with it in any spiritual way, and you touch death because you've touched something evil, something unholy. Even unspiritual and unconverted men discern something like this. The great Churchill you know (not a saved man, a man who has a life with God, but, but very shrewd in his perception and judgment) spoke of Hitler "that evil man, that *evil* man" - getting to the heart of it.

There's evil in this whole world system and God takes his people right out of that. For all spiritual associations and connections, you've got to live in it but not to be of it, not to be in any way spiritually related to it. Holiness, sanctification (the same thing) is just separation unto God *from* that evil regime that governs this world. Ah, wrestling, says Paul, is with the world rulers of this darkness, hosts of wicked spirits. For they had been brought out and their right position with God was that! And when they maintained that position, heaven was on their side, heaven was on their side, whatever they were in themselves. But here: "like unto the nations…" What a drop. What a collapse. What a break with their right position. I can't take more time with that, but the Bible speaks of that kind of thing as spiritual fornication. Spiritual fornication: intercourse with an *evil* state of things which is in this world. Touch it and you lose God, He stands back. Well leave that for a moment; do notice that the battle has always been on that for the people of God, always on that issue, if only the forces of evil can in some way bring about some kind of link between the people of God and themselves and

their system, that's the doom of the people of God. This talk about worldliness, worldly Christians, and worldly church, and worldliness in the church goes far deeper than just how you dress and how you get yourself up and what you do and where you go; it's far deeper than that. It's touching spiritual iniquity and it spells spiritual death. It was a break then, with their right position, it was a breach of vocation, a breach of vocation.

Why were they chosen out from the nations? Why is the Church chosen out from the nations? Let's bring it right here: why have you and I been called out from the nations? For God looked to take out of the nations a people for His name. And we belong to that people if we're in Christ but why? Why? Just to be saved and go to heaven? Thank God for all that, but this people and we, were chosen, separated in Christ for a purpose, for a vocation. And the vocation of the Church, as was the vocation of Israel, and your vocation and mine dear friends, is a very great one, it is an ultimate one, there's nothing beyond it. It is threefold: we should be here amongst the nations though separated from them, for a testimony to the absolute supremacy of the Lord. *The absolute supremacy of the Lord!* Now you've only got to recall your Old Testament to say that's the issue: "I am the Lord, beside me there is no other." Their whole existence rested upon that, that they should fulfil this vocation of being here, to let it be known to powers seen and unseen, men and demons, earth and hell that the Lord is the Lord supreme. And that's a very practical thing, it comes down to a lot of matters you know. I prefer to live forty years in the wilderness, well here we are, where are you going to have bread in a wilderness? Where are you going to have water in a wilderness? How are you going to live in a desert for forty years? Only as heaven comes to your rescue. Only if God Almighty intervenes on your behalf. It's a great illustration of this but go through your whole Old Testament and you'll find that this is the thing: these people are either doing this or they're failing to do this - maintaining a testimony in their very life and being, history and experience to the absolute supremacy of the Lord without any pluses, without the Lord needing any help from the world; without your having to turn in any other direction to see you through for your support, for your maintenance, for your progress. The Lord alone and the Lord sufficient. That's why they were chosen. It was a breach with their vocation when they said: "Like unto the nations…"; not only the supremacy of the Lord but to keep before the world the nature of the Lord, the *nature* of the Lord. What kind of a Lord is this? What kind of God is God? The Lord, the Lord merciful and gracious, plenteous in loving kindness, slow to anger. That was their song in testament. A holy God, a *holy* God. Without enlarging upon that, their vocation was to keep alive on this

earth amongst the nations a testimony to what *kind* of a Lord the Lord is. Stating that, we leave it.

And then their vocation was to demonstrate to all around the complete sufficiency of the Lord. The Lord did not choose you because you were greater than any other people, because you were more able and efficient and you were better. Better? not a bit, we know today that that people is no better than the other people of the world, indeed Moses did say, "If you depart from the Lord you'll stink in the nostrils of all peoples." How true that has become. Not because they were better, no they needed the grace of God perhaps more than any of the other nations. They needed, because of their weakness, the power of God more than the nations round about. Oh, they just needed the Lord! That's all there was to it, and the Lord chose them, chose them. Paul said to the Corinthians, "You see your calling brethren, not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble, God has chosen the foolish and the weak and the things which are not…" That is very comforting to us, but mark you that can be just negative comfort. What for? To bring to nought the wise, the mighty, the things that are, that no flesh should glory before God but he that glorieth should glory in the Lord, the absolute sufficiency of the Lord! And that was their vocation, that's your vocation, that's my vocation and that has got to be preserved intact in weakness, oh yes, weakness… if the Holy Spirit does one thing with those who He gets really hold of, He brings them to weakness. He just undercuts all their self-sufficiency, their self-importance, their self-resourcefulness; you meet a truly Holy Spirit possessed man or woman and you meet one who has no strength in themselves, no confidence in themselves, foolish. Foolish! Why, you're destined, you're destined under the hand of the Holy Spirit to come to the place of utter bewilderment over everything if God doesn't resolve your problems and see you through, you're beaten absolutely for want of explanation and understanding. It's alright, it's just the way of the Lord! Emptiness, emptiness, yes, that's the way of the Spirit, the way of the Spirit.

You know, the way of a river, the way of a river is always the lowest channel; always seeks out the lowest place, a river does, the Spirit which is the River of God always seeks out the lowest place: emptiness. And this is the way of the divine glory, but this was a break, a break with vocation: "make us a king like unto the nations…" Now as I close, it was a repudiation of the principle of their very existence. What was it? You see dear friends there are depths of divine wisdom which we have not fathomed or grasped. By His people and in His people, God is undercutting the whole of the work that the devil did in mankind

at the beginning. And the principle of the man of God, the woman of God, the people of God, is *utter and absolute dependence upon the Lord*. Dependence upon the Lord! Look at Moses, look at Abraham, look at all of them: Moses, a man learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, evidently a very wise, intellectual, well-trained and tremendously efficient man when he was in Egypt, comes out and after forty years under the hand of God when God calls him to go he says, "I cannot speak; I cannot speak; I cannot. Oh if You will send, send by anyone whom You will but not by me, I'm not Your man." He's only one example isn't he, Jeremiah: "I can't speak, I am but a child, I am but a child." Here is utter dependence upon God.

Saul of Tarsus, a big man in his own realm, yes, everything, everything but if there is one man in history who knew his dependence upon the Lord it was Paul the apostle. Utter dependence upon the Lord, "…we have this sentence of death that we might not trust in ourselves but in God who raiseth the dead." That's where I am, a dead man needing to be raised. A dead man can't do very much can he? Not much good a dead man, needing to be raised. The principle of absolute dependence upon the Lord which was the principle of Christ's own life: "The Son can do nothing out from Himself but whatsoever He seeth the Father doing…", "the words that I speak I speak not of Myself…", "the works that I do I do not of Myself…" dependence, dependence and here: "Make us a king like unto the nations…" repudiation of this very principle; a change from the spiritual to the natural. Saul, Saul… their choice, Saul, the man who God gave them, was everything that pleased the natural. Look at him, he's taller than any other man in Israel. He's finer looking, a finer specimen of humanity than any other there. A magnificent fellow judged naturally. Yes, alright, you asked for it, you've got it; what you asked for. The natural? God will give you the natural.

But we close, what did the Lord do about it? What did the Lord do? Well He did two things, He helped them to their own conclusions. This is a very terrible thought. He gave them their request but sent leanness into their souls. You know dear friends, apparent prosperity and blessing is not always a good sign, you think that we are having great blessing and things are going just as we want them to go, but there may be a snare in it. It depends on the motive lying behind it all: your natural gratification and pleasure… something to glory in… your wonderful 'Saul' whatever he may be: *your* system, *your* organization, *your* thing… wonderful Saul, bigger than any other, something to take note of and to point out and "look, look!" There's a terrible snare in that. The Lord may not be in it.

The Lord helped them to their own conclusions, He gave them a king, told Samuel to anoint him, go on, go right along their line, they are determined, give them what they are determined to have, we'll help them to their own conclusion. And so He did and you know what the conclusion was. By divine aid they came to tragedy. But the Lord was doing other things and this is better; while all this was going on, He was secretly preparing something that *was* after His own heart. Unrecognized for the time being, taken no note of, no account of for the time being, while these people are getting on with their Saul, the Lord was working outside. That little David, secretly chosen and anointed, separated unto God, going through a deep history with God, deep history, for a long time, during the whole of these forty years of Saul's reign, what a terrible time David was having out there in his cave of Adullam, but God is doing something in him. Secretly doing a deep work in David preparing him for the day of crisis. And there is seeping out to him those who are being disillusioned saying, "This is not it, this is not it, we've made a mistake, we've got on a wrong line, this is not meeting our real need, this is all disappointing" and a few like that growing company and their disillusionment and their heart emptiness - disappointment with this whole thing - were moving out to David and God was forming something secretly and hiddenly that was really after his own heart.

Oh, there's a lot of history in that. I don't like being critical at all, but I do point this out dear friends, that there's a great deal of the Saul idea about in Christianity: the *big* thing, the *wonderful* thing, the natural fleshly thing that appeals to men and the world, something like unto the nations... like that, there's a lot of it. But is it not true that even in such a day there are many hungry, empty hearts that are not finding that to be the answer? They're on stretch for something more and God is doing a secret work in our day, make no mistake about it, you can go over this world and here and there, one, two, a few whose hearts are disappointed and whose hearts are reaching out for the true thing of God and God is doing it *secretly*; going to do no Saul kind of thing over this, no great public bigness, but no, quietly and secretly He's doing His deep work and *these* will be the instrument when that day arrives when this whole other thing will be blown to bits. It will be the people who know the Lord, with whom the Lord will go through to the end.

I've had to skimp a lot and leave out quite a lot this morning, I've gone far beyond my allotted time but I got a comforting note to take all the time I needed, I haven't done that. But dear friends I trust you see the point, this is the issue: whether you're with a thing like unto the nations or whether you are being after

the thing after the heart of God, “I have chosen for Me a man after My own heart who shall do all My pleasure.” “My pleasure…” The Lord give us understanding… Do give us this insight, perception, understanding, discernment in the things that differ even in Christian things, the things that differ, and lead us in the way where Thou Thyself canst commit Thyself without reserve… where Thou canst abide forever for Thy name’s sake, amen.

Mental or Spiritual

There is a vast amount of intellectual comprehension of truth and doctrine which is not touching the situation, not meeting the need... A person may know Scripture most thoroughly and yet be the most awkward, cantankerous and peevish person in daily life; or go into business relationships, drive a hard bargain and send another man to the wall for his own ends. You may have all knowledge and yet profit nothing. It is the natural man receiving on the plane of the natural man. It is mental apprehension of Divine truth, and it is not alive, it is not the 'water of Life, clear as crystal.'

Services may be very beautiful but dead... You may have very high ideals, sublime thoughts, and yet there may be just something that renders it all ineffective and you get nowhere. The modern pulpit goes as far as it can, with its own human mental outfit. If a man happens to be more scholarly and better educated than another, his interpretation is thought to be nearer the truth than that of anyone else. If he can put a construction upon the Word of God which is fresh, interesting, and fascinating and just satisfies the inquiring minds of his hearers, they go away with the idea that that is truth. That is no argument at all - no criterion whatever. To make the whole thing a matter of scholarship is to get off the road.

Moses was learned in all the knowledge of the Egyptians, and yet he had to have forty years of isolation and discipline. At the end, Moses had to say, 'I cannot,' and then God was able to say 'Now I have got you down to a level where I can say, 'I can.' Before Saul of Tarsus could go anywhere for God, he had to talk like this: 'Sinners, of whom I am chief'; 'I am the least of all the apostles and not meet to be called an apostle'; 'the things that I counted gain, I now count but loss'; 'I received it not from men, it was made known to me by revelation'; 'it pleased God to reveal His Son in me.' That is not objective achievement; that is subjective experience, and between the two there is all the difference that there is between life and death...

The man who brags of scholarships and argues that because he has a higher brow than anybody else and is therefore nearer the truth is probably the most blind of all men... The moment you introduce the element of the natural man into the ministry you kill it. The river of the water of Life clear as crystal will not flow

through the channel of the flesh.

What you minister must be born of the Spirit of God in your spirit, and it must not be interfered with by the flesh. God will not let the stream of living ministry flow until the flesh is laid forever in death and it is no longer I but Christ.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, May-Jun 1926, Vol 4-3

The Necessity For New Birth

Reading: 1 Cor. 15:45,47; 2 Cor. 5:17; John 3:3,5-7.

I want to bring a word very simply to you, a word which many may think to be quite elementary, but it will be intentionally so. Perhaps there is no fragment of Scripture which at the same time is more elementary and yet more comprehensive and profound than this, You must be born anew. I want to place the emphasis where I believe the Lord Jesus placed it in that statement. It is on the word must, you *must*. You must be born anew.

You will have noticed that the statement was in answer to an unasked question. As far as you can see as you read, there was no enquiry made, nothing asked of the Lord Jesus. All that Nicodemus said was: We know that you are a teacher come from God. He made a remark about Him, and about His teaching and about His work, and it is almost as though the Lord Jesus was abrupt, as though He held up His hand, and said, That is all right, Nicodemus, but it will not get us very far! It is as though in effect He said, Nicodemus, I know that you are interested in these things, you are interested in religious matters, you are interested in teaching and good works. But, Nicodemus, that will get you nowhere, and if you have come to Me in order that I might say something to you by way of enlightenment or help, if you have come in a spirit of enquiry to know things from Me, Nicodemus, we shall get nowhere until we are on common ground. The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. Nicodemus, I am from heaven. You belong to the first category, and therefore we are in two different realms altogether, but there is no bridge across the gap. It is no use our trying to talk across that great gulf between these two worlds, the old creation and the new, the earthly and the heavenly. We shall never get anywhere. If we are going to get anywhere at all, you will have to come to the place where I am and become another kind of man; you will have to be born from above!

You know, that is a very real thing that is very often overlooked. We can never get anywhere with the Lord Jesus, with the things of God, we can never have any kind of understanding, appreciation or enjoyment of the things of the Lord until something has taken place in us. We can never get anywhere until that something has happened, and that something is what the Lord Jesus called being born from above. Now, let us get down to this with our several passages of Gods

Word.

In the first passage, we have been presented with two men. They go under the name of Adam; respectively, the first man Adam, and the other, not the second, but the last Adam. It is very important not to make that mistake. If there were a second, there might be a third, and a fourth, but with the Lord Jesus the thing is brought to an end, there is not another. Everything is finished in Him, God has no third, fourth or fifth Adam. He has a first and a last Adam, only two races.

This Scripture makes it perfectly clear that all who are born into this world are by nature in the first Adam. That first birth is from the first Adam, and we belong to his race. We are born of him. Well, Adam the first was made by God, as we know, and when he came from the hand of God he was very good, God was very well satisfied, there was nothing wrong with him. But then he was marred, he was spoilt, he was ruined by sin, and then he was rejected by God, as no longer pleasing to God or satisfying Him. He was set aside; sinful in nature, judged as sinful in nature, and now dead to God. As the apostle puts it, dead in trespasses and in sin.

Now, we must recognize this, that in Adam everyone shares Adams sin, and Adams judgment, and Adams rejection. This is where a great many people have made lots of mistakes, very vital mistakes. They have misunderstood God altogether as to this rejected Adam. This Adam, this first Adam and his race in which all of us are by nature, is not pitied by God. He does not look upon us in our sin and sinfulness and rejection, and so pity us that He will come to have compassion upon us and lift us up and improve us, so that we are restored to His favour. No, with all that the Word of God seems to say in that direction, it does not mean that. Yes, God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on Him should not perish, but have eternal life. You say, surely that contradicts what you have just said? No, it does not. Yes, God loves, but He does not love that old creation, God does not love that old Adam race. It is something which He does not pity, and yet and yet He looks upon us with love that desires to get us right out of it, that desires to get us to leave it behind; not to be improved in it, not to be mended, but to be made a new creation in Christ Jesus. There never does come a moment in our history, however long we may be the Lords children, when He loves our old creation, when He has pity upon it and when He sets Himself to do something to repair it. Never! It always remains that right to the end, always rejected by God. Well, that is where we are in Adam, and we are all there, as we have said, by nature.

Well, what does God do? God brings in a new Adam, a new man, and that is His Son, but He does not bring Him in in the same way. He comes in from heaven; He is not of the earth, earthy; He is from heaven. He is not made in time; He is timeless, eternal. He is, therefore, not subject to death. He is deathless, and although He may enter into death, as He did, He will conquer death because it was not possible that He should be hold of death. He is deathless. This is the new Adam, the Lord Jesus. It is very important to get this first point, where this new Adam comes from.

In John 1:51, we have these words. Verily, verily, I say unto you, you shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man. The heaven open; the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. Well, that clearly implies two things. That the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus, belongs to heaven. Heaven is His place. He comes from heaven, He goes to heaven. Heaven is His home. The last Adam is from heaven. The other thing that it indicates is that the heaven is opened, and you notice it says, in the Authorized Version, Hereafter (or afterwards) you shall see heaven open. The Lord Jesus was just pointing on a little way to a time not far ahead of when He said those words. When He said those words, this was not true. The heavens were not opened, they were closed. When the first Adam sinned, the heavens were closed, and from that time onwards for all his race the heavens were closed. Just as surely as Paradise was closed to Adam, and the cherubim with the flaming sword were set to guard the way that he should not return, just so was Paradise removed from the earth and became part of heaven and remained closed to Adams race right up to the time that the Lord Jesus came, and no one of Adams race can get into heaven.

That is what the Lord was saying to Nicodemus. You are interested in heavenly things, Nicodemus, but interest in heavenly things will not get you anywhere. The thing is to get to heaven, the thing is that heaven should be your home, that you should belong to heaven, that you should have the right to heaven, and all that heaven is and has should be yours because you were born there, your name is enrolled there as a citizen, it is in the Lambs book of life. That is the thing that matters, Nicodemus, not interest in heavenly things so that you talk about them, discuss them, sing about them, have a lot of information. No, but that you belong there. Now, Nicodemus, I was born there, I belong there, and no one of Adams race can ever come there. You will have to be born from above.

The Lord Jesus in the words in John 1:51 to which we have already referred, was

just pointing on to that day not far ahead when He would deal with all Adams sin and take all Adams state in His own body on the tree and bear it away in judgment, and then, rising from the dead, become the first man of this new race, this last Adam. And what happened to Him? Well, after His resurrection, as they were gathered round one day, they suddenly saw Him go up and the way it is described is, He was received up into heaven. You notice, if you look at it, it is put like that frequently. It does not say He went up into heaven, He was received up into heaven. Yes, you see now He has a right of way, everything is open to Him, He is received. He has gone back to His own place. He is the last Adam and the first man of a new race, and You shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man, that is, there will be a way for you. There will be communication, the heaven will be open. Yes, in the Lord Jesus, that heaven which was closed to all Adams race and is closed to everyone of us as members of Adams race, that heaven is open now. In Christ, a new creation, all from above. You must be born from above, which means that we, like the Lord Jesus, become possessed of a heavenly nature.

Everything depends then upon our being in Christ. I do want to press this home to you very simply and very earnestly. I expect everyone of us is interested in heavenly things. You would sing hymns about heaven, about going to heaven, about desiring to go to heaven, about the time when you will be in heaven. I love to hear the story; you know the sort of thing: unseen things above. We are all interested, we all hear about these things, we all read about these things. They are brought near to us continually. Yes, but Nicodemus lived in all that world. You see, his very life, his business, was to do with things about God. It was his whole life. He was a grown man, and probably from his infancy he had been interested in a very real way in things about God; that was his world. And yet the Lord Jesus had to say to Nicodemus: Nicodemus, this is no good. You may spend your whole life in touch with these things, and yet never get into the Kingdom of God! You see, it is not good enough for us to know about heaven, about the Lord Jesus, about the things of God. It is not good enough. It would be a terrible thing, and it will be terrible for a great many, to have heard about it, known all about it, to have been in touch with it every day in some way or other, and then, when it comes to the end, to be outside. Terrible, and yet it is going to be true of many, and that is why the emphasis is upon that word must, You *must* be born again. There is no other way. You *must* be born again. So it is a question as to whether we are in Christ.

We know we are in Adam. If you have any doubt about that, well, you will not

have to go very long before you can prove it. I think most of us have proved it very well indeed that we are in Adam. We talk about our old Adam, our old man, that nature which is ours, that sinful nature. It is there all the time. We know that we are in Adam because of the effect of Adams sin in us. All the hatred, the unlove, the disagreeableness, the irritability, the bad temper, all the selfishness, all the unkindness; all that, and so much more mountains of it well, that is Adam, it is the fruit of Adams sin in us. We know we were in Adam.

How can we know that we are in Christ? Well, just in exactly the same way. Being in Christ means that, just as we share the life of Adam by nature, the sinful life that Adam has passed on to us, so we come to share the life of the Lord Jesus, to have His life really in us, and we have it by being born anew. To be in Christ then is to share His life. He has given us one very beautiful and very simple illustration of what sharing His life means. I am the vine, you are the branches (John 15:5). The phrase in Christ or in Me in its various forms occurs more often in that fifteenth chapter of John than in any other chapter in the Bible. Abide in Me. If you abide in Me. The branches must abide in the Vine. We must abide in Him. Now, what is the link, what is it that makes the branches abide in the Vine and what is the result of their abiding in the Vine? What is it that makes the Vine and the branches one? It is the one life which runs through all, just one life in all. If that life were cut off from any branch, that branch would soon fall off and cease to be in the Vine, a part of the Vine; something dead, and we should not call it part of the Vine at all. It is the life shared by every part which is the basis of the oneness and of the abiding in the Vine, so far as the branches are concerned. Life, His life, the life in the Lord Jesus, which He had and has from heaven, that is the basis of being in Him.

Now, what is the effect of that life? Well, there are several things, and I will select one or two. If we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection (Rom. 6:5). And Paul says concerning that likeness of His resurrection, being planted with Him, that we also should walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). This is newness of life in Christ, and if you want to know whether you are in Christ, here is something by which to test it. Do you know what that newness of life is? Now, newness of life is a very wonderful thing. I think that the thing about it which is its particular feature and characteristic is its newness, is its wonder, is the wonderfulness of it.

Have you ever watched lambs at play? There they are, skipping, playing all sorts of imaginary games, jumping over imaginary fences! There are the old mothers

getting on with the grazing, just going on quite quietly and steadily, and here are these little lambs springing and jumping, almost turning somersaults! It is newness of life. Now, that life was derived from that old mother, but you do not see it in the old mother. You would think it very wonderful if you saw an old mother sheep doing what the little lambs do! There is life there, the same life which has been imparted to the little one, and it is simply marvellous what that newness of life does. Has no parent ever tried to imitate their little one for half an hour when they are in a lively mood? You are exhausted in three or four minutes, you cannot keep it up. Newness of life! It is a wonderful thing. It is freshness, it is energy, it is activity, it is joyous irresponsibility, just newness of life. Is that not true to the experience of everyone born from above? Did you not feel like that when you were born from above? Is that not exactly how you have felt at every fresh crisis of the spiritual life when something more of the Lord has become real to you? I remember quite well when the real transaction took place between myself and the Lord. I remember the newness of life. It was not put on. The hallelujahs that came from my lips were not artificial. The number of open-air meetings at which I spoke was not some hard task that I undertook. No, there was newness of life and I had to talk about it, I had to let it out somehow or other. If I did not, I felt I should have exploded! It was just newness of life. Now, this is very simple, but it is very real, and I mention it to test the situation. You must be born from above. Do you know anything about that real newness of life? That is what it means to be in Christ to start with.

But it does not of course mean that it just remains at the start. As we go on with Him, with every fresh movement in fellowship with Him, there can be and there is a fresh experience of this newness of life. Some fresh act of obedience, some fresh step in compliance with His will, some new development in our knowledge of Him, a new life it is just wonderful. It is discovering what we have in Christ. I think that we must realize that this life, while its outward manifestation may not always be the same on to the end, this life has got to be a reality to us right on to the end this different life, this newness of life.

Now, I have heard quite a lot of people asking the Lord that they might have back their early experiences. They seem to think that, because it is not like it was at the beginning the skipping lamb kind of experience they have lost something, and so they sing, Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord? Not necessarily have we lost anything. You look at the old mother sheep, and, while it is not skipping and dancing and turning over itself, it has got life. It has got just as much life as that lamb. I venture to say it has got more life.

Put them both out alone in a storm, and see which will weather the storm longest. The lamb will not last as long as the old mother. The life has gone deeper, the life has become stronger and more mature. It is still the same life; the life there is going to prove itself in other ways. We all like a little lamb, I think we would like the energy of a little lamb. We all like the beautiful trees in spring when the blossom is on them. We all like the bubbling brook on the mountain side, or running in the valley, shimmering and making such a noise. When the blossom has blown away, perhaps we think that the life has gone. Do we? But presently, if we wait a little while, we shall see some fruit in the place where the blossom was. It is the same life, not making quite so much show, but being a little more valuable, more useful. If we follow the brook far enough, we shall find it widening into a stream and deepening into a river, and presently in the midst of the great city, we shall see laden ships borne by it. It is the same brook, but it has become mature. It has the same life, but it is a good deal more useful now. That is not to say anything disparaging about young Christians, but you see my point. This life is a very real thing, and although at the beginning it has these marks of freshness and newness, all the way through it has got to abide as that thing which has come out from God and bears its testimony in different forms. From the early days of bright, sunny, cheerful, happiness of new birth, we go on into storms and tempests, now proving that life by endurance, by suffering, and by fruitfulness and usefulness to others. It is the one life, it is a new life, an altogether new life.

Now, have you had the first stage of that? If not, oh! then, this word is a very important word. Heaven is closed to you, however much you may think about heaven, and long for heaven, and sing about heaven. You must be born from above. If you are, your experience will be in common with all those who have been born from above. You will know that newness of life which simply bubbles up in joy, in wonderful joy, and manifests itself. It is only a half dead lamb that does not show that activity and energy, and does not skip.

Be very patient with this simple word, but let it come home to your hearts and test your own position. Do you know the newness of life?

Then you know how often in the Word this life is called eternal life. *My sheep hear My voice*, said the Lord Jesus. I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish (John 10:27,28). This life is eternity of life. You see, it has no beginning, it is not something of time that is the first Adam. The last Adam out from eternity, passing through time on into eternity, timeless life; that is the life

which the Lord gives us so that we are no longer children of time; though we may pass through this life and although this body that we use here for the time being may be laid aside in the grave, we receive another body which is deathless, governed by eternal life, we are alive for ever. You must be born again, anew, from above, to have that life.

Then one other thing about this life, a thing that ought to be of great help to us as we remember it, although we know it perhaps so well the wonderful sustaining power of the life of the Lord Jesus. A great deal is said about this in John 6. You seek Me... because you did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life (vv. 26-27). If you look on in that chapter, you will see that, not very far on, the question arose about the Israelites in the wilderness. The men here asked the Lord Jesus what sign He would give, and they referred Him to the sign of the manna in the wilderness. That to them was a sign, it was a miracle. What kind of miracle do you show as a sign that you come from God? The Lord Jesus refers back to the bread of life. He says that He is the bread of life. The point is this. There are tens of thousands of people in a wilderness for forty years. You know quite well that you cannot grow anything much in a wilderness, and you know quite well that it would be an impossible thing to have stores for tens of thousands of people for forty years, and as a matter of fact, we know that these people did not bring out into the wilderness food to last them more than perhaps for a day or so. They had no bread with them for all that time. The fact is that they did not starve, they did not become weak and emaciated for want of food, but they were kept strong, well, sustained, supported, able to keep going for all those years, because God sent them food from heaven.

Now, the Lord Jesus says about the life that He gives in Himself, the life which He is, that it is like that. You may be in what is like a wilderness. There is no spiritual food, nothing to keep your new life going, nothing to keep you going as a Christian here everything is against you; it is like a wilderness. You will not find anything in this world to help your spiritual life. There will be nothing here to help you to go on as a Christian. It is starvation in this world for Christians. There is nothing that they can feed upon or live upon. The wonder is that, here in a world where there is nothing to make us strong, to make us grow, to enable us to go on as the Lords children, we do go on in the midst of all the difficulty and adversities. This is the miracle of His life in us, its sustaining power to keep us going. Oh, it is a great thing to remember in days like these. We know that in some parts of the world the Lords children are being scattered everywhere in

China, for instance their meetings broken up. No more meetings, no more Christian fellowship. None of these things to help, but everything to hinder and make difficulty. How are we going to have any hope that they will survive at all? It is here. It does not depend at all upon conditions outside, it is the life that is in them, the life of the Lord Jesus. That is the basis, and to be in Christ just means that, it means to know His power within keeping us when there is nothing outside to help. That is being in Christ. That is very simple. The link is life, the life which keeps us going when there is nothing else to help us, but everything against us.

Then, if I were adding one more thing, I should remind you again of John 15 the fruitfulness of that life. He that abides in Me, and I in Him, the same brings forth much fruit (John 15:5). The life of the Lord Jesus in us is a fruitful life. By their fruits you shall know them. What are the fruits? Well, the Apostle puts it this way. The fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal. 5:22). Then he breaks that up, explains what he means by love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. The fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of His life love. That means everything. Yes, joy and peace. Have we got His love? Is His love manifested? Is His joy manifested? Is His peace manifested? Are these fruits growing in us, being shown in us? That is what it means to be in Christ.

All that is very simple, but I have mentioned it because I feel it ought to just test us right the way through. Newness of life, the sustaining power of His life in adversity, the fruitfulness of His life in love and all that it means. You must be born again. May the Lord make us very sure about this matter.

The Need For A New Apprehension Of The Gospel

I am just going to talk for a moment out of my heart, because I do feel that we are in a very perplexing, but very significant, situation at this time. There is a sense in which it does seem that the Lord is not doing very much. I mean there are not very manifest movements of God on the earth along certain lines in which we look for God to be moving. I do not mean that He is doing nothing, that there is nothing going on. I believe there is, and in parts a very real work of God is going on. But, speaking generally, there is no great movement of God in an outward way spiritually. For a long time such forms of Divine activity seem to have been suspended.

We think back to Wesley, and even to Moody, and then see that at a certain time a whole galaxy of great Bible teachers was raised up. We have all the names of the men of a generation ago. They have all gone. There are no movements like that, and have not been for a long time. Moreover, the situation has changed so much that I do not believe that if all those men came back today, they could meet the situation. Something has happened. The situation has not only changed but it has become much deeper, and the need is for something more than has been during these past generations, something more potent and something deeper. The need is such as to require something from God of a new order. It was there, of course, in New Testament times. I am not thinking of something extra so far as the New Testament is concerned, but I am wondering very much whether this whole matter is not largely one of a new apprehension of what the Gospel is.

We have a very widespread situation the world over today amongst Christians which is an altogether unsatisfactory one, and I think most leaders and responsible people realize that. I think ministers and missionaries are aware that the state of the converts and the Christians is altogether unsatisfactory and inadequate. It is a real question sometimes whether many of them have really been born again. The spiritual life of the Lord's people is a very shallow thing, speaking generally, a very poor thing. And surely today it is manifest that the Church generally is failing to register itself with any impact upon the world situation. Why this apparent hiatus, this suspension of any general and

impressive working, any working that is adequate to the situation - God seeming to be doing nothing? Oh, I believe that He is doing something inwardly, but that is not what I am talking about. Why does this situation obtain?

Well, I say, I wonder whether it is not because there has to be a new apprehension of the Gospel. I believe that it really is the demand of a late hour in the dispensation, that we have advanced in this dispensation toward the end so much that the Lord cannot any longer accept the elementary. He must have the mature; He must have the fuller. Everything surely along the line of intensification, as we see it, demands that.

How did God decide to solve the whole problem of this universe after the chaos and ruin resultant from the working of Satan, and men's complicity with him, and the entrance of sin? How was God going to deal with this whole situation? By Himself coming right down in the form of man in terms of sonship and begetting a new race of beings as sharers of His own Divine life; not His Deity but His Divine life, partaking of His own Divine nature, becoming as a family His own moral and spiritual reproduction in the universe.

I say that is infinitely - may I use the word of God? - infinitely ingenious. There is wisdom about that that is profound. Not a working from the outside to try and remedy and patch up a broken down situation, not a dealing with the thing objectively at all, but Himself coming right into it - God incarnate, God manifest in the flesh in terms of sonship; that is, in generic terms, to reproduce after His own kind. That is a secret which God kept hidden through ages and generations. God had that secret.

What is the Gospel? It is Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh in terms of sonship, brought through to glory to generate a new race after His own kind, to bring many sons to glory. That is it in brief. Oh, that is something very much more than getting your sins forgiven; that is very much more than justification by faith. It is that, but it is infinitely more than that, and all the other things included - the deep, deep inner secret of God, how He is eventually going to have triumph in His original purpose. "The faith", according to the New Testament, is sonship, and it is in relation to sonship as an inward, spiritual reality brought about by this work of God in generation which is the occasion of all the conflict.

Yes, the fact of sonship is there through new birth, but sonship is something

more than birth; sonship is maturity. It is so clear that the New Testament shows that the continuation unto the full growth of sonship is as vital and as important as the beginning of sonship; that is, the bringing of the Lord's people to full spiritual growth is as important as bringing them to new birth. That is where there has been a breakdown.

Today, and for a long time, evangelical leaders have put all the emphasis, or the main emphasis, upon getting people saved. They are interested in that more than anything else, and that is the direction of their main occupation. With what result? That we see a most unsatisfactory state among Christians, and that too in the face of the fact that the very existence of the New Testament itself is the evidence that to bring converted people to full spiritual growth is as important as bringing them to new birth. Why have we the New Testament, with Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and all the other letters, occupied with the fight of the faith to bring believers to full growth? Every one of them is a battleground. All these letters are battlegrounds, and they all have to do, not with the conversion of the unsaved but the going on of the saved - the terrific fight of sonship. Why? Because the issue is not that babes are going to oust the powers of darkness, but full grown believers. The Church has to come to maturity.

So the Apostle says, "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.....and He gave some apostles, and some, prophets," and so on. What for? "The perfecting of the saints.....till we all attain unto the unity of the faith.....unto a full grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:8,11-13). The unity of the faith, the fullness of Christ. You see, that is the thing that comes to light. It is just as important for the seed or the family or the Body to come to spiritual full growth as it is for it to be begotten at all. That is a tremendous thing. The mystery of the Gospel is not just getting people born again. The mystery of the Gospel is the fullness of Christ, and that only begins at new birth. This is the disclosed secret, this Gospel, and it is the occasion of the tremendous, unrelenting conflict, a cosmic conflict with principalities, powers, world-rulers of this darkness, spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies (Eph. 6:12). That is where the wrestling goes on.

Beloved, the focal point of the conflict is the spiritual advancement of the children of God toward full growth, and by any means whatever the enemy will seek to interfere with that. He is striking right at the heart of this thing all the time by every means in his power. God will reach His end; He will come in, in

His Son in terms of sonship, to take up residence within those begotten of Him, and will grow in them, increase His measure in them, until at last, brought to the unity of the faith, they become a mighty embodiment and revelation of God Himself. Not in Deity, but in what He is spiritually and morally in this universe - conformed to the image of His Son, a living expression of God's own thoughts - to fill His universe. The enemy is out against that, and every little step in that direction is challenged; the spiritual growth is countered all the time. He is striking at God's Son.

Oh, that we could get a fresh glimpse of the immense significance of the Gospel, the Gospel of God concerning His Son Jesus Christ, God's secret! I like to dwell upon that. If you sit down in the presence of the world situation and try to sort it out and find the solution to it, it is beyond us altogether; but all through the ages God has been perfectly at rest about this whole thing, about the issue. He was able to say, I have the secret of the whole thing, I have solved the whole problem, I have the means in hand; in the end My method will absolutely succeed!

And the secret? Why, it is just this: "I will go down Myself in terms of sonship and will generate a new race through faith, and that new race will be brought eventually to spiritual full growth; which simply means that then I shall fill all, I shall occupy all the space; there will be no room for anything else at all." That is the issue for every Christian life. It is whether God is going to fill the whole space or not, or whether we are going to have a bit. All the time that is what is going on.

The Need for a Spirit of Grace

"And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt" (1 Sam. 24:5).

"And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends" (Job 42:10).

"And the people of Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. And the tidings reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he made proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, nor drink water; but let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and beast, and let them cry mightily, unto God" (Jonah 3:5-8).

In the above three fragments of Scripture, we have examples of how much value the Lord puts upon a spirit of grace. Very great spiritual issues are shown to have hung upon the spirit which actuated each of the three men concerned. Let us look at them, each in turn.

Grace, the Way of Ascendancy

It is impressive how the Spirit of God so governs the narrating of David's life and activities as to disclose what was in his heart. Concerning him God had said that "the Lord looketh on the heart," and so it must needs be that his heart is uncovered.

This incident is very revealing. It was during that painful period when David was being hunted by Saul, as he said, 'like a flea, or a partridge.' Saul was making life as much of a burden for David as possible. David knew that he had been anointed for the throne. He knew that Saul would one day be at his mercy. But he was sorely harassed by this demon-driven man, and was constantly in deadly peril because of him. And now, the hour of opportunity had come. He had come upon Saul asleep and unguarded. One blow and his troubles would be over. One thrust of his sword and he could be free of his worries. Moreover, the man who

stood in the way of his destiny would be removed, and the throne could be his. Although urged by his men to believe that it was the Lord Who had delivered Saul into his hands in order to put an end to him, David put back the suggestion, quenched the dart of temptation, and, in order to show just what he could have done if he had liked, he cut off the hem of Saul's robe and withdrew to exhibit it as evidence of - what?

It was then that "David's heart smote him." Was it just that David had a conscience, or was it the Spirit of God that smote David's heart before his heart smote him? Conscience could easily have been squared with the argument that the Lord had delivered his enemy into his hand, especially as the Lord had told him that such a day would come. No, the Spirit of God sees more and goes further. He goes right on to "the grace of the Lord Jesus." For one thing, grace takes away all merit, and if David was in danger of saying with his evidence 'What a good boy am I; see what I could have done if I had chosen, but I didn't,' then it is not grace, and he, for that much and that moment, was under condemnation and judgment. David was in the way of the throne, that is, the way of authority and government, and so he must learn that in this age it is a "throne of grace." Spiritual ascendancy is the principle wrapped up with David's life and destiny, and spiritual ascendancy in the life of one in vital relationship with Christ is through "Father, forgive them." So Christ came to the Throne. Do we want power, spiritual authority, and the support of the Lord? Then meekness, suffering wrong, "being defamed, we bless," "bless them that curse you," is the way. There must not be even a small bit in our hand which we use to prove our own goodness. What a thing it is to be sensitive to the Lord, so that the Spirit in us can tell us when we are infringing Divine principles, even when we think that we are being very generous! Pride is a very subtle and deceptive thing, and it may be behind even our good works. Kingship is not something official with God; it is a regal, noble, and transparent spirit.

Saul may represent anything in the permissive will of God that seems to stand in the way of our Divinely-appointed destiny or vocation. The principle is that we may not do anything out of personal interest. We may not be governed by ambition or self-realisation. In personal heat we may not take matters out of the Lord's hands into our own. The Lord had seemed to put Saul into David's hands, but it was only to test David's heart, his faith, his humility, his selflessness. This was necessary training to govern.

We pass to Job, and here we see

Grace, the Way of Enlargement

With Job the same point of vindication arises. The Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends. He was not their enemy. They had made themselves his enemies, they set themselves against him in the main. Now the end of the story is that the Lord says to them, 'You go to My servant Job and he shall pray for you.' And they went and they brought their sacrifices, and Job saw them coming, and what was Job's reaction? Put yourselves in Job's place. After having had such a time at their hands - oh, what a time they had given him, and what wicked and cruel and malicious things they had said, how they had persecuted that man's soul, hitting a man when he was down! - now they were coming, and all their interests hung upon whether he would pray for them, on how he received them. What a chance!

You see again, what is the point here? It is not only ascendancy and vindication, it is enlargement. Afterward the Lord gave Job more than ever he had before - twice as much as he had before. It is a matter of enlargement now, it is a matter of wealth, it is a matter of increase, it is a matter of the Lord being able to say, 'I am unrestrained in my desires toward this life, toward this people; there is no need for Me to keep back; I can give twice as much; I can give here.' Ah, but it just hung upon the way Job reacted toward these people. He might have said, 'So you see I am right after all; you have had to come to see that I am right!' No, it is a matter of the graciousness of this man kneeling down in the presence of *these* after all, and saying, 'Lord, bless these men, bless them as much as you possibly can!' - and the Lord blessed Job when he did that.

Now spread that out as far as it can go. Have you got enemies, individual enemies, collective people, who are always misjudging, misrepresenting, misconstruing, condemning, saying you are wrong? What are you going to do about it? Watch for their downfall, wait for the day when they will have to admit you are right after all? No! Pray for them, for their blessing, show the spirit of grace. That is how God has dealt with us. It is the way of enlargement.

And now we pass on to Jonah, and the message in him is as to

Grace, the Way of Expansion of the Kingdom

Jonah had been a great man, but he now has a bad name and a little place among the Prophets. It goes a long way to redeem his reputation, that he wrote his own

story and covered up none of its shame. Jonah was contemporary with one of the greatest of Israel's kings after the dividing of the kingdom. Jeroboam II did great work in restoring the kingdom, recovering lost territory, and building the destroyed places. He brought the kingdom to a high level of prosperity and strength. Jonah was his friend and counsellor, and doubtless had much to do with Israel's restored and prosperous condition. It was just there that the trouble arose. Steadily and powerfully there was growing up beyond Israel's frontiers another great power, the Assyrian, with its mighty capital, Nineveh. Its wickedness was very great, and its numerous inhabitants were in gross moral darkness. The Lord commanded Jonah to go and preach or proclaim to Nineveh pending judgment. Jonah was alive enough to know that God did not want to destroy Nineveh if Nineveh would repent; if He did He would not tell them what He was going to do. Jonah therefore saw the possibility of Nineveh repenting and being spared. He was so much a patriot that their being spared was the last thing that he wanted. Then he would not give them a chance by preaching. The end of his story clearly shows that this was what was in his heart.

Well, what does it all amount to? There can be such zeal for God's interests as is blind to God's grace. If Nineveh is saved, then Israel will suffer. There is only one way of really serving the Lord's interests, and that is by revealing His grace, whatever the cost. Consequences must never be taken account of. Policy must never be a governing consideration. Diplomacy must not influence. Leave the Assyrian with God. He dealt with their presuming upon His grace later on. Ours it is to exhibit the spirit of grace, for only so does the kingdom expand and stand.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, May-June 1948, Vol 26-3

The New Birth

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God… Marvel not that I said unto you, You must be born anew” (John 3:3,7).

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on Him should not perish, but have eternal life… He that believes on Him is not judged; he that believes not has been judged already, because he has not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:16,18).

“You must be born again” (or anew).

There are three reasons for speaking on that word to you. One, for the sake of anyone who needs to know what it is to be born anew or again; two, for the sake of those who do know what it is but who need continually to be reminded and to keep before them what the difference is between those who are born anew and those who are not; and three, because you are constantly moving amongst those who know nothing about it and are from time to time called upon to state or explain or testify to the difference that being born anew makes.

We are very often in the position which might, if we allowed it, bring us into some weakness on this matter. For instance, we meet many very nice and outwardly good people who are certainly not born again people and they compare very favourably outwardly with many whom we know who claim to be born again people. Sometimes the born again people do not compare very favourably with many who are not born again and such a fact may weaken our position and raise questions in our minds and destroy the definiteness of our testimony, our confession.

Then sometimes, especially for younger people, the challenge as to what difference it really does make to be a Christian finds them unable to give a very direct and concrete answer. We find that we are led all round the globe in an attempt to explain things. It is not very often that you find a person, especially a young Christian, able to state precisely and concisely what it means to be a Christian or what it means to be born again. Now these are reasons for speaking

to you on this matter — “You must be born again.” I am going to be just as simple and as plain as I can and approach the subject along the line of three questions.

What it is to be Born Again

Firstly, what is it to be born again? While that is a very big wide question which can be answered with a very great deal of material, we will confine it to one simple answer, for being born is, after all, a matter of blood, and you can gather a very great deal of the mystery which seems to surround the Bible teaching about blood into this one fact, that you cannot interchange blood with any vivifying, life-giving, health-giving value or prospect. You cannot change the blood of different species, that is, transfer the blood of one species to another. If you do, you not only reach deadlock, you do damage. You cannot pass animal blood into the human system with any real value — there is no such thing as a transfusion from a beast to a man. You never get anywhere by that means; it is to no purpose at all but rather does damage. Every species has its own blood and that blood is locked up to that species and must not be transferred to any other species. The blood in the Bible, as we know, is representative of the life and when it is said that in Jesus Christ, or through faith in Him, we will receive eternal life, that is only the effect of the symbolic language and sacrament of drinking His Blood. “Whoso drinks My blood has eternal life” (John 6:54), and that means that we are receiving the life of — may I use the word about the Lord Jesus? — a particular species. There is no species in existence in this universe like the Lord Jesus; He is a unique order of creation, an exclusive order of creation. He represents something which is not to be found anywhere else and being born anew is receiving the life of another order of creation of which He is the first and representative.

What is it then, to be born anew or again? It is to receive another and altogether other life, and the deep fact, truth, reality about a true born again child of God and about all such, is not in what they are naturally, outwardly. It is that, right deep down at the centre of their being there has been imparted something which is altogether different from what they are in themselves and altogether different from what all other people are. However good they may be naturally, the difference is there. You and I know quite well that in ourselves the difference is not complete and manifest, but we know that there is a fundamental difference, that there is that which makes the difference and it is a difference which is not in any way forced or strained but it is as natural as anything can be to this new

creation. We know that something has happened in us that has made the difference between us and others and that basic fact is constantly making itself known in us. It is like a new kind of intelligence, a new kind of consciousness and conscience which is all the time discriminating, pointing out the differences, constraining or restraining something there that has happened. There is the difference and it is this other life of another order which is the order of God's Son which has made the difference, and to be born anew is that.

The difficulty with many Christians, not only with young Christians, but many others is that, under severe strain, pressure and trial and when this natural life is being provoked or strained for some reason or other; perhaps by physical disorders and infirmities and weaknesses, perhaps by pressure from without. Under given conditions the natural life seems to be so strong still on the wrong side, on the evil side, and the old things of that natural life make themselves felt and assert themselves. Then we are tempted by the enemy to ask the question, Well, after all, what difference does it make to be a child of God? Is there anything really in this matter of being a new creation, of being born again? What is the difference?

The answer is deeper down, much deeper down, than our own natures. What we are naturally in ourselves remains, but there is a new creation. It is very important to get your emphasis upon the right word. When the apostle writes, "If any man be in Christ" (and our Authorized Version has failed us here when it says, "he is a new creature" or "a new creation"). The Revised helps us, but even then it does not underline the important word. It says, "If any man is in Christ, there is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). You want to put under the word 'there' a thick black line. Where? *There,* in Christ; there is a new creation in Christ; and it is just there in Christ, where we are in Christ, what we are in Christ, when we are in Christ, not when we are in ourselves, but when we are in Christ. It is *there* that there is a new creation. It is what is in Christ that is the new creation.

We will not stay with that further, but I want you to realize that there is a difference and that difference we know. It is that difference which has become evermore real to us as the mark of our spiritual growth, the difference between what Christ is and what we are and what man is as a whole by nature, the difference, because we have received (to use the symbolic word) a new blood, a different blood, or, to use the proper word, the actual word: another life, a different life. What is it to be born again? It is that.

Why We Must Be Born Again

Why must we be born again? Why was the Lord Jesus so emphatic? Note this double imperative — Verily, verily; truly, truly, I say unto you... Why? Well, the answer, I think, is found in the complete statement. “Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Now, there is no reference to the Kingdom of God in the context, therefore one of two things must be taken account of. One, that Nicodemus and the people whom he represented needed no explanation as to the fact of the Kingdom of God. That is, it was no mystery, it could be taken for granted that they knew about the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus knew something about the Kingdom of God. It was not introducing a strange subject so far as he was concerned. But, whether the Kingdom of God is a new idea or not, the point is this — the Lord Jesus assumes without any explanations at all, without stopping and saying, Now look here, there is such a thing as the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of God is so-and-so — giving a long explanation of the Kingdom of God. No, He assumes that the Kingdom of God is the thing which matters, is the thing which counts, is the ultimate and the supreme thing, and His attitude is simply this — Look here, Nicodemus, ultimately, eventually, pre-eminently, the Kingdom of God is the thing in view; the time is coming when there will be no other kingdom but the Kingdom of God. All other kingdoms will have been met, judged, destroyed, blotted out, and this universe will be the Kingdom of God! So the thing that matters is whether we are going to be in or out. There will not be an alternative to the Kingdom of God. We will either be in the Kingdom of God or we will be out: “...should not perish, but have eternal life”. Perish means to go out of what God is going to bring about, to be outside of what God is going to institute, to miss it, to be out of it, to have lost it, to be judged unworthy of it.

The thing which matters, then, is the Kingdom of God, for it will be that which will be all pervading and all-inclusive at last. That is why we must be born anew, because to get into that Kingdom is no mechanical matter. It is a matter of birth, it is a matter of nature. That Kingdom will be constituted by a God-nature, the nature of God imparted to all His subjects and all the citizens of that Kingdom. It will be a matter of constitution. The difference is to perish being outside, and to have eternal life being inside, and you only get this life through birth.

So then, if the Kingdom is the thing which eventually and ultimately matters, then that is why we must be born anew, and there is no getting into the thing which matters other than by new birth, that is all. So you simply say, when you

are challenged — What does it mean to be born anew, to be a Christian? It means to have received another life more inward and deeper down than the life of nature and which is gaining ground, steadily gaining ground and making differences, and that is why I do not do certain things that you do. It is not that I have decided that I shall not do these things, that I have drawn up a list of things which I should do and should not do, can do or cannot do, ought to do and ought not to do. It is simply that there has taken place in me something which has made these differences and I am following the law of another life which is at work within, and it is no merely legalistic thing at all. That is the difference, that is what it means to be born again and why we must be born again. In the end there is only going to be one Kingdom, the Kingdom of God, and you get into that Kingdom by being born anew. You are either going to be out or in and if you are going to be in, you must be born anew.

How We Are Born Again

Then how are we born again? What do we have to do to be born again? Well, in the first place, it is by acknowledging the fact of our sinful nature. No, it is not an acknowledging that we have done some wrong things, that we have committed sins — that is not good enough. A lot of people think that if you are going to become a Christian, it is a matter of confessing that you have done this, or that, or the other which is not right, and asking God to forgive and saying you will not do it again. That is not it. It is not *sins* but *sin*, it is not what we do or do not do, it is what we are. And no one ever gets through with God by acknowledging a certain number of sins even though they might make a mountain of them that is a countless number that they would confess. That is not the way through with God, because God knows a great deal more than we can count about ourselves. What He calls for is acknowledgment of the fact of a sinful nature, what we are in ourselves, and then, in the light of that, the acknowledgment of Christ as God's Son.

There is a very important matter bound up with that. You expected me to say, the acknowledgment of Christ as Saviour, and I did not say it; the acknowledgment of Christ as God's Son. You look at the New Testament; that is what men have to acknowledge from Pentecost onward, that Jesus is the Son of God. Why? Son implies something, it implies a father and it implies a begotten one, and that brings you immediately into touch with this very fact of the begetting of a family relationship, of getting into a family. The door into that family is the Lord Jesus, the Firstborn. He is the way in and so you have got to acknowledge Him, not as

a great prophet, a great teacher, a good man, the best that ever lived, but you have got to acknowledge that unique relationship, that we are not all the children of God in that same way by nature. There is no such thing, in the essential sense, as the universal Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man. That is all nonsense and rubbish, it does not get you anywhere. This Fatherhood is a peculiar Fatherhood, this sonship of Jesus Christ is unique sonship, and this is an inclusive family relationship and there is only one way and that is through Him in that position as Son.

Oh, Satan knows quite well all about that. Probably there is nothing through history that Satan has laid himself out to do more thoroughly than to deny that essential sonship of Jesus Christ. The one thing at which he has aimed his blows and all his cunning, skillful attention through the ages has been at the sonship of Jesus Christ in its utterness, in its exclusiveness, in its uniqueness. All the false doctrines of history have had that somewhere lurking in them. So the acknowledgment of Jesus as God's Son for our salvation is the way of new birth.

And then a definite act of committal and acceptance by faith. I am not one who commits so many sins or sins of this kind or that, but I am a sinner by nature. Jesus Christ is God's Son of another order. I, by a definite act of committal and acceptance, take a faith relationship with Christ to bring me into that family which is another, altogether other kind of family!

Now, can you grasp that? What is it to be born again? Will you answer that simply? Why must we be born again? How are we born again? Well, if anyone here does not know what it means to be born again, that is it very briefly. You know the way now. If any of you have had difficulties over this matter of the difference between very nice, good people who make no profession at all of Christianity and Christians whom you feel let down the whole thing, or because of what you still find in yourself. You wonder, 'Does it make so much difference after all, what really is the difference; it does not seem to me that those who are Christians even come up to the level of many who are not! What is the difference, what does it mean?' There is an answer and a very real answer. I have not given all the facts, but there is a real answer. And why? Well, there is no reason for anything more imperative than that we should be born again because the Kingdom of God is the thing that is going to govern everything. Whether we are in the Kingdom of God or not is the most important matter that ever anybody could have to face.

Well then, if it is true, and if I am persuaded or anyone is persuaded that it is something to consider seriously, what about it, how is it done, what is the way? Can you give that answer? Have you all come that way? May the Lord just use this very simple word for our confirmation, clarifying and new joy.

A New Creation

The all-inclusive rule of the new creation is that "all things are of (out from) God." Concerning this fact the Apostle Paul uses the word "but" - "*But* all things are of God" - as though he would anticipate, intercept, or arrest an impulse to rush away and attempt life or service upon an old creation basis, or with old creation resource.

The great question then is: What does it mean that all things in this new creation are out from God? What kind of a life will such a life be? To answer that question adequately would be a very comprehensive task and the most revolutionary thing conceivable.

To begin with, we should have to be settled regarding the *difference* between the old and the new creations, and then as to how far-reaching that difference is. In addition, we should need to see that God has put these two creations asunder, utterly and forever, and however gracious and forbearing He may be with us in our ignorance and slowness of apprehension, He never accepts the overlapping or intertwining of the two. Then there would be the further need of an inward, intelligent judgment and power by which we are made aware of the Divine veto upon the one and energy toward the other.

There are a few things which, precisely stated, sum up this matter.

1. All things out from God means that all things, in the first place, are in God. A truism though it be, that fact is one of great significance. Whatever man may have, or think that he has, or knows, or can do in the realm of the old creation, nothing of the knowledge, ability, or power of the new creation originates with man. He has to begin as a helpless, ignorant, innocent infant. Everything for him is in God, he has nothing in himself.

2. Whatever God may impart, of wisdom, knowledge, or ability in the new creation, He never does so outright. That is to say, He never gives the resource to be held apart from Himself. He never constitutes men gods, with independent Divine resources. He never allows man to become a possessor in himself, in such a way that man of himself is something. Everything must be held in abiding dependence upon God, both for receiving and using, and nothing can be

absolute. It was the violation of this law or the attempt to have it set aside, that brought ruin in the first instance. Man had all by dependence, faith, obedience, and humility. He yielded to the suggestion to have it in himself, with freedom from this law - to "be as God." God is not leaving that door open in the new creation, and nothing that savours of man will ever get through at last. Here is the importance for life and service of a life wholly in God.

3. The larger the measure of what is of God the more utter will be the application by God of the law of dependence. This means that God will have no plenipotentiaries-at-large. The life and instrument related to God's fullest thought will be kept on a basis of step-by-step guidance and strength. There will be no making over of plans, schemes, schedules; no seeing of the way from beginning to end; no resources to draw upon without Divine witness, or to endanger exactness as to the Divine intention; no making of men into authorities and courts-of-appeal by reason of *their* being a fountain of wisdom and knowledge: in a word, nothing that would infringe the law that for all things, at all times, and in all ways, "all things are out from God."

The only certainty is God. An apostle may be led to move in a particular direction, and then by reason of need and opportunity he may conclude that certain regions are the objective, but when he reaches a point he will be met by a double, Divine "No" to those thoughts, and be shown something unthought of. (Acts 16:6-10.)

To the old creation such a life is most unsatisfactory and irregular. Yes, and in a thousand other things this life is utterly different from what man naturally wants and likes. But that does not mean that God is not more honoured, glorified, and satisfied. Let us read the New Testament with this one thought in mind, the Gospels as well as the rest, and see if it was not true in the case of Christ, the Apostles, and the teaching.

4. If this is all true, then it is its own reflection upon those other major questions. The difference between the two creations, their extent, and the Divine attitude toward them, is clearly and forcefully revealed by such issues as we have pointed out. The difference is irreconcilable and cannot be bridged. The extent reaches to mind, heart, and will. It is a matter of mentality, capacity, and the very springs of life. We are not only confronted with the fact of limitation when we come to probe the question of the old creation, but with a state with which God can have nothing to do. Even though it appear in religious form, and that in the

red-hot devoutness of Saul of Tarsus, its deeper nature will be proved inimical to God.

5. There remains one thing to be referred to. In the divide between the two creations there is planted the Cross of Christ. The Cross has a death side and a life side; death to the old, life to the new. The recognition and acceptance of the Cross in this twofold meaning is God's only way to the new creation. To the believer who receives Him by faith the Holy Spirit is given as the inward intelligent power for witnessing to the Cross against the one and for the other. Hence the immeasurably great importance of a life governed by the Holy Spirit at all points and in all things. Only that which, by the Spirit, is immediately out from God will survive or get through. All else must perish with the creation which God has placed under condemnation.

It is not what is done for God that will last, but what is done by God.

The measure of spiritual value is determined by the measure in which God promotes it, not the measure of human activities according to human judgments and energies in the name of God.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jan-Feb 1937, Vol 16-1

On Knowing the Lord

"That I may know....." - Phil. 3:10.
"Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know Me." - John 14:9; (A.S.V.).
Phil. 1:10; Heb. 8:11; 1 John 2:20, 27.

It is of the greatest importance for the Lord's children to recognize fully that, above all other things, His object is that they should know Him. This is the all-governing end of all His dealings with us. This is the greatest of all our needs.

It is the secret of strength, steadfastness, and service. It determines the measure of our usefulness to Him. It was the one passion of the life of the apostle Paul for himself. It was the cause of his unceasing striving for the saints. It is the heart and pivot of the whole letter to the Hebrews. It was the secret of the life, service, endurance, confidence of the Lord Jesus as Son of Man.

All these facts need looking at more closely. We begin always with the Lord Jesus as God's representative, the Man after His own mind. In His life on earth there was no part or aspect which did not have its strength and ability rooted in, and drawn from, His inward knowledge of His Father, God. We must never forget that His was a life of utter dependence upon God, voluntarily accepted. He attributed everything to the Father: word, wisdom, and works. The miracles were made just as possible through His apostles as through Himself. This does not put the apostles on the same personal level as Himself. His Deity remains. He is God manifest in the flesh; but He has accepted from the human and manward standpoint the limitations and dependence of man so that God might *be* God manifested. There is a subjection here because of which He is able to do nothing of Himself (John 5:19, etc.). The principle of His entire life in every phase and detail was His knowledge of God. He knows the Father in the matter of the words He speaks, the works He does, the men and women with whom He has to do; with regard to the *times* of speaking, acting, going, staying, surrendering, refusing, silence; with regard to the motives, pretensions, professions, enquiries, suggestions, of men and of Satan. He knows when He may not, and when He may, give His life. Yes, everything here is governed by that inward knowledge of God. There are numerous evidences in the "Acts" as the practical, and in the

Epistles as the doctrinal, revelation of God's mind, that this principle is intended by God to be maintained as the basic law of the life of the Lord's people through this age. This knowledge in the case of the Lord Jesus was the secret of His complete ascendancy and of His absolute authority.

Masters in Israel will seek Him out and the issue which will precipitate their seeking will be that of knowing. "Art thou the teacher of Israel, and understandest not these things?" (John 3:10). Nicodemus has come to One Who knows, and Whose authority is superior to that of the scribes, not merely in degree but in kind.

Toward the end of the Gospel of John, which especially brings into view this very matter, "to know" occurs some fifty-five times. Our Lord makes the statement that "this is life eternal, that they should know Thee the only true God, and Him, Whom Thou didst send, even Jesus Christ." (John 17:3). This does not mean merely that eternal life is given on the basis of this knowledge. There can be life with very limited knowledge. But life *in fulness* is closely related to that knowledge, and the increasing knowledge of Him manifests itself in increasing life. It works both ways; knowledge unto life and life unto knowledge.

Seeing, then, that the Lord Jesus Himself, as Man, represents man according to God, we are well prepared to see that

The Dominating Objective Of The Divine Dealings With Us

is that we may know the Lord.

This explains all our experiences, trials, sufferings, perplexities, weakness, predicaments, tight corners, bafflings, pressures. While the refining of spirit, the development of the graces, the removing of the dross, are all purposes of the fires, yet above and through all is the one object - that we may know the Lord. There is only one way of really getting to know the Lord, and that is experimentally.
Our minds are so often occupied with service and work; we think that doing things for the Lord is the chief object of life. We are concerned about our lifework, our ministry. We think of equipment for it in terms of study and knowledge of *things.* Soul-winning, or teaching believers, or setting people to work, are so much in the foreground. Bible study and knowledge of the Scriptures, with efficiency in the matter of leading in Christian service as the end

in view, are matters of pressing importance with all. All well and good, for these are important matters; but, back of everything the Lord is more concerned about our knowing Him than about anything else. It is very possible to have a wonderful grasp of the Scriptures, a comprehensive and intimate familiarity with doctrine; to stand for cardinal verities of the faith; to be an unceasing worker in Christian service; to have a great devotion to the salvation of men, and yet, alas, to have a very inadequate and limited personal knowledge of God within. So often the Lord has to take away our work that we may discover Him. The ultimate value of everything is not the information which we give, not the soundness of our doctrine, not the amount of work that we do, not the measure of truth that we possess, but just the fact that we know the Lord in a deep and mighty way.

This is the one thing that will remain when all else passes. It is this that will make for the permanence of our ministry after we are gone. While we may help others in many ways and by many means so far as their earthly life is concerned, our *real* service to them is based upon our knowledge of the Lord.

The greatest of the problems of the Christian life is

The Problem Of Guidance.

How much has been said and written upon this subject! The last word for so many is, "Pray about it, commit it to God, do the thing that seems right, and trust God to see that it turns out all right." This to us seems weak and inadequate. We make no claim to ability to lay down the comprehensive and conclusive basis of guidance, but we are strongly of the conviction that it is one thing to get direction for the events, incidents, and contingencies of life, and quite another thing to have an abiding, personal, inward knowledge of the Lord. It is one thing to call upon a friend in emergency or at special times for advice as to a course to be taken; it is another thing to live with that friend so that there is derived a sense of his mind in general that will govern in particular matters.

We want instructions and commands, *the Lord* wants us to have a 'mind.' "Have this *mind* in you," "We have the *mind* of Christ." Christ has a consciousness, and by the Holy Spirit He would give and develop in us that consciousness. The inspired statement is that "His anointing teacheth you concerning all things." We are not servants, we are sons. Commands - as such - are for servants, a mind is for sons.

There is an appalling state of things amongst the Lord's people today. So many of them have their life almost entirely in that which is external to themselves - in their counsel and guidance, their sustenance and support, their knowledge, their means of grace. Personal, inward, spiritual intelligence is a very rare thing. No wonder that the enemy has such a successful line in delusions, counterfeits, and false representations. Our greatest safeguard against such will be a deep knowledge of the Lord through discipline.

To know the Lord in a real way means steadfastness when others are being carried away - steadfastness through times of fiery trial. Those who know the Lord do not put forth their own hand and try to bring things about. Such are full of love and patience, and do not lose their poise when everything seems to be going to pieces. Confidence is an essential and inevitable fruit of this knowledge, and in those who know Him there is a quiet restful strength which speaks of a great depth of life.

To close let me point out that in Christ "are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden," and the Lord's will for us is to come to an ever-growing realization and personal appreciation of Him in Whom all the fulness dwells.

We have only stated facts as to the Lord's will for all His own, and their greatest need.

The absence of this real knowledge of the Lord has proved to be the most tragic factor in the Church's history.

Every fresh uprising of an abnormal condition has disclosed the appalling weakness amongst Christian people because of this lack. Waves of error; the swing of the pendulum to some fresh popular acceptance; a great war with its horrors and many-sided tests of faith; all these have swept away multitudes and left them in spiritual ruin.

These things are ever near at hand, and we have written this message to urge upon the Lord's people to have very definite dealings with Him that He will take every measure with them that they might know Him.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Nov-Dec 1930, Vol 8-6

"One New Man"

The Revelation of Christ

READING: Gal. 1:15-16; Eph. 2:15-16; 4:15-16,24; Col. 3:10.

The phrase which I feel is to engage us at this time is that in Eph. 2:15 - "one new man". But before we speak about that specifically, there is a word which must lead to it.

The question that is exercising many hearts today is that which relates to the need, the great need, for a recovery of the original freshness, vitality and power of Christianity. Many are concerned with this matter. How can that original freshness, vitality and power be recovered amongst the Lord's people? It is in seeking to answer that question, at least in part, that I think we should find some profit. But we must, of course, ask why it is that that freshness and vitality is lacking. What is the reason for its absence? What is it that accounts for the present state of things which is so different from what it was at the beginning? Do you not think, dear friends, that, while the answer may be a very much wider one, it can be answered in this way, that the present vitiated state of things spiritually in Christianity is so largely due to the fact that Christianity has become almost entirely a tradition, a fixed system, a system of doctrine and of practice crystallized and formed and presented as something from the outside to be accepted, adopted, and conformed to. Christianity has taken a fixed shape. It is an "it", and you are called upon to accept that "it" which is Christianity. When we have recognized that, I think we have got really to the heart of the matter, because in the beginning and in principle throughout the New Testament everything was a master of a living inward revelation of a Person; for whenever God has moved to take some fresh step in relation to His purpose, His comprehensive purpose, He has always done so by giving a new revelation in an inward way.

A Revelation of the Lord the Way of Progress

It was a great step in that purpose of God when He brought Abraham into fellowship with Himself. "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham" (Acts 7:2), and that is only saying in other words, "it pleased God to reveal..." In

principle it was a revelation that came to Abraham of the God of glory. It was that revelation of the God of glory that emancipated Abraham and resulted in all that came in and through Abraham as a link in the chain of God's eternal purpose.

It was true of Moses; and Moses represents another step on the part of God, a fresh movement in His purpose. God appeared unto Moses in the burning bush. He saw the Lord; he had a vision of the Lord; that meant everything to him. I think we should not be wrong in saying that many times in the life of Moses when pressed hard, under stress, in temptation, trial, suffering and adversity, in the difficulties of the way, he called back that original vision. He called to mind that day when he saw the Lord in the flame of the bush. The Lord appeared unto him. It was something which remained in his history as basic. He would say, On that day I saw the Lord, I came into living touch with the Lord, it pleased God to reveal Himself to me!

So we might go on with one after another and find it true in every case. Isaiah will say, "I saw the Lord high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple" (Isa. 6:1).

It was true in the New Testament. The disciples had to base everything upon the forty days after the resurrection - "We have seen the Lord". That is what the Lord meant by it. He appeared after His resurrection by the space of forty days and they saw, but in another way, in a spiritual way, in a way in which they had never seen Him before. It was in a living way.

Paul certainly based his whole history upon this; "it pleased God to reveal his Son in me". He could say, I saw the Lord.

And that was not only true as one tremendous thing at the beginning of the life of each of these. It was something which in principle was repeated again and again in order to get fresh developments, fresh advances. Peter had seen Him alive after the Cross by the space of forty days. He had seen Him in that way, but there was still need for Peter to move on, and so he saw the Lord again in connection with Cornelius and the inclusion of the Gentiles. He saw the Lord again, and that fresh seeing of the Lord emancipated him some more from the old traditional position, the old legal bondage, from the earthly and the merely historical, from knowing after the flesh. He saw; and we know what happened. When he saw he could not help himself. It was no use arguing. He went up to

Jerusalem and they contended with him, they disputed with him, they called him to question over this matter of going in to the Gentiles. He, in effect, says, I have seen, I cannot help myself; I saw and what am I to do? When a man sees, he cannot help himself. He is simply emancipated by what he sees, if he sees in the right way.

When the Lord would make that fresh tremendous movement with the Gospel into Europe, He did it by showing something. Paul saw a man of Macedonia, and that man said, "Come over into Macedonia and help us", and although Paul had essayed to go into Bithynia and sought to preach the Word in Asia, the Lord said, No, and then showed him a man of Macedonia (Acts. 16:6-10). Paul could have summed it all up in this way - The mighty movement of God into Europe with the Gospel was by a new divinely given vision; I saw and I went. The way of advance was the way of the heavenly vision; the way of development was the way of new revelation; the way on in the purpose of God was by having the inner eye opened to see. Not once nor twice, but whenever God wants to move on, He opens the eye anew. "It pleased God to reveal his Son in me" - that is the principle all the way along. It has ever been so; a living revelation, the eyes of the heart being enlightened, but a revelation of Christ. "It pleased God to reveal..." That is the opening of the inner eye, the eye of the heart, the understanding.

Not Things, but Christ

"It pleased God to reveal *His Son*" - that is the comprehensive object. In Him all the purposes and ways and intentions of God are gathered up. God does not show *things* to His people, He shows His Son. He does not show truths; with God no one truth is an abstract thing. It is personal. Christianity has become a system of abstract truths, the truths of the Gospel. God ever presents His Son, and the truths in relation to a living Person, never out of such relation. If we see the Lord by the revelation of the Holy Spirit, we have seen everything related to our salvation, related to our sanctification, related to our vocation, and related to our glorification. It is all in seeing Christ. The recovery of the original spiritual vitality and freshness and power will only come along this line - a new revelation in an inward way, in a living way, of the significance of the Lord Jesus. That means much more than it sounds in a statement, because there is nothing of significance beside Him. The very significance of this universe is centred in God's Son. "All things have been created through him and unto him" (Col. 1:16); He is the significance of all things. All time has its significance in

Him - "He is before all things" (Col. 1:17). To see the meaning of the Lord Jesus is to be out of everything earthbound, timebound, fleshbound. You cannot see the Lord Jesus and be limited to any of the things of this old creation.

We have mentioned some of those who saw, and you observe what happened. When they saw, they were soon out; out with God, free with God. Nothing in this world would have extricated Saul of Tarsus from his Jewish history, his Pharisaical bondage, his legal strait-jacket, from his very blood as of a son of Israel; nothing! But he saw Christ, God's Son, and that did it. It is a mistake to talk to people about this and that and the other thing from which they should escape and "come out", and so on. You can get things done like that and just get a Christianity of a systematised order imposed. People embrace *it* and become adherents to *it* and believe in *it* in a way, but you do not get the freshness, the vitality and the power that was there at the beginning. That comes when people are in a position to say, I see; it pleased God to reveal His Son in me, I have seen, I cannot help myself; I am bound to take such and such a course because I have seen!

You can see how hidebound Peter was - "Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath ever entered into my mouth" (Acts 11:8). Not so, Lord! If you and I see Christ, the things which are religiously impossible with us will become actualities, and religious impossibilities are much stronger than human impossibilities.

Today the need is not primarily for the recovery of doctrine and truth. There may be a need in a large area for the restoration of fundamental truth and doctrine to its right place, but when you have it, when you have exact doctrine, you have no assurance of having life. It is possible to be exact and correct in your doctrine and to be perfectly dead. Whatever may be the need of the recovery of lost truth, the need over all, greater than all, is the recovery of spiritual revelation as to the Lord Jesus, to see Him anew.

A Revelation of Christ Corporate

That can lead on to what is bound up with the fragment of the Word which is before us - "one new man". You can see from these Scriptures that there is a double, two-sided, major revelation of Christ comprehended by the New Testament; it came by revelation. Firstly, there is the revelation of Him personally, Christ personally, the Son of God; and then following that, by

revelation again, Christ corporately, not as two things but two sides of one, so much so that the second is spoken of as "the Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12 Gr.). This word 'man' is a collective term and is gathered up into the one Christ. Here is the statement - "have put on the new man... where there cannot be" this and that and the other thing "but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:10-11). The new man where Christ is all and in all.

You notice the significance of Eph. 4:20: it is worth looking at closely. "Ye did not so learn Christ." It does not say learn about Christ, but learn Christ. "If so be that ye heard him, and were taught in him, even as truth is in Jesus: that ye put away... the old man... and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man." So learn Christ that ye put off the old man and put on the new man, being renewed in the spirit of your mind. That is worth thinking about - to learn Christ, is to do something, is to result in something, and that something is that if you have learned Christ, you have put off the old man. If you have learned Christ, you have put on the new man. To learn Christ is to see and embrace an entirely new order of man. That is the significance of Christ. It is this - a new and different kind of man has been introduced by God into this universe, and He is the object of all spiritual education. "So learned Christ". It is a practical thing, it is not an academic thing, it is not a thing at all; it is a Person, and your way of learning that Person is not observation and imitation. Your way of learning is the exchange of something for Him, an old man for a new.

Have we seen that new man? Have we really seen Christ and the tremendous difference that there is between Him and every other creation? Is that being brought home to us in an inward way, that we are altogether different naturally from Christ, that He is utterly different from ourselves? "Renewed in the spirit of your mind"; that we "should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4); that we should "serve in newness of the spirit" (Rom. 7:6). It is all newness and all different, all other. To see that difference is the way of recovering the vitality, freshness, and power of seeing with ever-growing vision what Christ is. He is the first and type of a new family. The Holy Spirit has come to generate after the order of Christ a new type. The life in the Spirit is the progressive conformity to the image of God's Son, and the consummation of that life is the revelation of the sons of God, a different order altogether.

Dear friends, if we could recognize it, the explanation of everything in this world is bound up with that. What is the explanation of the present world upheaval and travail? Well of course, this is only a development of things that have been going

on all the way through the centuries, but what is the explanation? There is no doubt that this world is plagued; it is plagued by war, it is plagued by tumult, it is plagued, plagued all the way through. And who has plagued it? God has plagued it. And why has God plagued it? Because it is the kingdom of Satan and as God continually plagued Egypt until Egypt disgorged His son, so God has plagued this great kingdom of Satan until the sons of God are secured. Then "the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption" (Rom. 8:21). An explanation of this world's trouble and travail is this, that there is a corporate sonship within this kingdom, and until this Pharaoh's overthrow is made good this world will be plagued. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain waiting for the manifestation, (the apocalypse, the revelation) of the sons of God." (Rom. 8:22,19). Yes, this is the explanation.

Well, how does that affect us? It brings us right back here. Our primary concern is not to get better conditions in this world, to get peace and a new order here on this earth. God knows we long for wars to cease and conditions to be changed, but that is not our primary concern. Our primary concern is this question of sonship, this question of getting out of the nations the people for His Name, getting out of this kingdom that new family, getting that Christ-order completed. That relates to ourselves. We have to see to it that we are bent upon this matter, that this Christ-order, this Christ-kind, this Christ-nature, this Christ-species into which we have been brought by regeneration by the Holy Spirit is brought to perfection in ourselves, that we are being conformed to the image of that Son, that we are growing up into Him in all things Who is the Head, even Christ, that we are making increase spiritually after that order. But it is a corporate thing. Our business is the completing of the Christ order in a corporate way in the Church which is His Body, and beyond that the bringing in from the nations of those who are eventually to make full that Body and be the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.

You see, dear friends, that the New Testament has one object in view, only one object, and that is the completion of this Body and its ultimate emancipation. It begins with evangelism, but evangelism is not a thing in itself. When the gifts are given by the ascended Lord - apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, they are all related to one thing, they are all centred in one thing. They are not things in themselves. "Unto the building up of the body of Christ". That is the issue of all and of each, but evangelism has been made something in itself, detached and unrelated. Those who are taken up with it very often have no interest beyond that. It is something in itself. Evangelize, evangelize, get souls

saved, that is all that matters! But it is related to a centre. There are those who are teachers and their whole interest is in teaching, and it becomes a thing in itself, teaching, teaching, teaching. The poor people are fed and taught, taught and fed, but it is something going round in a circle. Teaching is to the building up of the Body. The teacher, the evangelist, the prophet are all centred in one thing - the building up of the Body. That Body is God's end. The evangelist to bring in, the teacher to build up, instruct; everything is to one end, and that is the Christ corporately expressed and ultimately universally manifested in that Body. Let me say again how needful it is for us to get this in the way of a living revelation, otherwise these things become technical and ecclesiastical; you make them something in themselves and very earthly. But to see the full vision by revelation of what God is after does mean deliverance from little ends in themselves, little circles constantly going round earthly things, ecclesiastical orders, religious systems, mere doctrines and teachings; all these things in themselves. Oh, see God's one great end and it is enlargement, it is life!

Of course, here is the difficulty. If you have not had some real experience of what I am talking about, then I am saying to the blind, See! That is always the difficulty. If you know in a little way what I mean, if you have seen, though it be a little, something has come to you at some time with all the force and power of the opening of the inward eye and you have been able to see, and you say, I see now! You know what a power that seeing has become in your life, what a release has taken place with that, what a new prospect loomed up before you. There is tremendous strength in really seeing like that. Well, if you see, you know what I am talking about.

But what I am saying is this, that there is a full, mighty end that God has in view, a tremendous thing, an immense thing, and the way by which He is going to reach it is the continual opening of eyes. We shall come to a standstill, we shall just be stuck, if we have reached the end of revelation. There are many who have reached the end of all revelation. You understand that I am not talking about something extra to what is in the Scriptures, I am not going outside of the Word of God. I am saying this, that here is the Book and the Book can be comprehended and mastered and you may be, like Apollos, mighty in the Scriptures and know nothing whatever about the mighty vitality of the Holy Ghost. Paul came on the heels of Apollos of whom it was said that he was mighty in the Scriptures, and those to whom he had been ministering at Ephesus knew not that the Holy Spirit was. Aquila and Priscilla took him and expounded unto him the way more perfectly. You may be mighty in the Scriptures. There is

the Book, the letter, and we may be letter perfect, Book perfect, masters of what is written and yet there be no life about it, no energy about it, no power, no freshness. The one cannot dispense with the other. We must have the Scriptures, but oh, to have the Holy Spirit opening, revealing in a living way so that with the inner eye we are seeing more and more through those Scriptures the significance of Christ, the fulness of Christ ever breaking upon us. That makes Christianity a living, fresh, powerful thing. That is the way of revival. A think that is the revival we need - to see the Lord again and things will happen; to see the Lord in ever-growing fulness so far as our seeing is concerned, and things will happen when it is like that.

Now I have just presented to you the object and stated the realm of revelation. What it requires is for the Lord to reveal Christ to us, breaking in upon us, but there is no doubt about it that it is going to be a costly thing. There never has yet been true revelation without tremendous responsibility and cost. Those who have seen have been involved in a costly way. It cost Abraham a lot to see the God of glory; it cost Moses a lot to see the Lord; it cost Isaiah a lot to see the Lord; it cost Paul everything when he saw the Lord. But, having seen the Lord, who would exchange that revelation for a tradition, for something earthly, of time, in religious things? No, you cannot go back upon that. It is the most precious thing to have seen, and to see. It is life, and I take it that you and I desire more than anything else that our Christianity should be living. We do not want just to be brought up in something, having been told something, instructed in something in an outward way, so that that has become our religion. No, we want it every day to be something that works, something that is real; no matter what it means of finding us out, of making demands, we want it to be real, to be living. That is what the people of God need - living, real Christianity that is a constant challenge to them and through them to others, and the secret of such a Christianity is seeing the Lord and seeing more and yet more of the significance of Christ. It is along the line of living revelation that power comes. May the Lord explain to our hearts what this means and interpret His Word.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, March-April 1946, Vol 24-2

One Universal Spiritual Remedy

Romans 15:5; Colossians 2:8.

It would be a wonderful thing if in the realm of medicine one remedy could be found whereby every conceivable malady could be most certainly cured. What a tremendous amount of complication and confusion would at once be removed. It is almost too big a thought or prospect for us to take in; there is so much of life taken up with the endless systems of healing, and the countless number of remedies. Not only are there the varieties and multitudes of propositions and advocacies, but there are the strong and, sometimes, fierce rivalries in medicine and surgery; the opposing schools.

Someone years ago gave to spiritual ministry the. name of "the cure of souls". That "cure" far outreaches the matter of individual salvation. The Apostle Paul, in particular, had all his time taken up with the "cure" of believers, and the "cure" of the churches. The maladies of individuals and churches were many; from sins of a very low level, through jealousies, factions, personal interests etc., to false doctrine, and all the complexity of church technique.

But this servant of God had and propounded, one universal remedy, one panacea for all ills. You ask, "Is that possible?" Yes! In this realm of the spiritual borders in the Lord's people, whether personal or collective, as for the unsaved of every different constitution, temperament, inheritance, etc., there is

One Universal Remedy

That simplifies things very much. It sets aside a thousand questions and perplexities. The evil germs of suspicion, prejudice, fear, jealousy, and many other such like things will be killed by the radium-like power of this new Life. The dislocations between people will be quickly and effectively adjusted. The whole question of order and technique in the churches, in all its particulars, will spontaneously resolve and answer itself. The malady of spiritual inertia and lack of concern for the salvation and eternal good of others will yield to a new vitality and energy.

Yes, there is one all-inclusive cure; but to say this is of no more value than an

advertisement, unless it is believed and obeyed.

What then is this one all-embracing Remedy? It will not help a great deal just to give the answer in a simple sentence so we must illustrate or instance it. It is quite clear that every letter written by the Apostle Paul has some maladies as the occasion of it. That is to say there were things that were wrong in every place to which the letters were written, and that needed to be put right. The outstanding case is Corinth. The disorders and diseases there, both individual and collective, were many and great. While the Apostle referred to these specifically, and rebuked, reproved, exhorted, and warned concerning them, he knew quite well that they could never be cleared up as things in themselves. It was of no use to try to get a solution by discussion, debate, logic, personal persuasion, or threat. His one all-covering Remedy is announced, or prescribed very early in the first letter to them:-

"I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ... and him crucified."

In other words, Paul's finally settled position was that a passion for Jesus Christ in terms of His Cross - that is, in terms of love: the letting go of all personal interest, the yielding of all natural mindedness - will solve every problem and cure every malady. Paul believed that if he could get those believers to become really captivated by a concern for Christ as the objective of an ever increasing devotion and self-surrender, all the evils and hurtful things would fade out. If something more than the initial and basic personal advantages of salvation were to fill the heart, so many of the unhappy conditions in individual and corporate Christian life would disappear. That is to say, if the Lordship of Christ were to be given its place and His *fulness* were to be the governing goal, life would be ever rising in ascendancy above the low level and be enlarging beyond the small and petty measure which is characteristic of so many.

Oh, for the ability to show how the Lordship of Christ in a life, or in a church, and in all the churches, is the solution to *every* problem and difficulty! Will you ask the Lord to impress you firstly with this *fact*, and then to lead you into its reality. To this ministry, by His grace, and as helped by your prayers, we give ourselves until we - with all saints - "attain unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

The Peculiar Conditions of an End-Time

Reading: Luke 2:25-38; I Cor. 10:11; Heb. 8:13, 9:26.

We are being led at this time to take note of the fact that we are at an end-time, and that God does a peculiar work at such a time. Things become very strange and very difficult at an end-time; everything seems to be thrown into a state of disturbance, upheaval, intense pressure and conflict. The great conflicting faces in this universe register very terribly and intensely upon that which is of God and upon those who are of account to Him, so that there often arises the sense that this is an actual end, and a question as to what more is possible. Inwardly we feel that the way is becoming exceedingly hedged up: 'frustration' is the word which seems to prevail, and outwardly everything is in a state of serious and great question as to the future. Indeed, it becomes more persistently the experience of the true people of God that they could give up and abandon everything. The ways in which this works out are numerous, but the whole effect is to paralyse and put out of commission that which is of God and bring it to a complete standstill. It is this, then, that will govern our consideration at this time - that we are in an end-time and that in end-times the work of God takes a particular form and is of a peculiar nature. It obviously becomes supremely important and necessary for the Lord's people to know the time in which they live, what the portents are, and what it is that God would do at such a time.

I suggest to you that that constitutes a real reason for getting together in serious and solemn conference, for it is not something that we can take just as a part of a sequence of meditations. Our consideration of it may be supremely crucial and in a peculiar way related to a time in the history of this world, and of God's work in this world, which is of tremendous importance and will not be repeated.

Now, this matter of the end-time and God's work therein is brought very fully and clearly into view by Simeon and Anna. There is no doubt that they represent firstly an end-time - an end-time dispensationally and an end-time with regard to their own age, for they were both advanced in years. And then they also represent God's service at such a time. Simeon used the word of himself - "*Now lettest thou thy servant* (bondservant, the word is) *depart, Lord, according to thy*

word, in peace." "Thy servant." Anna was found continuing in the temple in fastings and supplications day and night, not leaving it, a prophetess thus occupied in the house of God; and if that is not a picture of service, what is?

FULNESS OF RIPE AGE CARRIED ON IN FRESHNESS OF NEW LIFE

I am, in the first place, going to take up the age factor. Let me say at once that, although I am going to talk about old age, my message is mainly to young people. If that sounds hardly kind and fair to others, let me put it in this way: age is not a matter of years at all. You may be young in years and yet be far beyond your years, or you may be old in years and far behind your years. This is a spiritual matter. This age factor, as represented by Simeon and Anna, corresponds to the word in Hebrews 13, "*He hath made the first old. But that which is becoming old and waxeth aged is nigh unto vanishing away*"; and again, to the words in I Cor. 10, "*upon whom the ends of the ages are come*." That makes us very old, does it not?

Well now, what have we as the picture before us? We have an aged man with a babe in his arms, at once bringing an end and a beginning together, an end handed on to a beginning, a beginning taking up all the fulness represented by the old. It is the old passing over into and giving place to the new. If we get the Divine idea, the spiritual thought, about this - an aged man with a babe in his arms - we at once see that from the Divine standpoint that is the Divine principle. Age is not diminution, contraction, declension, depreciation. That is not God's mind about old age. There is a passage in Isaiah which says, "*The child shall die a hundred years old*" (Isa. 65:20). There is a state, a condition, a realm in which a child shall die one hundred years old. It means there is a principle here - that there is a realm in which age has the child present, has the babe there in its arms. At one hundred years old the child has not gone, it is still the child. The Divine thought about old age is rather that of fulness, fulness unto the enrichment of what is yet to be, and which is about to come in; to provide a heritage; not to pass out and take everything with it and for that to be the end, but to have something very full and rich to be taken up and carried on and expressed in newness, freshness, youthfulness; all the values of a long history brought out in new ways. That is what is here.

You know the instances in the Bible of infancy linked with old age. How much is made of this spiritual principle in relation to Abraham and Isaac! When Abraham was old, Isaac was born. The fact is taken up to express this - that

when there is a great accumulation of history and spiritual knowledge, God will reproduce that, He will give it form again and yet again. "*In Isaac shall thy seed be called*" (Gen.21:12). Or again, Jacob and Benjamin, the child of his old age; and what a lot Benjamin represents spiritually. Then we have the case of Eli, who was very old, and the child Samuel. It is not only a beautiful picture, but it is a very significant one, that child along side of the aged Eli. God started there again, right in the presence of something that was in itself about to pass out, but taking up all its spiritual values to reproduce them and bring out all their intrinsic worth. Here again are the aged Simeon and Anna, - by certain computations we arrive at the conclusion that Anna was 106 years old at this point - these two with a babe. It is not an end with God; it is something very much more than that.

ALL FORMER SPIRITUAL VALUES NOW CENTERED IN CHRIST

So the inclusive thing represented by Simeon and Anna is fulness by fulfilment. Firstly, it was the completing of a phase, the gathering up of all past spiritual values, as represented in these two, into a new and wholly spiritual order, the order of Christ.

Simeon so clearly speaks of that transition mentioned in the first chapter of the letter to the Hebrews: "*God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son*." It is a transition from the fragmentary, the partial, the occasional, the diverse, to the complete, to the inclusiveness of the unified, and to the final. That is the transition here represented. The bringing in of the Babe, the Christ, holding Him in his arms, was in figure, simply the gathering up of all that had been of God in the past, and centering it in Christ, and seeing how He takes it up and is the fulfilment of it and transcends it.

See Simeon, then as to the past. Something was happening now with the coming in of this Babe, the coming in of the Christ. It is not without a certain significance that Matthew's Gospel has been put out of chronological order and put into the first place in our New Testament. In that Gospel, again and again Matthew uses this phrase, "*that the scriptures might be fulfilled*," or, "*that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Prophet*." It is characteristic of Matthew's Gospel. It pointed backward to all the Scriptures which were looking toward this Christ in Whom they were to find their fulfilment, their realisation, their finality and their transcendence. All the hopes, all the expectations all the promises, all the foreshadowings and all the forecastings, were gathered into the

hands of Simeon that day as he held that Babe. The Hope Of Israel was in his hands. What a long hope, what a chequered hope! Even through all their failure, when black and dark despair seemed sometimes to have settled down upon them and they cried that their way was hidden from the Lord and their judgment passed away from their God, still they cherished a hope. Through all their failure, through all their sufferings, they still held to the hope that there was something yet to be. Through all the judgments which were poured upon them from heaven for their sins, they still clung to the promises and believed that they would one day see the salvation of the Lord. Oh, here it is all in the hands of Simeon! All that past is here present in those arms. That Little One answers to it all. The Hope of Israel!

This expectation and hope has reached its consummation in these very two who with others were looking for the consolation of Israel, the redemption of Jerusalem. They were looking; and what a day it was of little prospect, of seeming hopelessness! and yet there were those who were still hoping, still believing, still clinging. And there that day stood Simeon, holding in his arms the fulfilment of all the hopes and expectations and promises - holding the complete embodiment of the full thought of God. Simeon held all that in his hands, and by his words and attitude and spirit you can see him projecting that into the future, holding it forth. "*This child is set for...*" - the whole future is going to be affected by Him. It was a tremendous moment.

ALL TYPES AND SYSTEMS TRANSCENDED BY CHRIST IN PERSON

Ah, but note, it carried with it a stripping of all framework of earthly systems. It was no longer that which encased Christ, it was Christ Himself. All the encasements of Christ were finished at that moment. What a moment it was! The encasing in types and figures, symbols and prophecies and the whole system of Judaism, that whole framework was shattered and stripped off that day, and the manifest reality of all that had been inherent and intrinsic in the past was in Simeon's hands, to be handed on to the future. It was a crisis, a turning of the dispensations. It was a passing from all that was merely of earthly systems in relation to Christ, to the Christ Himself: and that is no small thing, and that is the mark of the end-time.

See what we come to. Christ Himself emerges from the framework of things, from all the scaffolding of past ages, from all the figurative and typological and symbolical, and transcends the things by His own Person. There is all the

difference between Himself and His things. Right up to that time, God's people had been occupied with the things concerning the Christ: now they were to be occupied with the Christ Himself. It was a tremendous moment. This is what will be at an end-time. That is the point. An end-time is transition from a lot that has had to do with Christ to Christ Himself, transition from frameworks to the essential and the intrinsic, transition from all the works and the things related to Christ to that which is known of Him personally. All the other is going to be stripped off, and we are in the day when that stripping off has seriously commenced. The issue is going to be - may I put it this way? - how much we have actually in our hands of the very Christ Himself, how much we are occupied with the things concerning Him, the encasement of Christ.

This work of transition is going to be done, for this is an end-time movement. I see it here so clearly, the pre-figuring of the prophesying of that other end-time which we have in the book of the Revelation, when the man child is brought forth, and the ultimate things are in view. At such a time everything will be tested and challenged by the forces that will be let loose from hell. There started, with the bringing in of this first man child, the Lord Jesus, a loosing of Satanic and hellish forces which has gone on and on, right through this dispensation. Herod heard, and loosed his sword, occasioning a terrible massacre, in an endeavour to compass the death of this One; and from that time onward hell was out (and has continued to be out) not against a system but against a living person. So here we see the man child presented and the tremendous reactions that are immediately provoked.

Pass right on to Revelation 12, and there you see a corporate company called the man child. (It is corporate because the language is " *and they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb*.") This is the corporate counterpart of the individual, of the personal. When that corporate expression of the man child is presented in the book of the Revelation, what have you? - a most violent release of evil forces for the destruction of everything that speaks of Christ.

GOD'S END-TIME WORK - EVERYTHING ESSENTIALLY SPIRITUAL

Well now, what is the service of God at an end-time? As far as we have gone, surely we are able to see one or two things. The particular work of God at an end-time is, to begin with, the constituting of a new and spiritually inclusive dispensation, a new age of an essentially and wholly spiritual kind. In Heb. 12:27 we have, "*And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those*

things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain." That word 'removing' really means the transferring or the transposing on to another and different basis. The fact that that comes at the end of the letter to the Hebrews is significant, for that letter is just full of that earthly system of Judaism with all its forms, its ritual, its make-up and constitution. All that is earthly, even in relation to God, is going to be removed, and everything is going to be transferred to another basis - a spiritual, a heavenly basis; and when things begin to happen on the ground of an end-time, that is the character of what is taking place. The earthly is now going to be forced to give way to the heavenly , the temporal to the spiritual, the outward to the inward. Then it will be proved just how much we have that can be transferred, for there are many things that are not going to be transferred, "*Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*" (1 Cor. 15:50). That signifies and implies that there is a whole order of creation which is not going to constitute that eternal order; it is to pass away. Everything is going to be transferred to another basis, and this kind of thing intensifies at an end-time. Do you see that?

Let me put that more simply. What God will see to, by sheer force of conditions, is that anything that is only temporal will go and that which is spiritual alone will remain. There must therefore be intensifying processes to bring out the spiritual. Is not that where we are? I do not know what your experience is, but touching one and another here and there I find there is some real understanding of this. We never knew such spiritual conflict, pressure and difficulty as we are knowing now; things seem to be getting beyond measure. May this not be the explanation? The Lord seems to be concentrating upon bringing out spiritual values, making spiritual men and women, and if I am not mistaken (and I claim no gift of prophecy, in the foretelling sense), we are going to see, and are already seeing, the removal of so much, the external things, upon which Christians have been relying as though these things constituted their Christian life. We are going to be forced back to the place where the one question that faces us is, After all, what have I got of the Lord Himself? Not, What can I do, where can I go? but, What have I got? I believe that is a very present and appropriate question in many parts of the world just now, and it will be increasingly so as everything outward is brought to an end. Now is the test - What have I got in my hands?

GOD'S END-TIME WORK INCLUSIVE OF ALL FORMER VALUES

Yes, the constituting of a new and spiritual dispensation. But I also used the word inclusive - that is, the heritage of all the values that God has ever given.

This is, mark you, a dispensation principle. Spiritual history returns upon itself, it goes back to the last point of fulness. Perhaps you do not grasp what I mean by that. If there has come about a decline, whether in our own spiritual life or in the life of the Church, sooner or later we shall be forced back to the point where we left the full measure of God. Cannot you see that happening? We see it in various connections to-day. Take the matter of literature. There is an increasing demand for the old works. Publishers are finding a great demand for something of years ago, and it is coming into the market. The shelves have been full of cheap, superficial Christian stuff with gaudy wrappers and all that, and times have come when people are aware that this is not meeting the need, and the demand for something more is arising. The call is for some of the books which former generations had. That is happening. History is returning upon itself. There has been decline, loss, superficiality, frivolity, cheapness, in Christianity, and the Church is going to perish for want of solid food unless it is provided. Thus the cry is, `Let us get back to what there was before.' That is happening in many ways. It is a dispensation principle. If God has really given anything, that will never be lost. Time will vindicate it. Sooner or later we shall have to come back to it. We shall be thrown back for our very lives on what God has given. This is where the new takes up the old.

It is a sorry and a superficial day, and one which will not stand up to things, when you think you can dispense with experience. If young people suppose they can think lightly of those who have gone through the fires and grown grey-headed in the service of God, in learning to know the Lord, and that such can be set aside as back numbers, that is a sorry day for the future. With all that is needed of the new generation, do not let us think they can produce all the past in their own lifetime. God will throw them back upon what has gone before. Do not count the past servants of God as back numbers. They are very much up to date. Simeon was very much up to date when he brought all the wealth, fulness, richness of the past in his hands, and, so to speak, transferred it to the new, to the Babe, Who took it all up, and Who later confessed that He did take it all up. "*Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfill*" (Matt. 5:17). There are always, sooner or later, reactions from cheapness and superficiality, and that usually under duress and compulsion and a sense of being unable to go on without something fuller.

Infancy in the arms of age. Yes, and infancy depends upon those arms. I think I am not going too far in saying that here, in the holding of the infant Christ in these arms, there is this signification, that for the fulfilment of His life and

ministry the Christ depended very much upon the past, upon all that God had done before. The only Bible He had was the Old Testament. How He lived on it! When He said, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*," He was talking about the only Bible He had, the Word of God, the Old Testament. You see how the Old Testament is used in the New. It is but another aspect of this. One of the richest studies and most profitable lines of inquiry is to mark where the Old Testament is found in the New and why it is found there, the use made of it. Yes, it is a tremendous fact: that which is new depends upon that which has gone before.

THE ABIDING VALUE OF EVERY WORKING OF GOD

We come to a close for the present by noting this. We must live and we must work with our eye upon the after value of our lives. Thank God that can be. Life would be an enigma and intolerable if all that we have learned through suffering and discipline passed out with us and there was nothing more for it. No, it is not like that at all. There is an after value, and we ought to live, I say, and work, with our eye upon that heritage which we are to give beyond our own time. On the principle that God vindicates everything that He Himself has done and given, and makes it necessary, then He is making necessary for His new dispensation what He is doing in you and in me now. That new dispensation is going to be constituted on the basis of what He is doing in his saints now. That is a New Testament principle. What He is doing in the Church now is to be the good of the coming ages. What He is doing in us, it is not presumption to say, is going to be the very life of some beyond our time. So we should not think of this life as something to be got through, to be lived through to ourselves, something in itself. It is something that is to be found again to the glory of God in that which is to be - the passing on of that which has been of God, which can never die but is conserved by Him for ever, and will be necessary. I wonder if that is a new thought to you? What the Lord is doing in you by way of increasing the measure of Christ in you is going to be necessary long after you have gone. It is a principle, a law, that anything that God does is for ever and will be necessary.

We will leave it there for the time being and ask the Lord to exercise us quite strongly about this matter of the intrinsic value of the knowledge of Himself for the time that is to be, through this transition upon which we have now so seriously entered.

The Place and Work of the Levites

"And David made him houses in the city of David; and he prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched for it a tent. Then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them has the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him for ever." (1 Chron. 15:1-2).

"Thou therefore, my child, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." (2 Tim. 2:1-3).

I do not know whether the connection between those passages is apparent to you immediately, but there certainly is one. “None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites; for them has the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him for ever.” The two fragments in the 2nd chapter of the 2nd letter to Timothy, verses 1 and 3: “Be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus... Take your part in suffering hardship, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus”, bring us into the spiritual meaning of that word in Chronicles, that is, into the place of the work of Levites.

The Levites, as you know, are a very interesting people and their history is full of valuable things for the Lord’s people in all times. But there is one thing amongst those many things which is on my heart particularly just now, which I feel the Lord would have us consider. It is that responsibility represented by being in the position of Levites. You will remember that this word of David’s was the outcome of some history which was full of tragedy. One of the very many snares set by the adversary against the Lord’s testimony in the life of David had succeeded in the incident of the cart which David had inadvertently, forgetfully, unwatchfully constructed to bear the ark. It was a violation of the law of the Lord as here set down, with the result that one man, at least, had died a tragic death, and the whole testimony had been brought to a standstill for many years, for quite a considerable time. Then eventually, after the chastening, the discipline by which David had come to recollection, to remember the Lord’s word about the carrying of that ark of testimony, a new spiritual movement was made, and things were adjusted. Now, according to the word of the Lord which David had remembered, the ark was brought out and committed to the Levites,

and David says, not a cart, but: “None ought to bear the ark of God but the Levites, for them has God chosen...”. Theirs was a peculiar responsibility among the Lord’s people, and they had got to take their responsibility and it was not to be transferred to any other means. The responsibility belonged to them, and if they did not take their responsibility, then the testimony suffered loss, tragedy came in amongst the Lord’s people and everything went wrong. That is exactly what happened. When the Levites were not taking their responsibility then there was weakness, failure, breakdown, arrest, and the Lord was dishonoured. Now when the Levites are eventually brought into their place and take their responsibility things go on, and the ark of the testimony is brought to a position of advancement.

It is just that word, that thought about taking responsibility for the testimony that is weighing upon my own heart; that which is meant by our place as Levites. It is a place of spiritual strength, as over against a place of spiritual immaturity and weakness. You will remember that the Levites could not enter upon their ministry until they were 30 years of age, and then they had to give it up when they were 50. While the age of 20 was the age for going to war, the entering upon this Levitical ministry in fulness was not allowed until they were 30, and then they had to retire at 50. (Of course, that does not create a precedent for retiring from the work of the Lord when you are 50!). It is a spiritual thing that is represented, and all that it says is this, that for this carrying of the Lord’s testimony in spiritual responsibility, full strength is required. It was a taking out of life of the section of the best years, the years of full strength. That full strength was related particularly to Levitical ministry. Now literally it is not carried over, of course, to the work of the Lord now. That is, it does not apply in the sense that we may not come into a place of full responsibility until we reach a certain age and then we must give it up when we reach another age. But it does mean this, that there is required a spiritual strength to take this responsibility, and the Lord calls for the taking of this responsibility for His testimony, for His glory, and therefore He calls for us to be strong.

Now you see exactly that element in this passage in Timothy: “You therefore, my child, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus”; there is your spiritual strength. What is it for? Well, so far as Timothy was concerned, it was that he might take his part in suffering hardship. So far as others were concerned he was to commit to faithful men these treasures which had been committed to him. You see the whole background is Levitical. Timothy and the others, faithful men, who have come to a place where they can take responsibility; and the

necessity for that is spiritual strength. So, “be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus”.

Very simply this says to us that there is a tremendous need for people to take responsibility for the Lord’s testimony, and not always to regard certain others as being the people who are solely responsible; not to remain babes, to be carried and nursed, and to have all our own personal feelings considered, being always so sensitive and open to take childish offences, leaving the weight of things spiritually to others. Such can never take responsibility, such will never take their share in suffering hardship, such will never be good soldiers of Jesus Christ; with such the testimony will never be safe. Perhaps one of the greatest spiritual tragedies of our time is the fact that so few are in a sufficiently strong spiritual state to be able to shoulder the responsibility for the Lord’s testimony themselves. They belong to the great camp which follows. Yes, they are prepared to follow where others take the testimony, but they are followers; they are not taking responsibility.

I feel quite sure that it was because Israel had not recognised spiritually the meaning of the Levites in their midst that they failed so constantly through the wilderness. The Levites had been chosen to take the place of the priestly firstborn in every family. The firstborn in every family was the natural priest of the household, and took responsibility in the household in priestly matters. Now the Levites as a tribe were chosen to substitute the firstborn and became the tribe of the firstborn ones. If all Israel had recognised that, and abode by the spiritual truth, that in those Levites was their responsibility, that what the Levites were doing was only as them representatively, and that the responsibility resting upon the Levites was their responsibility, and that they were vitally linked with that testimony being borne by the Levites, there would not have been that detachment which meant so much weakness and found the general company constantly drawing back, wavering in uncertainty, unsettlement, in a place where they were as people who had never seriously taken responsibility for the Lord’s testimony. They were in a detached state of mind; the Levites carrying the ark were one thing, and all they had to do was to follow. And so they followed very often murmuring and complaining, and they were not taking the responsibility that was resting upon their representatives.

I feel that today we have something very much like that. A large number of those who belong to the Lord are just in the camp, in the throng of the Lord’s people, and leaving the main responsibility with others. They are not regarding it as their

first concern. They are ready to follow, but they are not ready to take responsibility. They like to see things going on, but for themselves they do not care to be responsible for things going on. Now the Lord would say to us, ‘Take your share, take your part in the sufferings as a good soldier, be strengthened. Do not be as those Corinthians, always babes, carried about with every wind; not as those Hebrews who, when they ought to be teachers, still needed that someone should teach them the first principles. Take responsibility spiritually, let the testimony of the Lord Jesus be your personal business. Take the attitude — in a right way — that if you fail the whole thing might fail.’ I think we should be quite justified in taking an attitude like that, that this thing, after all, does very largely depend upon us individually, that this is our business, our responsibility; that we are not just one of a crowd, but a responsible member. Levites are not a separate class of people from all others; they are those who have spiritually taken responsibility. That is the only difference between Levites and the rest of the people. The Lord has found them to be His responsible people. Be strengthened unto taking your share in the hardship, come up to that state of spiritual strength, reaching out to the Lord, in order to take responsibility. I do believe that if we recognised that we were called to the responsibility, and, at the same time, were so deeply conscious of our own weakness, for the Lord’s sake, for the sake of His testimony, if we reached out to Him, He would give us more strength. So often we are not reaching out for the glory of the Lord and the maintenance of His full testimony. The way to get strengthened is to take on more than you can carry.

Perhaps you are working the other way. You say, When I am stronger I shall be able to take responsibility; when the Lord gives me more strength then I shall be more serviceable to Him. I will ask you if the Lord has ever done that with you. What is your experience? Has the Lord come to you and started by giving you, in the first place, a great deal of strength and enablement in order that you may be able to take the responsibility, or has He come to you and called you to take the responsibility? Your experience differs from mine very much if it is not the second way. I have found all along that the Lord makes demands and calls for an exercise of faith, and then meets the demand. We must not wait until we are such wonderful people before we do anything for the Lord and begin to take responsibility. We must recognise that the Lord says: Take your share, and then, recognising your responsibility, you may take your strength. Strength comes not along the line merely of consciously needing strength, but along the line of recognising that for which we need the strength. It is the object of the strength that brings the strength. We must have a motive for it. We say, ‘Now Lord, here

is this interest of Yours. I am unequal to it, but because it is Your interest I must be strengthened unto it, and I come for strength for Your interest, not just because I want to be stronger.' That is the ground upon which the Lord works.

The Levites ought to bear the ark. It is their responsibility, and none but the Levites ought to bear it. It is the responsibility of those who have come to a place of recognising how tremendously the Lord's interests are bound up with their life. That is priestly ministry. You see, the tabernacle is the place of the crowned King. The King Eternal, Invisible is in the tabernacle in the midst. All that relates to His glory, His honour, His majesty, as invisibly dwelling among His people is put into the hands of the Levities. They are as it were the bodyguard here on earth of the King invisible. They have to keep things for Him, watch His interests, maintain His testimony in strength, guard against the encroachment of those things which would pollute. And that is just where we are. The Lord is in the midst of us, the Lord is with His people, but things have got to be maintained in accordance with the Lord's presence, and some have to take responsibility for that. It is not just to be a latent and passive fact, things have got to be kept in accordance with the presence of such a One as the Lord. He is holy, then the work of holiness is committed to the Levites. He is in power and majesty, then the power and the majesty of the Lord is the responsibility of the Levites. It is responsibility for what is related to the Lord as present, the testimony of the Lord, and that is our business. We have to be faithful: "...the same commit to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." It all speaks of a position, a standard, a life that is not just the Bible; not just the scholar. We shall always be that in a sense to the end but, "able to teach others also", taking responsibility for the testimony.

The Levites were divided, as you know, into three sections. They had three departments of responsibility. One section, the firstborn, had the vessels of the sanctuary, all the holy vessels; another section had all the curtains and the tapestries; and the third had the bars, the heavier work, or the heavier side of things. We may have our different aspects of work. There are those Levites whose ministry is, shall I say, more essentially spiritual; it may belong to the vessels of the sanctuary. There are others whose work is in another direction. Mine it may be to mainly minister in the Word of the Lord, what a lot of people would call 'the spiritual ministry', (I repudiate that suggestion that spiritual ministry is bound up with people who preach — that is not spiritual ministry only.) There may be others who minister in other spheres such as business life or household work. The Levites were divided into sections of different kinds of

work. Some had the rougher work, the heavy bars and boards of the tabernacle, more physically strenuous than the carrying of the pots and the pans and the golden vessels and implements; but it was all Levitical work, they were all one people, one tribe. Responsibility rested upon all equally, for all these parts made one ministry. And so your sphere, your work and mine may differ, but it is one ministry, one calling, one responsibility, one testimony. This emphasis is upon taking it, assuming it, regarding ourselves as being responsible people in the testimony of the Lord.

I am sure the Lord's heart must long for that. I am sure that often He has had, in looking at me, to say, Oh, I wish I could trust him more! I wish he were more reliable, more responsible! And I know that as I have looked at many of the Lord's people I have said, I wish that they did not need so much looking after; if only they would begin to stand on their own feet, and take responsibility, so that we need not worry about them any more because we know that they can be trusted! They need urging and encouraging; and all the time following up and putting right, because they have taken offence, and so on. If only they would take the responsibility and go right on in these things and not need to be looked after. How much more progress the testimony would make!

Now may the Lord give us the grace to take our share in the sufferings as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, to be strengthened with the grace that is in Christ Jesus, to bear the testimony of the Lord.

Published in "The Golden Candlestick" magazine, Vol 132

A Positive and Purposeful God

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Genesis 1:1-3).

"I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was waste and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved to and fro. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful field was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the Lord, and before his fierce anger. For thus saith the Lord, The whole land shall be a desolation; yet will I not make a full end" (Jeremiah 4:23-27).

'In the beginning, God...' And everyone will say, That is right; that is the place that He ought to occupy. And so, with these words, so familiar to us, the whole Bible is introduced. From this keynote, the whole Bible runs, and becomes a harmony - God. Here, God, the subject of the whole Bible, is introduced. 'In the beginning, God...' And when God is in His place, which is first and primary, there is always a new beginning. This is a point of departure, and a point which marks a new prospect. It is always like that when the Lord has His place.

Characteristics of God

I want to dwell for a few minutes upon the kind of God that is introduced with these words. These early verses of the Bible contain in principle the great truths as to what God is like; the kind of God that He is. We open this Book, and are at once confronted with a state that is wholly negative. Everything about that condition is negative: there was *not* this, and there was *not* that; that is the mark of it. And God, introduced against the background of a negative condition, is immediately shown to be a God who is positive; a God who is not negative, and a God who cannot bear anything that is negative. He is the great 'Yea' God, the Almighty Yes, and whenever God comes to His place, there will be a change from a negative to a positive character, some meaningfulness. With God all that is negative will just begin to go out.

We shall, in fact, find that, whatever His activities may be - and His activities are many indeed, and sometimes they seem to be working in a negative way - the truth is, that, whatever He is doing, He is doing it with a positive object and a positive mind; His end is not going to be negative. "I will not make a full end", we have just read in Jeremiah. However it may appear that things are being brought to an end, He will not make a full end. It is all with a positive purpose in view. The very first thing about this God, who is the subject of this whole mighty Book, is that He is a positive God, who is set against any negative condition. Take that as a great truth in your relationship with the Lord, in your apprehension of the Lord. These are the foundations of everything.

Purpose

The next thing is: *"And God created..."* Put that in another way: 'God got to work'. God is a God of purpose, and not passive, inactive. He is a God actuated by positive purpose. We know from the rest of the story how true that is. How much there is in the Bible that just comes back to this truth. God is not an inactive God, a stand-off God, just a spectator, somewhere amidst the shadows. He is right on the scene; He is right in things. As Paul says, He is '*working* in all things' (1 Cor. 12:6). He is not a purposeless God, and He cannot endure a state of things that has no purpose. He cannot look upon this 'without form, and empty'. God is not going to tolerate that; He is introduced to us as One who will not bear any kind of purposeless state, and who will do all in His power to turn things to positive purpose. He is the God of purpose; He is not a passive God.

Order

"Without form". He comes in as set against anything that is formless, or without order. He is a God of order. It is a beautiful story of an order being introduced, evolved, where there was no order. Disorder is always weakness, disorder is always loss. A disorderly person wastes much time and energy, and throws away a great deal of vital value. Disorderliness in our person; disorderliness in our home, or in any sphere; disorderliness in the Church - it all means weakness and loss. God is a God of order. So, when the Scripture says that the earth was "without form", God is introduced as One who is not going to allow that to continue. His activity is to bring about an order - not merely for its own sake, not because He is fastidious or pernickety, but because, as we all know, economy is always bound up with being orderly, being systematic. And that is the kind of God He is, who does not want to see all the loss that is associated with a lack of

heavenly order.

Fulness

"Without form, *and void*". The Hebrew word would be better translated by the English word 'empty' - 'without form and empty' or 'desolate', 'barren'. God is not a God like that. If there is one thing that the Bible says about the Lord, all the way through, it is that He is a God who believes in fulness; His thoughts are full thoughts; His ends are full ends. The great end that He has in view is when "the earth shall be *filled* with" - shall be full of - "the knowledge of the glory of the Lord" (Hab. 2:14). He is working toward that. He cannot bear to have a condition that is not full; He just cannot. He does not like people to be empty; He does not even like us to be partially full: He wants us to know His fulness - to 'receive of His fulness, grace upon grace' (John 1:16). God cannot bear vacuums, for a vacuum is always a dangerous thing. He acts against that.

Light

"And God said, Let there be light". God cannot bear a state of darkness. He is the God of light, the God of illumination; and His desire is that there shall be light everywhere, fulness of light. That is the kind of God that is introduced with this word, "In the beginning God..."

God's Second Movements: 'I Will Plant Again'

There are those that believe that the state here described was the result of judgment upon a former creation. Whether that is so or not, the rest of the Bible does show, again and again, that God had to act in relation to a state of things that had missed the purpose of its existence, to break it down, destroy it, throw it into disruption and desolation. When a thing which He raised up for a purpose, had lost that purpose, He did that again and again. But whenever He did it, He moved again. The Bible is just full of the second movements of God, in lives, in a people, in places. Think of some of the double movements of God that the Bible contains. How thankful Jonah was that the Lord did not leave him in the depths of the sea in his misery! The word is: "And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time..." Thank God for that second time! How glad Peter would be that the Lord came a second time into his life, after the chaos, after the blinding darkness of his failure. The Lord came again to Peter. The Bible is full of such examples. "I will not make a full end". In other words, 'I will come back

again, whatever I have to do.'

Sometimes the Lord does seem to be on that line of pulling down. I read recently in that shortest chapter in Jeremiah, chapter 45, the tremendous statement of the Lord through Jeremiah to Baruch. He says: "That which I have planted I will pluck up... Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not" (Jer. 45:4,5). But we know that, while the Lord pulled up, rooted up that people from the land because they failed to fulfil their Divine purpose, He planted them again. Through the prophet, He says: 'I will plant again; I will plant again' (cf. Jer. 32:41, etc.). And He did. Sometimes there does seem to be the pulling up or pulling down business going on; the destroying, the bringing about of a state of chaos and desolation. If it seems like that, may it not be only another aspect of the Lord's positive line of action? If the Bible says anything at all, it says that even His judgments, in time, are intended to be to His glory, and not to final desolation.

We could take many illustrations or instances in the Bible of the working of this principle, as showing what kind of God He is. There was the chaos and desolation, the barrenness and unfruitfulness and darkness of Israel in Egypt; a condition in the nation, in the people, very similar to what we have here at the beginning of Genesis. It might well be said of Israel in Egypt during those four hundred years: 'Without form and void... and darkness'. The Lord moved into that formlessness, emptiness, purposelessness; and in the wilderness, what a beautiful order He established. From a rabble He created a nation; from a purposeless people, He brought out a people with a wonderful prospect, from the chaos in which they were living, He produced that marvellous system of worship in the Tabernacle. How ordered it all is, to the last detail! He is the God of order. Israel in Babylon was in a similar condition - "without form and void... and darkness". The Lord moves against that. What about the disciples after the Cross? We could say: "without form and void... and darkness over the face of the deep" - awful chaos and desolation. But see the Creator at work after His resurrection, recovering! We know the end of that story.

The Spiritual Counterpart in the New Creation

What I want to say alongside of this is the great thing, of course. All this is true as to what kind of God this is that is introduced with the Bible. The great thing is what Paul says about it, that 'all things were created for... unto... and by Jesus Christ.' What does that mean? It means that all this, of which we have spoken so

imperfectly, becomes spiritually true in the Lord Jesus. As it is true in creation, in nature, at the beginning, in the new creation in Christ Jesus it becomes spiritually true for every member of that new creation, every one truly born anew.

Purpose

We know how every true child of God, who comes into this relationship with the Lord Jesus, immediately assumes a new sense of positiveness in life. Before that, it is all so negative, is it not? Even the positives of this world - things in which the world glories or finds its pleasure - are all negative, and everybody knows they are. They must have, and have, and have, in order to try to overcome this negative element that is in everything. In Christ that negative gives way to a positive. Most of us can testify that union with the Lord Jesus has given to life a positiveness and a purposefulness. That comes in at once. When anyone is saved, born again, you see them assuming a sense of purpose in life; a new meaning to things has been introduced. "Called according to His purpose" - a sense of mighty Divine purpose comes in with Christ, it is found in Him.

Order

Then the life begins to take on a new order. All that uncoordinated state, where everything was as it were disintegrated and unrelated, begins to give place to a co-ordinating purpose; the life becomes united, and united by something quite positive. It is a new order that is brought into life in Christ, a heavenly order, a Divine order.

Fulness

The same is true of this matter of fulness: how empty after all life is until we find the Lord Jesus! I can never understand really the phrase: 'an aching void'! What is an aching void? A void is a void, and it is void of even an ache! But it is an expression; we know what it means - an emptiness, an ache for something to fill life. That is answered, is it not, in the Lord Jesus. We begin to know something of that when we begin the true Christian life; we know we are on the way to something rich and full. And it goes on and on; there is no end to this fulness. John said: 'Of His fulness have we all received' - *of* it! not 'it'; we have not received His entire fulness; but *of* His fulness have all we received. And the end is 'unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' (Eph. 4:13) - 'the

fulness of Him that filleth all in all' (Eph. 1:23) - the fulness of God. That is what we are introduced into. God is that kind of God, but He is now made all that to us in Christ. There should be no vacuum in the Christian life, no emptiness.

Light

And again, is it not true that in Christ there is the true illumination, the true light? He is the light. Paul, as we know well, linked this first chapter of Genesis, these very first phrases, with his own spiritual experience, and said: "It is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). The new creation is a new illumination; the light begins to shine.

Now that we have it - imperfectly, it is true; a little, and more, and more - the measure of light, the measure of understanding of Divine things, will entirely depend upon two considerations.

On the one side, it will depend on how prepared we are to subject *our* wisdom to the wisdom of God. You know, our heads are usually the hindrance to spiritual illumination. We are wanting to get it all through our heads, through our reason to understand with our natural minds; we are struggling and struggling, and we don't get very far; and we have to say: I can't understand! Well, we never shall that way. Just as the will has to be subjected to the will of God, so the mind has to be subjected to the mind of God. We come up against something that is God's revealed mind, and it does not accord with our minds, and our minds do not accord with it; we therefore put our minds in the way, and say: But... but... but... There light is arrested; there understanding is arrested. 'Your thoughts are not My thoughts', saith the Lord. 'As high as the heaven is above the earth, so are My thoughts above your thoughts' (Is. 55:8,9). So you have got to surrender your own mental activities to the Lord, and perhaps be crucified in that tremendous reasoning faculty that you have, in humble acceptance of what God says. The light will break then.

That is one side. The other side is this. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of illumination, of revelation, and we must have the Spirit for spiritual understanding. 'The Spirit of God brooded over the face of the waters'. He it was who was the agent in transforming this scene, and bringing in this light, which made all the difference. The Spirit of God does this. It is a simple word perhaps for beginners in the Christian life. It is a wonderful thing how, if we surrender,

on the one side, mind, as well as heart and will, to the Lord, the Lord can get on with His new creation so much more quickly than if we are all the time arguing, or reserving, or holding back, or contradicting. When the Holy Spirit really gets His place in us, how quick the change is; how wonderful the transformation.

But my point is this. All this that comes in by way of illustration (I am not saying it is only illustration and parable, history or not history - that does not really matter for the moment) - all this is God's way of leading us on to His Son. He is saying: What is true in the natural order of creation, under the hand of God, has its superior counterpart in the spiritual, heavenly, new creation in Christ. And this is what we find, or should find, in Christ. This kind of thing: God working against what is negative, to bring about the positive; against what is empty, to bring about the full; against what is disorderly, to bring in the order; against what is dark, to bring in the light. That is the nature of the Christian life; that is what is made true in Christ, in the new creation.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jul-Aug 1961, Vol 39-4

The Positive Ground of the Church

There is one thing that is giving me a good deal of anxiety and apprehension. In this time when a twofold movement is taking place on a wide scale: that is, on the one hand the great movement towards union (not unity), as in the World Council of Churches, on the policy of the combine and monopoly, with all the necessary compromises and sacrifice of distinctiveness of message; and on the other hand the unrest, dissatisfaction, and loosening of ties with the established system of churches and institutions, resulting in many leaving their old associations and either meeting in groups or drifting without anchorage in their disappointment - my disturbing fear is that there will be a movement, or some movements, towards the formation of another undenominational or interdenominational denomination, this coming about also by policy, expediency or seeming necessity. Such a movement would only be another tragedy and incipient sectarian calamity, which history would show had not been of God but of man, although with the best of motives. May the Lord save us from this so serious mistake! It would be a starting at the wrong end; a trying to form something instead of an organic growth from a living illumination, a revolutionary encounter with an unveiling of the true nature of the Church. For this latter God would have to lay an apprehending hand on a man or body of men, and by a devastating showing of the true, universal, and spiritual significance of Christ, as effectively emancipating them from all the historic accretions of Christianity as the Apostle Paul was emancipated from historic Judaism. The growth of this organism would be as other emancipated men sprang from the essential root, and not just adhered or sponsored. The power of such an organism would be the all-conquering life of resurrection: "the power that worketh in us." There is nothing artificial, imitation or manufactured about this, and it requires no propaganda. The Holy Spirit is the great Propagandist of what is of heaven.

The above is written out of a very deep concern; a longing and a fear. It should be remembered that when God made His "new thing", His "new cruse" as the foundation of this dispensation of the Spirit and the Church, He did so with a nucleus of men who had been broken by the Cross and reunited by the Resurrection. These two things were wrought deeply into their very constitution and were the ground upon which the Holy Spirit built in every place. This is the

only positive ground for the Church and churches. Anything other will be negative. They were men who had seen! It may be that if the Lord is to have such a spiritual impact as was then made on the world, it will be necessary to sift down to that basis the conglomeration of the man-made and start - or go on - with the small but intrinsic seed plot.

This may be like a "voice crying in the wilderness", but perhaps some wind of God would carry it as a guide or warning where it is needed... as things are, it is becoming more and more evident that God must "do a new thing" if His full end is to be reached. May He raise up His Prophets to "show the House to the house of Israel", that they may be ashamed, and may some Josiah, personal or corporate, arise to lead to such a taste of the real thing as to result in the leaving of all that is false. We can only resort to prayer!

November 1966

The Potter's House

"The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and behold, he wrought his work on the wheels. And when the vessel that he made of the clay was marred in the hand of the potter, he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it" (Jeremiah 18:1-4).

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

As we read this so well-known illustration of God's workmanship seen in the house of the potter, to which the prophet was told to go, there are three possible effects that it can have upon us, depending upon which word we underline, where we stop, where we put the emphasis. There are three words which sum up this paragraph, and which of those words we choose and resolve into the message will decide a very great thing for us. It may affect our whole life.

Three Possibilities

There is the word 'marred'. "The vessel that he made... was *marred* in the hand of the potter". If we make that the word, then something of a spirit of hopelessness will come over us. We shall begin to find an inward sinking; we shall begin to say, 'Yes, I made a mess of things, I spoiled it all. There is not much hope for memy life is marred, spoiled.' If you take that word and make it the message, it will have one effect upon your life. Thank God, that is not the message; but there may be someone reading who has got there. Looking back on your life, you do so with very little gratification or pleasure; rather with regret, perhaps remorse. Maybe you fall into this mood, if you think of yourself as the clay. You feel there has been a breakdown; you have perhaps made a mess of things, or you have not fulfilled all the promise, all the possibilities. And that sense of failure, of lost opportunity, and much more in that direction, creates a shadow over your life. It makes you feel, 'Well, that is that. Now it is up to me to try and get through in some way and finish up as decently as I can.' That is a despairing outlook on life, and that will most surely be the result of putting your circle round this word, variously translated 'marred' or 'spoiled'.

There is another word here: "he made it again *another* vessel". If we put our line under that word and make it the message, that, too, will open the door to gloomy thoughts and considerations. We shall at once begin to say, 'Well, God has not been able to fulfill His original intentions where I am concerned. I have to be content with being His second-best; something other, something different, something that He really did not mean me to be. He is making the most and the best of a bad job. He is just working with me on an alternative line. Sowell, that reduces me to being something of a misfit, not what I was intended to be.' You see the possibilities of putting your circle round that word 'another' vessel.

But then there is another phrase here: "as seemed *good* to the potter to make it." That introduces an altogether new possibility. If, after all, it is possible for Him to say, 'It is good, My work is good'; to find His own pleasure and His own satisfaction in it, that will certainly be far better and greater and higher than my greatest satisfaction could possibly be. His standard is so much higher than my best. If He can say, 'It is good', that surely opens up a new outlook and prospect, does it not? That introduces the triumph of His grace, in spite of everything. In spite of what we are and of all our failure and of all His difficulty with us, His grace triumphs. His wisdom triumphs over all the problems in usyes, over all the setback that He may have encountered in us; His love overcomes all the difficulties that He has with us. If the end is that it is good in His sight"as seemed good"I say, that brings into view an altogether new situation.

These are the three possibilities that arise out of these words. We choose the third. That is the message that I want to bring to you.

A Story of Vessels Re-made

(1) The Earth

Our method will be to take the principle that lies at the heart of this, lift it for a moment out of its immediate context and setting, and see it in its larger relationship and application. The Bible opens with a 'potter's house'. It is a very big Potter's house, very much bigger than Jeremiah's. In it we find at first a shapeless, distorted, chaotic mass. It must present to view the aspect of utter hopelessness and impossibility: What can you do with that? It is simply said: "The earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep" (Gen. 1:2). It is chaos. But the very next thing we see is the great Potter getting to work on the shapeless, distorted mass of clay. "He made it again", and when

He stood back from the wheel of creation, of making again, He was able to look upon all things and say that "it was very good" (v. 31). That was God's verdict: 'It is very good.' The principle is of very large application, is it not?

(2) Adam and Abel

But then it is not long before we come to another breakdown, and once more the vessel is marred. We know the story of Adam's sin, by which he drew the whole creation into judgment, again under a curse. He himself came there: he was marred, spoiled; the creation came there. To the man God said: 'Because you have done this, the earth is cursed for your sake. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth, and you shall eat bread by the sweat of your brow' (3:17,18). Well, we know something about that! To the woman He said other things; there would be suffering associated with her life and her function (v. 16). The clay is marred in the hands of the Potter, spoiled.

But does He throw it aside? Does He give it up? Does He say, 'It is hopeless, it is impossibleI can do nothing with this', and so discard the whole thing? That is not the God of the Bible. He has got poor stuff, poor clay, it is true; it is proved to be very poor stuff; but with that stuff He sets to work again, and He 'makes again another'. And out of that poor stuff we see a man emerging, named Abel: a man who stands in the Bible with much honour, whose name has come right down through the ages as of one who found the approval of God. The New Testament puts the clear approval of God upon Abel. No greater approval could be given than that the Lord Jesus should call him 'righteous': "Abel the righteous" (Matt. 23:35).

(3) Abraham

And then Abraham. I am always so glad that with these great men God never, never hides what poor stuff they were in themselves. He lets us see their flawsthe flaws in the clay. He lets us see their weaknesses; He lets us see them break down; He lets us see that, but for that mighty hand of His, they would make shipwreck like all the rest. They in themselves are no better stuff than others. But they are in His handsthese are men in His hands. And out of that clay, that same clay, the same clay that we are made of, there emerges this man Abraham. How much there is in the Bible that is of this character'It is very good, very good'; 'as seemed good unto the potter'.

(4) Jacob

And what shall we say about Jacob? No one needs to be told that Jacob was poor clay. We know. That name has become the synonym for human frailty, weakness, and worse. Yes, he belongs to that clay. But he is in the hands of the Potter; and when the Potter has done His work, He forever afterwards is proud to say: "I am the God of Jacob"the God of *Jacob!*

(5) Elijah

Think of Elijah, and then hear what the apostle James has to say: "Elijah was a man of like passions with us" (James 5:17). Yes, the same stuff, the same clay; we know that even in his life there was breakdown. He showed his weakness under the strain, under the tension. But he stands in great honour with God. "He made it again". Out of that breakdown in Adam, out of that poor stuff that Adam's broken-down race represents, He has taken this one and that, and 'made it as it seemed good to the potter to make it'.

And so we might go through the whole of the Old Testament. The principle, you see, is at work everywhere. We might go on to look at the men who failed and whoto use the translation of the Revised Standard Version, which I rather likewere 're-worked'. In that version it says: 'He reworked it'. "We are his workmanship", we have read in Ephesians. It would be difficult to know where to begin and where to finish with the men who broke down and whom He re-worked.

(6) David

But let us take one more from the Old Testament, who is quite an outstanding illustration and examplenone other than David himself. We know the fifty-first Psalm. That Psalm is a Psalm of Davidthe cry of a heart overwhelmed with the consciousness of its failure, its breakdown, its sin. A great sob is rising out of that Psalm; and we know, from the history that lay behind it, that there was good cause for David to weep before God, confessing his sins, crying: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (v. 10). We know the tragedy of David's life, the breakdown. Oh, this clay was indeed marred in the hands of the Potter. He failed, he broke down; from one standpoint he became a tragedy. You are amazed that the man was capable of such actionsuntil you know your own heart.

But look again. Did God discard, did God cast away? God did not give him up. He made the vessel again, so that the David that comes down to us today is not the David of the failure, but another one. He is the David of honour, the greatest of Israel's kings, "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Sam. 23:1), the David of our beloved Psalmswhat should we do without the Psalms of David? And listen: "I have found David... a man after my own heart" (Acts 13:22)! Is it possible to say anything more, anything greater than that?

(7) Peter

If we pass out of the Old Testament into the New, at once there leap onto the stage men who embody this great principle. What about Peter? Did Peter break down? Was Peter poor stuff? In one breath"If I must die with thee, I will not deny thee" (Mark 14:31), and in the next breath 'I tell you I know not the man' (v. 71)denying his Lord with oaths. We do not like talking about men in this way, bringing up their faults, but we have to see that dark side in order to see the marvel of Divine grace. Here is Peter: did that clay disclose flaws, seeming unworkableness, resistance? Hear him speaking to his Lord, to his Master: "This shall never be unto thee" (Matt. 16:22)! "Not so, Lord..." (Acts 10:14). There is something there in the clay.

But what a Peter we have today, have we not? That is not the Peter we havethe old story of the clay that broke down. Remember that! The Peter we have now is a very different Peter. Wonderful help and inspiration come from his two letters in the New Testament; we love to read them. We love to see him standing up on the day of Pentecost; we love to see him later, dragged before the rulers, standing on both his feet and challenging them with all courage and boldness. What a changed picture from that fireside denial in the courtyard, when his Lord was standing trial for His life! What a change! Yes: 'He re-worked it'; 'He made it again, as it seemed good to the Potter.' And we can only say, 'It was good, and it is good.'

(8) John Mark

Take one other example from the New Testamenta young man by the name of John Mark. He lived in Jerusalem, evidently in a godly home, in the very place where the Lord Himself and His disciples were wont to gather and to have their fellowship. They had no doubt wonderful times in that home; and John Mark lived there. The day came when Barnabas and Paul took this young man with

them on their great missionary journey (Acts 13:5b). From town to town and city to city John Mark saw the wonderful things that God was doing, beheld the wondrous works of the Lord. But it was strenuous going, it was costly; and, when he reached a certain point on the journey, he said, 'I am not going any further. I can stand no more of this, I am going home.' The narrative tells us that he left them and went back to Jerusalem (v. 13b). The clay has given out, it has broken down; the stamina been found wanting.

And that is not all. When he reflected upon it, I wonder what his thoughts were. I am quite sure that they were very gloomy reflections. 'Oh, I have made a mess of things!' And then, on a later occasion: 'To think that I have been the cause of separation between these two great menBarnabas and Saul. I have been the occasion of their parting asunder and the end of their united missionary activity' (Acts 15:37-40). For that is indeed what happened over him.

Those are things which might well lead to gloomy reflections and a hopeless outlook. The clay seems to have been marred and spoiled. But that is not the end of the story. You know how the story finishes. Even Paul says: 'Bring Mark; for he is profitable to me' (2 Tim. 4:11b). There are some lovely things said about this young man in the end. He is recovered, restored, recommissioned, in full-time service; and it is he who has given us the beautiful book which goes by the name of the Gospel by Mark. And many scholars today believe that Matthew and Luke very largely built their Gospels upon Mark's, that Mark was the source of the others. So, there is a story! 'He made it again.'

The Triumphs of Grace

These are men who broke down in the process of being worked, but grace triumphed. The Potter did not discard the poor clay. So much depends upon how we interpret this Potter, does it not? Let us look at Him: who is He? This Potter is not a man. How differently men would deal with these people! This is God. He has the clayyes, the poor stuff: and, as He is seeking to work it, He comes suddenly upon something in it that resists, that does not yield. For a moment He pauses, and says, Oh, what is this? What does He do? It is not the way of this Potter to say: We can go no further, we must give it up; all our intentions are impossible of realisation; we will just throw it aside and look for something better. Not this Potter! That is not the God of the Bible! Watch Him. He may be sorry that He has met that something, whatever it may be; He may for a moment have to pause; but then you see light come into His face, you see the smile of the

triumph of His grace and of His wisdom, as He says: We will not be defeated; we will have something for our pleasure and satisfaction, whatever we find. That is the God of the Bible.

Behind all this there is one thought to which I want to come as quickly as I can. *God is a God of purpose.* And God does not undertake anything that He knows He can never achieve. When He starts something, He can perfect that thing: He has the resource, He has the wisdom, He has the patience, He has the grace, He has the love, He has the power. He can do it. He is the *God of hope*: that means the God who never despairs. It is something for our comfort.

Vessels Unretrieved

But we must always be perfectly honest and perfectly faithful. While all this is true in the Bible along the line that we have pursued, there is in it another linethe line of those who were spoiled and never re-made. It is a dark sideone hardly likes to look at it; but we must do so, in order to reach the point we have in mind. There were some spoiled and never re-worked. You can call them to mind at once. There is Abel's brother, Cain; there is Jacob's brother, Esau; there is Saul, the first king of Israel. In the New Testament there is Judas. Yes, these are people who have gone out into the dark; there is nothing about them that is to God's pleasure.

But one mentions that for a purpose. To see the reason for this means two things. Firstly, it will explain their opposites; that is, it will tell us why these others did come out to the glory and praise of God. And, secondly, it will bring us to the door of hope and promise.

(1) Cain

Let us look at these men quite quickly. Cain. Why was he unretrieved? Why was he not reworked, made again? In him, it seems, a sense of *sin* was completely lacking. Cain was a self-righteous man, a self-sufficient man. Yet, withal, he was a man who had some religion. He brought an offering to God. If he had lived today, he would have gone to church. But his religion was either mere superstition, or else patronage. It was the religion of one who acknowledges God for fear that, if he does not, it will go ill with hima sort of 'safeguard' religion. Oh, yes, you recognise God; you acknowledge that God is: but you have no sense of sin. It is, indeed, only too possible to be religious without having that

essential consciousness of sin and of the need of a substitute who is your Saviour.

That is Cain. Cain was the man who did not know his own heart. If you had said to Cain, earlier on: 'Cain, it will not be very long before you commit the foulest murder: you will take the life of your own brother. By your act, your own brother will lie dead at your feet, his blood trickling into the sand.' What would Cain have said to that? He would never have believed it! But that was what was in him. He had no sense of sin. He did not know his own heart. And God cannot do anything with a condition like that.

You notice that all the men of whom I have spoken on the *other* side were men who had this deep consciousness of sin, men who believed in the law of sacrifice for sin. Men like David: "I acknowledge my transgressions... Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight" (Ps. 51:3,4); men with a consciousness of sin and of the need of a Saviour, every one of them. But Cain was not like that, and that puts him out of the hands of God. He can do nothing with that; He cannot re-work that.

Which brings us to this: The way of the purpose, the way of the glory, the way of the realisation, the way of the Divine satisfaction, is the way of the consciousness of sin. If you have that, it is a way of promise. That leads to the door of hope. The most hopeless person before God is the one who does not, in their heart of hearts, realise that they need what He has provided in His Sona Saviour.

(2) Esau

Consider now Esau, Jacob's brother. We know about him. Here, again, there was a fatal lack. He lacked a sense of the supreme importance of things spiritual. The birthright brought him, or would have brought him, into the place of *standing for God*. The firstborn was supposed to stand for God, that is, to be God's representative. He was the priest in the family; he had to do with holy things. He it was that led the family into the presence of God. And much more was bound up with the firstborn and his birthright. But Esau, the Bible saysand this is the final condemnation of the man"despised his birthright" (Gen. 25:34). That is, he lacked this essential consciousness of the supreme importance of things spiritual. And whatever else you may say of Jacob, that, at least, was not true of him. He maybe stole the birthright, but he did at least recognise the superlative value of

spiritual things.

And how much there was hidden in the veins of Esau!a long, long historythe history of Edom. How that breaks out in the Bible story again and again! Think of Doeg, the Edomite, whose vile treachery resulted in the slaying of all the priests of God (1 Sam. 22). Yes, Edom and the Edomites are the descendants of Esau, and wherever you find them in the Bible you find an utter lack of the sense of the importance of spiritual things: holding spiritual things lightly and cheaply: thinking that a mess of pottage, to gratify some passing whim and pleasure, is more important than the things of God. God can do nothing with that. He never works that over again.

(3) Saul

We pass to Saul. Saul's fatal lack was of that spirit of meekness which trusts and obeys the Lord. That is how it came out in the end. The final downfall of Saul came about because, first of all, he did not trust the Lord. He was put to the test; he was given a magnificent opportunity of showing that he implicitly trusted the Lord; and he showed that he did not. His trust in the Lord would have led him to do a certain thing that Samuel the prophet, in the name of the Lord, had told him to do; and he disobeyed, because he did not trust. That is fatal. God cannot do anything with that. The kingdom was rent from Saul; he went out a marred and never re-made vessel. If God is going to do this thing, He must have in us that simple faith which trusts Him and obeys Him. It is the very least that He asks of us.

(4) Judas

And, finally, Judas. Many things can be said about Judas, but let us try and sum it up. Judas fatally lacked an adequate sense of the greatness of his opportunity. Just what would you give to have been called by Jesus Christ into the circle of immediate discipleship; to be with Him wherever He went, and to share His ministry; to be His companion, to be His helper? Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was here in the flesh, and here was a man called into fellowship with Him in His life and in the great purpose of God for which He came into the world: and then to throw it away for thirty pieces of silver! Yes, he was utterly lacking in a sense of the greatness of his opportunity.

We, every one of us, are called into the most honourable company and circle that

this universe hasinto living fellowship with God's Son, in life, in service, in companionship, in suffering for Him. That, all that, is the call for every one of us. Oh, what an opportunity! What an honour, what a privilege, what an unspeakable blessing! "Called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:9)that is Paul's phrase. If God is going to realise all His great designs, fulfill all His purpose, make out of this poor clay something that is pleasing to Him, that is good in His sight, you and I need to have this: a sense of the great, the immense honour that is conferred upon us, in being thus "called into the fellowship of his Son".

So there must be in usnot as in these men, Cain and Esau and Saul and Judasan overmastering sense of the transcendent importance of eternal things. Eternal things must outweigh for us all other considerations in this life. To use a phrase of the Lord Jesus: 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God' (Matt. 6:33). The things of the Kingdom of God shall be to us of such paramount importance that nothing is to be compared with them, or to come in their way. All else, however great, is worthless. The kingdoms of this world'What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' (Matt. 16:26; Luke 9:25)which means lose the purpose for which Christ redeemed you.

No, we may be poor stuff, we may be very poor stuff; but, if there is in us and with us an overmastering sense of the transcendent importance of things eternal, He will 'make it again' a vessel that is good to the Pottergood. To think that, at long last, He might look upon His work in you and in me, and say, 'Through grace, it is very good'! That is the possibility, that is the prospect. May the Lord find in us the things that will make it not only a possibility, but an actuality.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, May-June 1958, Vol. 36-3

The Power of the Kingdom

"I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:19).
"Verily I say unto you, There are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matt. 16:28).
"They therefore, when they were come together, asked him, saying, Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).
"Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).
"Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven... And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying, Behold are not all these that speak Galilaeans? And how hear we, every man in our own language wherein we were born? ...we hear them speaking in our tongues the mighty works of God... But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice... saying..." (Acts 2:5-14).

The whole matter of the kingdom of heaven can be reduced to one simple issue. In all the above passages it is undoubtedly the kingdom of heaven which is in view, and which is governing. Pentecost saw the Son of man coming in His kingdom, and the exercise of the authority concerning that kingdom of which the Lord had spoken to Peter. The disciples still had some earthly ideas of the Kingdom, but by the happenings on the day of Pentecost they were lifted completely out of their old ideas and came to see that the whole matter of the Kingdom, as regards this dispensation, was bound up with the person of the Lord Himself - that it is Himself present and manifested in power by the Holy Spirit.

The Kingdom is not, in the first place, what is so commonly implied when people speak of 'extending the Kingdom,' meaning thereby the realm in which Christianity is propagated and converts are secured. The Kingdom in its inception at all times is the Lord Jesus present in power. "Ye shall be my witnesses" - that is the simple issue of the Kingdom. It is not a movement, it is not a teaching and it is not an institution. It is firstly Christ; then it is 'ye'. It is Christ present by the Holy Spirit in people - and manifestly present.

This coming of the Kingdom on the day of Pentecost, or Christ the Son of man

coming in His kingdom, changed everything from negative to positive. Up to that point, everything was negative where the disciples were concerned. Now everything became positive. The Kingdom is very positive. Christ is very positive. The Holy Spirit is very positive. Where Christ and His kingdom by the Holy Spirit are in people, things are of a positive character. It is not a case of just being there, just going on from day to day, just waiting for something to happen; the Kingdom is there. There is a witness for Christ. It does not have to be organised. At Pentecost it was not organised at all. I recently read the statement of a modernist trying to interpret these things, and his word on this matter was that on the day of Pentecost the Apostles came to the conclusion that they had to form a society. Nothing could be farther from the mark, more utterly out of keeping with what God was doing, than such a statement. What happened was spontaneous; and that is the point about the Kingdom - it happens. Where it is a matter of lives made positive by the power of Christ in the Holy Spirit, everything else follows.

It is remarkable how much was included in this. First of all, you notice that the feature of the universality of Christ was very clearly and powerfully displayed. There were all these languages and tongues represented in Jerusalem. There is a Rabbinical statement that the whole range of human languages at that time was seventy. It seems clear that the intention of Luke was to show that practically the whole world in tongue and language was represented in Jerusalem, and then, by this miracle, all those differences of language, tongue, nationality, were suddenly transcended. The universality of Christ, of His gospel, of the Church, of the Kingdom, transcended all the earthly aspects; and more - it overcame all the results of Satanic interference with the race in disintegration and division. What a marvellous thing it was! But that is all part of the Kingdom.

The point is, the Kingdom is so positive, and it is not an organised thing. It is not something set up in an external framework. It is the Lord present in us in the power of the Holy Spirit, and that, without any appointments or institutions, constitutes us positive factors; there is nothing negative about us at all. I do feel that is a point upon which we should focus for personal exercise. Supposing we take out of our lives any given period of a few months or a year; how far can we say that our life in that period has been positive, there has been some registration, some real impact? How far do we have to say that it has just been a matter of carrying on, and we have not been positive at all; there has been no impact? It is a simple, concrete issue which we ought to take up before the Lord day by day. 'Now, Lord, today at least my presence here must be a positive thing

so far as the Kingdom is concerned, so far as Thou art concerned; I desire that Thou shalt be positively manifested whatever I am doing.' I think that both men and the powers of evil should have something to reckon with in our being here. That is how it was in the "Acts". The world and the devil had to reckon with the presence of these people. Their mere presence was a menace. It must be like that, that we count, that we mean something that is positive, that there is some mark left by our going on from day to day. "Ye shall receive power... and ye shall be my witnesses". That implies the presence of men in whom the Kingdom has become a reality by the power of the Holy Spirit.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, May-June 1950, Vol 28-3

The Release of the Lord

That enlargement through straitening is an abiding law of the Kingdom of the Heavens in this age is a well-known truth. Its implications are various and its instances are numerous. One of its too oft-unrecognized implications is that *efforts* at enlargement in a really spiritual realm only result in an artificial inflation, with all the weakness, unsatisfactoriness, and instability of all that is not spiritually real. True development is not the work of man, of his ingenuity, acumen, efficiency, resource, drive, cleverness, or enthusiasm. The very law of which we are speaking has its strength and vindication in the fact that God begins at zero. When, humanly speaking, there has remained no hope and it has been fully recognized that only God could do the necessary thing, it has often been proved that that was just the situation that He had been taking pains to bring about.

"He hangeth the world upon nothing" is an abiding principle from the standpoint of the natural man. It is always a salutary thing for the Lord's servants to pass their eye over the Scriptures and review the zeros of man and the intervention of God at that point. Such a survey must ever lead to a recognition that God is speaking in all ages in the terms of the Cross, and that there, all-inclusively and forever, has been established the Divine law that the "flesh profiteth nothing"; that the "natural" (Greek: soulical) man "cannot" in the things of God; that the first Adam species and race has been wound up and finished. That is the comprehensive " first Adam" zero, and at that point an entirely new order is instituted; and this is one in which God is personally resident and dominant by His Spirit. Henceforth for all Divine purposes the indispensable condition is a new creation, a "Last Adam" personally and corporately.

Surely it is a justifiable inquiry to make as to whether the above qualification is the one supreme consideration in all choices and appointments in the service of God.

In our missionary boards and directorates what has been the basis of membership? Has it been missionary interest on the part of Christian men, plus business ability, financial resource, circle of influence, a name that obtains confidence? In our church councils and committees, has it been by popular vote governed by any one or more of human considerations? In our methods has it

been thought that an efficient organization, machinery, plant, "interest" would secure the end?

Or has it honestly and truly been that, all other things given a secondary place, the Lord needs first of all such as, being full of the Holy Ghost and faith, know above all things what "prayer and fasting" mean? When in the primitive and free method of the first days the Spirit said, "Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them", it is a blessed thing to realize that it was not said to such as were living in comparative ease and comfort, or whose occasional or second business it was to attend to these things, but to such as "ministering to the Lord and fasting" were experimentally sharing the great spiritual cost which would fall to those who would be sent forth. It is so easy to issue instructions, give orders, make plans, manipulate lives, pass decisions, when these do not immediately involve those who do so in the spiritual cost and anguish and conflict. We think that no one ought ever to be in such a position who has not gone just as far in the cost and sacrifice, and who is not just as fully abandoned with all that he has, as those who go forth "for the sake of the Name". The Lord's ways are equal, and any inequality is unrighteousness, and ties the hands of blessing. The Holy Spirit is free to take the initiative only in so far as the holy constituents of that Name are the foundation of the purpose, policy, methods, means, motives, and lives of such as are associated with holy things. This is abundantly established in all the Scriptures. Sometimes this Divine principle is demonstrated by the reaction to its violation in the breaking forth of judgment; sometimes in reverses and defeats; sometimes in stagnation and arrest; sometimes in the abortion and miscarriage of labours.

In the New Testament we can find nothing which corresponds to the later and more modern Missionary Society. Then the Church was an organism which, by the very nature of its life-energy, was reproductive. For it is an essential and inherent characteristic of life that it reproduces. That which does not reproduce is an end in itself. But there is all the difference between reproduction by life and multiplication by imitation, as in either mass production or serial production. The Lord's intention was that everything should be Church-wise, not society-, organization-, or "mission"-wise.

The Church declined, and for many years it almost ceased to be a worldwide reproductive organism. Only in very limited ways and in remote quarters did any reproductive vitality function. Then there came the missionary renaissance, and because the Church was both out of order and out of position, the Lord blessed

and used the secondary means of "Missions". He has indeed used and blessed this means, and through it has brought home to the Church its responsibility. But while we would attribute everything to this means that should be recognized, and it is not a little, we are bound to recognize that it has severe limitations and is responsible in the long run for much that defeats its own ends. It is now an open question whether there is any future in such countries as India, China, etc., for the professional missionary and *organized* missions. The days for taking in something systematized from another country may well be numbered. Indeed, we know positively that there is a movement in such lands to eject and exclude professional missionary work and workers. The day is coming, if it has not already dawned, when it will be just by means of people living as *people - living people* - with a passion for Christ among these nations that reproduction will take place spiritually. That in itself will be but a return to the original position.

But we were speaking of the Church. It began in Jerusalem, and while its representative members went and deliberately preached in other places, certain features have to be observed. The scattering of believers (mainly by means of persecution - a Divine providence) paved the way for the reproduction of the Church in what has been called "The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church" (Roland Allen). It was the expulsion of life, not the conceiving of a "plan", "movement", "enterprise", etc. Neither was it a missionary committee in the Church, or Council, Board, etc., apart from the local church. As the churches multiplied, so they in turn each became a *direct* evangelizing instrument, so that Paul could speak of those who were with him thus: "Whether any inquire of... our brethren, they are the apostles of the churches" (II Cor. 8:23). There is no denying the fact that where there has been the closest approximation to this original basis, there has been, and is, the widest expansion and the best taught and spiritually strongest churches.

The fact is that while, because of the Church's failure, God owned and used a secondary means, He has never abandoned His original and primary thought, and with that thought He has irrevocably and inseparably bound up spiritual fullness. All other and lesser ways must stop short, and after reaching a certain point find that limitation, spiritually, characterizes the work and its results. Many other things may also indicate that all is not well. We can perhaps best explain all this by looking at the reason why Church-wise is God's primary and ultimate way.

Everyone will agree that in the intention of God everything appertains to His

Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. "It was the good pleasure of the Father that in Him should all the fullness dwell" (Col. 1:19). "God hath summed up all things in Christ" (Eph. 1:10). "That in all things He might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18) . . . . When God' s end is reached, Christ will be all in all, and "fill all things".

But while Christ retains His own personal and individual identity, He has bound up with Himself in organic oneness His Church, which is "His Body". As the personality is hidden within the physical body, and gives that body its true character, its distinctive character, and the personality of the being is its mystic but real value, so Christ is linked with, and the very reality of, the Church. This Church-Body was "chosen in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). It is "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (I Pet. 1:2). For *it* He gave Himself (Eph. 5:25-26). God purchased it with His own Blood (Acts 20:28). It is "the fullness (completion) of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph 1:23).

We are thus made to see that all God's interests in His Son are Body-wise and therefore of a corporate nature. He sent Saul of Tarsus into Damascus to get the answer to his inquiry through the Church. Later He ratified his apostleship and sent him to it in and by the Church. The laying on of hands in both instances was an act of identification with the Body; firstly in union, and secondly in ministry. Nothing in those days was personal, independent, or separate from the Church. Everything was on Body-ground.

This eliminated personal authority as such. This ever and always found the Holy Spirit ready to judge, direct, and empower. Elders were only representative members of the Body. They were not officials or ecclesiastics. Theirs was a spiritual function for which they had to be "full of the Holy Ghost". This "Body" consciousness was a great reality and meant a very great deal in every situation. In serious crises - physical, circumstantial, spiritual, and temporal - it meant that need was registered in the Church and prayer was made. Those concerned acknowledged that the crises were triumphantly negotiated and passed because of the cooperation of the Church.

Evangelization was not just the salvation of so many individuals or the establishment of so many churches. It was the increase of the measure in which Christ was, and is, present in this world. It was "the building up of the Body of Christ" - "the completion of Him". It is because things have been, and are, things

in themselves - evangelization, "soul-winning", "church"-building, teaching, etc. - that so much limitation exists, and after so many centuries the world is so little touched and Christians are so unsatisfactory.

WE ARE CONVINCED THAT A NEW HEAVENLY APPREHENSION OF THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST, WITH WHAT THAT IMPLIES AND DEMANDS, IN THE REVELATION AND POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, IS ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL TO THE SOLUTION OF THE GROWINGLY FELT NEED IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF CHRISTIANS.

The missionary problem, and many another problems, can only be so solved; but it can and will be solved thus.

There is very much prayer being made, and appeal being pressed for revival. It is said and believed that if there should take place a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the people of God, all our difficulties would be overcome, our defects and deficiencies made good, our mistakes transcended, and so on. Reference is made to such events in past times and the inferences or conclusions drawn. We would be far from denying the truth of this as to the actual period of its duration, but we do feel that a too superficial deduction or conclusion results in a delaying or staying of what God is really seeking.

What have been called revivals have really, in the Divine intention, and in their very essence, been reformations. The high tides of spiritual life have invariably had the effect of making ridiculous many of the things of which the Church was proud, making puerile many things formerly considered essential, ruling out many things prevailing, and generally upsetting the accepted and established system of things. Barriers have gone down; secondary things have been removed from primary place. Indeed the whole standard of estimates has been changed and turned about. This is true not only with regard to great "revival" times, but also in times when the Lord's people of all connections and complexions have met on purely spiritual ground, as at great conventions.

Now the point is this. If the Spirit of God so either ignores or transcends so much that marks the Christian system, and makes it as though it counts so little (and the Holy Spirit never compromises on what is vital and really of God), does it not mean that He calls for a reconsideration of very much that obtains? There are several ways of putting this. For instance: The nearer the earth and its

temporal life Christendom has got, the more and greater have such things as ritual had a place... Formality and such like externals have always been the marks of low and poor spiritual conditions, and the measure of importance given to them is always an index to spiritual measure. On the other hand, a deep, strong, pure spiritual state has always been marked by simplicity. History proves this beyond a doubt, and tides of the Spirit are outstanding evidence of it. One thing is patent: it is that in such times the Holy Spirit does not revive and stimulate these religious *things*; He very largely negatives them. Does it not, then, become necessary for us to see and take note of the effect of a Holy Spirit movement, and by His works does not the Lord call for some adjustment in this matter?

Our present point is that we have very much evidence borne by the Spirit of God in true spiritual movements that He has weighed this whole matter as it now exists and has written it off as not only unimportant but definitely obstructive and limiting. We can reason both ways. To get away from the lesser things we need a mighty visitation of the Spirit of God; this, and this only, will do it. Most people agree to this, and we have heard very much said along this line. What has always perplexed us is that while things of this kind have been so repeatedly and strongly stated, the implication seems never to have registered itself with sufficient strength as to result in practical adjustments. So, on the other hand, if we seriously faced the things which the Spirit of God has again and again ruled out when He has had His way, would not the way be opened for a more *permanent* high level of spiritual life, fullness, and effectiveness?

Is not reformation an essential part of revival? Does not the Lord call for certain drastic adjustments before He can "open the windows of heaven"? Are we able to agree that what is needed is not so much a "visitation" of God in a passing wave of revival, but a reformation which will make possible a new level of life for, at least, a long time to come?

IS THERE NEED FOR A NEW REFORMATION NOW?

If so, what is the nature of that reformation?

I. Evangelical Christianity has very largely become resolved into a crystallized and set system of doctrines. Those doctrines are the Deity of Christ, His Atoning Death, His Bodily Resurrection, His Ascension and Exaltation, and, with some variations as to time and manner, His Personal Return; the Person of the Holy

Spirit; the inspiration and absolute authority of the Bible, etc. These things are rightly and truly basic and governing, and must be maintained in purity and fullness. But when we have said all that could and should be said for them, we are far from having solved the problem of the Church's spiritual life and power. Orthodoxy and "soundness" never was the sign of spiritual life. Indeed "Fundamentalism" as such can be as cold, hard, cruel, bitter, dead, and ugly as the Inquisition, and it often is so. Its weapons are often completely carnal, and it does not hesitate to resort to physical force. This may be its extreme form, but even where these truths are held without these particular features, there is more often than otherwise a rigid legalism resulting in hardness, suspicion, prejudice, and exclusiveness of spirit. Many divisions have followed, not the faithful stand for the truth, but some enforcing of some aspect of a particular truth - hair-splitting. The doctrines of Christianity have become something in themselves, and because this is so a host of unhappy, unholy, and unnecessary elements have gained a strong place in Christianity. Christianity is not necessarily or inevitably established when the sum of its doctrines or tenets is enunciated and assented to. Here 'the letter may kill' rather than make alive.

II. Evangelical Christianity has become a system of denominations, sects, and sectional organizations. In fairness and righteousness, we must remember that many of these had an honourable beginning. As to denominations, in not a few cases it was a conscientious stand for some particular doctrine, doctrines, or form of expression, costing very heavily, that brought these into being. And so with many other institutions, movements, missions, and organizations; some divergence from the truth, or some failure in the responsibility, obligation, and purpose to which Christianity is committed resulted in the rising up of these specific and varied activities. It is no small history of devotion, heroism, sacrifice, and service. The story can fill a library. We take nothing from it. That is not our object. What we are saying is that many of these things have now become so largely something in themselves and are often *ends* in themselves. It is the *thing* with which so many are bound up; and here again all the unhappy elements, rivalries, jealousies, competitions, suspicions, etc., have their occasion. The effect of much of this is to make organized Christianity the enemy of Christianity, and a menace to the real work of the Spirit of God.

III. A peril is discernible very early in the Church's life. It was in the nature of, on the one side, a giving preeminence to one side or direction of Christian interest; and, of course, on the other side, suspicion or reservation where this preeminence was not recognized. For instance, there was a strong Jewish strain

in the Church and the tendency, at least, was to give preeminence to preaching the Gospel to the Jews. When the Gentiles came increasingly into the picture, these reservations and suspicions became almost acute, even between apostles. The Holy Spirit, who fortunately had a large enough place and way then, was able to negotiate this dangerous passage and resolve it into a unity. But the tendency has persisted, and with the lowering and lessening of spiritual life, the peril has passed into an actuality, and an established one at that. Evangelization of the unsaved has become something in itself, and often ends with itself. There is often no vision beyond this. If there are Christians who are not exclusively or primarily engaged in evangelistic work, they are often regarded with suspicion and reservation, even worse. Frequently the evangelist has no room for, or interest in, what is beyond the work of saving souls.

"Man looketh on the outward appearance; God looketh on the heart"... fairly sums up the governing standard of so very much in Christianity. "Man looketh on the outward." How things appear and appeal; how things impress and carry weight; how things attract and secure support; how things imply success and obtain influence. In this direction there is room for all the publicity, commercialism, competition, vainglory, display, and much more with which we have become familiar in Christian work. It is sad to see how many things the Church *must* have when its spiritual life is low. And it is very joyous to note how little is necessary and how many things are absent when spiritual life is high .

What is the nature of the needed reformation? In a sentence, it is all that which is bound up with a new and dominating conception of God's purposes, object, and method. When we ask what that is, the answer is a MAN! We are taken by the full revelation in the Scriptures right back into the Divine counsels before times eternal. There we are allowed to see the resolve that this universe should ultimately be centered in and governed by a Man. But not just officially, as by selection, choice, appointment arbitrarily. The determination was governed by character, type, nature. It would be a certain kind of man. He would embody all the Divine features, manifest them, and determine all values by that standard alone. That Man would eventually have "all things" gathered into and summed up in Himself on the basis of His nature. He would also "fill all things" in the same way. Thus, not by an institution, organization, movement, scheme, would God reach His end, but by an organic being. One of the supreme necessities of the Church is to either recover or have given a new and mighty realization of the significance of Christ in God' s universe. Everything hangs upon our apprehension of Him.

But when we have said this we have not said all. The fuller and further revelation of Scripture shows that in those same Eternal Divine Counsels the fullness and completeness of that Man was to be realized in a corporate way, so that eventually God' s universe would be centered in a "One New Man"; universal and countless, yet one and individual in the sense that He would indwell all, and He is one and *indivisible.* This corporate entity called "His Body" was "foreordained to be conformed to the image of His (God' s) Son, so that He might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). This sets forth God's object, and shows His method. The Divine object is *not* an institution, a religion, a dogma, a fraternity, an organization, a system of doctrines, a set of works and activities. It is a spiritual man, an organic spiritual body .

Now, to resolve into one issue all that has been stated and indicated, what does it amount to? Just this: if Christ in His personal significance and in His corporate expression were really dominantly and overwhelmingly present to the eye and heart of the Church, on the one hand numerous things which now limit, hinder, retard, weaken, and defeat the Church would fall away and just cease to have any place of government; and on the other hand there would be the effects, if not the event, of "Pentecost"; i.e. life, power, victory, fullness, and great joy with real fruitfulness. What we need, we repeat, is not the transient event of "Pentecost" but the abiding effects; not only revival but reformation.

Whenever and wherever by a new revealing of Himself, His purpose and method, the Lord has secured those who have moved out on to the ground of Christ *only* and in fullness, they have always had to meet a great and painful cost. Usually it has been their own brethren in Christ who have exacted it. Fake charges of "forming a new sect"; "seeking a name for themselves"; "dividing the people of God"; becoming "extreme"; "thinking they only are right"; etc., have been leveled at them, and they have been "cast out". The truth is that, in many cases, they have only taken the ground which everybody knows is the ground of spiritual fullness; where questions of "church connection" and orders, etc., are never raised, where such things as joining something or conforming to a special teaching or practice are never mentioned, but "Christ is all and in all"; and the one concern has been that He should have what is His ground and way of continuous increase .

How difficult it is for organized Christianity to believe that anything very much of real value can go on without machinery, publicity, and all the framework of

organized work! May it not be well to pause and consider whether God's mightiest and most fruitful works in nature and in grace are not done hiddenly, quietly, utobtrusively, and in many cases, done before anyone knows about it? What of the resurrection of nature every springtime? The law of God's highest work is the biological - the law of life; it is organic.

A Right Thing Done in a Wrong Way

(1 Chronicles 13-15)

The inclusion of this episode in the Chronicles of Israel has evidently a very definite purpose; it conveys a message which the "Israel of God" - the Church - has been, and still is, all too slow to take account of.

Precisely, it is this. A right thing done in a wrong way can be as disastrous as either not doing it at all or even doing a wrong thing. It says beyond question that God is as jealous and particular about *how* a thing is done as He is about having it done at all. Let us look carefully at this tragedy.

The Credit Side

On the credit and good side we have

1. The right object. There was no question whatever that the matter in hand was something right and that God wanted to be done. Eventually, when it was done in the right way, He greatly blessed it. That the homeless Ark of the Testimony should be brought a real stage nearer to its final resting-place was all in accord with the mind of God. It was really destined to have its full and final place as the focal-point of the life of the redeemed nation in Jerusalem, and so reach the end of that disorder resultant, so largely, from the man-made regime of Saul (verse 3).

2. It was contemplated, discussed, and decided upon with reference and deference to the will of God (verse 2). That will was desired and honoured.

3. Although the initiative and inspiration came from one man, it was a corporate decision, taken in conference and fellowship. There was no independent act of an individual (verses 2, 5).

4. There was no lack of zeal, enthusiasm, and energy. It says that they did it "with all their might" (verse 8).

5. The motive, good intention, sincerity, and devotion were unquestionable.

This makes a fairly good total on the credit side: right object; the will of God desired; unity and fellowship in decision; whole-hearted zeal in committal; rightness of motive and intention. What more could be required? Are these not the things which characterize most enterprises for God? There is certainly nothing wrong with *them* in themselves, and no condemnation attaches to any one of those points. What more could be called for?

And in the case under consideration, all seemed to be going well and prospering *for a time*. They were 'making merry before the Lord with all their might, with songs, and lyres, and harps, and tambourines, and cymbals, and trumpets' (verse 8). The *seeming* success up to a certain point led them to assume that the Lord was with them and that His acceptance was assured. But - Oh, woeful But! - something happened. In itself it was a simple thing and not an extraordinary happening. It was only that "the oxen stumbled". Upon that stumble in the threshing-floor of Chidon the entire scene changed. An apparently simple incident uncovered a whole lot of wrong in principle. It was well-intentioned on the part of Uzza, prompted by real concern for the Ark and its safety; a real interest in the success of the whole undertaking and enterprise. All that he did was to "put forth his hand to hold the Ark" (verse 9). It was all so natural, so spontaneous, so well-meant, so free from vice and evil desire. But "the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzza, and he smote him... and he died there... before God" (verse 10).

Well, we may not like it, and we may feel bad about it. That is how David felt. He was angry (verse 11). He was afraid of God (verse 12), and he said, "How can I bring up the Ark of God to me?" Looked at naturally there appears to be very good reason for being offended with the Lord; for saying, 'evidently the Lord does not want us, or our service; He does not care for all our well-meaning efforts to do what we were convinced was His will and would please Him. We had better give it up!' So David felt and acted accordingly, and the whole project came to a standstill.

So it remained long enough to permit the resentment to die down and exercise of heart to take place. There was deep enquiry before the Lord as to His meaning in all this. David was a big enough man in character to rise above mere pique, resentment, and offendedness. God has to be justified and His ways vindicated. So, in heart-enquiry, the debit side comes to light.

The Debit Side

What was a cart, even though it be a nice new and handsome one, doing in this business? What was it and where did the idea come from? Familiar and well-worn as it all is, let us frankly face it. This cart idea was born among the Philistines, persistent and incorrigible enemies of Israel (See 1 Samuel 6:7, etc.). David had spent a not very commendable period of his life among the Philistines. It was a time governed by that abomination to God - compromise. Compromise - like appeasement - only puts off the evil day for a while, but it is an uneasy interim and the end is shame and reproach. It is at heart but a temporary relief.

So it was with David. During his time with the Philistines he had become familiar with the cart-device, and no doubt the idea had returned with him. When the Ark had been captured by the Philistines in the days of Saul, they had placed it on a new cart. They had suffered the severe judgments of God for having touched it and, although superstitiously, had sent it back in awe.

In the interval of tragedy David - *through enquiring into the Word of God* - came to see that worldly methods, organizations, inventions, and the productions of the "uncircumcized" (uncrucified) in heart and mind, are not the ways and means of the Spirit of holiness. Nothing imported by the natural man, or that emanates from him, will pass with the Lord when it is the essential and full testimony of Jesus which is in view. The cart may represent many things and may be linked up with many well-intentioned objects, but it is an invention of man.

In the oxen we may see symbolized the strength and energy of nature. Strength of mind, will, emotion, were all there in that enterprise. The Lord's word is "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit" (Zech. 4:6).

So much then for the Philistine cart. But what of Uzza? What was he, and what was he doing there? There is something here which calls for a very close and careful attention. Uzza was the son of Abinadab. It was in the house of Abinadab that the Ark was lodged when the Philistines sent it back on their new cart. Uzza had become very familiar with the Ark, perhaps too familiar, and most likely a kind of proprietorship had come into him. The sacred testimony had been in his house for a very long time. His father was a Levite; he was the son of a Levite. He should have known, indeed, he must have known the history, the nature, and the vocation of the Levites. All the provisions and the instructions for carrying the Ark were a part of his very inheritance. The Levites were especially near to God because of that radical repudiation of all that related to foreign gods in the

day of the golden calf. The very principle of foreign worship was expunged from their constitution as the tribe of Levi. The Ark embodied what was utterly separate and holy. On long poles alone could they carry it, not touching it with their own hands,

Uzza was supposed to know all this. He was, however, held responsible for knowing it. The eyes of glory and of flame saw in Uzza a fatal familiarity with holy things. Moreover, those eyes saw beyond the Ark to what it represented. The Ark was no less a type than of the Son of God Himself: Divine in the gold; incarnate in the wood; containing the mind of God in perfection; the rod of living priesthood in resurrection; the heavenly manna of life for the people of God. To God the Father, the Son is infinitely holy and sacred; "separate from sinners", and to touch Him with familiar hands is to meet the jealousy of God.

Uzza had insinuated himself into a false position. Was there some secret pride which led to presumption? God had not put Uzza where he was at that time. Being in a false position, he could - as it seemed - of necessity put out his own hand when things became difficult.

There *was* a movement of God stirring. God had repudiated and brought to an end that false regime under Saul. That also had been man's choice. It was human glory that governed; it was natural strength. God had exposed it. There is one thing that God will not tolerate in what is truly of Himself; it is that any "flesh" shall glory in His presence. God was moving toward that which, in the history of Israel, would - as fully as type could do so - represent His mind about government, foreshadowing the Kingdom of His Son. If that was to be through 'a man after His own heart', then everything of a contrary nature thereto had to be judged.

It is to be noted that this dramatic incident had a very wide audience: "all Israel, from Shihor of Egypt to the entrance of Hamath". So that all the people of God were to know the solemn lesson being taught. The kingdom is coming in, and it is to be established according to Heaven. It cannot stand if its foundation is other than heavenly. It is - in principle - the Kingdom of *God,* not of *man,* even with the best intentions. The great lesson, then, and the lesson which David learned, is that for spiritual things only spiritual people have a place. Let us put that into large print, it is so important.

FOR SPIRITUAL THINGS - ONLY SPIRITUAL PEOPLE

The basis upon which the tribe of Levi was set apart for the holy ministry to the Tabernacle defines the nature of spiritual men, and it should be carefully studied again. They were men who in their very constituting knew the difference between the natural and the spiritual. They had been tested very drastically and had shown themselves true at great cost. Their office or public service was not their testing. They were not put into spiritual responsibility in order to give them an opportunity to show their fitness for it. They were not selected by men, much less were they there of their own volition or ambition. They were there because God approved of them as *men.* They were *men of God,* not firstly officials or parts of a machine. They were men with a history with God which came to light at a time of spiritual emergency. All the Lord's people knew this. They were an Israel within Israel and showed what every Israelite ought to be.

God had been watching the development which had been initiated by David and the new cart, and He saw the contradiction and falsehood at its very heart. It is not just a matter of correct technique or right form; nor is it just correspondence with an orthodox system of teaching or practice. It is essentially and indispensably the spirituality of those in active association with the Testimony. We can be passionately evangelical or 'fundamentalist'; we can be fastidiously jealous for correct doctrine and order, and yet - with all this - still not be spiritual men. There can be as wide a gap between a rabid fundamentalist and a spiritual man as there is between a conservative and a liberal theologian. Failure to understand this difference results in a very great deal of confusion.

Uzza would have passed for a very zealous evangelical, but his lack of spirituality led to the tragedy recorded. It amounted to interfering with or overlooking God's spiritual order.

So we end where we began. This whole episode, so full of powerful instruction shows that God is just as particular as to how a thing is done in relation to Himself as He is that it should be done at all. Spiritual principles are very serious things with Him; even to the point of life or death. Whether it be in Old Testament foreshadowing or in New Testament reality, it is all a matter of God's jealousy for His Son. No *man* may put his hand on God's Son to control or take charge. The custodianship of the "Testimony of Jesus" is not in man's hands.

Good motive and intention may be quite right, but with that there must be spiritual understanding. Zeal, yes, indeed; but not zeal that is not according to knowledge. Let there be a desire to do God's will, but let the doing and the way

of doing be governed by the Spirit of God, and not just by human judgment. God's *way* is as important as God's end.

If, through a mistake, tragedy, confusion, and even heartbreak ensues, natural questions would be - 'What is to be done?' 'How can the fault - if not the damage - be corrected?' 'Now that the damage is done and cannot be undone, should we not just leave it and trust to the sovereignty of God to over-rule it for good?'

If we are to take the particular incident before us as a guide and answer, there is quite clear guidance. If a situation exists concerning which we have in all honesty to say that the *way* was wrong, we must do what David did. We must go back to the point where we were wrong, that is, to the Word of God and its provision, and in humble, contrite confession, start again from *that* point. God will have no glossing over of the violation of basic principles with talk about 'sovereignty'. That would be to use God against His own word. If it is possible to do so we must correct the wrong. Let it be understood that we are not here referring to errors, mistakes, or even sins in human life; we are referring to the work of God and the Lord's Testimony in building according to Christ.

It is the law that God's end must be reached in God's way.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jan-Feb 1963, Vol 41-1

The Seamless Robe

“They part My garments among them, and upon My vesture do they cast lots.” Psalm 22:18 (A.R.V.).

“The soldiers therefore, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also the coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore one to another, “Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be:” that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, ‘They parted My garments among them, And upon My vesture did they cast lots.’ ” John 19:23–24.

Read: Ezekiel 43:1–12.

The Man Created

As we dwell upon that seamless robe, and see how it was under the very careful sovereign preservation and protection of God, it is difficult to fail to see that the robe speaks in a typical way of the humanity of the Lord Jesus, of that which the Son of God assumed as His garment. What has the Son of God come to wear? He has taken the garment of humanity. He took upon Him the form of a Man. He was found in fashion as a Man. This is signified in the vesture. The vesture, in a word, then, speaks of His humanity. This robe is presented to us as something complete, whole, a perfect unity; of one piece, woven from the top throughout. That is *God’s* conception of man. That is the Man conceived in the mind of God. That humanity is the product of the counsels of God from eternity; man, in himself personally, individually, and corporately a complete whole, a perfect unity, of one piece, woven from the top throughout.

Such is man as produced by the hand of God, as the result of that Divine activity, God’s weaving, shall we say. The humanity of the man, Adam, was a figure of Him that was to come. Before there was any complicity with the adversary, Satan; before there was any disobedience through unbelief, man was in his own being and nature a unity, a harmony, an accord, a whole. The man created was not a discord, not a tangle, a contradiction, a divided being. He was a figure of Him that was to come; a unity, of one piece. Yet only a figure.

The Man Ruined

What is the nature of the ruin? It is as of a one-piece garment rent and torn to shreds. If you have a one piece garment torn, you know quite well that you cannot make that good. If you have a two piece, a three piece, a four piece, you know that the part where the tear takes place can be removed and replaced. But when it is a one piece thing, it is ruined when it is torn. You can patch it, but you have not restored it to its original perfection. You can sew it up, but you have not made it as it was. There have been many efforts to sew up torn humanity, to patch it up; but the patch always reveals the damage, the sewing up always betrays that something has happened, and before long, under given strain the thing breaks again. The Lord Jesus says, “No man putteth a piece of new cloth into an old garment...; the rent is only made worse.” No, this humanity once torn is ruined, and there is no hope but in a new garment, because of its essential oneness before God.

I ask you, Is it not true that man is anything but a unity in himself, a oneness, a harmony, a perfect whole? We know ourselves, that we are torn and rent, as it were, into many fragments, contradictory elements. Is not Romans 7 the great unveiling of the dividedness of man? Even when he is brought under Divine law, that dividedness is brought all the more to light. “For that which I do I know not; for not what I would, that do I practice; but what I hate, that I do.” Here I am, straining in one direction and going in the opposite. I am a division. I am a contradiction. I am not one piece. I desire right, but against my desire I do wrong, and in spite of all my purposing I do it. I am not one. A river always flows in one direction, in one way, but not so human nature. It is sadly otherwise with our nature now. We are not flowing all one way. Even when perhaps the greater part seems to be working harmoniously to one end, there is always a reactionary “something” in us, a kick back. It needs no stressing that we are anything but a unity. No, the garment has been rent. Even our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. Man’s humanity now is in rags at its best. Man is ruined, torn, disrupted.

The New Man Pre-figured

It is not necessary to do more than to point out that in the Old Testament there is a pre figuring of the new man. In those men who came into a living relationship with God in the Old Testament, you find pre figured the spiritual and moral threads of the new man; the threads being woven typically into the form of the

new man. It may be the *faith* of an Abraham, the *meekness* of a Moses, the *worship* of a David, the *truth* of an Elijah, the *life* of an Elisha, and so on. These are all threads in typical men, being woven into the One Perfect Man, the garment of a renewed humanity. All of them are to be found in the new Man when He comes. He takes up all those moral elements, all those spiritual features: they are woven from the top throughout in His humanity. See the wonder of His faith, the beauty of His humility, His meekness. See the devoutness of His worship, His honouring of God, His Father. See the zeal for truth which burns with a blazing heat more than that of Elijah. See Him as the life, the power of life triumphant over death, as in an Elisha; and so on. These are all the threads of His humanity, and all this is pre figured in the Old Testament.

The New Man Provided

No longer is it now the figure, but the Man Himself. His humanity is not the humanity of fallen Adam, but a perfect humanity. There is all the difference between God creating Adam and God providing Jesus Christ. But we will not stay for the moment with the comparison or contrast between Adam and Christ. We point out that the new Man is provided, and in this new Man you cannot detect any join; you cannot trace any place where two things have been sewn together. He is not in parts, He is whole. Oh, the wonderful completeness, perfection, balance, wholeness, harmony of His humanity. He can be angry, with a burning anger, without ever losing His balance and allowing fleshly heat to come in; but, being angry, He can at the same time be full of love. He can turn from one thing to another, and on the surface these things may seem to be altogether at variance, and yet in Him they are so perfectly poised that you are no longer sensible of any contradiction in His Presence. We could stay a long time with the perfect balance of His humanity, the oneness of His nature. He is not a patchwork; He is not so many parts joined together; He is a perfect whole. He is of one piece, woven from the top throughout.

The New Man Tested

The new Man provided! Ah, yes, but tested! This humanity, like the garment, is subjected to the test. All the strain is loosed upon it. Its power for taking moral strain is tested. Every one of those threads in the garment is put to the test. Meekness? Cast Thyself down from the pinnacle of the Temple! What would such an act have been? A proud boast! And men would have said, You are a

wonderful Man; we will follow you! No, to have yielded would have been to have forsaken meekness. “Behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass’s colt” (John 12:15). But that meekness was oft times put to the test. On another occasion the multitude would take Him by force and make Him King, and He escaped through the midst of them. Then it is given us to see His devotion to His Father, that devotion which is the essence of worship, the fear of the Lord, that utter abandonment to God. That was the great characteristic of David’s life. Whatever were the faults of David, you cannot get away from the true worshipfulness of his being toward God. The sublime touches in the darkest hours of David’s life are those. Even when he has sinned in numbering Israel, and God visits his sin with terrible judgement, he goes down before God and says, “Lo, I have sinned, and I have done perversely; but these sheep, what have they done? let Thine hand, I pray Thee, be against me, and against my father’s house” (2 Sam. 24:17). What fear of the Lord! What reverence for God! What a falling down before God in utterness of surrender and yieldedness! That was the spirit of David’s life. And the perfection of that spirit, that devotion to His Father in the life of the Lord Jesus was put to severe tests. “If Thou be the Son!” Right at the end, when men come and take Him with swords and staves, Son of God as He was, He tells them that if He should ask His Father He would send twelve legions of angels; but that devotion to His Father must mean that the angels must stay where they are.

We might dwell upon all the moral features of Christ, and see how they were tested, tried under strain. This fabric underwent a very severe test in every thread.

The New Man Proved

Tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin! Not only without sinning in the act, but without sin is this Man. Sin is a deeper thing than sinning. He was not only tried, but proved.

The New Man Perfected

How? Through suffering. This is the word of the Lord. He was never anything but perfect! But I quote Scripture: “Made perfect through sufferings” (Heb. 2:10). That is said of Him. We need not stop to argue the doctrine. To quote the Scripture is enough. He was sinless: He was perfect; and yet He was perfected. If you cannot understand the seeming contradiction look again. It is only another

way of saying that He was perfected through the strain placed upon the fabric.

A sapling may have no vices in it. It may be a perfect tree as a sapling. But show me that sapling grown to the full tree in a few years' time, and I will say, It is perfected through sufferings; not that those sufferings bore witness to any vice, but its perfections were being brought out to perfection through the storm, the stress, the strain. It is a matter of the measure of perfection, not so much of kind.

The Man Installed

"I see the heavens opened, and the *Son of Man* standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). "Inasmuch as He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man Whom He hath ordained..." (Acts 17:31). The Man is eventually coming again to be the instrument of the judgement of this world in righteousness. God shall judge the thoughts of men by Jesus Christ: "He gave Him authority to execute judgement, *because He is the Son of Man*" (John 5:27). It is into the hands of the Son of Man that God has given all authority in heaven and in earth. Thank God that there is a Man in the glory. Thank God for all that means for you and for me in our need of a perfected humanity. He is installed there as God's standard, and the earnest of our full conformity to the image of God's Son is that He has given us His Spirit. We have the earnest of that. "When He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). What is the earnest, the guarantee, the title deed? The Spirit of Christ now dwelling within those who have been born anew, born of the Spirit!

The New Man Related, and Corporately Expressed

"And gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him That filleth all in all" (Ephes. 1:22–23). What is the expression of that? Or, shall we put it in another way: What is the significance and implication of Christ related as in the simile of a seamless robe? As Head of the Church which is His Body, He is a oneness of nature, a oneness of life, a oneness of everything! His Headship represents the oneness that is in Christ Jesus.

We can hardly divide these last two features. They are really the two sides of one whole; related, and corporately expressed. They are represented by two Letters, the letter to the Colossians, and the Letter to the Ephesians. One sets forth the absolute sovereign Headship of Christ; the other the unity of the Church which is

His Body. They have their own emphasis and meaning and value. The Colossian letter sees all things gathered up into Christ, summed up in Him, and all things holding together in Him; and then the statement is made that He is the Head of the Church, His Body. As Head, in that perfected, glorified humanity, there is secured and established a oneness which is indestructible.

Look back for a moment upon that seamless robe. The Psalmist has prophesied. Hundreds of years afterwards the scenes of the Cross are transpiring. The scenes pass rapidly with their many details and incidents, and in the course of the whole these men, the roughest, most brutal, insensible, cruel, thoughtless, caring really nothing about fine things, having crucified Jesus, sit down to watch Him, so we are told by Matthew. They have stripped Him of His garments, and their eyes fall upon them, and they see the possibility of some capital in those garments. They were avaricious men, whose whole thought was any kind of acquisition, gain, profit; yes, profit out of a thing like this. Did ever man sink so low? To crucify a Man, and then in the presence of that dying One to think only of what they could get out of His garments. So they, being four, find four pieces, and take one each. Then coming to a fifth and recognizing that this is a garment which is of one piece and that there is not much to be gained by dividing it into four, they toss for it. That is what it amounts to. The dice is brought out and cast, and one man is lucky and gets the seamless robe in addition to the other. It all looks like a horrible bit of the whole evil programme.

The Seamless Robe and The Sovereignty Of God.

And yet, standing back in the shadows, is God Almighty, exercising His sovereign power, bridging the gap of hundreds of years. A Psalmist had prophesied under the inspiration of the Eternal Spirit, and God is watching that word to perform it, and the most brutal, cruel, insensible men come under that sovereignty unconsciously, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. Even the worst of men are compelled to fulfil the counsels of God, and that oft times unconsciously. Anything that belongs to Christ is watched over by God. It is because of the principle lying behind it, the spiritual meaning in the thought of God.

What does that seamless robe mean? God is careful of His types, of His prophecies, even of His foreshadowings, until He brings them to fulfilment. Not one bit of the type has failed of fulfilment, and this shall not, and God brings it through in His sovereign over ruling. Of what does it speak? It speaks of a unity

which Christ represents which is indestructible, a oneness in Him which cannot be divided. It means, in one broad, glorious word of affirmation, that in Christ victorious all the damage by the fall has been put away, and God has secured His thought. There is no rent here. That has all been removed. The old garment of Adam has been destroyed, and God has brought in His new seamless garment, and established it in the place where it can never again be rent. Satan cannot get at Him. Sin cannot get at Him. All these have tried themselves out to the limit upon that garment, and by sovereign power He has triumphed. By the glory of the Eternal Spirit in Him He has overcome. The oneness of Christ by the Eternal Spirit has been preserved, and it is there in a related position, related to you and to me. Turning it round the other way it means that through faith in Christ and by receiving the Holy Spirit, we are related to Him and all His perfect humanity.

What is the corporate expression? “Till we all attain unto the unity of the faith... unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephes. 4:13). “Joined to the Lord one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17). What is the Church? What is the Body of Christ? It is that which by the Eternal Spirit is linked with the exalted and perfected Lord *in one life and in one substance*. When we take the loaf and the cup we are testifying to the fact that we are communing by faith and in the spirit with that perfect humanity. We look, in other words, into the face of Jesus Christ, and, as we look, we are changed into the same image. Oh, that we might see, on the one hand, what Christ installed and related means, and then what the Church is as the expression of the unity of Christ, the oneness of Christ, through partaking of Him. To use the word in Colossians, “Holding fast the Head.” It is not too late even now for the Lord to have a company on this earth who will hold fast the Head. What does it mean to hold fast the Head? In a word, it means to allow the Lord Jesus to express Himself in us in absolute sovereignty; to bring us into the unity of the Spirit, the unity of the faith, the unity of direct government from heaven. That is the only way to unity. Now some of the things we are up against are just in that realm. The question arises, Is it to be ecclesiastical government or government by the Holy Spirit? That is one of the great issues—the government of a man established system, or government by the Holy Spirit? Is it to be an order imposed from the outside, or is it to be the life expressed from the inside? In a word, is it to be organized, or is it to be organic?

These are tremendous issues. The answering of those things all bears upon this great question of holding fast the Head. Is it to be the Holy Spirit, or is it to be the counsels of men? The head governs the members. The members of the body do not conspire or confer to tell the head what to do; to arrange the plans and

programmes for the head. Neither does the head ask the members to make the plans. The members are but informed of what the plans already are, or of what the next step is, and their responsibility begins and ends with obedience. Which kind of order will obtain depends on how far the truth of holding fast the Head is being expressed. The oneness of Christ in His thought, His purpose, His way, His means, His time, His everything, expressed in the saints, is what is in view. It is not too late to have that in a company.

Old Adam is not a unity like that, and that is why you get such a contrary expression in what is called the Church. Discords, divisions, contradictions, contrasts, schisms, etc.! Oh, the history of the Church as an earthly thing is just a history of internal friction. But Christ is one, and I do not believe that you will get three or four different interpretations of the same Scripture if you are under the government of the Holy Spirit. I do not believe that you will get three or four different orders of Church government if you are under the government of the Holy Spirit. He is one. Christ is one. It is not for us, mark you, to say, Well, we are right and everybody else is wrong! Beware of any spirit like that! But I do say this, Be quite sure that the ground upon which you stand is not the ground of your study, your reason, your comparing of one thing with another; but upon the ground of the absolute sovereignty and Headship of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.

We come to this position at length: The Cross surely does come in and cleave between Adam in all his dividedness, his discord, his torn and rent state. Individually and collectively, the Cross cuts that whole thing off, in its ruined fabric, and it is put away. It is rolled up like a garment and buried for ever, and in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus the new Man comes forth, a unity, a whole.

We can test our relationship to the Lord Jesus in two connections. Firstly, that we find that there is a progressive triumph in our own being of that which is ruling out the contradiction, a progressive victory taking place over the schism in our own being; that Christ is getting the upper hand more and more, and bringing us to that glorious peace which is the peace of harmony. That, of course, wants a lot of explaining and breaking up, but let us touch it at one small point and you will see what we mean, and it will open a great field. As we go on with the Lord, walking in the Spirit, or in other words, as Christ is becoming more and more Master in us, so there is a lessening and a decreasing of those awful conflicts, and of that awful unrest and lack of peace that springs from our trying to explain the ways of the Lord. Faith has ruled out our reasonings, and we are learning to

trust the Lord, and peace comes in. We are in the ascendant, and the dividedness, the stormy conflict of our own souls, is silenced, is hushed; He is bringing about a harmony. I believe as we become more and more spiritually mature we shall have fewer storms between ourselves and the Lord, and more peace. Not because things will become easier, not because problems will cease to exist, not because mysteries will disappear, but because faith is trusting the Lord, and all this schism in our being is being subdued; and we are coming to a poise, a balance, a rest, a settledness. It is the oneness in us of Christ. How long this takes is determined not by time, but by the Lordship of Christ within. It may be very swift, or it may be long delayed, it depends upon our abandonment to Him.

And then what is true in the individual becomes true amongst the saints, and we can again test our relationship to the Lord, our progress, by the transcendence through His love of those human elements, those natural things, which come between us, so that while the natural things are still there, and people are still themselves, and the old Adam is not eradicated, nevertheless there is a growing ascendancy over that in others, a forbearance, an understanding, a love, and the seamless robe is governing; for the beauty, so to speak, is being expressed in the Body.

Woven from the top! Where is that? Where the Head is. Woven from the top throughout!

In closing let us be reminded that the seamless robe is not in process of being woven. It is already an actuality. The unity of Christ is not something to be achieved. It stands complete now. Whatever may be the immature state of the believer or the Church as seen here, the fact that in Christ we are complete is not affected. A responsibility rests upon us to glorify Him by living according to the heavenly fact. We must recognize that all in Christ are one, for “There is one Body, and one Spirit... one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father....” We must put on the seamless robe, and not contradict in conduct the high and holy garment which we wear. “Putting away all strife, anger, malice, etc.” We have not to *make* the garment; it is made. Ours it is to be suited to it.

The Seen and the Unseen

(The 1928 Motto)

Faith is the victory that overcometh and "faith is the conviction of the reality of things not seen."

If this is true then the secret of victory is the capacity for and the deliberate persistence in looking - not at things seen but at the "things not seen." So it has always proved to be in the history and experience of God's people. Paralysis, defeat, disaster have always been consequent upon judgment after the sight of the eyes (the eyes of the natural senses). Victory has always issued sooner or later from someone's assurance of and discernment of the Divine resources and realities behind all else.

How often this twofold issue upon this one principle is seen in the scriptural record of the experience of men. How often deliverance was because someone was given spiritual and moral ascendency because in their close walk with God their inner eyes refused the tyrany of their outer and were given to a spontaneous "LOOKING OFF"! How often the effect of the Divine admonition by which triumphant emergence came was negatively "NOT AT THINGS SEEN," and positively "BUT AT THE THINGS NOT SEEN." And when "*things*" were hidden for faith's purifying, the sum total of all the things was "HIM Who is invisible."

So when a deep sea lies ahead, a ten times hardened and infuriated Pharoah and his host hotly pursue, unnegotiable peaks rise on either side - a humanly impossible situation - but the saving attitude is "Not at the things seen, BUT" and *what* a "but"!

A land of promise, of fulfilment, of realisation, the entering into the purpose of long and painful preparation lies immediately before. But, as is so often the case, one big final challenge to spirituality as against carnality stands between an exodus and an eisodus. Gigantic difficulties demonstrate before the senses and God waits in the dim unseen.

Again the issue of going over and in, or back and out rests upon a capacity to

apprehend the Supreme Asset, and the exhortation is again heard - "NOT AT THE THINGS SEEN."

A prophet's servant who depends upon another's spiritual perception and has none of his own will see only the forces of earth beleaguering the city and will be petrified with fear and paralysed with apprehensiveness, but the prophet who has a firsthand fellowship with God sees the mountains round about filled with "the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof."

An apostle who has seen what others have been blind to because of their grossness; and because they do not know the Lord finds his supreme opportunity when all else in the company are terrorised and in dismay because of thing's seen - storm, tempest, havoc, darkness, threatening destruction. Everything falls into his hands because his resources begin where men's end and his confidence is not resting in "*the things seen*" but in "*the things not seen.*"

Thus we might illustrate *ad libitum.* Satan succeeds along a line which captures the senses of body and soul, and many of God's sincerest children are led away by an appeal thereto. God seeks His ends in and through the spirit, deeper than feeling or seeing, deeper than sensation or emotion or reason.

Satan is great at demonstrations.

God is great at hiding Himself, in order that he may be sought out in spirit and in truth. If the Church is a heavenly body, if the law of her life is faith, and if the pilgrimage of faith is translation and transition from the earthlies to the heavenlies, from the natural to the spiritual, then surely we may expect that the nearer she comes to the end of her journey the more acute will become the demand for spiritual vision, discernment, and perception. The more will Satan seek success by deception on the ground of the senses, and the more will the Lord make the true life in Himself spiritual, divorced from earthly proof, evidence, and gratification, one of the pure essence of faith, looking "Not at the things seen," or FOR things seen. The spirit of pilgrimage is that of "strangers on the earth," and the sense of strangeness and estrangement in the earthlies must necessarily increase even to an agony of home-sickness for the things which are heavenly.

So we gather up the word; victory, spiritual progress, and transcendant service lie in the direction of a spiritual capacity to recognise, draw upon, and rest in

those Divine things unseen, but all inclusively "HIMSELF." "JESUS."

Take this motto word by word, bit by bit.

"WHILE." - May it be all the time, no lapses because we ceased to look away.

"WE LOOK." - Deliberately, fixedly, in faith.

"NOT AT THE THINGS SEEN." - Let this be a check, a warning, a rebuke, a correction, in the hours of the seeming.

"BUT." - Every adversity and difficulty may be very real, actual or threatening - "But -".

"THE THINGS NOT SEEN." - And perhaps the supreme reality, though so often hidden from the natural consciousness - "Christ IN YOU."

"LOOKING OFF." - Oh, for a trained and spontaneous gravitation of looking off - from - unto.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jan-Feb 1928, Vol 6-1

The Silver Trumpets of Redemption

Reading: Numbers 10:1-10

There is a great deal about trumpets in the Bible: indeed the word occurs about a hundred times. This suggests that God has something to say to us on this subject, especially to His servants. This is our privilege as ministers of Christ, to sound forth the clear message of salvation like silver trumpets.

We notice that the material used for these trumpets was silver which, in Old Testament symbolism, denotes redemption. This suggests that God's message to man is about redemption, but it also means that no one can be God's trumpet unless he himself is redeemed. The trumpets were made of solid silver, which means that they were the embodiment of the spiritual reality of redemption. So it is that before we can proclaim the message of God we must know redemption in the very constitution of our being. What is more, they are described as being "of beaten work". They have to be hammered out in such a way that redemption is wrought into their very experience. It is not just that God gives us words to say, but that our message must have a background of some real and thorough-going experience in the matter of which we speak.

These things, then, should characterise every one who would be a messenger of God to others. It is better to have a small experience but a very real one, and to witness of that, than to speak empty words which have no solid background in the life and cannot therefore serve God in the trumpet call of His grace. The process will go on if we allow God to pursue it and He will work our redemption into us, making us like those silver trumpets which were "of beaten work". Redemption does not begin and end just with our being saved from judgment and hell and being assured of heaven. This is an important part of our Christian experience, but it is only a part, for redemption begins to apply to and touch every part of our lives until we are wholly on that ground.

When the Israelites were redeemed by God from their bondage in Egypt, the result was that not one ox was left in the land. God applied this matter of redemption to the last hoof of the last animal to leave Egypt. His idea was a very thorough-going redemption which left nothing outside. Now that illustrates our

point. It was true in history, but it shows us that in our spiritual life everything has to be wrought and beaten into us, so that our lives can be silver trumpets for God.

The trumpets were two in number. This surely stresses their devotion to witnessing. In the Bible the legal position was that the evidence of one person alone was never accepted. It had to be confirmed and corroborated by a second reliable witness before it could be valid. "At the mouth of two witnesses... shall every word be established" (2 Corinthians 13:1). Two is the irreducible minimum of God. As many more as you like, but no less than two. It was equally the case with the silver sockets of the tabernacle boards - there had to be two sockets for each board. God wishes to have everything ratified and confirmed in an unmistakable way where His testimony is concerned.

This matter is taken up by the apostle Paul in the passage about trumpets where he writes: "If the trumpet give an uncertain voice, who shall prepare himself for war?" (1 Corinthians 14:8). Unhappily there is far too much indefiniteness and uncertainty about some Christian witness today. It is essential that there should be nothing of the kind where redemption is concerned. The witness must be positive.

It is helpful to consider the purpose of these silver trumpets:

1. To Call Together (v.3)

In the first place they were to be used to call an assembly together. Here were instruments to establish the relatedness, the oneness, of the fellowship together of God's people. We should have a unifying effect on our fellow believers, avoiding anything which could tend to scatter or divide the people of God. It is a great ministry to bring the Lord's people together. The ministry of the silver trumpets is never to disintegrate God's people but rather to strengthen relationships and consolidate fellowship.

2. To Order Movement (v.5)

We find that the trumpets were used for the ordering of the life and movement of Israel. It is interesting to notice that the two silver trumpets come next to the cloud of Shekinah glory which rested upon the Tabernacle. They worked together. The pillar of cloud and fire provided guidance for God's people, and

when Israel was in right relationship with Him, then the guidance was always towards the land of promise. So when it was time for the people to move forward, the trumpets were sounded to give direction to the march, bringing them ever nearer and nearer to the spiritual wealth and fullness of God's objective for them.

In this way we see that the trumpets proclaimed God's great purpose for His redeemed people. The trumpet note cannot be sounded too strongly in this connection nor too clearly, for we are called with a great divine purpose which God formulated before the world was. The Lord's people need to have it made known to them, for there is a tremendous purpose governing their being called together into the fellowship of His Son, and they need not only to know the purpose, but also God's way of realising it. They need to be kept from wandering round in circles, straying about indefinitely without any clear assurance of what redemption really involves and where it should be leading them. There is a great need for an enlightening and inspiring ministry of the Word which will summon God's redeemed people to move on to His eternal purpose for them in Christ. The silver trumpets were to govern God's people in relation to the ultimate fullness which He has for them in Christ.

3. To Call to War (v.9)

They were also to sound the summons to war. Perhaps this note is as much needed as any, for every Christian is intended to be involved in spiritual warfare. It is so easy to be surprised or worried when we become involved in conflict, as though this were very strange and unfair for peace-loving persons. The fact is, though, that conflict is far from being strange or unusual but is the calling of every true Christian. The silver trumpets call us to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ. We must realise that we have a part in the Lord's battles and that these will go on to the very end. We must learn to respond to the rallying voice of redemption's trumpet. It calls us to victory, for the words seem to suggest that the Lord Himself would listen for the trumpet alarm and when He heard it, would remember His beloved people and send them salvation from their enemies.

4. To Express Praise (v.10)

The fourth purpose was simply the trumpeting of praise to God on feast days and special occasions of rejoicing. Salvation is a feast, and is often so described in the Gospels. Our testimony to the world around us should always be bright and

clear. In this way the trumpet call can be a call of salvation to those who are outside of God's grace in Christ. Paul writes about their sound going into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world (Romans 10:18). God's people are set in so many places that they may be a witness to Him, like the silver trumpets celebrating the perfect offering of Christ and the gospel truth of God's provision for sinners by that offering. For us, then, every day should be a feast day, a day of gladness. There is no time when we should not be sounding the silver trumpets of redemption as we remember Christ and rejoice in His saving grace. As we make much of the Lord Jesus and concentrate on Him, then from us goes out a message of hope and salvation to those around us. We blow our trumpets over the one great Burnt Offering and Peace Offering and we are assured that God will always remember us and work for us as we do this. The last word of this passage is: "I am the Lord your God". What a joy if others should enter into such a relationship because we have served as silver trumpets of redemption.

Simulation - Exaggeration - Predomination

Bible interpreters have been convinced that the words ostensibly addressed to "the king of Babylon" in Isaiah 14 have a larger context and can only be exhausted if seen to refer to some erstwhile angelic being. This conviction is strongly supported by other statements and allusions in different parts of the Bible, such as Jude 6, II Peter 2:4, Luke 10:18.

If this is true, then the above makes clear the three steps leading to Satan's downfall. They also indicate the downfall of much more which has had a good beginning. There is much solemn and valuable teaching here, although the subject is not pleasant.

1. SIMULATION

"I will be like the Most High"
(Isaiah 14:14)

There is much in the Scriptures which shows that one of Satan's master methods is the imitation of God, and the imitation of God's truth. So much so is this that tremendous emphasis and importance are placed upon spiritual discernment as a gift and as a mark of the anointing. Indeed, it is a characteristic of "he that is spiritual" - the spiritual man. We can say that a primary work and function of the Holy Spirit is discernment. The Holy Spirit is spoken of or represented as having "seven eyes," which means the perfection of spiritual vision. We can here introduce another paragraph of much weight from Dr. Tozer:

"COULD THIS BE OUR MOST CRITICAL NEED?"

"When viewing the religious scene today we are tempted to fix on one or another weakness and say, "This is what is wrong with the Church. If this were corrected we could recapture the glory of the Early Church and have Pentecostal times back with us again."

"This tendency to oversimplification is itself a weakness and should be guarded

against always.... For this reason I am hesitant to point to any one defect in present-day Christianity and make all our troubles stem from it alone. That so-called Bible religion in our times is suffering rapid decline is so evident as to need no proof; but just what has brought about this decline is not so easy to discover. I can only say that I have observed one significant lack among evangelical Christians which might turn out to be the real cause of most of our spiritual troubles; and, of course, if that were true, then the supplying of that lack would be our most critical need.

"The great deficiency to which I refer is the lack of spiritual discernment, especially among our leaders. How there can be so much Bible knowledge and so little insight, so little moral penetration, is one of the enigmas of the religious world today. I think it is altogether accurate to say that there has never been a time in the history of the Church when so many persons were engaged in Bible Study as are so engaged today. If the knowledge of Bible doctrine were any guarantee of godliness, this would without doubt be known in history as the age of sanctity. Instead, it may well be known as the age of the Church's Babylonish captivity, or the age of worldliness when the professed Bride of Christ allowed herself to be successfully courted by the fallen sons of men in unbelievable numbers. The body of evangelical believers, under evil influences, has during the last twenty-five years gone over to the world in complete and abject surrender, avoiding only a few of the grosser sins such as drunkenness and sexual promiscuity.

"That this disgraceful betrayal has taken place in broad daylight with full consent of our Bible teachers and evangelists is one of the most terrible affairs in the spiritual history of the world. Yet I for one cannot believe that the great surrender was negotiated by men of evil heart who set out to deliberately destroy the faith of our fathers. Many good and clean-living persons have collaborated with the quislings who betrayed us. Why? The answer can only be, *from lack of spiritual vision.* Something like a mist has settled over the Church as 'the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations' (Isaiah 25:7). Such a veil once descended upon Israel.... That was Israel's tragic hour. God raised up the Church and temporarily disfranchised His ancient people. He could not trust His work to blind men. Surely we need a baptism of clear seeing if we are to escape the fate of Israel... surely one of the greatest needs is for the appearance of Christian leaders with prophetic vision. We desperately need seers who can see through the mist. Unless they come soon it will be too late for this generation. And if they do come we will no doubt crucify

a few of them in the name of our worldly orthodoxy. But the Cross is always the harbinger of the resurrection. Mere evangelism is not our present need. Evangelism does no more than extend religion, of whatever kind it may be. It gains acceptance for religion among larger numbers of people without giving much thought to the quality of that religion. The tragedy is that present-day evangelism accepts the degenerate form of Christianity now current as the very religion of the apostles and busies itself with making converts to it with no questions asked. And all the time we are moving farther and farther from the New Testament pattern. We must have a new reformation. There must come a violent break with the irresponsible, amusement-mad paganized pseudo-religion which passes today for the faith of Christ and which is being spread all over the world by unspiritual men employing unscriptural methods to achieve their ends." - *Dr. A. W. Tozer.*

There are various things in the New Testament which were intended for a witness to Christ; for building up of the Body of Christ; for the glory of Christ, which - for those very reasons - have been taken hold of by Satan and simulated, imitated, and given a resemblance to the true, but have been made - in the end - to discredit Christ, and do just the opposite to their Divine intention. It looks so much like the true that many dear people of God are deceived, perplexed, and led into error. Mixture of error with truth has always been a very successful method of seduction, even from the beginning. God is imitated in idolatry, false worship. Christ is imitated in anti-Christ. The Holy Spirit is imitated in guidance and gifts. Man is deceived by the psychic simulating the spiritual. People, under the stress of pressures of run-down nervous batteries, neuroses, overstrain, spiritual accusations and condemnations, rush to the psychiatrist. The method is to get them to relieve themselves of their tensions by self-expression, divulging hidden things, and in extreme cases by hypnotism. This has a psychological effect and the patient feels 'wonderfully relieved.' Expression; expression! Self-expression! One man told the writer that he came away from the psychiatrist feeling that he had been "born again," something even better than his conversion! But - yes, but! - it all came back again, and worse than the former.

Psychology - the science of the psyche - can be Satan's masterpiece in simulating the spiritual, and then plunging the soul into deeper depths of despair.

While there *is* a releasing of *the spirit* in prayer and song, and sometimes release can only be experienced in such ways, and fellowship is a great means of such blessing, there is the counterfeit of noisy and soulical chorus-singing and

unbalanced repetition. Music is often the greatest blessing and the greatest peril. "In the Spirit" is the Divine dictum.

2. EXAGGERATION

"I will *ascend above* the heights of the clouds"

This whole paragraph - Isaiah 14:9-15 - is an exaggeration, if by exaggeration is meant 'to heap up, to load beyond normal, to carry to excess,' etc.

"I will ascend above..." holds this meaning - 'I will exceed'. It is ambition run amok. It is pride in full tide. It is something unrestrained by modesty, humility and dependence. It is extravagance. It is just adding to what is right and true. It is overstepping the mark. It is inflation. This is the peril of the passionate soul. *If Satan cannot keep back he will push over.* If he finds earnest devotion he will urge it to excess. If he finds an active mind he will cause it to add that extra to the truth, so that the truth becomes untrue.

In "the king of Babylon" we have the exaggeration of personality. "See this great Babylon which *I* have made." The "I," the ego, is assertive, pronounced, overmastering. Leadership and natural ability and gift become autocracy, dictatorship, even tyrannical. There is often a thin line between autocracy and *spiritual* leadership, and it is here that discernment is needed. The former forces, compels and makes legal. The latter comes of suffering, deep history with God, and sets a high standard, and keeps to it. This may be difficult for the flesh in others to accept, and they may wrongly interpret it. Leadership is a Divine gift and of great importance. No one will get far without it. Hence Satan has always marked down this function and its possessors for special attention to exaggerate it and defeat its true object. Dependence is the refuge of the spiritual leader, and the Lord very fully sees to this!

There are many exaggerated movements in our time. Teaching is pushed just that much beyond its true meaning. Something right and good, and then the bit in excess. It is thought to be very *spiritual,* advanced teaching, but the line of actual meaning has been crossed, and confusion follows because of an unbalanced emphasis. This has so often been the cause of exotic and eccentric sects and groups, and their number is legion. The Athenian propensity was "some new thing," which usually means some new *sensation.* How powerfully Satan supports such exaggerations and makes error grow without proportion! He

knows full well that he is going in this way to fill the world with disillusioned people who presently will not believe *anything*, particularly the truth. It was this very thing which made the Apostle John so strongly, almost vehemently, pinpoint the truth in his constantly repeated: *"This* is...." See his letters, and note his emphasis upon "the anointing teaching all things." The context is anti-Christ in deception.

3. PREDOMINATION

"I will *exalt* my throne *above..."*

"Exalt." "Above." The object, the goal, the climax of Satan's aspiration. It sounds fantastic and remote. But it is not so remote and unthinkable as it seems at first sight. Is not this the motif and stimulus of all power politics? If only we realized it, the undercutting of this was *the* reason for the Incarnation, because *all* sin has sprung from this root. The birth, the childhood, the manhood, the teaching, and the Cross of Jesus Christ were a positive offset to worldly power and glory. Never did He seek to 'make an impression,' draw to Himself or to His cause by prestige, elaborateness, glamour, or a show of natural glory.

Even of His rightful heavenly glory and status "He emptied Himself" His Kingdom and His Kingship were not of this world.

All this was to undo something which had been distorted. This something is in us all. We worship the idol of success. We have a totally false conception of strength, power, and importance. Jesus came to correct this in His own person. "Thou madest Him to [in order to] have dominion." Yes, but not self-centered. "Bringing many sons to *glory."* Yes, but the glory of His infinite grace, favour without any merit! "We shall reign with Him." Yes, but as worshippers of the Lamb!

The test of everything is whether it really exalts Christ. Not in word only. That may be a form of simulation and exaggeration. The demon-possessed temple girl of Phillippi may sponsor and preach the Gospel, but it is a "deep thing of Satan," and the Apostle was not selling the Gospel cheaply to the devil to gain popularity. The holiness of Christ is the criterion!

So we - all so briefly - note the way of Satan's course, but the way of his fall. The judgment upon his simulation, exaggeration, and predomination is "Thou shalt be brought down to hell."

Over against the false may the Lord produce the true similitude of Christ: the true magnifying of Christ: the true exaltation and supremacy of Christ!

From "A Witness And A Testimony" January-February, 1970; pp. 15-18

Stephen - Thy Witness

An Appeal for Spiritual Christianity

Acts 22:20 (Acts 6 & 7)

It would be difficult to find a Christian who did not hold Stephen in very high esteem. The reading of the account of his martyrdom, as that of a young man of great gifts and unimpeachable character, stirs every kind of emotion into intense reaction. Sorrow, grief, admiration, anger, contempt, hatred, are all mingled in the tears which are very near when we hear his last words and see his last look. Our heads go down when we seem to see in the darkness of the night the torches of the "devout men" and hear their hushed tread as they go out to recover and bury that mangled body - "And devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him". A young, brilliant, brave, and beautiful life has been taken away by brutal, vicious, bestial fury. The cause we shall examine, but view the event.

True, Stephen had flung some serious charges at the Jewish rulers present. He had supported those charges by long Jewish history and Scripture, but prejudice will never listen to the best documented argument. So, at a given point, they stopped their ears, gnashed at him with their teeth, and rushed upon him, dragging him outside the city. The place for stoning was a ramp higher than a man. The first witness against Stephen threw him from the ramp in such a way that he fell on his back. Then a large stone was thrown with great force on his heart. The blow did not kill him, so, according to the Law (Deut. 17:7) it was the people's turn. The men took off their white mantles and laid them at the feet of Saul, who was present in an official capacity to support the proceedings. The stones rained upon Stephen who, at a point, raised himself to his knees and prayed for their forgiveness, and, as the horrible work reached its climax, he just said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." The deed was done. The mangled body lay motionless.

But, from that point, we have to begin our enquiry. What did it all amount to? What was

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF STEPHEN?

Was Stephen just the first martyr for the faith, to be followed by many more, and so to be *JUST ONE* of the Noble Army of the Martyrs? Or was there something special and different about Stephen? We answer that in an affirmation, and then proceed to uncover that particular significance.

Stephen was making spiritual history. What Stephen was fighting for to the very death was something in Christianity that even the chief Apostles - Peter, James, John, and the rest - had not yet seen and come to. It was something different, even in Christianity.

That is the affirmation; now for the explanation. The explanation will be found, firstly in his own discourse, and then in what eventuated from his death.

1. STEPHEN'S DISCOURSE

In his discourse to the Jewish rulers and his other accusers, Stephen ranged the history of Israel with a single definite thought and object before him. He started with their racial or national father, Abraham, and went on through Isaac; Jacob; Joseph; Moses; the people - in Egypt; the Exodus; the Wilderness; Joshua; David; Solomon; the Prophets.

In what he had to say about all these, one feature and factor runs through all and was governing everything. That factor is that God is ever moving on, and that nothing but disaster can come to those who do not go on with Him. This going on of God, Stephen pointed out, was not just in the progress of history, even the history of a chosen people, it was more essentially a spiritual going on. To Abraham the command was "Get out"; and then, *WHEN* he was out, a life of pilgrimage to the end; no settling down or taking root. Stephen is quite detailed on this.

When, through Jacob, the national family and potentially the twelve tribes were secured and the possibility of a stop, an arrest, and death by famine was threatening, the continuance and going on was secured by Divine sovereignty as told in the fascinating story of the life of Joseph. From Joseph Stephen went on to Moses - his birth, preservation, education, escape, commission, and the Exodus. God was going on.

At this point some of the strongest and most terrible things are said by Stephen. He is dealing with Israel in the wilderness and he exposes the hidden causes of retarded progress.

Remember that progress is Stephen's subject: God was ever moving on and man ever contrary. Stephen indicates that the retarded progress and the extension of a few days into forty years was due to one thing; it was that, while they were out of Egypt, Egypt was not out of them. Not only were they ever literally looking back to Egypt and inclining to return there but the spirit and principle of idolatry was still strongly in their hearts. This came out in the demand for the golden calf; but Stephen - quoting Amos - said something even more terrible, namely, that, in some mystic way, the very Tabernacle and Temple were, in their souls, associated with Moloch and Rephan - gods of the stellar bodies; and their sacrifices had the same subtle link. While ostensibly Jehovah was the object of worship, actually He was mixed up, in their worship, with other gods. If this is what Stephen meant and what Amos was actually dealing with when this thing in the heart had come out to find exposure in the latter days of the Monarchy, it fully justifies his charge of 'resisting the Holy Ghost'.

But Stephen goes on far beyond the wilderness with the same people. He touches lightly on Joshua, but implies the same spirit. We know that Joshua in type postulated God's movement, ever on, ever up: the going on to exploit the inheritance ever more fully. But, again, that incorrigible disposition to settle down too soon and not go on to fullness marked and marred the history of the conquest.

On Stephen goes to David and to Solomon. David's desire to build a house for God on earth received a very reserved and non-committal response from Him, and was met with the answer that God would build a house of a different order, for

"The Most High dwelleth not in houses made with hands...
The heaven is my throne,
And the earth the footstool of my feet:
What manner of house will ye build me? saith the Lord:
Or what is the place of my rest?
Did not my hand make all these things?". (Acts 7:48,49).

What Stephen saw, and what is stated, intimated, and implicit in the New Testament (a monumental document on the matter is 'the Letter to the Hebrews'), was that Solomon was - at most - but a figure of a greater 'Son', and his temple, with all its glory, wealth, and beauty, was only a pointer *ONWARD* to "A house not made with hands"; what Peter - after a difficult and painful transition -

called, God's *SPIRITUAL* house.

Stephen concludes with a comprehensive gathering of all this history into "the Prophets", and virtually says that the spirit of prophecy was related to this ever-future, onward, and ultimate *SPIRITUAL* goal of God.

What again, then, does all this amount to? On the one side, it is a mighty exposure and denunciation of the incorrigible habit and disposition of *GOD'S PEOPLE* to bring what is essentially heavenly down to earth and fasten it there; to make of the spiritual something temporal; to make of the eternal something which will not - and cannot - abide; to make form, means, orders, and technique all-important. In a word, to have things fixed and boxed, so that the Holy Spirit is thwarted and frustrated in His ever-onward and ever-sovereign movement and innovation, if He so choose. The most dominant note, the most imperative cry of the New Testament is "Let us go on". But the context of this cry is - "outside the camp". The writer of those words in the Letter to the Hebrews, who has so much in common with Stephen, makes it abundantly clear that "outside the camp" means outside of all that which in its Judaistic nature systematizes and crystallizes *CHRISTIANITY* into a set and settled form: into something earth-bound and final.

On the other side, all this is a revelation of how fierce and terrible will be the opposition of such systems to a purely and definitely *SPIRITUAL* testimony. Unless there is a conforming, there will at least be ostracism, and at most martyrdom.

2. THE EFFECT OF STEPHEN'S TESTIMONY

Now we have to go back to Jerusalem and look into the real meaning and effect of Stephen's testimony, and consider its particular meaning for Christianity.

Stephen had - at the cost of his life - dared to touch the Temple, and the Temple as the heart and sum of the Jewish system and hierarchy. The effect of his pronouncement was to repudiate that whole system and its earthly centre. He had seen that it had been but a pointer to the heavenly and spiritual which was reached and realised in the entry of Jesus Christ into this world. He had been spiritually immanent in all the aspects of that system and that history, dominating all its features and represented in all its constituents. They had never been the *REALITY*, the *ESSENTIAL*, but only ways and means by which the real was

signified; they were signs not realities. That which they had signified had now come in fullness and finality, therefore, *EARTHLY,* material, and localised Temples, Priests, Sacrifices, Vestments, Forms, Names and Titles, Cults, Orders, Times and Seasons, and everything else that made up such a system had, at least, served its purpose, and, at worst, become an empty shell, and a hindrance to the spiritual.

Stephen, in statement and implication, said this, and said it in no uncertain terms and manner. There was no equivocation in his declaration, and he made it quite clear that to have been blind to the spiritual significations of their history, and to continue in that blindness now that the One signified had come was nothing less than 'resisting the Holy Spirit'.

Very well, then, that is so far as Jewry was concerned; but there was a twilight transition period in Jerusalem. While the Apostles and disciples had seen that Jesus fulfilled so much of the Scriptures (as see Luke 24), they certainly had but a very limited apprehension of His full significance as to the old system. They were still 'going up to the Temple', and that, *AT THE HOUR OF THE SACRIFICE.*

Their last recorded question to the Lord before His ascension shows that they were still clinging to the Jewish hope of a temporal Messianic kingdom on the earth, in spite of His parable of the lord returning after *A LONG TIME,* and all His teaching on the Holy Spirit, etc.

Is that why, when those who stood on Stephen's ground were, after his death, "all scattered abroad", the Apostles were excepted. They had not wholly repudiated Judaism, circumcision, the Temple, the sacrifices, etc., as Stephen had.

Why did Saul of Tarsus immediately seek out, in Jerusalem (Acts 9:13) and unto 'distant cities' (Acts 26:11), those who had identified themselves with Stephen's position, and leave the Apostles alone? True, the Apostles were having a hard time with the rulers, but not on Stephen's ground. James seems to have been able to hold things together with a group on a partial Judaistic ground, a compromise; and Peter and John were, for some time, with him, as 'Acts' shows. In Jerusalem the Christian Church was largely Judaistic, within the covert of the Temple and the ordinances. But, the Holy Spirit was moving on, and a point is reached where it is *A QUESTION FOR CHRISTIANITY* whether it was going on or going to stand still, which would mean going back.

The fact is that Stephen had caused a division - the first division - in Christianity, a division which has characterized Christianity right down the centuries into our own time.

The Holy Spirit was moving sovereignly toward a position of utter spirituality and heavenliness; the very essentials of Christ now being in Heaven and the Holy Spirit being here as the characteristic of this dispensation. Peter, himself, was caught up in that sovereign movement in the episode of the house of Cornelius. He prevaricated under the influence of James and "certain" others; but his letters show that he made the transition. This was also abundantly true of John.

But the great event in the sovereign movement of the Holy Spirit was the 'apprehending' of the super-Stephen, Saul of Tarsus. It was he who, in the seeing of Christ in a blaze of illumination, saw all the implications of Stephen's testimony. Henceforth the battle between both the immovable Judaisers and the twilight Christians on the one hand, and an utterly spiritual Church and Christianity, on the other, would focus upon him, until that full revelation had been embodied in his letters and he also fell fighting. Paul's spiritual position, as opposed to a temporal or a semi-mundane system was called "a heresy" (Acts 24:24, margin), and was referred to as a "sect which is everywhere spoken against" (Acts 28:22).

If we are prepared to call Paul's position a "heresy" or a "sect", let us remember that it was that for which Stephen died, and let us see clearly what he and his great successor really stood for, and for which he died. It is something very searching. It reached the first Apostles. It sifted the Church at its beginning. It lies at the root of very much Christian history. It explains many spiritual tragedies. It accounts for much loss of power. It is the meaning of much talk about 'schism', 'sectarianism' and 'divisiveness'.

It would be a vain hope to expect that all Christians - even evangelical Christians - would see the distinction that is presented, or that, if they did see it, would pay the price of accepting it. But there is no doubt or question that the most vital consequences for Christianity are bound up with this issue.

Shall we continue in or revert to what is *VIRTUALLY* a semi-Judaistic Christianity: an earth-tied, man-managed, system? Shall we fall into that pseudo-spiritual mistake which leads only to limitation - at least; the mistake of

collecting from the New Testament, either in actualities or by deductions, certain forms and procedures, 'methods', and technicalities, and shaping them into a 'New Testament' formula, 'blueprint', and 'pattern'? Shall we attempt that vain thing of making a fixed mould from 'New Testament methods' and pour everything into it? Shall we constitute *OUR* churches on the basis of popular votes, majorities against minorities, natural selection, etc., etc.

Or shall we see what Stephen and Paul saw, that the only Prototype of the Church and the churches is Christ Himself; that the revelation of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit is the only true way of building: that the anointing of the Holy Spirit and the qualification by spiritual gift is the Divine way of 'office', function, and responsibility: that this is the true *ORGANISM* springing and forming out of spiritual *LIFE:* that it is conception and not imitation, birth and not manufacture: that prayer and definite guidance coming out of it and not the 'Board Room' or its equivalent is the Holy Spirit's 'method'?

Stephen was the only one in the New Testament who used Christ's chosen title for Himself - "the Son of man", and in that designation all the universality and super-national, super-denominational, and super-racial features are embodied.

What we have written *CAN* be a key to the Bible, especially the New Testament, and while we believe profoundly that it represents the mind of the Spirit, we can only trust that there will be found a sufficient spiritual concern to lead to a re-reading of Scripture with Stephen's testimony in mind.

No one, we trust, will think that there is any intention of *FORCING* division in mind or act. As we said in our heading, this is an appeal for spiritual Christianity. Christianity has had, and still has, its battles with heathenism and paganism, and this has meant many martyrs. But this does it no spiritual harm. Where real harm is done and loss is suffered, is in the battle within itself against retrogression, downward spiritual gravitation, traditionalism, legalism, and natural-mindedness. It is the battle against superficiality; which often masquerades as 'simplicity', a fear of depth.

Yes, this battle is a costly one, and has not infrequently brought the heavy stones against those who have stood for the essential spiritual character of this dispensation.

From "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine Jan-Feb 1963 Volume 41-1

Subjected... In Hope

"For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God" (Romans 8:20,21).

'The creation was subjected to vanity... in hope...' It is impressive that, although the writer of this letter set out, in the first instance, to reveal a state of utter hopelessness, which he very thoroughly does in the first chapters, the letter itself is strewn with this word *hope*. Beginning with Abraham, it says: 'Who... against hope, hopefully believed' (4:18); again, 'we rejoice in hope of the glory of God' (5:2); 'patience worketh experience, and experience hope; and hope maketh not ashamed' (5:4,5) 'the creation was subjected... in hope...' (8:20); 'rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer' (12:12); 'that through patience... we might have hope...' (15:4); 'Now, the God of hope fill you... that ye may abound in hope...' (15:13). The letter abounds with this word hope, although it set out to show how hopeless everything really was.

Now here is this statement: 'The creation was subjected to vanity'. If you like to change the word there, you would be quite right in changing it to 'hopelessness' - 'the creation was subjected to hopelessness'. A later version puts the word 'futility' there, which I think is a very good translation: 'the creation was subjected to futility... in hope...'; 'to hopelessness... in hope'; 'to vanity... in hope'. A deliberate act of God is this. We will gather it all up in this way: The Law of Vanity, or Futility; the Law of Hope; the Way and the End of Hope.

The Law of Futility

Why did God deliberately act - for it says '...by reason of *Him who* subjected it...' - why did God deliberately act to bring the whole creation under this law and reign of futility? I am not staying to enlarge upon the fact of futility or vanity; we may say something about it as we go on. But it is the fact that it is an established law; it is something in the very constitution of things, this something called 'vanity' or 'futility'. Why did God establish that law?

(a) God's Purpose for Himself

Well, His act related to three things. Firstly, it related to God's purpose for Himself: for He created all things for Himself, and, in creating all things, He had a personal object in view. All things were to derive their value and benefit from His having what His heart was set upon - it is always like that. God, then, had in view something for Himself, and that something was to have a place for Himself in honour, in pleasure, and in complete satisfaction. The Bible gathers itself entirely around that one, primary, supreme thought - God having a place for Himself in His creation, amongst men: a place where He can come; where He can walk; where He can talk; where He can be received with pleasure, and acknowledged with the heart; where, without grief, without restraint, without reserve, He can just be free to dwell with men. He made all things for that. And when He had made all things, and pronounced them very good, God walked in the garden, in the cool of the day, and we are led to believe that He came to converse, to have fellowship, to enjoy Himself, to find His pleasure there. 'The Lord God planted a garden...', and did not leave it, but came to it, to the man in it, for fellowship. That runs through the whole Bible.

But, you see what happened. God's place was given to another - a rival and a rebel. Man gave God's place to another, and God withdrew. And because that thought of God, that purpose of God, that He should have a place for Himself, as the all-governing thing in this whole creation and universe, was set aside, God said: The very object of the creation has been removed, has been ruled out, has been violated; the whole creation must be subjected to futility. It is the natural, the logical outworking: when purpose ceases, that is futility; when governing purpose is set aside, what is it but vanity? God moves in purpose, firstly for Himself, to have a place. When He no longer finds His pleasure and His satisfaction, a state of vanity and futility enters in; nothing goes right, nothing realises its destiny and its calling.

(b) God's Purpose for Man

When God created man, He had a great purpose for him. That purpose was not realised when the man first came from the hand of God: that was only setting him on a course, in the way of Divine purpose. If you ask what that was - and still is - it can be summarised from what we have now in the Bible, and particularly in the New Testament, like this. God intended that the man should graduate from the stage and the state in which he was made, into something else, into something more. God made him what the New Testament calls 'the natural man'. Paul says: '...first that which is natural' (1 Cor. 15:46), and there is nothing

wrong about that. The word, as you know, in the original, is 'soulish', 'soulical', 'of the soul' - he was made like that.

But God's intention for that man was that he should become a 'spiritual' man. The New Testament draws that great distinction between the 'natural' and the 'spiritual'. The 'natural' is that in which we are born; the 'spiritual' is that into which we are born again. And God intended that there should be this graduation from the 'natural' to the 'spiritual', that the man should become a 'spiritual' being (with all that we understand from the New Testament that that means): beginning in his own spirit, growing up into spiritual maturity, and consummated with a spiritual body, 'like unto the body of His glory' (Phil. 3:21). 'Not that which is spiritual is first', says Paul, 'but that which is natural, then that which is spiritual'. That is the order. But man cut short his own intended way, and he remained just a 'soul' man, a 'natural' man - that is how we find him, and ourselves - and did not go on to full growth, to become a spiritual being. And so God says: 'Man has defeated the very purpose for which I have created him. He has turned aside' (there are many ways in which the Bible speaks of this arrest); 'he is less than I intended him to be.' God said therefore: 'Therefore, futility!'

Looking away from the story, is it not true in experience, right up to date, that if you and I, as the Lord's people, live on the natural basis, there is frustration and futility? It is only as we emerge (if I may put it that way), and become more and more spiritual, that the seal of God is upon us, that the pleasure of God is found in us. He is saying, It is very good; I can accompany that; I can associate Myself with that; I can go on with that. Spiritual men, spiritual women, are those to whom the Lord can commit Himself, with whom He can speak, commune, and have fellowship. The purpose of God lies *there,* and if *it* is in any way arrested, or diverted, or violated, it is futility. It is the tragic story of much in Christianity, in what is called the Church, and in Christian lives - futility, vanity, confusion, not arriving, held up, waiting for something. And there is a good deal of groaning in this creation, for something that is not, that we know ought to be.

(c) God's Purpose in Creation

In the next place, this law of futility related to God's purpose in the creation. He created it for Himself, as His own dwelling; He created man, to be a man after His own heart - a spiritual man; for 'God is Spirit, and they that worship must worship in spirit.' God created the creation with an object in view. What was it? It was for the fulness of His Son, in whom, through whom, and unto whom He

created all things. And we are told, through the apostle, that the end, the goal, in view is that He should 'gather together all things in one' in Christ, and that He 'whom He appointed heir of all things' should fill all things - Christ, the heir of the creation, in which He was to find His fulness, and express His fulness. Well, the rival knew something about that, apparently, and stole the place of God's Son, and tried to steal God's Son's inheritance. He has become the 'Prince of this world', the 'god of this age', taking what belongs to the Lord Jesus. There is much about this in the New Testament. But God has not let go His intention. He holds to it, and the time will come when 'the kingdoms of this world shall become the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ', and He shall fill all things. But, until then, everything is in chaos, in confusion, in futility, in vanity; and it is only as Christ comes into His place that the law of vanity is removed, and there is release and liberty - the liberty of sons.

The Law of Hope

As the law of Vanity, of Futility, is in the very constitution of things, it is equally true that there is in the constitution of things the Law of Hope. 'The whole creation groaneth and travaileth' - in despair? No, waiting; waiting! And the word there is a strong word; it is a picture word of someone stretched out eagerly in anticipation, for 'the creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption.' 'The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain until now', waiting, stretched out, eagerly anticipating. The creation has a consciousness - it may be a dull consciousness - but it has a consciousness, in every part, that something is wrong; this is not what it exists for; there is something better than this! God is blamed, of course, by many. Nevertheless, there is this sense that things ought to be different. And it looks for that difference; it waits for that difference.

This law of hope is in the constitution, everywhere. No one is naturally ready to surrender to the situation. Whenever a person gets to the point where they surrender to the situation absolutely, they take their own lives; it is an end of all things; they cut themselves off. But, normally, no one is prepared to accept this state of things; they will strive against it, work against it, groan against it. There is something of hope in the very nature of things.

Now, what this passage says is that this law of hope, by the ordaining of God, governs the very judgments of God. He subjected it *in hope.* It was a judgment, a pronouncement; it was a terrible thing that the whole creation should come into

this state of futility: 'thorns and briars shall it bring forth' everything to make life hard and difficult. Yet it says, He did it *in hope.* All the judgments of God upon the creation were in hope, and are in hope. If the Lord has to pronounce futility upon something - that is, to say, Now, we are not going on; I am not going on with you; bringing in confusion and arrest and frustration - is it because He is making a full end? No, there is something there which is out of line with the purpose for which He brought that into being. It is not in a straight line with that. Therefore we must be brought to realise that there has to be a fundamental adjustment to God's intention. And therein lies the hope. God has done it in order, not to destroy and finalise, but to secure the thing which He ever had in mind. God is working on positive lines always, with hope. 'Subjected... in hope!'

The supreme example and demonstration of this, of course, is the Cross of the Lord Jesus. It includes the whole thing. Yes, see Him, and hear Him. It is a picture and a cry of utter hopelessness: 'My God... Thou hast forsaken Me. Why?' There is no hope, because He gathered up this whole hopelessness in the creation into His own Person; took it to the Cross, received God's full and final judgment: No way through for that creation; no way through for that kind of man. The door is closed. But - 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' (1 Pet. 1:3). Yes, it is a picture of despair, and a cry of despair, but it is *in hope, in hope.*

The Lord Jesus, before He went to the Cross, knew what it was going to mean - that is the meaning of the broken heart; that is the meaning of the terrible cry, and the sweat like drops of blood - He knew what He had got to face of forsakenness on the part of the Father; He knew. But while He was moving toward that, and fighting His way into and through that, He was always speaking about the beyond. 'I will come again'; 'the third day He shall rise again'. Terrible despair, but *in hope;* terrible judgment, but *in hope!* The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is the great proof that the very worst judgment that God can bring to man, in this life, is intended to be with hope, and not to annihilate him and destroy him.

The Way and the End of Hope

We close this brief survey with a reminder of the Way and the End of Hope. You see the immediate context of our verses: "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed

to us-ward" (Rom. 8:18). Suffering - what is it for? It is just to dispose of this false thing that has come in. Suffering is to dispose of a false state, a false condition, a false position, that has come in. Everything is false, you see; it is not what God intended. It was a lie, an untruth, a falsehood, that brought about all the vanity and the judgment. It is a false world, a false creation now. The suffering that the Lord brings into our lives has this one object - to dispose of that which is false in us, and to make way for that which is true in Christ, who is the Truth. We are not the truth, and this creation is not the truth, but Christ is the Truth, and the false has to be disposed of, removed, and it is only done by suffering.

This selfhood is the root and spring of all the trouble, is it not? By the suffering or the discipline under the Lord's hand, the selfhood is set aside, and the way is made for Christ. Through suffering, the virtues of the Lord Jesus are inculcated in the believer and in the Church. It is the only way. We only learn patience through demand for it - and what demand! We only learn faith by having to have faith. And all the virtues of the Lord Jesus - meekness, and all the others - are only inculcated in us through suffering. The sufferings of this present time - what is the goal? Well, the original purpose is still the goal. It is a humanity conformed to the image of God's Son, a world cleansed and purged by fire from all this falsehood, and ground of vanity and futility, and then peopled and filled with those who are an expression of the Son of God - conformed to His image.

The Lord has to pronounce vanity upon all else, or there would be no going for His object at all. And as we go on with the Lord, the one thing that we become more and more aware of is that there is *nothing else but the Lord.* We are losing all hope in every other direction, all expectation; it must be the Lord, just the Lord! And our hearts, through disillusionment, through disappointment in many directions, through much that we shall just have to call 'vanity', futility - our hearts are being drawn to the Lord as our only object, our only goal, our only hope. So it becomes true: "He is thy life, and the length of thy days" (Deut. 30:20). Towards that the law of vanity works, and therefore it is 'in hope'.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, May-June 1961, Vol 39-3

Suitability for the Glory of God

"And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:14).

"And he called unto him his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of disease, and all manner of sickness. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot... These twelve Jesus sent forth, and charged them." (Matt. 10:1-5).

"And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

"...being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph. 2:20).

The Wall of the City

Reverting to the 21st chapter of the book of the Revelation, I want to say something about suitability for the glory of God. You notice that, in the vision given to the Apostle, the vision of the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, the city is said to have the glory of God. The foundations of the wall, as a part of the city, bear the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. We understand that this city, as seen in the vision by the apostle John, is a representation of Christ fully manifested in the Church. This is the fulfilment and realization of the words so familiar to us in Paul's letter to the Ephesians - *"He put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22,23).* And again in the third chapter of that letter - *"Unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever".* That is fulfilled and realized in the city, the fulness of Christ in the Church.

The wall of the city is that which speaks of its character and its strength. You would rightly determine the significance of a walled city by looking at its wall. If the wall were a poor thing, broken, unrepaired, dilapidated, you would at once pass a poor judgment upon the city behind it. If the wall is a great wall, a mighty wall, a wall which evidently bears marks of care, you would say - 'There is something behind that wall that is great'. You would say that it betokened the character of the city. And so it is here. This is a wonderful wall, a glorious wall, a mighty wall, and it speaks of the character and the strength of the city - in other words, of the Church, of Christ manifested in His Church at last.

The Twelve Names on the Foundation of the Wall

The twelve apostles whose names are on the foundations of the wall are a representative figure. Twelve is always representative. The twelve stones in Jordan and out of Jordan represented all Israel. The twelve stones of Elijah's altar at Carmel represented all Israel. Twelve represents Christ in fulness in His Church. The twelve Apostles represent the Church. And what is here in these foundations is representation of Christ in the Church by those whose names are here. It is the testimony to Christ. You notice Matthew 10. He chose twelve, He sent them forth: they were those who testified of Him, who went before Him to bring Him into every place. They spoke of Him; they had the mark of the King; where they went He was portrayed. That, at least, was the thought. So they, the twelve apostles, represent Christ in fulness at last in a full Church. They testify to Him. One, who proved unsuitable, was eventually changed for another who came in after prayer and fasting.

"The twelve apostles of the Lamb". How that name governs everything in this book! Here all that we will say about it, as it comes in finally, is that everything is recovered that was lost. The Lamb has overcome, the Lamb has prevailed, the Lamb has redeemed: the Lamb has done it all, and all is recovered unto God that had been lost to God. And here is the testimony in the Church that all is recovered, there is full recovery. That was the principle in the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem by Nehemiah. The wall had been broken down and destroyed and burnt. The rebuilding of the wall was that in the Old Testament which portrayed the recovery of the full testimony of Jesus. Recovery - and it is all recovered. The Lamb has done it. Throughout this book it is the Lamb in action in a many-sided way recovering everything to God.

So in these fragments of the vision, in representation, we have this whole matter

of suitability to the glory of God, suitability to the end which God has in view - that is, the manifestation in fulness of the character of His Son.

Now, most of these twelve apostles have dropped from our view. We know little or nothing about the majority of them. Their names are mentioned here at the beginning. They are mentioned again, with Judas having fallen out, in the first chapter of the book of the Acts; another is incorporated; but we know nothing more. There are traditions, plenty of them, but, so far as Scripture is concerned, the majority of them have just gone out of our vision. Yes, that may be so, but their names are preserved in heaven. What they represent is never lost. They represented Christ, and let the men on the earth pass out and be forgotten, but that which they represented is maintained in heaven and reappears at last in the final manifestation of Christ. Remember that! We may not signify very much in ourselves upon this earth, amongst men, but if there is anything of Christ about us, that will appear again, that is preserved in heaven, it will be found at the last. So you begin with the mention of their names at the beginning of the dispensation, and then for the more part you know little or nothing about them, and then they are all there at the end. That is how it is. Every fragment of Christ, in any part of the Church, preserved eternally, is represented by this representative number.

Peter and James and John, of course, are the most outstanding ones, and they seem to be always representative of the rest. I think we can truly take them as that. You notice in Matthew 10 - "First... Peter". It is put like that. "The first... Peter". And it does not mean that he just came first in number. Peter always was first. He was given first place by the Lord; that is, he took a position which was a first position. "First... Peter". Well, we hardly need talk much about Peter here. We know very well we could not say much that was new about Peter. He stands there, a full-length portrait; we know him - I mean as he was before Pentecost, in those days when the Master was here. James and John: we do not know so much about them by record of their behaviour. But we know one thing about them that they were called "Boanerges, the sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). I wonder how you have interpreted that? I think that the interpretation which is the true one is that they were men of very strong temper. There are indications of that. Their reactions were never moderate reactions; they were always very positive, very strong. When they were present there was no mistaking that they were present. "Sons of thunder".

How the Lord Gets Suitability for His Glory

Now then, these men, in some way, have got to be found suitable for the city of God, for the foundations of the wall of the heavenly Jerusalem. Peter has got to be suitable for the glory of God; James and John and all the others have got to go through some handling by the Lord to bring them to this final position: where the city having the glory of God is revealed as the expression of Christ in fulness in the Church, and representatively by these men.

That sets the ground for a great deal of most profitable consideration, far beyond our time and scope at present. But note some things. He chose twelve - their names are given; He sent them forth, gave them power, and said, "As ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of the heavens is at hand". They were precipitated into something that as yet they did not understand, about which they knew nothing experimentally. They were called upon to move out into something, which had yet in a future day to become a reality to themselves. What did they know about the kingdom of the heavens? Very little indeed! If they had known about the kingdom of the heavens as they later did know, how differently they would have behaved, and how they would have been delivered and saved from the awful subsequent tragedy of their denial, of their forsaking and fleeing and leaving their Master alone. They were precipitated into this - and that is one of the tactical movements of the Lord to get suitability. How often the Lord has to precipitate us into something of which for the moment we know nothing - but by being forced into that position, a very practical basis is laid down for our coming to understanding. You note this movement.

The kingdom of the heavens - what does that mean? Well, to begin with, it surely does mean *heavenly-mindedness,* a heavenly mentality: that is, a heavenly conception of things, a heavenly standard of things, a whole realm of things which is not of this creation; different, utterly different; a mentality which no natural-man possesses, which is only created by the operation of the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. *Heavenly*-mindedness. But they were earthly-minded. When He, their Lord, had been crucified, their world was gone, was shattered in pieces. They had had such an earthly, worldly-minded conception of the kingdom that when He was gone they had nothing left. Heavenly-mindedness: it is what we call spirituality; that is, God's thoughts about things, as other than man's thoughts; the mind of the Spirit of God, as differing from the mind of man - the natural mind, to which Paul gives so much attention in his first letter to the Corinthians.

Patience - these were the most impatient of men. They could not wait, they were

always urging to some precipitate action to bring in this kingdom. Right up to the end, even after His resurrection, it was "Lord, dost thou *at this time* restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). That was their disposition. 'Let us hurry this thing'. They knew little about patience.

What did they know about the heavenly nature of the kingdom as a universal thing? They were Jews, wrapped up in Jewry, and it was a terrific thing that happened when at last heaven broke in and showed them that Israel was not the sum of God's redemptive purposes, that Gentiles also had a place in this city. It represented a tremendous upheaval in their whole mentality and acceptance and tradition - the universality of the city lying four-square, with its gates open in all directions. These twelve here were not like that, not at all!

And what about the great principle of subjection to Christ's absolute Lordship and Headship; complete subjection, as was later brought out so fully and clearly by the Apostle Paul? They knew nothing about that. They were not at all subject, they were assertive. Well, this is not suitable to the glory of God. This will not give them a name upon the foundation of the city. Something has to happen - but, praise God, it happened, and their names are there. It is a great declaration and testimony to the fact that something has happened in these men that they should be there in that capacity as the glory of God. No one listening to Peter denying his Lord with oaths and curses will say that that is for the glory of God. Something had to happen, and it did happen, and they were made suitable. And we are not thinking only of them. As I have said, they are there as representing the whole Church, and what was true of them has to be made true of the whole Church: for it is the whole Church that is here set forth in this city and this wall, and it has to be true of us.

You see, they were made suitable firstly by a very *practical* method. They were not made suitable by just sitting at their Master's feet and hearing His teaching. They heard it all - His long discourse on the mount at the beginning, His ultimate discourse in the upper room, and all between: they heard it all. It did not change them. We can be here; we can listen; we can attend a Bible School, and get all the teaching and all the theory, and it does not make us any more suitable for the glory of God. It may serve a background purpose of showing us the way, but it does not do the thing. God's methods are *practical*. Do lay hold of this. People do not like to lay hold of it, but we shall not get anywhere unless we do. God's methods of making us suitable are never theoretical, they are always practical, deeply and drastically practical.

And how does He do it? He does it by contrast with ourselves: I mean by contradicting us, putting us into situations and circumstances where what we are naturally just cannot stand up to it. There is something so completely contrasting with ourselves that we are altogether out of our element in this realm. You see, the kingdom of the heavens is that realm where we have naturally no capacity or functioning power to exist. We are just not fit for it. I often wonder how these men did feel and what they did say privately and in secret. Peter, for instance. I think when the Lord had been speaking about the Cross and Peter had rebuked Him and said, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee" (Matt. 16:22), and the Lord turned to him and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan", it must have gone home to Peter badly. I think when he got away quietly, if not on the spot, he must have said, 'Look here, Peter, that was wrong, you were wrong this time'. A little later something else happened, he came up against the Lord, and Peter might have spontaneously said, 'Wrong again, Peter!' On the mount of transfiguration - "Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, I will make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. And there came a voice, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matt. 17:1-8). I can hear Peter saying, 'Wrong again, Peter!'

How often it goes like that, so that we begin to mistrust ourselves altogether. We have constantly to say, 'There you are, you are wrong again, you have put your foot in it again, said the wrong thing again, done the wrong thing again', until in the end we cry, 'Can we ever be right?' *That is the important thing with the Lord.* Peter was so right that it had to be proved that he could not be right at all in the realm of the kingdom of the heavens. Before he could be right, he had to be proved incapable of being right in himself. There is another realm, standard and order of things, and this practical application of the principle of being translated out of one kingdom into another is a very ruthless thing, and it does bring us down, so that we "have no confidence in the flesh". That is Paul's way of putting it (Phil. 3:3). These men were self-confident, they thought they knew, that they could do it, that they could go through with it, and again and *again* they had to turn to themselves and say, 'Wrong again!' and in the end I think they despaired of ever being right at all - and the Lord took them up there. Here on the one side is the man who says, 'I *will*' - "I will lay down my life for thee" (John 13:37) - and he has to be shown that he cannot; that is, the 'I will' man has to be translated into another kingdom where his 'I will' is of another order and not his own. It is not the 'I will' of natural strength, but of Divine strength. Peter was no less an 'I will' man after Pentecost, he was a far greater 'I will' man; but he was in another realm, his 'I will' was of a different order.

On the other hand, there is the man who said, "I will not" - Thomas. *"Except I see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25)*. Thomas seems to be the man who is always holding back like that: he will not commit himself. Thomas had to go through exactly the same process in a practical way. He had to become a man who in another realm would say, 'I will not' - but that is of a different order. It is right to put back our own disposition, under the government of Christ and by the Holy Spirit, so that we are not carried by our impulses, our own disposition, our own way at all.

If we are naturally of the 'I will' type, that is brought so completely under the Holy Spirit's government that there is brought about another kind of 'I will' man altogether. We do not become jellyfish without any will at all, under the hands of God, but another kind of 'I will'. On the other hand, if we are naturally of the 'I will not' kind, we are made 'I will-ers' under the Holy Spirit; but also we become those who are of very great value in the Church, who are not just carried away by any whim, emotion, idea, but who are making very sure of the Lord. That is a good thing provided it is not my stubbornness, not my pigheadedness, not that I must have a sound argument before I move. That can be in the flesh, it can be nature; it may hold us back, keep us out of much, as it did Thomas. These men went through a practical school. We have to be undone in one realm. We may be all agog, too ready to take hold, to take the lead and be masters of the situation - it may be nature or training. It has to be emptied out in the realm of nature. It will come back in another realm. I believe that Paul was translated, with a great deal that the Lord could use in his make-up, translated into another realm. It came under the power of God, and that is the thing.

So Pentecost saw these men taken up by the kingdom of the heavens, and they understood then the nature of the kingdom of the heavens, and still the work went on, and at last their names are found on the foundations of that which sets forth the glory of God in Christ in the Church. *"Unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever"*. The Lord has us in hand in a very practical way, and if sometimes you get to the place where you wonder if any good thing can come out of you, if ever you will be right, and not always wrong, just understand that that is a way to another positiveness, another value. These men did serve positive values in the kingdom of the heavens. But see the way they came to it. The Lord has us in hand, and our bad times are just His practical way of bringing in that which is of Christ to supplant that which is of ourselves.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, July-August 1952, Vol 30-4

The Supreme Vocation

Reading: Daniel 10:1-21
From the tenth chapter of the Book of Daniel I want to take just this fragment from the nineteenth verse: *"And he said, O man greatly beloved, fear not peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong."*
And I want to add to that, for later purposes, two fragments from the New Testament:
"Withal praying for us also, that God may open unto us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ" (Col. 4:3).

"We would fain have come unto you, I Paul once and again; and Satan hindered us" (1Thess. 2:18).

An Expression Of The Heart Of God

"0 man greatly beloved." The actual and implied content of that declared approbation of Daniel comprehends a very great deal of the whole revealed heart of God. There is no doubt that it is a heart expression, and it is the expression of the heart of God. "0 man greatly beloved." "Thou art greatly beloved" (9:23). Three times was that said to Daniel, and when we have the Lord speaking like that there must be a very great reason for it, and very great content in it. It is not just some emotional overflow of sentiment. God does not waste Himself like that, however kind He might want to be. If God says a thing like that, there is much behind it and very much in it. This declaration gathers up many of the major features connected with God's relationship with man, and man's relationship with God. If I indicate just two or three of these features, it will be immediately seen how true what I have just said really is.

Vocational Love

For instance, we have in the statement the tremendous truth that it is possible for a man - or let me use the larger term - for *man* to advance beyond the wonder of redeeming love, which is no small thing, to something even more - a vocational love, where, because of man's fellowship with God's purpose, Heaven may attest him in such language: "Thou art greatly beloved." Now, that is not peculiar to Daniel. That is a great Bible truth - it is something in the Bible. It is positively

immense that an archangel, right out from Heaven, should be battling his way through to reach this man, and be saying, in effect, 'Heaven's estimate of you, Daniel, is a very great one. In Heaven you stand in a position of very high value. "Thou art greatly beloved." ' I say that is something beyond, much beyond even the wonder of redeeming love. We feel that redeeming love itself is more than we can grasp. It is beyond us; it gets us out of our depth. Redeeming love is our theme, our song, and we say it will be so for eternity. And yet here is a love of God and Heaven toward a man which goes beyond redeeming love. It is what I have called vocational love: the love which lights in a peculiar way upon that which serves God's ultimate purpose.

We say: 'Can there be anything more glorious than redeeming love for man - anything more wonderful than man standing in the love of God redemptively?' That you and I, knowing even the little that we do know about ourselves, should be compassed about by redeeming love - that man, such as he is, should be in such a position - is nothing short of marvelous. And yet there is something more, after redeeming love. It is a love which relates to the purpose of God served, God satisfied as to His purpose. Notice that it is *man* again; this is the word that we shall emphasize and underline all the way through. And Heaven is declaring, angels and archangels are speaking for God concerning man: "Thou art greatly beloved", "0 man greatly beloved". Is that a theme? That is only one thing included in the statement. We may see much more of what that means.

Intelligence As To God's Purpose

We note another feature gathered into this declaration - the immense importance and value of being a part of God's heavenly intelligence system. Perhaps that sounds strange, but that is what is here. Notice how repeatedly the thought occurs of Daniel knowing, understanding, having understanding, being in the knowledge of things, in the intelligence of Heaven about things, having intelligence as to God's purpose and the meaning and portent of the present situation. If God finds someone like that in that position, that someone or that instrument is of tremendous value to the Lord. It was that intelligence, that knowledge, that understanding, that spiritual insight, which led to this - "thou art greatly beloved". It was because of that that all the other followed. What a tremendous thing it is to have spiritual understanding and intelligence, to be in what I have called 'Heaven's intelligence system', being 'in the know' as to God's thoughts and intentions. It must be noted here that, in the case of Daniel, this included light through the Word of God. He had been studying the Scriptures,

and he received light through the Word. We shall perhaps see more of this later.

Heaven-Affecting Prayer

Take a third thing included in this declaration - the basis and nature of that kind of prayer which reaches beyond temporal things and touches the whole spiritual order, setting in motion the powers of Heaven, celestial and diabolical. If we read the whole chapter, we shall see that that is what is there. That goes beyond our temporal affairs and matters, our personal and private things, the things of everyday life. They are very important, those requests which relate to the details of life; but this goes beyond the temporal and beyond the earthly. It touches the whole spiritual background of this world, and sets angels in action and Heaven on the move - and Satan, furious to combat, resist, withstand, frustrate. Is that a small thing? But that is a great Bible subject, not peculiar to Daniel.

Now I know what you are thinking. You are thinking: 'All this sounds very high, very exalted and beyond us. This is not the simple Christian life.' But, dear friends, listen. The fact is that this is *the* very nature and explanation of the Church's existence. We have failed, utterly failed, to grasp the real significance of our calling in this dispensation if we have not apprehended this fact: that, just as much as Daniel, in another dispensation and another relationship, but with the very same setting, was called into this realm of things, so are we. This is definitely shown to be the case in Ephesians, and it heads up in chapter 6:10-20. Now, if these things which I have mentioned are examples of what is contained in this phrase: "0 man greatly beloved", I am sure you will agree that there is very much in it. If all that was true, then Daniel certainly stands for something.

Let us then consider *the basis and nature of Heaven-affecting prayer.* I believe that this is a key to everything. Everything hangs upon and circles around this whole matter of Heaven-affecting prayer - the prayer that really gets right away and touches things at their ultimate source, gets right through to the throne, to the place where "the heavens do rule". That is a phrase, as you know, peculiar to this book of Daniel.

The following passages indicate something of the estimate placed upon Daniel because of his prayer influence:
"Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel; for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to humble thyself before thy God, thy words were heard: and l am come for thy words' sake. But the prince of the kingdom of

Persia withstood me one and twenty days; but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me: and I remained there" (the margin says "was not needed", because the other one had come to help) *"with the kings of Persia. Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days; for the vision is yet for many days"* (Daniel 10:12-14).

"When a land sinneth... though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God.... Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God, they should deliver neither son nor daughter; they should but deliver their own souls by their righteousness" (Ezekiel 14: 13-14, 20, A.R.V.).

What is the basis and nature of such prayer? Well, to begin with, as we have already intimated, it is intelligence as to God's purpose, and as to the meaning and portent of the present situation. That is essential as a basis to this kind of prayer.

The Place Of The Word Of God In Daniel's Understanding

Now notice first of all the place of the Word of God in Daniel's understanding. If you look at chapter 9:2 you will grasp it. "I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet." As I said earlier, he was reading what Bible he had, reading it prayerfully, thoughtfully, devotedly; and as he was seeking, not to get Bible knowledge as such, but seeking to know what God was really after, what God really intended, what God's purpose really was, and how the immediately present phase of things stood in relation to that - as he so sought, in and through the Word, intelligence and understanding were given. It is not my intention at this point to spend time on how to read the Bible or how to study the Bible. What I am seeking to indicate is this: that before you can touch the powers on high, you must know what God wants to do. Before this kind of prayer - whether it be of the individual or of the company, or (would to God it could be!) of the whole Church - before this kind of prayer which had the effect that Daniel's prayer had, can be made, there must be this intelligence and understanding as to God's purpose, God's intention, and where we stand at this time in relation thereto.

Dear friends, I cannot be stronger. It would be, I think, impossible to be too strong in emphasis upon the importance of this matter. I must leave you to consider it in the light of the whole situation. Here it is. Tremendous things

issued from Daniel's prayer, things in heaven and in earth, but nothing at all would have happened if Daniel had not known what he was praying about, if he had just flung out petitions and requests and longings and desires into the air without knowing quite clearly and definitely what God was after, and therefore what he himself was after. It is strange that, while so many will devote themselves to the subject of the fulfilment of prophecy - Daniel's included - so very few will seek to discover what God has revealed concerning His eternal purpose and the character of their own dispensation - the meaning of the present condition of things in relation to God's eternal purpose.
Yes, there are many, many, who will study the Bible along the lines of prophecy and its fulfilment, and yet there are very few who devote themselves to the understanding of God's eternal purpose, and the peculiar character of the dispensation in which they live. Fulfilment of prophecy lies so very largely, although not exclusively, in the future, in what is subjects, but they all belong to the future. The most important thing of which we can conceive is: What is God after *now*, and what does the present situation say as to that? You see, there can be a wonderful knowledge of prophetic truth without in the first place the spiritual life of the student being affected at all; and what is the good of that? Though I know all about prophecy, if it does not come right home to my own spiritual life and make tremendous differences in me now, it is nothing. That is the estimate of all your prophetic study. It is possible to have this great knowledge of prophetic truth, and yet for the great purpose of God in this present dispensation not to be served at all.

Oh, how many side-tracks there are, side-tracks of secondary interest; whether they be true or whether they be false, they are side-tracks. British Israelism is a very fascinating subject. I only mention it; I am not going to discuss it. Universalism is a very likeable idea, sweeping like fire across Europe, carrying away multitudes; and so I could go on. What effect do these things have upon the spiritual life of those occupied with them, and what effect upon the present aspect of the eternal purpose of God do they have? *Nil!* They count for nothing in the spiritual life where there is a touching of things heavenly. For the most part they are either future or earthly.

Now note: Daniel knew God's thoughts for His people, and he knew what was characteristic of the dispensation in which he lived. And that is where we must begin. What is the characteristic, from God's standpoint, of the dispensation in which you and I live? What is the nature, object, purpose, of this dispensation, the day in which you and I have our time on this earth? What does God mean?

Daniel knew quite well what was characteristic of his dispensation, and he knew further that, until that dispensation was finally closed, that purpose of God held good.

Now, why do we say that? What is the point? It is this. There are many people today who are giving up the revealed character of the dispensation as unattainable, hopeless. But God does not change the character of any one dispensation in itself. If God has said that a given dispensation or age is to serve such-and-such a part of the eternal goings, He does not change that. He neither goes back upon it nor alters it to fit into the conditions which arise.

Listen! If what we have in the Letter to the Ephesians is the sum, the substance, the comprehensive and conclusive revelation of God's eternal purpose, and God saw it worth while to take a man away from his world-wide activities - from all his visitation of churches, all his personal contacts with believers the world over, all those affairs with which his whole life had been occupied - to take him right away and shut him up for a period where all that was cut off, and cause him to write the full revelation of His purpose as centred in this age: if it is true that the Letter to the Ephesians is the consummate presentation of Divine revelation, centering in the Church as the Body of Christ of which He is the Head, and that the securing of that, with all *its heavenly nature and heavenly vocation* for the ages to come, is the Divine characteristic given to this dispensation, then God will not depart from it, no matter what we find as to the state of the Church on this earth.

There are many who have despaired of there being any realization of an 'Ephesian' revelation of the Church in a practical way in this dispensation. Things seem so hopelessly confused and divided that they turn to evangelism as the only way of any effective work.

We cannot dismiss the New Testament as easily as that. The answer is not in trying - however devotedly - to realize the ideal New Testament Church, but, having the vision clearly and strongly before us, to keep the *fullness of Christ* as *the* object of all spiritual attainment and exercise, and the Cross in its fundamental and continuous power as the Holy Spirit's way of realizing the true fellowship which is the meaning of the Church. We must work from the inward, not from the outward; the spiritual, not the temporal.

Daniel knew the characteristic of his own dispensation, and he knew that, while that dispensation continued, and until it finally closed, God would not change; and that led him to pray as he did. A man never prays for a thing about which he

has lost all hope, given up all expectation, sees no prospect. Certainly he does not pray like this. But because Daniel knew, because he had intelligence on this matter, he set himself to pray it through - and he prayed it through. When Paul came to the close of his great letter to the Ephesians, he concluded with: "praying at all seasons in the Spirit for all the saints..." (6:18). We shall only pray like that if we have in ourselves the sum of what is in that letter, and spiritual apprehension as to its meaning.

Daniel Knew The Meaning Of The Present Situation

Further, Daniel knew the meaning of the then present situation. The existing situation of the people of God was not according to God's original thought. Of course, it was obvious in his case because it was so much in the realm of temporal things. It did not need a great deal of insight and perception to recognize that Israel in Babylon was not what God intended. Nevertheless, the principle holds good. Daniel knew the difference between what was and what ought to have been, according to God's mind. That is the principle. However it works out, either in that dispensation of what was temporal, or in this dispensation of what is spiritual, the principle is this - having knowledge and understanding of the difference between what God intended and what is.

Daniel's Stand For Recovery

And that situation, so contrary to God's mind, was due to lost spiritual and heavenly position. That is another mighty principle. If things are today far from what God intended them to be, and from the condition in which He actually had them at the first, the same reasons lie behind it - firstly lost spiritual and heavenly position, and then the loss of the understanding of the nature, the essential nature, of God's heavenly kingdom. There will be no improvement, no recovery, no getting what God is after until there is a recovery of those two things, spiritual position and understanding. Daniel stood in the reality of that position. Though physically actually in Babylon, he was standing in a spiritual and heavenly position altogether out of and above Babylon. He was just not a part of it. That is a very costly place to be in.

And then the recovery of the essential nature of God's kingdom. You see, the disciples of the Lord had their own conception of the kingdom before the Cross. It was earthly, it was temporal, it was material. The Cross shattered that whole thing for them for ever. The coming of the Holy Spirit gave them an entirely new

conception of the nature of God's kingdom. Oh, how revolutionary and transforming was that Holy Spirit's enlightenment as to the true and the essential nature of God's kingdom: not meat and drink (Romans 14:17) but power, heavenly power (1 Corinthians 4:20). These things have to be recovered, and that is what God is after, and that is what Daniel saw that God was after, and that is the meaning of the present situation. Take note of this, friends - *God is more concerned with character than He is with systems and institutions.* Israel, even in Babylon, may have been clinging to their systems, traditions and institutions, but God was transcendently more concerned about character than all that.

The Purpose Of Suffering

Listen now to this very important, particularly important thing. It is, indeed, all-important. Daniel knew that God was using adversity, suffering, disillusionment, to force His people back to His original and primary thought. For Daniel it was perfectly clear that God was using all that was in Babylon, that suffering, adversity, affliction, to force them back - yes, to force them back; not just to call them back, but to force them back - to His original full thought. They were being driven, literally driven, by Heaven to a position where they would just have to make a choice between two things: either a counsel of despair and compromise and frustration, or, alternatively, all that was involved in going back to, and standing for, God's full thought.

There is much of present history in that. Let us go to China, to what has been in China for some generations from the standpoint of Christian activity and endeavor. Now what I am saying is not meant for a moment to under-value or disparage all the sacrifice and all the poured-out devotion. That will find its place in what abides. But when the whole story is read, as we are now able to read it, it is clear that *much* crept in that was not according to God's full and original thought. It came to be very largely something foreign, something institutional, something organizational, something of man's making. And what has happened? Oh, a deluge of suffering, of adversity, of disillusionment, of break-up and disintegration and scattering. What is surviving? What is coming out of it? The *things* have gone; the people of the *things* have departed. What is surviving? Only - but surely - that which is heavenly and spiritual. And it *is* surviving, thank God. Something not made with hands; something not of man's making, however well-intentioned. Oh, the suffering, the unspeakable suffering! But what has it done? It has driven believers back to God's original thought, to His full thought, with all that is less and other than that stripped off.

China I have taken as an example. But this is spreading, and it is going to spread. It is going on and coming on. God is doing in relation to His heavenly purpose what He was doing in Daniel's day in relation to earthly purpose. He uses suffering and adversity to *compel* back. That is the explanation of your suffering and my suffering. What is God doing by means of all this adversity and suffering? Just driving us, forcing us to a position which cannot be shaken, to the truth which cannot be destroyed, to the spiritual which will ever overcome the temporal. He is just forcing us; we are under compulsion. And this is going to spread, dear friends. That is a mark of what belongs to the present age.

Have you intelligence as to what God is doing - doing in you by way of suffering, disillusionment, doing in the world, doing in the Church? God has not abandoned what He set out to realize, and if He cannot do it in any other way, He will force to the point of a decision. Either you deliberately accept this situation as hopeless, and you compromise, as the majority did in Babylon, and settle down; or you take the course of the remnant who said: 'All this points clearly to the fact that God is not satisfied, that the situation is not what God intended, and we are going to give ourselves to that which God meant.' Will you be like the few who went back for that? But oh, how costly! You see, Daniel's prayer had to do with that, the bringing about of that issue, the forcing up to that decision - co-operation with God to secure that parting of the ways. Are you going to stay behind, or are you going on with God?

Complete Separation

And that prayer was based upon a life, in the case of Daniel, firstly of complete separation from self interest. If you have got interests, personal, private interests, in the kingdom of God, then you will not be able to pray like this, you will not be able to touch Heaven. Secondly, there was complete separation from all worldly principles. They tried to involve him in their worldly principles. He said: 'No, never'! Much ought to be said about that - the Church and worldly principles. Thirdly, there was complete separation from the fear of man. How delivered from the fear of man was Daniel! And, finally, there was complete separation from merely earthly associations. That involved him in something. The den of lions prepared for himself, and the seven times heated furnace for his companions - they were Satan's alternatives to going his way. To Daniel's companions Satan said: 'Either you come my way, or you burn. Those are the alternatives. Abandon your line, your way, your life of separation and your

objective, and come my way - or burn.' You can interpret that as you like. You know something, perhaps, of what that means spiritually.

Daniel Was Deliberate

In prayer such as Daniel's, there are four things to be taken account of. First of all, he was deliberate. The angel said to him, when at length he arrived: "From the first day that thou didst set thine heart...." *"Thou didst set thine heart."* There is a man gathering up all the loose folds of his interests, and girding to concentration on this one thing. "Thou didst set thine heart." If (to anticipate for a moment) we are to fall into the train of the Apostle Paul and his brethren, and take up that which particularly relates to this present age, to bring it through to consummation by prayer, it will not do for us to be diffuse and scattered. There will have to be a setting of ourselves to this thing; it is very practical. Whether it be in our own individual life of prayer with God, or when we come together for prayer as a company, smaller or larger, representing the Church and God's eternal purpose concerning it, we shall have to come in this mind, deliberately setting ourselves to this thing. 'We are set, we are committed, we are gathered; we know what we are after. Like Daniel, we have seen, and what we have seen of God's thought has become a pattern, a body; and we set ourselves.' God characterize all our prayer times by this feature of the man beloved, precious to God, that which God approves.

Daniel Was Persistent

Then Daniel was persistent. The angel said: "From the first day...", and Daniel himself, describing it, said that this engaged him wholly, utterly, for twenty-one days. It is something to pray about the same thing continuously for twenty-one days! How we just ask the Lord for a thing, and leave it there, perhaps. in a false notion of faith. Here is an example of the opposite. Daniel was persistent. He did not let go, he would not let go; he held on until the thing was done. Let us take his example and lay it to heart. Very, very great issues are bound up with such prayer.

Daniel Was Abandoned

Daniel was abandoned. "From the first day that thou didst set thyself... to humble thyself..." Daniel again described it like this: "I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth." Here is a man 'all-in' on the issue,

abandoned; not allowing indulgences, distractions, other interests, secondary things; just abandoned.

Daniel Was Conclusive

And finally he was conclusive. Daniel stood for and would take nothing less than a verdict. The angel said: "I am come for thy words' sake." He had spoken, and he would take no other answer in this matter from God - yes, but because he knew so deeply that this was what God wanted. Effectual prayer demands such conviction, such assurance, such knowledge. If we do not know what the Lord wants, then we do not know how to pray. But if, as Daniel had, we have made the discovery by revelation through the Word of God, that is tremendous strength. We must be *there* to pray in this way.

The object was of such importance to God that Satan fought it until he could fight no more. It is something to take note of when Satan fights. It is very significant and indicative when hell rises up and is provoked by the object which is in view. And whatever may have been in Daniel's case and Daniel's time, there is a counterpart of this in our own time. The counterpart of this, in this present dispensation, is, in the first place, Paul and his brethren, who understood what God eternally intended in regard to the Church, who abandoned themselves to that with such abandonment, who travailed and who prayed, and through whose travail and prayer there was given to the Church its charter for the whole dispensation. But that charter is passed on to us - to you, to me - for it is the same dispensation, and what was characteristic of them must be characteristic of us, if we are to come to that place of superlative value to the Lord where, not only as accepted in the beloved One, and beloved for Jesus' sake, but because of our co-operation with God in the thing that is deepest in, and nearest to, His heart, He is able to say: "0 man...!" It may be to individuals; it may be to companies just as well. Man is a collective term as well as an individual term. "0 man greatly beloved."

We are in the consummation of this dispensation, and it is necessary to know what God is going to have, what He has set His heart upon, and to be with Him in it. The Lord give us a heart for that.

The Swing of the Pendulum

If a pendulum clock is not true on its base the pendulum will swing too much to one side. This will upset its timekeeping, and those who are guided by it will be misled. There is much that spiritually corresponds to this, and in the Word of God there is a constant effort to keep the Lord's people true on their basis.

The Church is intended to be God's instrument for keeping life true. Too often its pendulum swings too much to one side or the other and its guidance becomes unreliable. This unbalanced condition relates to many things. In different ways and at different times the swing is in some exaggerated or extreme direction and an abnormal condition results.

As we have said, so much of the Word of God is concerned with either guarding against such loss of balance, or restoring it when it has been upset. Here we are going to touch upon one major aspect of this matter. Let us say immediately that anything which goes to extremes and loses its proportion means a serious loss to the Lord, and throws His people into confusion. This has been and is the result of

Extremes in Exclusiveness or Inclusiveness

While it is true that each of these has often been a reaction from, or fear of, the other, such reaction is never a satisfactory solution, or a justifiable expedient. Excess in any direction is wrong, and what is wrong is dangerous.

Let us first look at the evil of exclusiveness when it is carried too far. In the New Testament there is a very clear and strong appeal against this disposition. We see this in at least two connections. It was the incorrigible propensity of the Judaisers. They had their base in Jerusalem and their tentacles reached out to the ends of the earth. Like the arms of an octopus they spread out to strangle the life out of anything that they could fasten upon. Not merely did the Lord and Paul appeal against this life-destroying evil, but they thundered against it, and were never so vehement against anything else as they were against this.

It goes by various names, such as Legalism, Puritanism, Exclusivism, etc., but it is anything that is wholly and invariably negative without a balancing positive.

Of course, there are differing degrees and various causes or characteristics, but, whatever the form it takes, it is one of the persistent enemies of life and of the fulness of Christ.

In the case of the Judaisers, exclusivism was a system, not just a tendency. You belonged or you did not belong. You were 'one of us', or you were an outsider and suspect. Prejudice was in the very roots and it instinctively ruled relationship.

But there was, in New Testament times, as there ever has been and is now, another aspect of this malady. It was one of the strongest elements in Corinth. As you know, the Apostle, in his letters, was dealing in the main with the 'natural man', that is, the 'soulical man'. A large element in this 'natural man' complexion was natural selectiveness, preference, partiality, etc.; both in the preference for the type of man and in the kind of ministry. The eye was not on the Lord in the man, or looking for what he had to impart of the Lord, but upon the man himself; his manner, his ability, his personality, his 'line of teaching', and so on.

There were things about the Apostles personally which the Corinthians either preferred or resented and these things resulted in more-or-less-closed parties. It is tragic to note that this kind of thing brought them to the point of losing the values of the ministry of the great Apostle himself. Because of this he made his great and pathetic appeal in the words, "Be ye enlarged".

The classic and incomparable thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians took its rise and had its basis here in this very context. There is nothing larger in all the Bible. That this particular feature of exclusivism marked and marred the Corinthians and threatened both their spiritual fulness and their world-testimony becomes immediately evident by the very way in which the Apostle *opens* his letter, and we do well to ponder his words.

"With all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, their Lord and ours".

The range and scope of benediction is "all in every place". Who? What? - Who hold our particular interpretation of truth? Who conduct their meetings as we do? How many such questions could be introduced here. But what *is* the denominator? It is "who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours". The basis of fellowship is thus determined as being the

acknowledged, accepted, and declared Lordship of Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ as Lord uniting them and us. Well, so much regarding exclusiveness, for the time being.

What about excessive inclusivism? If it is dangerously possible to make Christ smaller than He really is, it is equally possible to make Him, not greater, but more inclusive than He is. We have only to read that First Letter to the Corinthians to see (if we will so study it), that there are more than a few things which have no place in Christ. These things, of course, are not just the moral, social, and pagan evils referred to; but are, again, the bringing in of the 'natural man' with his standards of wisdom, power, and success(?). Natural wisdom is particularly ruled out. Indeed, it is the whole system of this world's ways and standards which is vetoed.

If there is one thing that the Bible reveals as being hated by God more than another, it is mixture. There are two irreconcilable spiritual systems in this universe, the very natures of which are positively inimical and hostile to each other, emanating from two utterly contrary sources. The overlapping of these and their admixture, where what is of God is concerned, is Anathema to Him and He hates it.

It is with regard to this that the Apostle says in this letter that "the fire shall try..." The fire of God's wrathful judgment will expose and consume all mixture. Christians, the Church, and all which claims to be of God and for God will do well to examine all things in this light and ask just how much 'conforms to this age' and is according to this world? There is an inclusiveness everywhere which is sapping the very vitals and destroying the very effectiveness of Christianity.

The greatest plague and menace in the physical realm is cancer. What is the effect of cancer? When it gets a hold, it enlarges the organism out of all natural proportions, but as it does so, it destroys its particular and distinctive form so that the organism no longer looks like itself and loses its natural character. This is what has happened very largely to Christianity. There has been an invasion by this world which has enlarged it abnormally and at the same time robbed it of its distinctive character and function. God has always spoken along physical lines concerning spiritual conditions. Distinctiveness is something very vital to, and rightly characteristic of, the Body of Christ, but it should be that of the whole Body. Otherwise the Body will be thrown out of balance. If God has to raise up specific ministries in and to the Body, it is not with a view to making the Body

unbalanced and bulgy, but because the Body has become deficient and indefinite. There is a difference between specific ministries *to* the whole Body and abnormal features *in* the Body.

If the whole Body were as God would have it, it would be outstandingly distinctive and pronounced. The fear of distinctiveness and a reaction from the specific may result in a very general, heterogeneous, nondescript, something-or-nothing mixture. This may be very 'happy' and free from conflict, but it has no impact and will not meet need in its deepest demand.

How clear it is that there has never been anything which God has raised up to lift His Church from the 'ordinary', nominal and very general level but that sooner or later a 'down-grade' element has come in which has made that thing quite general, broad, indistinct, and, if it goes on, it is with but a shadow of its original and former glory and effectiveness. There is a bigness which is disastrous to spiritual quality.

In order to recover a true and effective testimony the Lord has more than once had to put into effect His words, "I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people and they shall trust in the name of the Lord" (Zeph. 3:12). This was first said in relation to an inclusiveness which had robbed of all distinctiveness.

So, for this present, we close by repeating our conviction that the two great needs of our time are, on the one hand, salvation from man-made fences around our Lord Jesus by which He is made smaller than He really is: and, on the other hand, the recovery and consolidation of the outstanding distinctiveness and unmistakableness of what is really Christ, without mixture.

Let us seek largeness of heart with proper discrimination: true distinctiveness without hardness, bigotry, superiority and spiritual pride. The Holy Spirit, when in full control, will always adjust contradictions and establish proportion and balance. This can be easily seen if we read our New Testament with the object of noting this feature of His leading and work.

Let us pray that we may really be set level as to our basis, and that our pendulum may swing evenly and equally; resulting in a true and safe testimony to all who are looking in our direction for guidance.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, May-June 1963, Vol 41-3

A Talk to Young Christians on the Nature of the Christian Life

I am going to talk to you very simply. I trust that the people who 'know all about it' will not think it is too simple! But I feel we want to be quite clear about our foundations, our beginnings, and so in what I have to say I shall risk being as simple as I possibly can.

I am going to take as the foundation the eighth chapter of the letter to the Romans. Perhaps you immediately say: Well, we know that one! And yet, you know, we may know a lot *about* it, and still we may not *know* as it has to be known. You will know this, to begin with, that the last section of this chapter is something immensely comprehensive. It reaches right back, takes us back into the "before times eternal" and gives us just a glimpse into what was happening with God before this world was. And then in the same section we are taken right on beyond these ages, to the 'ages of the ages', and told what things will be like then so far as we are concerned. So this chapter has a very big context.

And in saying that, I have enunciated a law, a principle, which you will do well to remember: namely that, in order to have a Christian life that is really full, you have got to have it in its full setting. I have always felt, and the longer I live, the more strongly do I feel it, that it is a mistake just to try to keep people to little fragments - what is called the 'simple Gospel' - even at the beginning. If you are to have a great Christian life, you need to see from the beginning what a great thing it is you have come into - what a tremendous context the Christian life has! Right at the beginning, indeed even before they have made a beginning, people need to be impressed with this; that it is no little thing to be a Christian. That gives them a very good starting-point. If they start on that, they will make better progress; and they will arrive at something much fuller, in a quicker way, than if things are just doled out to them in little fragments as they go along.

So remember that, and if sometimes it seems too big for you, just say: That is a very good thing; I would not have it as small as I am; there needs to be something very big to get *me* anywhere! For the bigger it is, the mightier is the dynamic and the motive for the Christian life.

The Gateway to the Christian Life

This eighth chapter of Romans, then, in its last section particularly, represents a strategic point in the movement of the whole letter, as you will see. You know that the first seven chapters are what we might call the Gateway into the Christian life. I am not going to stay for an explanation of them, but that is what they represent: seven chapters on the gateway into the Christian life. The word that will be written on the portal of that gate is 'Faith' - you know that. And on the gate itself, 'The Cross'. Faith in the Cross of the Lord Jesus is the way in, and seven chapters are taken up with the Way In. And then, when you come to chapter 8, you find what is inside: what kind of situation, what kind of a life, this is, that you have come into.

Chapter 8 presents to us the real nature of the life into which we have come. And I suppose it is one of the most elementary things, which you have heard and noted many times, that in this chapter there is one word that stands out - one word. One of the first things I did in Bible study, as a young fellow, was to underline the words in different chapters, to see how many times particular words occurred. When I got to this chapter, and underlined one particular word, I found that the chapter was simply smothered with this word. You are familiar with it: it is the word 'Spirit'. If you go through this chapter, you will see that there is really very little else left to talk about. It all springs from, centres in, and circles round this matter of the Spirit. It begins there: "The law of the Spirit of life *in* Christ Jesus" (v. 2). We are now *in,* through the door; you see; we are in; and what we find here is what we may call -

The Life in the Spirit.

We need to understand what kind of life that is, what it really means; because with it we come into the peculiar character of a dispensation that is altogether new. There have been other dispensations in the past - dispensations in the Old Testament - which we will not mention in particular.

But now those dispensations are past; one has followed the other, and the Old Testament, with all its different phases and stages, is closed. With the New Testament, a completely new age has been introduced, with a character all of its own, a character that never was before. You and I live in a period of time, marked off by the coming of the Lord Jesus in the first place, and by the coming of the Lord Jesus again, which is a particular phase in the whole course of the

ages, with its own peculiar aspect and character.

Now, the peculiar characteristic of this time in which you and I live, is that it is the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. I am sure you will agree with me that we do need to know what is the order of things, from God's standpoint, in the time in which *we* live. In the Old Testament, they had to learn that for themselves, as to their own times - what times they were living in. You and I have got to know this: what is the time we are living in? And the answer is that this is the age, or dispensation, of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has come; He has introduced a new order of things entirely; and, until we understand that order, we shall not make any progress in our Christian life. It is very necessary for us to understand that.

"Joined to the Lord"

In the first place, the effect of the Holy Spirit, simply but fundamentally, is that He joins us to Christ; He brings about a vital union with the Lord Jesus. "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17); it is a spiritual and inward union with the Lord Jesus. The words and language are, I know, so simple, and perhaps so well-known, that they may not grip you very forcefully, but out of this everything comes. You and I, if we are truly born-again children of God, have got to know that, right inside of us, a union has been effected between Christ and ourselves, and ourselves and Christ; that we are joined to Christ. That union has been effected; we have been made one - *one*.

Now, you see, if you are one, you are not two! That seems quite obvious, of course; but there is more to it than it sounds. Very often, you know, we are two: even in the Christian life, the Lord is 'that', and I am 'this'! The Lord's way of illustrating this, you remember, is the marriage bond. Paul says: "The twain shall become one flesh. This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church" (Eph. 5:31,32). 'One flesh'. Now, if that union is what it ought to be, those two people are so one, that to separate them is to cut one person in two, and only leave two bits, two halves, and not a whole. That is the illustration of our union with Christ. We are not complete until we are united with Christ; our completeness is in union with Christ.

If we haven't got Christ with us, we are only half here. If we lose the Lord, we have torn our very person in two; we have torn ourselves asunder, or we have been torn asunder - that is the effect of it. You know that spiritually, although the

division may not be ultimate and utter and final, we can - by disobedience, by playing with sin, by disobeying the Lord, by this or that - bring about such an effect, so that we feel: Well, something has happened; the Lord is there and I am here, and we are not together. It is as though we have been torn in two, are not complete.

We could dwell much upon that. But, you see, that is the beginning of the Christian life; that is the very foundation and basis of the Christian life: We and Christ have been made one - *one*; not two - *one*! To divide, now, is not merely to walk away and have an independent life - it is to destroy your own identity, to tear your own spiritual personality in pieces; and that is how it is, if we get away from the Lord in any way.

So here, the very first thing that we find about this life in the Spirit, is that there has come about between us and Christ, and between Christ and ourselves, a oneness, which is not in any outward sense, but in a vital, inward reality. And, in greater or lesser degree, I am sure you know that that is quite true.

The Witness of the Spirit

We must not stop with every part of this life in the Spirit, but the next that this chapter tells us is this: "The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God" (v. 16). The first thing is: "The law of the Spirit of life *in Christ Jesus"* (v. 2) - the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus - that is the union: union with Christ. Now, the Spirit in us bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. How does He do that? Again, forgive me if I seem to be talking to you as to the Kindergarten, as to little children; How does He do it? Well, the Holy Spirit does not constantly speak in our ear, and say: You know, you are a child of God; you are a child of God. He says what He does *on the basis of* our being children of God - that we know it. We *know* how others can do certain things that we cannot; we *know* that we cannot take even our cue from others; there is something that we have in our own heart which makes us aware that this is, or this is not, according to the Father's mind. Putting it into language, giving it terms, that is how it works out; it is like that. The simple truth is this - we *know:* "the Spirit beareth witness"; we know.

I have many times in my life fallen back on that quite deliberately. Coming to very real testings and trials, and going through dark times, and many adverse circumstances and conditions; being tempted to wonder, to wonder if after all

you are the Lord's - those questions that can come up because of many things, experiences, and so on: many times in my life I have just fallen back on this - 'Yes, but what about this and that from the beginning?' I can recall, again and again, occasions when the Lord Himself definitely held me, or spoke to me, and made me know that this was right, and this was wrong. It was something that I never received from outside; I never got advice, counsel, or anything; but I knew it in myself! I could tell you of instances like that, again and again, right back from the beginning of my Christian life, where I could not do something that I did before I was the Lord's. Something said: 'You just can't - no, not now! You just cannot do it.' It was as real as, or more real than, any audible voice. And that has gone on through life, again and again, in different connections.

It sounds very simple, but I have had to say to myself: Yes, but what is that, coming right from the inside? That is the Spirit bearing witness with my spirit that I am a child of God. A child of God does not behave like that; a child of God *does* behave like this; a child of God does not do those things; a child of God *does* do these things. That is what it amounts to all the way along. The Spirit says: 'Others can; you cannot; you are a child of God.' Well, that is simple, but it is very real - the Spirit bearing witness. That is to be the basic law of our Christian life. And every one of you who is a child of God ought to know what I am talking about, and I am quite sure you do, at least to some extent. If you have not gone very far with the Lord, or if you are not even the Lord's yet, let me say: This is what it means to be a Christian. It is something real on the inside.

A Different Constitution

Now we come to another thing in this chapter. As you look at it, you will find that this means that we are constituted in an altogether different way from all other people. The Holy Spirit, coming inside, has created and constituted a new kind of human being, a different kind of humanity from all the rest of humanity. That is saying a tremendous thing; and yet it is not something advanced in the Christian life - this is something fundamental to it, belonging to the very beginning. We use the word 'species': well, the Holy Spirit has created and constituted a new and different species of humanity. The fundamental reality about a true child of God is that he is *different* from all other people who are not children of God. The difference is not that they have decided to be religious, and to go to meetings, and company with Christian people; do this thing and that thing, and give up a lot of other things - that is not it at all. Their very being, their very constitution, has been changed; they are different people.

You know how true this is. When you have really become the Lord's, and this great change has taken place, this 'something' has happened inside, and you go back into the world, you know that there are two kinds of humanity in your office, in your workshop, in your factory, in your school, or wherever you are. You are one, and the others are another! Although, on the outside, in outward appearance and so on, there may be no visible difference, yet there is just the same difference as there was between the Lord Jesus, when He was here on this earth, and the other people in the world. While He could understand them, they could never understand Him. It was just as though they were living in two different worlds. As He said: 'You are from beneath; I am from above' (John 8:23). And that is exactly true of every child of God. We too can say: I am from above: this is no longer my place; this is no longer my home; I am no longer at rest here in this world. I have got a new nativity; I have got a new location; I have got a new country, a new land; here in this world I'm just an alien.

That becomes a very real thing to the child of God. It is sometimes a very unpleasant thing to feel out of it, but it is something we have to accept. Never try to violate it - never try to be at home in this world. If you do, you will be doing damage to your new constitution - because it is that, you see, that is your testimony. It is not that you *try* to be different at all. Never try to be different; never put it on! Never try to create the impression that you are different. The difference is there, right enough! If you want any proof of that, you will find that, from the moment of your new birth, the Devil knows you! You are a marked person, just as Christ was a marked man when He was here.

As far as this world was concerned, and those who were under the enemy's control, Jesus could never do anything right: everything He said - that which in anybody else would have been accounted good - was wrong; everything that He did well, they found fault with it. I was reading about this only today; it is an amazing thing. As He was going about the country, up and down the length and breadth of that country, doing good, casting out demons, healing those who are sick - leaving behind Him a veritable trail of folk made whole and delivered, set free, blessed with a new life and a new outlook - here come along those other people: 'By the prince of the demons he casts out demons!' (Matt. 9:14. etc.). They put it all down to the Devil - He could not do right! And the Devil knows the children of God as he knew the Son of God. And, somehow or other, a lot of things come to us which would never come to us if we were not children of God. It is for that simple reason - that we are different, and we are known.

And it is sensed: sometimes it is almost uncanny how men of this world sense it. They are not able to explain it; they are not able to say why they take these attitudes toward us; they just cannot tell us. In fact, if you ask, 'Why do you look at me like that? Why do you feel like that about me?', they say, 'Well, I don't know why, but somehow or other... somehow or other...!' You see, that is just it; they can't explain it, they don't understand it at all. But - but - there it is: a fundamental difference of constitution. You might be people of different races altogether, who have no understanding of one another.

Well, it is like that. The Spirit coming in makes us different, and it is just that difference that is the basis of everything for the future. Never try to modify or reduce that difference. But, at the same time, never make it artificial: never make people think you are a 'goody-goody', that you are 'putting it on' and trying to be different - none of that. You are different, right enough; you won't have to 'put on' anything if you live in the Spirit. We are constituted differently, and we must understand that that is a fact. That is really what it means to be 'born of the Spirit'.

Led by the Spirit

Now, we have been constituted by the Spirit according to a Divine and heavenly order, and the course of our Christian life should be one of getting further and further away from the old order. I believe that that is what is meant by the words here in this chapter: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God"(v. 14). "Led by the Spirit of God". Now you may take hold of that and apply it to 'leading' in many things. It may apply to being 'led' about *things*; this is what we call 'guidance'. But, whatever it means for such guidance in particular matters, I believe the setting of these words demands a wider interpretation than that. You cannot lift these things out of their great context; and this is, as we have seen, a tremendous context - 'from eternity to eternity'.

You see, God started up something - that is the point that this chapter brings into view - He started up something, before this world was, where *we* are concerned. "Whom he foreknew, he... foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son" (v. 29). That is, right back there, God started up something, and swept down into the ages with that purpose, moving toward that great goal. And what was that goal? - conformity to the image of His Son.

Now, what is being 'led by the Spirit'? Well, take the illustration of Israel. God

came down into Egypt, into the dark world of their bondage and tyranny in Egypt: He came down with His great purpose; He took possession of them; and then He gave them the symbol and figure of the Holy Spirit in the Pillar of Cloud and Fire. Paul says: 'They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud' (1 Cor. 10:2). What was the pillar of cloud and fire given for? Well, it is an illustration. It is a type of the Holy Spirit. It was given to lead them into the Land of Promise, where God had intended them to be. That was the purpose for which He had come down into Egypt, and got hold of them, and pulled them out, and brought them into the Wilderness. The Spirit was ever moving ahead of them, in the Pillar, to get them into the Land.

That is being "led by the Spirit". As the Lord said, speaking of His people: "Israel is my son... Let my son go..." (Ex. 4:22,23) - 'Now these are the sons of God, who are led by the Spirit of God'. But what does it mean? It means that you are moving on, ever moving on in this way of the Spirit, in this leaving of the old order further and further behind, and getting nearer and nearer to the heavenly order. Now, if the Christian life is normal, this is true of the Christian life. This is not something abnormal; this is 'the *normal* Christian life'! This is what is real about it - that the more you go on with the Lord, the less and less do you find it possible to accept this world and to settle down here, and the further you seem to get away from it. Or it seems to get away from you. The things of the Lord get nearer and nearer, and more and more engrossing, taking up more and more of your life. You find that, whereas at one time, you could divide your time, you could spread it out over things, now you are more and more being absorbed - not obsessed, but absorbed in the things of the Lord; you have not time for other things.

Even your work - well, you go to work, you do your work, you give yourself to your work, you do it honestly... but - but -the thing that has got a grip of you inside, is the Lord's interests - the Lord's interests! 'Being let go', you go to your own people! (Acts 4:23); and they are the Lord's people. Is that not true? If you are going on with the Lord, oh, what you want is more and more of that which belongs to your own constitution, the heavenly order of things. That is what it means to be "led by the Spirit of God". Whatever 'guidance by the Spirit' means in things, in details, this is what it means here in this great context: it means that the Spirit is leading us on nearer and nearer to the fulness of Christ. We can, of course, test our lives by that.

Spiritual Qualification

The next thing, in the life of the Spirit, is that the Holy Spirit gifts us, and qualifies us for a place, a part, in this great purpose of God. This again is something that I want you to take to heart, because it means so much. In this realm, the matter of natural qualifications is not the argument at all. I remember - and you must forgive if I put in a word of testimony, because I want to keep this near to life, because it is real - I remember how, early in my Christian life, I was very conscious of many lacks and deficiencies and defectivenesses, and things that I wished I had had. There were ambitions that I was never able to realise; desires that I had in this life for learning, for becoming qualified in this or in that, and so on: many doors were closed to me when I came to the Lord, and so I had to face life pretty much without this background that I wanted.

And then I came early to see that this matter of natural qualifications is not the argument with the Lord at all. I saw this from both sides. On the one side, there are many who have very great natural qualifications, or qualifications acquired through study, or through all manner of advantages, but they are not necessarily spiritual people. And it never does mean - and you can prove this - that, because you have got a tremendous background of scholarship, education, or qualification of that kind, you have a special aptitude for grasping spiritual things. I have been amazed, again and again, when meeting some quite 'highbrow' people - Christians - who have had all the advantages of academic training, to find that, when I have talked to them about the Lord, they just have not known what I was talking about. They can't grasp it at all! And then I have met others, who have none of those qualifications and advantages, and you can go with them on spiritual things as far as you like, and they have got it - they see.

That is a great thing to learn early in the Christian life: it is not what I have, or what I have not got, naturally - the Holy Spirit is qualification for what God wants! The New Testament speaks of 'gifts of the Spirit' - and, while we have some catalogues of those gifts, I am quite certain we have not got a full list of the 'gifts of the Holy Spirit'; not all the gifts that the Holy Spirit will give are mentioned - qualifications, equipments, for a place in the whole range of Divine interests and values. Do take that to your heart. It may be that you are one of the least, and that you feel there is not much hope for you; but, if you have got the Holy Spirit, He can and will qualify you for something that is your particular part in the whole. And people can say: 'You know, he, or she, - not very much naturally, perhaps; you would not think very much of them if you looked at them; but, but... he counts; she counts, you know; and this is the way in which they count.' It is like that; the Holy Spirit has come to give us something we have

not got naturally, and we cannot get naturally - it is the particular equipment of the Holy Spirit.

Now, don't think in terms of wonderful, public gifts; it may never be that. In some simple, quiet way, you may be an effective faculty in the whole body corporate. That is what this means, to have the Holy Spirit: that we are something more in accountability than we are or could be naturally, even at our best. It is something different. The Lord will not always tell you what your gift is, but other people will know - that is just where you count for the Lord; just how you, particularly, mean something for the Lord.

Corporate Vocation

I want to come to one more very important aspect of this whole matter of the Spirit. Supposing we take an illustration; perhaps we can get at it best that way. Let us go back to the Old Testament, to the last section of the book of Exodus, which, as you know, contains the whole account of the making of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness. And you will know that it was through the Holy Spirit that the whole thing was made, constructed; that the Spirit came upon certain men for that work, and then, under those Spirit-governed men, gathered all the people together. *All* the people came into action.

While it does not definitely say so, it as good as says that the whole nation was in this business. They were all doing something about it; they all had something to give. Some had linen to give; some had other materials to give; but they all had something. I suppose you could see 'sewing parties' all over the camp, and men at work busy at this thing and that - some on wood, some on gold, some on silver, some on brass - all the different materials; everywhere they were occupied with the work, and it was all under the direction and instruction and counsel of Spirit-filled men. That is to say, they were all under the government of the Spirit. The Anointing, so to speak, spread itself all over the whole mighty host for work.

Now my point is this: the Holy Spirit creates corporate vocation. (Is that too difficult in language?) Just think: here are some women making a curtain for the Tabernacle. Well, are they going to have their own little 'tabernacle' made of their one little curtain, all to themselves? Here are some men making a part - just a part - of wood, perhaps to be overlaid with gold: is that the Tabernacle? Are they going to have a special little tabernacle of that thing that they are making - a

little church of their own? It is nonsense, you see. Now you see what I am getting at. All this, by the Spirit, is one thing - it is a corporate vocation: that is, they are not each living and working for their own little bit, they are living and working for the whole. They have got the vision of the whole, and their whole life is taken up with the whole - not with just their little bit as an end in itself. They are living and working for the Tabernacle in completeness. The Holy Spirit has brought them together, and bound them into a one-ness in corporate vocation. All the vocation is one, because they are under one Spirit.

Well, that is an Old Testament illustration; but in the New Testament, what does that mean? What does that mean now? If you and I are really under the government of the Holy Spirit, under the anointing of the Spirit, as we should be, we shall not have any little private things of our own, any little 'hole in a corner' business of ours, any detached and unrelated thing to which we are giving ourselves. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of unity, and of unity in vocation. What it will amount to, dear friends, is this: we shall live for the whole. And if it is a matter of our local relationships - such as here - none of us is to be living other than for the whole: we ought to be living for the complete thing; the corporate vocation ought to have got a grip of us. Our position must be: 'I am not living and working as an individual: I am living and working as a part of a whole. And, in the appointment of God, for the time being, my local 'whole' is here, and I am living for that; I work for that; that is my vocation.'

Now, there is a tremendous amount bound up with that, if you realise it; and it is all in the Word of God. I am giving you in a few words the sum of so much. So many people are wondering about their service: wanting to be in the Lord's work, or to do something for the Lord - some sort of ministry, some sort of work - and to know what their work is; and they are asking: What is my work? What is my ministry? What is my job? It is always 'my', 'my', 'my'... The answer is: Your job is 'they', is 'them'. Your vocation is a related thing. You will find the Holy Spirit coming in and using you when you link yourself on with all the rest, and become part of the whole. If you keep yourself in any detachment, He may not do anything at all with you; He will just leave you; you will be doing nothing, and be counting for nothing. We have to recognise this great law of Divine revelation, that the Spirit makes us one in a great vocation. The vocation is not our personal vocation at all; it is the vocation of the whole; it is the vocation of the Church.

You see, we are really in "Ephesians". "Walk worthily of the calling" (or

'vocation') "wherewith ye were called" (4:1); and the context all concerns the *relatedness* - our relationship one to another in vocation. This is not my vocation; this is not *your* vocation, as something personal, as something detached. It is the *Church's* vocation; it is not yours: it is not mine. Whenever people go off on a personal, unrelated, line (and I am speaking after fifty years' experience), they become an end in themselves; and when they go, that is the end. The thing started with them, and it finished with them; and now you have got to start all over again. I have seen this sort of thing happen again and again - people who were unrelated in their work, and when they went, that was the end of the work.

But that is not God's idea, and you will agree with me that we don't want it to be like that. We are not living unto ourselves, and dying unto ourselves - not by any means. If we are going right on, and the Lord's work is going on and on, we must recognise that the vocation is a corporate vocation; it is the vocation of the Church, and only of individuals as in a related way. This is a very important thing to recognise. And you come into blessing that way; you come right in - no detachment, no unrelatedness: the Lord can in some way let you contribute to the whole, and there is a real blessedness about it. Whereas, in a personal way, you make no contribution at all; in an unrelated way you would not mean anything - at any rate, the Lord is not putting His seal upon that - He will, if you come right into oneness with all the rest.

And so we go back to our illustration from the Old Testament. The people found their inspiration, and the Lord's blessing upon them, as they saw all the time the whole, lived for the whole, and regarded everything, every detail, as a part of the whole. And *you* live for the whole! If the local company is where the Lord has put you, live for it, work for it; not for yourself, but for it. But even so, as a local company, don't just work for your own ends. Have the whole view of God's Church, and you will find that the Lord's blessing is there. There may be difficulties, but the Lord will stand by you; and there will be something that would not be there if you just became a little company by yourselves, in a corner, living for yourselves, turned in on yourselves. No! have this great vision of God's purpose.

Well, now, these are a few things about the Life of the Spirit - this Divine character of things in this dispensation. We started from within - the Spirit doing His work within, working out in relation to others; then the Spirit of unity, the Spirit of purpose, the Spirit of vocation, embracing the whole Church of God,

the whole instrument of His eternal purpose.

Now I suggest you go back to Romans 8, and read it once more, very carefully, fragment by fragment, and, as you ought to do in all your Bible reading, ask yourself: What has that said? What is it that that says? And what does that say to me? Not just, What does it say in the Bible? but, What does that say to *me?* How do *I* get involved in that? I think, if you will just read it again, you will find that that chapter will take on new meaning, new light, and new values: because, as I have said, it is the link - *the* link. You have come in now; you were out, but you have come in. Where are you going? Well, the end of that chapter is: conformity to the image of His Son. That is where you are going. How? By the Spirit within, and living in the Spirit.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Sep-Oct 1958, Vol 36-5

"That I May Know Him"

"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places." (Eph. 1:17-20).

From time to time, right through the ages, those who have stood in quite a definite relationship to the things of God have either been seduced, or have drifted, or have for some reason come to fixed and systematized positions as to the ways, works, and purposes of God, which fixed ideas have come to limit Him, bind them, and result in going round in a circle instead of on a direct course of ever-enlarging and clarifying spiritual fulness and newness.

This propensity for fixedness and finality in conceptions has threatened the people of God many times with a fatal impasse. Indeed, Israel's captivity and eventual disintegration among the nations, with all the agony of centuries, very largely rests upon their fixed idea of being so right as God's elect. This same peril threatened to frustrate the real spiritual way and purpose of God with Christ's own disciples. Because of Jewish ideas interpreted by their natural minds, they had prejudices and preconceptions which menaced their spiritual lives and constantly came into conflict with Christ's mind and way. Paul's life and ministry was continually opposed by this element, and he himself in his pre-conversion days, is a supreme example of its danger.

So it has been through the ages since, and is one of the greatest hindrances to the quicker realisation of the thought and purpose of the Lord in our own times. The fact is that God must not move or do anything which does not conform to the accepted and recognised order of traditional evangelical Christianity. Anything that is outside of a prescribed circle of what has been done and how it has been done for generations is suspect and boycotted. The official bodies of organised evangelical Christianity are the final court of appeal. One of the strong factors in the ministry that this paper has sought to fulfil through these many years has

been that, while there are those foundational facts which are in their essence unalterable and unchanging, there is always, in everything that comes from God, a wealth and fulness of meaning and value which is commensurate with its infinite Source and Fountainhead, and that the Spirit of Truth can continually make us know that God's meaning infinitely transcends our apprehension. We must therefore never box the compass of truth or interpretation, and fix our methods and framework of doctrine or work in a way that makes it impossible for the Lord to show us that, although a certain way of outworking was all right for the time being, it was only relatively so, and fuller light means further adjustments. All this, not because the Lord is developing or changing, but because *we* can only move and change by life, organically, as we grow in understanding. That this is so is proved by much Scripture, and Ephesians 1:17-20 is the great stand-by in this matter; a word written to believers of no immature degree.

We venture to say that a time has begun when the old and fixed positions of traditional Christianity are losing their hold onnot only the Christian public in generalbut many sincere seekers for reality, and that great numbers of young people are looking for something not to be found in many of the churches, and what they are looking for is the real and true life of God.

The question which confronts us all is this; can the Lord lead us on into His fulness in Christ without continually bumping up against something in our own carry-over ofnot fixed truth, butour fixed limit of its meaning; or something in our fixedness of position in any direction or connection? Steadfastness, unmovableness, faithfulness, etc. are to be to the Lord, and to the foundation realities of the faith, and also in the purpose for which and to which He has called us in life and service; but adjustableness is an essential to growth and increase in light and fulness. At the same time, we cannot change and move on only as there is a basic work of the Cross by which the strength of natureeven as it impinges upon Divine thingsis set aside. The Lord find us such as have only one object, and that truly at any cost, "That I may know Him".

First published in an Editor's Letter in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Nov-Dec 1945 Vol. 23-6

Things That Differ

The Disaster Resulting from Confusing Divine Truth

"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet" (Acts 2:34-35).

"Jesus standing on the right hand of God..." "The Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55-56).

"If Christ is in you"; "...his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Romans 8:10,11).

It is a matter that should be clearly understood by all Christians that to confuse the truths of God is very often to nullify their value in the life of a believer, and worse than that, to bring about a condition which is a positive contradiction of what is fundamental to true Christianity. With great seriousness then we seek to discriminate between the different *essential* aspects of the truth, and the above passages represent one of the instances of immense importance. Although there are three quotations given, there are only two really separate matters signified. The first two are but two sides of one thing, but while those two and the third constitute a *full* Christian life, and are essential to such spiritual fullness, *they are two distinctly different things which must on no account be allowed to overlap.*

Christ in Heaven: (a) 'Sitting'

In the first two Christ is represented as in heaven at God's right hand, but in two postures, 'sitting' and 'standing'. There is no contradiction here. We must remember that we are in the presence of language which is figurative. In His "sitting" - "made to sit" (Ephesians 1:20): "Sit thou" (Acts 2:34) - there is the Divine attestation that His work was complete and perfect, and that as Son of Man He had won and inherited the place of absolute honour and glory. "We see Jesus... crowned with glory and honour" (Hebrews 2:9). The right hand is first the place of honour. It is of great significance that the new dispensation commencing with Pentecost begins with Christ *sitting* at God's right hand. All begins with a work completed! The seventh day the day of rest - becomes the

first day. The colours of the rainbow end where they began. It is the law of the octave, the eighth is as the first and marks a new beginning. Our Christian life begins at the point where the work is already completed in our Representative Son of Man. There is nothing to add to it, either in need or possibility. Immediately we try to contribute something to it we *in effect, for ourselves*, nullify it all, and God stands back. We shall come back to that again presently.

Christ in Heaven: (b) 'Standing'

With regard to the second posture of Christ as in heaven - "standing on the right hand of God" - this is seen when the Church is in the conflict, or when things are needing to be done for her, not in the sense of her justification, but for her defence and support in adversity. Thank God, there is One in the glory standing up for us, and He will see to it that the enemy overreaches himself, as in Stephen's case. Much could be said about that, but it is not our subject just now.

We pass straight to the third position of Christ:

"Christ in You"

Any mental difficulty as to two so widely separated locations of Christ at the same time is got over by the further words "By his Spirit that dwelleth in you". Christ and the Holy Spirit are one.

Here we cross over to another phase of things entirely, and the only link between the two is that the second is the outworking of the first.

"Christ in you" is unto our being "conformed to the image of his (God's) Son" (Romans 8:29). It is to work in us that which has been perfected by Him. It is the whole realm of our being made Christ-like; having all the faculties and features of Christ, which are resident in the new life received at new birth, brought to maturity. Every spiritual and Christly virtue has to be brought to full growth; love, meekness, goodness, gentleness, intelligence, etc.; so that we are not just theoretical and doctrinaire Christians, but real ones, spiritually responsible and accountable, with the root of the matter within. This, however, necessitates much discipline; what is called 'chastening'. This discipline, which employs many forms of adversity and trial, has the effect of bringing to light what we really are in ourselves, and it is an ugly picture. Our *own* features do not improve as we go on. We know ever more what poor, wretched, and deplorable men we are, and - but for the grace of God - hopeless. But something is being done deep down

which will show itself in due time to the glory of God.

Confusion Leads to Paralysis

But here is the point of our peril. Let no child of God whose heart is toward the Lord, who has not *deliberately* and wilfully and knowingly resisted the Holy Ghost, ever for a single moment confuse 'chastening' and its accompaniments of self-discovery with judgment. You do this at the peril of the joy of your salvation. If a child of God who loves the Lord and wants nothing more than to be well-pleasing unto Him should think that he is under the judgment and condemnation of God because he is finding out how evil his own heart is, that thought carries with it the suggestion that Christ did *not* die for our sins; that the wrath of God was *not* exhausted on Him and by Him when He was made sin for us. It goes back behind a completed work and Christ's *sitting* at God's right hand, and contradicts and denies the very bed-rock of our salvation - justification by faith. Satan is again *given* the place of power so far as such an one is concerned by such a thought. No, a thousand times No! Although I may discover unimagined depths of iniquity in my own heart, if I have put faith in Jesus Christ as the bearer away of my sin and myself, His perfections are placed to my account and God sees me in Him. This will never, never become to me an occasion for living complacently on the ground of what I am in myself. Without working through all the reasons for and the nature of Christian growth, with all the values in service which issue from it, let me keep on this emphasis. There are so many dear children of God who have so confused the two things mentioned as to be in an altogether negative condition. They are paralysed by their sense of sinfulness. They have seen the need for a subjective application of the Cross of Christ, and have recognized that when Christ died, they died in Him; but the realization that the work is not yet completed *in* them has resulted in their living in a world of death, and knowing little or nothing of the fact which cannot really be separated from union in death with Christ, that is, union in resurrection and exaltation. If such an one should read this, may I say to you that if you are unhappy, worried, depressed, or negative, uncertain, lacking in absolute assurance, and therefore limited in your usefulness to the Lord, you have entirely misunderstood and misapprehended the truth of union with Christ. You are really a contradiction to what you claim to believe. It would be better that you put back your subjective truth until you have got fully and firmly established in the glorious facts of what Christ sitting at God's right hand really means for you. Nevertheless, it is possible to be moving triumphantly and strongly in the path of a deep inward work of the Spirit, while knowing utter dependence and weakness.

Let me appeal to you again that you do not let these two things become confused. If you come upon fresh realizations of your own worthlessness, say, Yes, that belongs to the realm of God's work in me, and He will deal with that, but it makes no difference whatever to my acceptance in the Beloved *so long as I do not condone my wrong, excuse it, and accept it.* Remember, dear friend, that God demands the first ground, the ground of our settled faith in the *finished* and perfected work of Christ, in order to make any beginning inside of us. It would be fatal for Him to touch the inside had He not got that objective faith. We must be careful that we do not upset God's order and bring ourselves on to false ground. This can only result in destroyed testimony and much gratification to Satan at the Lord's expense *in us.*

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jul-Aug 1965, Vol 43-4

This Present Evil World

Before we proceed with the message, for the sake of any young Christians who may read it, and who have not yet studied the use of words in the New Testament, let us explain the one which is now to occupy us - the 'World'.

There are three main ways in which this word is used:

1. As to the material sphere which we call the earth.

2. As to the people who live on the earth.

3. As to the spiritual and moral system, order, economy, and principles which govern the people.

Peter has things to say as to the climax and destiny of No. 1. John three sixteen relates to No. 2: "God so loved the [people of this] world."

It is No. 3 that is the occasion of what follows here.

A reading of such passages of Scripture as John 17, John's Letters, Colossians 2:20, 3:1-2, Galatians 1:4, and many others such, will leave us in no doubt whatever that the New Testament designates this world system as evil, and that any spiritual relationship with it lies under God's judgment. It has always been so since the beginning, but we are now living in the full development of the fact, so terribly and shockingly, that it is ripening fast for final destruction. The following message is very timely, and we trust that it will serve the solemn purpose of leading many to save themselves from "this present evil world", and will explain the spiritual conflict through which many are passing.

We shall gather up certain things which we find running through the whole of the Scriptures, and what we find throughout the Scriptures is, for our present purpose, an eightfold thing:

1. AN ABIDING ANTAGONISM AND CLASH BETWEEN GOD AND THIS WORLD

I think that needs very little enlarging upon for the moment. Anyone who has any grasp of the Scriptures will be able instantly to recognize that that is so. From Cain - the man of the earth - right on through the whole of the Scriptures, you are brought to recognize that abiding antagonism and clash between God and this world.

2. AN ABIDING EXPRESSION OF THAT ANTAGONISM BETWEEN THAT WHICH IS SPIRITUALLY RELATED TO GOD AND THIS WORLD

Anyone, any company, or anything spiritually related to God is found to be in the expression of that antagonism and that clash between God and this world, and that very relationship to God spiritually involves in the clash, involves in the antagonism.

3. A NEW CONSTITUTIONAL AFFINITY WITH THIS WORLD IS SEEN TO BE IN MAN'S NATURE

A new constitutional affinity with this world is seen to be in man's nature, gravitating toward the world, like the point of the compass to the magnetic North. There is that which is in the very nature of man now as fallen which has an affinity with this world, and gravitates towards it, and the Scriptures reveal that that gravitation is of an inveterate character.

May I stay to make a parenthesis? No one is thinking that when I use the word 'world' I am just meaning the geographical sphere. You understand that the word 'world' is a very much bigger word as we use it spiritually than this geographical sphere. We use that word in its fullest meaning - an order of things here separated from God, organized and controlled by the evil one. That is the full meaning of 'kosmos'.

4. A SPIRITUAL SYSTEM OF INTELLIGENCE

A spiritual system of intelligence as revealed by the Scriptures to be bent with all its might upon maintaining that affinity, and that relationship between man and this world.

5. SPIRITUAL DEATH IS THE LAW WHICH GOVERNS THAT RELATIONSHIP

Spiritual death is the law which governs that relationship, and is the mainstay and master-hold of that system of spiritual intelligences. Let me repeat that: spiritual death is the law which governs that relationship, the relationship between fallen man and this world, and spiritual death is the mainstay and master-hold of those spiritual intelligences which are out to maintain that relationship between fallen man and this world.

6. TO SEVER THAT BOND, TO DESTROY THAT AFFINITY, TO INTRODUCE A COUNTER LAW OF GRAVITATION, IS THE ESSENCE OF THE WORK OF CHRIST

If you get that you get the heart of everything. That will explain everything. The work of the Lord Jesus in coming from heaven and fulfilling His mission here is, in its very essence, the severance of the bondage of man to this world, the destroying of fallen man's affinity therewith, and the introducing into man of another law, which counters man's gravitation toward this fallen world, another law of gravitation, which is not world-ward spiritually.

7. THIS SEVERANCE, THIS INTRODUCTION OF THE NEW SPIRITUAL LAW OF HEAVENLY GRAVITATION, IS ALWAYS MARKED BY A MOST INTENSE CONFLICT AT EVERY STAGE AND POINT

It is always fraught with deep spiritual suffering. You will never emancipate a people spiritually from this world except by intense conflict and through deep suffering.

8. THE METHOD IS THAT OF GOING INTO DEATH IN ORDER TO DESTROY DEATH, AND BEING IN THE WORLD IN ORDER TO OVERCOME THE WORLD

That is an outline, and if you were able to sit down with that prayerfully I am sure you would see that you have touched something which is of primary importance. Within the range of that everything with which you and I, as the Lord's children, have to do is gathered up. Now I am going on to take up one point. The work of Christ, the Cross in the work of Christ, and the purpose of His coming. That again is gathered up into eight things.

THE EFFECT OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE

Firstly: *To once and for all register in an absolute and pre-eminent way that collision, that mutual antagonism between God and this world*. Christ's coming into this world, and Christ's work in this world in a way unparalleled, unprecedented, registered, made manifest, dragged out into the light, threw up into clear relief that fact that there is a mutual antagonism between God and this world. You can trace it through the Old Testament. It is quite clear there, but it is more or less local or localized in the Old Testament. When you come to the Lord Jesus coming into this world you have the universal factor, a universal Person set down in the midst of the universe, and universal forces focused upon Him. And because of who He is, because God is there in Christ, because this is no mere man, as in the case of the Old Testament, because this is "God with us", you find that from the very commencement of His career, His course, His time here on the earth, there broke out that smouldering volcano of antagonism: first through Herod, and then by another, and another, and another means, until in the end it seems that everything has conspired and converged to cast Him out of this world, as having no place in it, as being a menace to it.

Demons betrayed secrets, the full explanation of which is not in the Word of God: "Art thou come to destroy us before our time? I know thee who thou art, the Holy one of God", betraying deep mysteries concerning the destiny and the doom of that spiritual world, that world of spiritual intelligences. Men and demons worked together, and this hate showed itself. What a great deal He had to say Himself about it, and to what lengths He carried it, and into what realms - right into the heart of Judaism and its spiritual, religious citadel, the Scribes and the Pharisees: "Ye are of your father the devil"; "The works of your father ye do"; "Ye are from beneath; I am from above"; "If ye had known the Father ye would have known Me."

You see, He carried it right there into the highest realm of religious life as this world knew it, and finding there this deep-rooted antagonism, and dragging it out, making it impossible for that thing to go on being hidden, until at last, stung by His presence, it broke loose, and from that realm came His doom, so far as his course here on the earth was concerned as a man. Oh yes! everywhere this universal focal point: God in Christ making manifest as never before not locally, but universally, not merely on the earth, but in that spiritual realm - that there is a clash, a deep-seated and terrible clash between God and this world. And His coming was for that purpose. It is important for us to realize that it was necessary to expose that thing. It was essential that that thing should be dragged out, but, oh, that the people of God had sufficiently recognized and grasped and

apprehended this thing!

Oh, dear friends, you and I, before we are through, will see the utter impossibility of that contradiction called 'a worldly Christian', 'a worldly Church'. If we do not see that now, well, the Lord help us! The very coming of the Lord Jesus into this world was, firstly, to manifest, as had never been manifested before in a universal way, that there is, right at the very heart of things spiritually, an antagonism between God and this world, and that world can never be reconciled to God. You have to use the word 'world' in another sense when speaking of reconciling the world; that is a more limited usage of the word, but that world of which we are speaking is beyond reconciliation. We shall see that as we go on.

Secondly. His coming was, while to register in an absolute and pre-eminent way that mutual antagonism, *TO RESCUE AN INSTRUMENT FROM THIS WORLD*, to secure an instrument in this world for this age, *EMBODYING THAT ANTAGONISM*. Do you get the force of that? Did Christ come, first of all, to make the antagonism absolutely apparent? Yes! Then equally He came to secure an instrument in this world, for this age, which would embody that antagonism. That is, the instrument which Christ secures in this age, in this world, is going to be an age expression of the antagonism between God and this world. That means that if you and I are a part of God's instrument in this world, resultant from the work of the Lord Jesus in His Cross, you and I are going to be the embodiment of that antagonism; that is, there is going to be something about us which can have no compromise with this world, and which for ever stands in a position similar to that which the Lord Jesus occupies in relation to this world in the spiritual antagonism. And that instrument is going to feel the antagonism which He met, and is going to be conscious that this place, this world, is by no means a place of rest and abiding. "In the world ye shall have tribulation...". To get rid of that is to undo the work of the Lord Jesus: to try to get popularity in this world for Christianity, to escape the world's bitterest antagonism, is to counter all that the Lord Jesus came to do.

Now that is a terrific thing to say, but it is true. I made a note in my Testament from Martin Luther. He had a pictorial way, as you know, of presenting truth, and he did it both for the devil and for the Lord. In speaking about Matthew 5:10-12 he pictures the disciples of the Lord, the believers, arriving at the gates of heaven and being met there by the Lord Himself: and one of the questions which He asks each one who arrives, with which He interrogates every professed

disciple, is this:

"Wert thou an abomination to the whole world as I and Mine have been from the foundation of the world?"

Well, the Lord's coming was to secure an instrument in this world for the age which would embody that mutual antagonism between God and this world. You see your calling, brethren. Does that explain something? I think it explains a lot. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews has a way of putting it: "Of whom the world was not worthy." That is his verdict on the whole matter.

Thirdly. His coming was *to destroy for such (that is, such instrument) that law of death*. Note: firstly, to bring out into the clear light, which He Himself was, the reality, the depth of that mutual antagonism between God and the world; secondly, to take out of the world a people for Himself, yet to be in the world for the age as a representation of that antagonism; then, thirdly, to destroy for such that law, that mainstay, that master-hold of the powers of evil, to destroy him that had the power of death and to deliver them; to destroy the power of death for His own. He came to do that. It would be impossible for us to live here on God's side and on God's behalf, to meet all that antagonism of hell to God, unless Christ had accomplished the destroying of that masterhold of the devil - spiritual death.

Dear friends, you and I are becoming more and more conscious, are we not - many of us are - that the only possibility of staying in this world and on the earth is by the life which is triumphant over death, and unless we know more of that, this place is going to be impossible spiritually. Is that not true? It is! There is a real spiritual world with which we are in touch, but which we so dimly understand. What is the spiritual experience of those who are really going on with God? It is, on the one hand, of an intensified consciousness of death, and, on the other hand, a growing emphasis on the power of His resurrection. Is that true? I do not think there is any doubt about it. And this is not something which touches merely the spiritually aged and fully matured. I believe that the Lord would teach the younger folk this thing: those of you who would, perhaps, think that you are not old enough to understand and enter into these great spiritualities. I believe the Lord would teach you that you can know deliverance and victory in the realm of death by coming into a full apprehension of Him as your life, and, while the phraseology, the terminology may be difficult for you, the experience may be as clear and as simple as anything could be. The fact that those who are children of God - whether mature or immature - *ARE* children of God brings

them into experiences which they might never have if they were not the Lord's children. The Lord does not save from going into those experiences, but in them draws out to Himself by a strong taking hold, when something very critical is threatened, and then Himself comes in, and it is something which is above what man can do, and they have learned their lesson. They have discovered that it is possible to live in this world, where death reigns, and to know victory in Christ by taking hold of Him as their life. He came that for His own He might destroy that law of death by which the god of this world, the prince of this world, holds his own in bondage, and by which he operates against the saints to try to bring them back into bondage, the bondage of death.

Fourthly. His coming was *to set up His instrument*, redeemed from the world, *that counter-law of a heavenly life*, to introduce something else into their constitution. The constitutional law of the unredeemed from the world, of those who are of this world, is bondage to the world. They see nothing beyond the horizon of this world, and all the time the world holds them and carries them on. The tides of worldliness carry this world on, and to try to stem those tides is an impossible thing until something has happened by which there comes about the realization of this: "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world", the introduction of that which is an adequate countering to the mighty gravitating affinity in man's nature toward the world. He came to set that up in His own, and here that big difference is recognized, which has been so often pointed out - that if you really do become begotten of God, born from above, there is put into you the life of God. You do not have to give up the world, there is not a struggle to break with this anew that and something else, and you never have to sit down and say: 'I suppose now that I am a Christian I have to give up this and that, and I must not go here and I must not go there.' You never have that sort of thing at all: you find a counter-gravitation, you find that something else has come in which has made that kind of gravitation comparatively weak, and your heart is now in other directions, drawn to other things. You may test your spiritual life by that.

Now, young people, let me say a word to you. Perhaps sometime in your superficial thinking and imagining you think the world has a better time than you do, and that you would like to have a little more of what the world has. I put it to you: make up your mind to go and have it. *IF YOU ARE A TRUE CHILD OF GOD*, start off, and see how far down the road you get. You will not get there. You will turn round and come back. What is the matter with you? Well, something has happened in spite of your thinking and your imagining and those

superficial feelings - many of them, perhaps, the fruit of the severe time which you have because of spiritual antagonism. In spite of all that you cannot go very far in that way. You know the parable of the squirrel; you know that the gravitation is upward. Although you might just jump down to get a nut, it is not your place. The Lord came to do that, and it is the strategy of the Lord never to say that you must not go there and you must not do this. He puts something into you - a counter-gravitation, a mighty work, which the Lord has accomplished.

Fifthly. *To gather out from the world spiritually a people for His coming Kingdom*. Not to take them away from the world. That would be very nice, but He would take them out from the world spiritually, so that He has here in the world His Kingdom spiritually represented by them. And He is gathering out from the nations spiritually now; a spiritual out-gathering, detachment, a people for that coming Kingdom. He came to do that, and He has made it perfectly clear that His Kingdom is not of this world and is not of things seen and handled. "I would have you know, brethren," said the apostle, "that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom." His Kingdom is now a spiritual thing in the hearts of those who have been taken out of the kingdom of darkness and translated into the Kingdom of the Son of His love. That is a thing already done. A day will come when He will translate them from this world while He deals with the rest, and purges this world and makes it fit for the habitation of saints, without any antagonism. He came to do that. He is doing it. We know it in our own hearts. That is exactly what has happened with us. We are not of the world. Our life "is hid with Christ in God." We look for a Saviour.

Sixthly. *The whole course of spiritual experience is progressive detachment from the world and attachment to Christ*. It is a course of spiritual history. It is a progressive thing, and not that in the very commencement of our spiritual life we were not severed from the world. We were fundamentally and originally separated from the world, but you and I know quite well that our experience has been all in the direction of this world becoming less and less, and Christ becoming more and more and more. "Whom having not seen, we love." "Where our treasure is, there our heart is also." We know something of the words: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is...". "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." We know that that is going on in us.

Seventhly. *The death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit are the basic factors in this work of Christ*. Let me repeat it. The

death, the resurrection, the ascension of Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit are *THE* factors, the basic factors, in this work of the Lord. His death is basic, and we are told that His death is to be entered into by us in faith. "Ye died...". That means we were crucified to the world and the world unto us in Christ. The resurrection of Christ is a basic factor in this work. It means that we stand on resurrection ground and are outside of the world. He never appeared personally to the world again after His death. He will one day, but He has not done so yet. So far as this age is concerned, He is not on that level at all. He is outside of the world, and for the age all His own, standing with Him in resurrection, are there spiritually. His ascension means that everything now for this age for His own is heaven-ward and not of this world. The anointing of the Holy Spirit will lead us progressively, ever more and more, away from the world to Christ, revealing His things. These are the basic factors in this great work which He has come to do.

Eighthly. *The Church is called to be the collective embodiment of all that truth*. The Church is called to be the collective - the corporate - embodiment of that full, absolute antagonism between God and the world. I realize that is a tremendous thing to say in the face of what is called the Church, in the face of what we know to be associated with what is called the Church. One hesitates in the almost hopeless situation that immediately confronts you when you raise the standard like that. Are we to conclude that what is called the Church is not the Church? At any rate, let us challenge ourselves on that. We can do no more than proclaim the truth and seek that it shall be realized in ourselves. It is not for us to go out and denounce or to judge, we must proclaim. But, oh! it does raise some very serious questions for many of the Lord's people. To be in any way entangled with that thing, that awful thing spiritually, against which God as in Christ has been revealed to be so utterly set! To be entangled in that through religion, through Christianity, through what is called the Church! You know quite well that if you stand on that ground you will meet the antagonism of the scribes and pharisees.

The Church is called to be the corporate expression of that antagonism, of that impact, by which Christ has destroyed the power of death, and living in the power of His resurrection. The Church is called to reveal in itself that it is not of this world and that it is moving steadily further and further away from the world, because Christ is becoming more and more its life; to be the embodiment of all that is meant by the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the ascension of Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. There is no doubt but that that is how it was at the beginning. Are we to say that that is gone for ever, and that that can

never be? No, we cannot say that. We may have to come within a very limited realm, but I verily believe that when the Lord comes, and there is that blessed movement toward Himself of the overcomers, He will have in them the embodiment of all that. They will represent all that.

For myself I cannot see translation possible on any other ground. Is the Lord going to translate this world to heaven? Never! If you are spiritually bound up with it - when I say 'spiritually' I mean bound up with it in heart, a heart link - I do not know what will happen. It seems to me to be so distinctly contradictory to the law of Christ's work. The work of the Lord Jesus marks the utter detachment from this world, and the consummation is simply the crown of that which has already taken place spiritually, the seal upon what has been done spiritually. That is how I see it, but I know the many difficulties that come up there.

Now let us close, so far as this broad survey is concerned, by just putting our finger upon one or two points. Do you see now why there must be no personal interests on the part of the people of God? What are personal interests? They are worldly in essence, in nature. It is what Paul spoke of when he said: "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." That personal element runs out into so many directions, and is so imperceptible in many things, that only the Lord can bring it to light and destroy it. Do you see, on the face of it, why there must be no personal interest, and that there must be such an utterness of abandonment to the Lord's interests, and that anything other than that is a spiritual link with this world? The enemy can come in and destroy your testimony if you have any personal interests, even in the work of the Lord. Deeper than we recognize there are those things which represent our like and our dislike, our want and our not want, our going to have and our not going to have, all of which give rise to suspicion of others, and then suspicion moves silently and imperceptibly on to jealousy, and jealousy on to a breakdown in fellowship. Tracked right down to its source it was some personal element, wanting it as we want it, wanting it ourselves, and not the utter emptying of self; and in the long run, sooner or later, the enemy has made an awful havoc because there was his link. Do you now see why?

When the Lord really gets a complete mastery of the life, He works to have everything carried on to resurrection ground. That is, He takes everything through a depth and a death, where we lose it, and then in a deep crisis, in which we are brought to the point in heart of letting that go to God, not reproaching God, not rebelling against God, not refusing to accept God's way, but where we

come to the place where our heart is one with the heart of God over that matter; then so often the Lord gives that back, but it has come back in a new realm. It has gone through death and it comes back by resurrection, and there is something in it now which is not of this world. It is not a time thing, nor merely an earthly or natural thing. There is something about it now which has God in it. It is on resurrection ground, and the world factor in it has been destroyed. Now that is a true spiritual law. Do you see why the Lord must have it that way?

Let me put that in another way. This is why everything must be brought through to the place where it is wholly for God. Everything has to be wholly for God. The apostle had something to say about the shortness of the time, and those who had wives being as those who had none. Do you think he meant that literally? Ignore your domestic responsibilities, or ignore something which was of God, or ride rough shod over it for what you call spiritual things? Never! A thousand times, never! What the apostle meant was this: you have to hold everything in the light of God's interests, and if you are holding domestic relationships, or anything else here on this earth, on a natural level, where they are for yourself, for time, and for what they mean to you merely in this life - and that is the range of things - well, that is wrong. Everything has to be held for God, in the light of the Lord's interests. Why? To have that link with this world and the natural life absolutely destroyed so that the power of spiritual death cannot operate there. Do you not know that when you as a believer, as a spiritual person, or I, touch things naturally we touch spiritual death? Have you no experience of that? The power triumphant over death is in having everything wholly for the Lord and not for ourselves, not for this world, not for this life. Everything has to be held for the Lord.

It is so easy to sing hymns of consecration. We can sing about being all for the Lord, and having everything for the Lord, and we can answer to such challenges, but now let us face it. Are we holding everything for the Lord? Have we got something which, if we would only let that go, would in some other life give the Lord larger interests? Are we taking this attitude: 'Now, while this thing means much to me, while in a natural way I have deep sentimentalities with this, and it is not easy to let things go, nevertheless, if the Lord is going to get more by my letting go, giving up, well, that is the thing that counts and that matters.' That is holding things for the Lord. Are we holding things for the Lord? If we are holding things for ourselves, if we are holding things in this life before those heavenly interests of the Lord, we are opening the door to spiritual death. We cannot grow spiritually; we become earthbound, and our spiritual progress is

delayed, if not utterly arrested. Everything must be carried over on to resurrection ground, and be wholly for the Lord, wholly for heaven. "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." There is so much bound up with this.

Now do you understand the meaning of suffering? I ask you, those of you who have suffered as the Lord's children, what has been the effect of your suffering? That is, inasmuch as you have not been persistently rebellious and hard because of the suffering, but inasmuch as you have sought to be one with the Lord in your suffering, what has been the effect of it? Answer me: has it been to make this world much less and the Lord much more, the things of heaven much more? Is that not true? This world has lost its grip, perhaps its charm, its hold. The things which are above have become far more to you through your suffering. Well, do you see the meaning of suffering? Do you see what the Lord is doing? Why does He empty us out? Why does He pour us out to the last drop? Just so that He can pour in, that is all. Just so that heavenly things may take the place of natural, earthly things. The Lord permits His people to suffer in order that that gravitation world-ward might be weakened, and that that power of death might be destroyed: that they may become a heavenly people, living by a life which is His own life, and which it takes full spiritual intelligences to appreciate.

That is the testimony of Christ triumphant, but you cannot recognize that with the human mind. You need a full spiritual intelligence to grasp that. It is only principalities and powers who are able adequately to register the power of His resurrection. They recognize it. So the Church goes on in suffering, in weaknesses, in infirmity, "in deaths oft"; but the Church will finish its course, and the issue will be that the full measure of that law of death operating in this world was taken by Christ in His Church and triumphed over. He is doing something through our weakness. We do not see it nor feel it, and we very often forget all about it in the presence of the suffering, but He is doing something, that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenlies should be displayed this manifold wisdom of God. That is the meaning of suffering - the raising of a heavenly testimony: getting us away from the world and making us live by a life which is hid with Christ in God.

Do you see the utter impossibility of being all the Lord's and having any kind of heart association with this world? That ought to come home to us in a new way.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Nov-Dec 1968 Vol 46-

The Time In Which We Live

An Appeal To The People Of God

Ezra 8.

The ground upon which we stand is very much more positive at this present time than even the Old Testament saints enjoyed, for we look back to Calvary's triumphant accomplishment. Yet the Old Testament position and condition is also a true picture of our own time and condition spiritually; I am thinking in terms of books of the Bible and not of verses.

We want to see what the Books of Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther have to say to us. I feel convinced that we are living in a time very truly represented by these books, and in that sense we are living in Bible times, so that these books are very up-to-date, and have their abiding meaning for our time.

I cannot think the Lord would merely have given us a set of books of history about things which happened hundreds of years ago with no real value for us. His Word says, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Rom. 15:4), so we see God meant them to say something to us.

The First Factor: Spiritual Captivity.

Let us see what these books represent, and how they touch our time. There are common factors about them. Firstly, their one general historic background - the people of God in captivity in Chaldea resulting from a spiritual breakdown.

Without going into what Babylon and Chaldea may mean, we take it as a settled fact that, when God's testimony breaks down in His people, a state of spiritual captivity ensues, and they are spiritually outside of the place where the testimony of God has its place.

They were in an earth-order of things in regard to worship, outwardly ordered by men, but at the back of it all was the hand of Satan as the god of this age - Babylon represents a great deal more on the positive side as to the dominion of a man-constituted religious order, or an earthly order of things, in the realm of

worship governed by the god of this age through man - but in the midst of those conditions were those who still stood for the Lord and represented something that was not compromising with those conditions; they were dissatisfied and inwardly revolting against them.

Heart Burden.

These four books represent that something; and in every case you find the state of the vessel mentioned as being under a very great burden concerning the Lord's testimony, His interests, His Name, and His people for that Name. That is the second common factor.

I am going to stay here awhile, for it is *here* that ministry begins.

On the whole today, the Lord's full thought and conception is not the general thing found among His people. The testimony of the Lord has largely broken down, and the great multitude called by His Name are governed and manipulated and controlled by something that is religiously of the earth and not of the heavens, of man and not of the Holy Spirit; and there needs to be seen the impossibility of accepting that state of things.

It is one thing to recognize that and quite another thing to be in relation with the Lord's movement to recover for Himself that which is according to His mind. One can be occupied all the time with the bad state of things, bemoan it, make people feel miserable, and yet never get anywhere. That is not sufficient; I expect there were plenty in Chaldea who bemoaned things and spoke of "the good old days"! It is quite easy to do that, and in a sense be religious malcontents; but that is not being active in the Lord's recovery movement. The Lord would act in relation to this thing, and He is acting. Ezra opens with the sovereign activity of God (chapter 1:1). God acts not only from the outside, not only sovereignly, but there is something that precedes it, that makes possible His activity, that brings in the sovereignty of God.

All these who represent His vessel for dealing with the situation were men who had a great burden about the situation, and they are no use to God in a situation like that unless in the burden of it.

We see Ezra latterly spreading himself out before God in such a way that the people gathered round to see him, and when they saw his desperate concern over the state of things, they were so tremendously moved that no sooner had he

finished praying than they came to him and sought to have things put right. So we see Ezra away in Jerusalem with a great burden for the Lord's testimony.

Nehemiah, away in Babylon, is seen to have a similar burden. For, having asked Hanani and his friends as to their welfare in Jerusalem, and hearing from them a report that was not good, this so burdened him that his countenance became changed, and he, knowing his life was at stake, went before the king with a sad face - for it was criminal to go before the king with a sad countenance - yet he could not help himself for sorrow of heart over the Lord's interests and testimony, concerning the people called by His Name.

Esther, another chosen vessel unto the Lord, is likewise seen taking her life in her hands for the life of her people - these people, these whose life represents God's interests and testimony in the earth. This is the way God would have us take on His concern for His interests in the earth.

Daniel is also a man with a burden, praying three times a day, and then for three whole weeks; and what prayer it is, moving heaven and earth! He is a man with a burden; and that is where real ministry begins. God must have a vessel, an instrument brought into such sympathetic fellowship with HIM, that the conditions around of breakdown and failure become acute suffering, an agony.

Paul knew something of that "suffering for His Body's sake"; "filling up that which was lacking of the sufferings of Christ." We must face that! The thing that is going to count for God is the sharing in His travail.

There is all the romance of Christian work but that is mere glamour; all the enthusiasm and interest of organized Christian activity; but it is not what we are before men in this matter that counts, but what we are before God in the secret place, having heart concern for the Lord's testimony. Have you a burden, a passion? Is the breakdown in the Lord's testimony in the earth among those upon whom His Name is called a heartbreak to you? We shall never get anywhere till, in measure, His travail is entered into by us. Ministry, in its real, abiding, eternal value, will depend upon the measure in which the travail is entered into by us. This is a day for travail: whether it be a travail for unsaved or for the Lord's people; every true spiritual activity is born out of travail, and those who have been most used of God in every time have been men and women who had this travail in their soul, in their secret life with God. Have you got it? Perhaps you say no. Then ask the Lord to bring you into His concern, stretch yourself out

before God to be brought into His burden for the time in which you live.

And so all this represents those who carry on their hearts a burden which leads them to a point where *their* interests have become quite secondary, and they take their life in their hands, and hold everything in relation to the Lord's own interest and His testimony, willing to let all go for God. This becomes a *heart* burden to be carried all the time, not merely a ministry burden. Oh! that the Lord would put this burden within us, so that wherever we are we cannot be slack. This is necessary to any real ministry. Not that we are ever to give the impression of being unhappy. There was a confidence and faith which created in these servants of God the strange, the very true paradox - "Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (II Cor. 6:10).

Beloved, that will be one of the emancipating factors in any life. The way of deliverance from oneself and from introspection is to get a share in the Lord's burden. If one might speak of one's own experience - but for the situation as it is, and the crying need and the desperate concern that the need should be met, one could any day be bound up in personal problems. Deliverance from oneself comes along the line of being concerned for the Lord's interests. You *can* become tied up with your own spiritual problems, and the way out is to have the burden of all God's people on your heart. That creates ministry, that means strength, that means praying. It is an emancipating thing to have the Lord's burden. Have you got it, or are you dabbling with things, toying with pebbles on the beach, instead of being out in the deep with God in His big thing? Are you just interested, or desperately concerned; just having a nice pleasant time, or really carrying God's need in His people on your heart? Are you there at all?

The Lord's Great Need - An Instrument.

The Lord must have an instrument, a Daniel instrument, whether personal or collective, that moves out towards God for His testimony. He must have a Nehemiah with a heartache over the people because of the breakdown of the testimony. He must have an Ezra who is not for a moment compromising with anything contrary to the mind of God. He must have the Esther instrument who flings fear to the winds, and goes, taking life in hand, to besiege the throne for the life of her people, for the deliverance of the people of God from the threat of the enemy. Oh! What those prayers wrought! And, beloved, the burden of the Lord *must* come on our heart in like manner if we are to be effective instruments for the Lord in His End-time activities; we must be exercised in a very deep way

with the interests of God. We must hold back nothing that will count for the Lord and His interests. You would be surprised how the Lord would come through if you gave Him a chance.

The whole thing begins with a recognition of the need, and the burden of these things upon our hearts. When we are really in it by the urge of the Holy Spirit, the common features found in these Old Testament instruments will be found *inwrought* in us; and we shall be found an abandoned people unto this ONE THING - the Lord's burden and heart concern for His testimony in His people.

Second Factor: The Opposition Of The Enemy.

Then when you come into the burden you find you are in a realm of opposition, and that you are really in a battle. That is another common feature in these books; every one of them represents a situation of terrific opposition and antagonism, all combining to stop the work. Ezra - "Now our enemies." And you are not far in Esther before you find you are in a realm of conflict. And what about Daniel? The den of lions was for praying!

Now this is a stile to be cleared at once. If we are going to stand with God, for that which wholly represents His mind, we have to meet the most fierce antagonism, conflict, and pressure, from every quarter; there is going to be no method overlooked by the enemy for frustrating the end in view. Why so much antagonism? Why so much pressure? Each time when something is in view which is to count for God in relation to His End-time purpose, there it is, you meet it all the time.

Where does the Devil get his information from? He finds out when we have a message from God that is going to count, and we meet this pressure from within and without when we are in the thing that is counting for God. When it comes you must recognize that it is related to something which is to count for God. It will come through people, and if we blame the people and focus our attention on them, we have missed the point; if we begin to fight people whilst all the time it is something deeper. "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies" (Eph. 6:12; A.R.V.).

People get cross with one another, and that gets on top of us, and we begin to direct our attention to them, and we get out with them and there is a distressing

situation, and we see afterwards how foolish we are to allow the Devil to swing us off into a human track when it is a spiritual issue. It has not really been the fault of persons, or just inconsequential happenings; there has been a spiritual issue at stake, and all these other things were brought about and used by the enemy to occupy us with the lesser, and so blind us to the real issue, thus keeping us out of prayer, and preventing our standing with the Lord for His rights which were at some point or other being challenged.

It is the realm of unceasing conflict, and it would seem that we have come into that part of the age when the enemy takes no rest, and we find we can take no off-times. *Anything you do must be done deliberately with God, and you must never act out of, or apart from, God;* that exposed movement has been watched for by the enemy, and you have to pay for it.

The Fourfold Ministry.

Recognize the fourfold aspect of the ministry of these instruments used of God. Daniel is the first to start this movement towards recovery in Babylon, and it is interesting and significant that it was started in prayer. Daniel took up the testimony of God in Babylon in prayer. God reacted through an instrument of prayer. Daniel's outlook is towards Jerusalem; he is praying that God would recover that which He has lost. His concern is for the place of the Name, and he gets through in prayer.

"From the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to humble thyself before thy God, thy words were heard: and I am come for thy words' sake. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days" (Daniel 10:12-13). Through Daniel's praying hell's forces had been stirred to their depths, even to the withstanding of one of the highest archangels of Heaven - "Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me."

Do you notice Esther comes next, and it is as if the Devil said: "Daniel has prayed to get a people out and back to Jerusalem; I am going to make it impossible for them to get back," and so we see him, through wicked Haman, seeking to wipe out all the Jews, determined to have no remnant to go back.

Today the enemy is out to prevent a remnant getting out to God, by bringing death, pressure from all quarters, in such force as to almost paralyze them. God sovereignly over-rules, and the devices of Haman are brought to nought.

Then Ezra takes up the testimony, and his concern is for the House of God at Jerusalem, and Ezra, with the remnant, goes back and builds the House and sets up the Altar.

Nehemiah comes in finally - his concern is for the walls and gates of Jerusalem. He has respect for the marking off in a clear definition of what is all of God and what is not of God. He is zealous for the safeguarding of the testimony of God; see his jealous watch over the Sabbath Day: "I contended... and said... ye do... profane the sabbath day... I testified against them if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you" (Neh. 13:15-21). The Sabbath is that great testimony to the completeness of God's works. The walls speak of the mark where what is not of God ends; there is a distinct bounding, and beyond this, things are not of God, they have no place here, we shut them out. The walls represent no mixture, no over-lapping, and a clear definition. That is the message of Nehemiah.

God's Roll Of Honour.

Now we will turn to Ezra 8, and see what its *value is to us.*

We find a number of names are mentioned: the names of "them that went up with me from Babylon." Here you have a record of those who did absolutely separate themselves to go through with God; we have Holy Writ here, and it is as if the Holy Spirit is taking the pen and putting down the names of men who took responsibility in the testimony of God, and HE is setting down every name of the wholly devoted company who went right through with God; for the Holy Spirit would have made comment, if anyone had stopped on the way. No, these left the comparative ease and comforts of Babylon for a long and difficult journey, fraught with many dangers, and came back to a ruined city.

There is hard work, a certain amount of suffering, opposition, and so on, but they are willing to pay the cost and go through; and these are the ones whose names are severally recorded with such care, and their names will stand as long as the Bible stands; they are "Called, chosen, and faithful" wholly for God, whatever the cost.

It is fine that God should put down every name of those men who are going through. Are we going through with God? Or are we counting the cost and drawing out?

And then I notice that the next thing in the chapter is Ezra's statement: "I found

none of the sons of Levi there" (Ezra 8:15).

Why was this? The Levites were those who had an inheritance only in God; they had no inheritance in the land (Joshua 14:4-5). To go to a land of desolation in which, in any case, they had no inheritance, does not look very promising, and they were getting more in Babylon than they could get there, and so the Levites could not see how they were going to get their bread and butter, and they knew they had no right to enter into the land-realm of things; and because they had no inheritance in the land, but had to trust the Lord, they stayed in Babylon. Those who had to come out and have their portion only in God, without seeing where "on earth" it is coming from, were miserably few; no Levites came out!

And is it not the same in the ministry of the Word, when you come out of a system where you are sure of your supply? It is a test of faith to have a secured position in the world of religion, and to come out and have your portion only in God, nothing in the world; and we find not many can stand up to that. So we find no Levite in that record of names.

Giving God A Chance.

The next thing is, Ezra proclaimed a fast (verses 21-23). What does this represent, spiritually? Just this - the *Lord* seeing you through! That is all. Oh, yes, but it is a test of faith again, for it is a journey of *faith.* Can the Lord see us through, had we better not ask the king? In other words, make an appeal for help to men, to the world; make sure of a safe conduct through - that is what it means; *but* we have taken our stand that we can go through without the resources of the world; we can count on GOD, HE will see us through; *that* is the testimony, beloved - GOD SEEING US THROUGH - that is our safe conduct, successful and triumphant conduct. Put in Psalms 121-134 after Ezra 8:21; notice there is a going up in them all the time, and a strong note of trust and victory; some have thought they were sung on this journey. They express that utter confidence in GOD - "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people." That is something better than all the horsemen and horses of this world. The Lord can see you through. Trust HIM; don't go down to Egypt or to the king of Babylon for help; give the Lord a chance to maintain His own testimony. And so they went on this journey of faith and the Lord vindicated their confidence.

Ezra 8:24-30 deals with the deposit; the holy free-will offering to the Lord;

"Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chiefs of the priests and the Levites, and the princes of the fathers' houses... at Jerusalem." It is blessed to regard this as the deposit which the Lord entrusts to us at the beginning. It is that of which the Apostle writes to Timothy - "Guard the deposit which is committed unto thee" (I Tim. 6:20). The Lord has committed to the vessel for His testimony those things which represent the fulness of His salvation. You have the brass, the silver, and the gold; we know what it means, and all this is the deposit, these sacred things of "the faith once for all delivered to the saints." Those great factors of salvation - Righteousness - Redemption - and Sanctification.

You meet brass immediately you come within the Court of the Tabernacle - the Brazen Altar - with all its wonderful meaning of the wholly and fully consecrated body of the Lord Jesus to the will of God, "By the which will we are sanctified" - the whole Burnt Offering which avails for our Sanctification (Heb. 10:10). Then you have the silver of our Redemption, and the gold of that conformity to the Divine Image. That is the deposit of the faith. Jude urges the believers to whom he writes that they contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints; that is the deposit entrusted to us at the beginning, and to be handed up complete at the end of the journey. Paul could say at the end of his life, "I have kept the faith," and he handed it back at the end in the House of God complete.

It represents the ministry concerning the House of God, the whole testimony, the full Gospel. The full faith once for all delivered to the saints is entrusted to us; and it has to be *enshrined within* the House of God, safeguarded on the journey, and at last presented to the Lord without mixture, the clear testimony; not an iota dropped, but handed back complete.

The Lord give us grace and strength to guard our trust and present it to Him saying, 'We have lost nothing, we have kept the faith, we have run the race - henceforth there is a crown of Righteousness."

All this is very good as Bible truth, but if it only goes that far, I have spoken in vain. I know the difficulty of bringing other people into one's own concern and travail. I believe you have a certain amount of perception as to how things are today; they are terrible spiritually, but there are those reaching out for more of God, and asking where they can find spiritual food.

The Lord would, I believe, do something in our day, a day of small things; and He will begin by having an instrument with a burden, with whom there is deposited the full-orbed revelation of the Lord Jesus; and who would step out in faith and trust the Lord; give the Lord a chance to vindicate Himself. *May the Lord constitute us part of such an instrument and move out to others also. Ask the Lord about this matter, and, if it is true, to lay it on your heart and bring you into fellowship with HIMSELF in what He would do today.*

"The hand of our GOD was upon us, and HE delivered us from the hand of the enemy and the-lier-in wait by the way... and the vessels were weighed in the house of our God... the whole by number and by weight: and all the weight was written at that time" (Ezra 8:31-34).

The Tragedy of the Unfinished Task

This evening we move in thought into the Book of Judges - and how very different it is from the Book of Joshua! I think the Book of Judges is the most terrible book in the Bible! And why is it such a terrible book? Because it is the book of the unfinished task.

In the Book of Joshua the people of Israel went into the land, and had a wonderful history of victory after victory, moving more and more into God's full purpose. Then, before they had finished the work, they settled down. In the last chapters of the Book of Joshua we see the people just settling down before the work is perfect. They had heard the great call of God. God's purpose had been presented to them and they had made a response to it. They had moved so far, and then, before it was all finished, they settled down. The Book of Judges follows, and that is the book of the tragedy of the unfinished work.

None of us will say that there is nothing like that in Christianity today! There are many Christians who make a wonderful beginning. They see the vision of God's great purpose, and certain words in the New Testament make a great appeal to them, such as: "Called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). That is a wonderful vision! "According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians 3:11). Such a thought makes a great appeal to these people and they make a heart response. They go on so far, and then many stop too soon. They lose the vision; they lose the inspiration; they lose the sense of purpose; they lose the energy to go on, and of some we have to say: 'Something has gone out of their faces. What was there with them once is not there now. They were so positive once, so occupied with the heavenly calling, but something has happened.' These people may not be altogether conscious of it, and they would not tell you that something has happened, but it is quite evident that something *has* happened. They have just lost something, and you do not get the response now from them that you once got. They are not so interested now as they were. The heavenly vision has gone out of their lives. That is true of many Christians, and it could be true of all of us.

And the Book of Judges is our instructor in this matter. What I say now is not in judgment - although it is from the Book of *Judges*! I have a very great deal of

sympathy with these people. Oh yes, I know how wrong it was, and how this book spelt the failure of these people. I know how sorry the Lord was about it, but from my own experience I cannot help being sympathetic, for I think I understand.

Weariness In The Battle

Why did these people stop short of finishing the job? I think that very likely it was because they became weary in well doing. The battle was long drawn out. It was spread over years and was very exhausting. No sooner had they gained one victory than they had to start fighting again. They did not have much rest between one battle and the next one. It was a long drawn-out warfare; they got weary in battle, and in their weariness they lost the vision, they lost heart, and they lost the initiative.

I am so glad that with all the strong things that the New Testament says, it says some very kind and understanding things about this: "Let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9); "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, ... your labour is not vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58); "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love" (Hebrews 6:10). What a lot of things there are like that! And Jesus said to His disciples, who were being brought into the battle: "Let not your heart be troubled!" (John 14:1), while we can hear the Lord's words to Joshua: "Be strong and of a good courage; be not affrighted, neither be thou dismayed" (Joshua 1:9). Again, the Lord Jesus said to His disciples: "He that endureth *to the end*, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13).

These people in the Book of Judges were discouraged by weariness - and we are all capable of that! Sometimes it is not easy for us to give up - or perhaps I ought to say that it is not *difficult* for us to give up! - because we do not want to get out of the battle, and yet, at the same time, we do want to get out of it. The battle is inside, and even so great a man as the Apostle Paul had that battle. He said: 'I really do not know what to do! I have a strong desire to depart and be with the Lord in order to get out of the battle, and yet I know that duty to the Lord would keep me in the battle. I do not know whether to give up or to go on!' I say that that is a possible temptation to every Christian, and the Lord knows all about that! The New Testament is full of understanding things about it.

The first reason why these people settled down too soon, then, was

discouragement. It was not because they had had no victories - they had had many - but because they said: 'There is no end to this battle! It looks as though we shall *never* finish!' So in weariness and discouragement they settled down too soon.

I feel sure that this Book of Judges recognizes that. Every time these people stirred themselves again they found that the Lord was very ready to go on with them. This book is a picture of an up-and-down Christian life. One day these people are down in despair, and another day they are up in victory. It was that kind of Christian life which was always up and down, but when they turned their faces to the Lord they found that He was waiting for them. The Lord had not given up. He was always ready to go on. I think that is the first great lesson in this Book of the Judges.

The Loss of Heavenly Vision

But what was the effect of this loss, of this stopping too soon? It was the loss of vision. They only saw the things that were near and lost sight of God's eternal purpose. They lost sight of what Paul calls the "prize of the on-high calling" (Philippians 3:14). Now this sounds like a contradiction, but they lost sight of the things that are not seen! You say: 'What do you mean by that? That is nonsense! How can you see the things that are not seen?' Paul says: "The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). They lost sight of the things which are eternal because they were looking too much at the things which are seen. They lost the heavenly vision for they became satisfied too soon. It was all good so far, but the good became the enemy of the best.

The first thing that happened, then, was the loss of the heavenly vision. It works both ways. If we lose the heavenly vision we settle down too soon. If we settle down too soon we lose the heavenly vision. And what do we mean by settling down too soon? We mean: losing the warring spirit. In this Book of Judges the Philistines resorted to a very subtle strategy: they took all the weapons of war away from Israel, and all that they had left was one file to sharpen their agricultural instruments, so that every farmer in Israel had to take a journey to the blacksmith to sharpen his farm instruments. All the sharp instruments had been taken away and the spirit of *war* was undermined. The Philistines had made it impossible for Israel to fight and you know that there is a very big Philistine about! The strategy of this great enemy of the inheritance is to take the fighting

spirit out of us. Oh, what a lot of mischief the Philistines have done to Christians! What about our prayer life? There was a time when we were mighty warriors in prayer. We fought the Lord's battles in prayer. What about our prayer meetings? Where can you find the prayer meetings now that are out in spiritual warfare? Yes, we ask the Lord for a hundred and one things, but we do not battle through to victory on some situation. There is some life in terrible bondage, there is some servant of the Lord having a hard time, and there are many other calls for battle, but where are the prayer groups who take up these issues and will not give up until they are settled? The warring spirit has gone out from so much of the Church. That is a clever strategy of the devil! Lose the spirit of spiritual battle and you will stop short of finishing the work.

The Spirit of the World

The next thing that caused these people to settle down too soon was the spirit of the world getting in amongst them. What is the spirit of the world? It is the spirit of: Have a good time! Let us have a good time! Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die! And these people of Israel looked at the world around them and, if I understand it rightly, they said: 'These people do not have all the hard time that we do. Our life is a life of continual battle. They do not know so much about that, but they believe in having a good time.' I think that is how it was at this particular time.

Of course, up to this time Israel had given the people round about a bad time! But Israel had lost the fighting spirit now, and the world was having a good time because the Church was no longer fighting it. Instead of fighting the world they made friends with the world. They made the world their friends, and so they did not finish the work. Compromise is a dangerous thing to the inheritance! Trying to be on good terms with the world and having an easy time will result in our losing a large part of the inheritance.

Recovering the Fighting Spirit

But let us finish on a better note. As I said before, God did not give up, and whenever the people took up the battle again and turned again on the Lord's side to fight the enemy, they found the Lord waiting for them. So we have the story of Deborah, the story of Gideon - and dare I mention Samson? However, although Samson was a poor sort of man, if only the Lord gets a poor chance, He will take it. You may not think much of Samson - but do you think better of

yourself? We are all poor creatures! We have all been discouraged, we have all been tempted to give up, we have all stopped too soon, we have all been weary in well-doing, but take the sword of the Spirit again! Take up the battle again, and you will find the Lord is ready and waiting for you.

Gideon - Deborah - Samson - and all the others. But I think there is one who is better than them all - do you remember that beautiful little Book of Ruth? Everybody is charmed with that book! What a lovely book of spiritual recovery it is! What a picture of the Lord's patience, the Lord's readiness to take advantage of every opportunity! How does that book begin? "And it came to pass in the days when the judges judged..." The Book of Ruth was in the times of the Judges, which until then was the most terrible time in history of Israel, but God was ready to change the whole picture. There are the two different pictures: the Judges and Ruth, but both were in the same period. Do you see what I am trying to say?

Dear friends, we are in a great battle, and it is long drawn out. We can get very weary in the fight. We can become discouraged and give up too soon. We may have to stop before the work is finished. That is always our temptation, the tragic possibility in the Christian life, but the Lord does not give up. He does not faint, nor is He discouraged, and if we will turn again to Him, rise up again, recover our fighting spirit and continue to fight the good fight, we shall find the Lord is ready every time, and He is always wanting to help us to fight to the end. He will help till the day is done!

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Nov-Dec 1969, Vol 47-6

A Tragic Answer to Prayer (or The Tragedy of God's Second-Best)

"He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their souls" (Psalm 106:15).

What a sad 'but' that is! It represents God's frustration and disappointment. It means that God has so left the decision and choice with man that He will not force or coerce. It points to the fact that God has a great intention where His people are concerned but they may miss it.

But when all that has been said, the reason for the tragedy was - and can be - persistent insistence on having what the people who pray want rather than what the Lord had so evidently shown to be His will.

It is therefore possible for God to yield to us, to answer our prayer, and for the result to be an everlasting regret and reproach.

What are the alternatives? The context of the verse in Psalm 106, and the reference to Numbers 6, shows that it all hinged upon the food question.

The Manna was too mysterious, too inscrutable, too delicate, too heavenly, too miraculous, too 'spiritual'. It contrasted with the tangible, certain (?), understandable, and *naturally* gratifying food of Egypt. The fact is that their spiritual life had dropped to such a low level as to make them forget the tyranny, labour, heartbreak, and groanings in Egypt, and to be in an illusionary mentality about that terrible history. Get spiritually low and the world holds out false attraction. Granted that the life of faith and a supernatural basis of life has trials and difficulties for the flesh and the natural man, but it has a daily miracle of sustenance at its heart. The point of departure with them was whether their own souls were to be gratified or whether they were to be a testimony to the Lord.

The phrase "leanness into their souls" indicates that, firstly, thinness, scantiness, smallness, starvation, tenuity, weakness, and contraction in spiritual stature and measure are quite contrary to a God who is so full, abundant, and beneficent. Such contraction and limitation could never be a testimony to Him.

In the next place, the words indicate that the heavenly, the supernatural, the spiritual, and the way of faith is really the way of spiritual robustness and substance.

How lean-souled many of the Lord's people are! How little many of them and many churches have to give! How rare it is to find those - individually or collectively - who have much more than they need themselves and plenty for others! Starvation conditions are all too common among the Lord's people. There are many reasons for this, but our verse says that it is the preference for the earthly to the heavenly, and an unwillingness to forego the natural for the spiritual. This whole matter is threshed out in the First Letter to the Corinthians, a church characterized by spiritual leanness, weakness, and smallness.

Spiritual leanness can be a judgment. "He *sent* leanness into their souls", while he gave them their request for natural fatness.

At any cost let us set the highest value and importance upon spiritual fulness, the fulness of Christ, and never by any means limit Him, or be instrumental in limiting Him in others!

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jan-Feb 1964, Vol 42-1

Union with Christ in Consecration

READING: Leviticus 8:22-24; Romans 12:1-2; John 17:19.

Referring to this passage in chapter 8 of the book of Leviticus, it is important to note what happened in the consecration of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood at that particular point. The ram of consecration was brought, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon it, and then it was slain, its blood was shed. That blood was then taken and sprinkled upon them at different points of their beings.

There we have two sides of consecration. The shedding of the blood is the death side, and the sprinkling of the blood is the life side. The blood poured out is the life poured out, delivered up, let go or taken away. Sprinkling is the making active and energetic of the ministry in a living power. When you recognise that, you understand what consecration is, and also the meaning of the act of identification through the laying on of hands with a life poured out, a life yielded up, a life let go, a life taken away unto death. In the act of sprinkling a new position is represented, which implies that now there is no longer anything of the self life, but all is livingly of God, active by God, and unto God alone. That is consecration.

Chapter 17 of the Gospel by John is known to us familiarly as the High Priestly prayer of the Lord Jesus. He is pictured therein as advancing to the altar in an act of consecration of Himself in the behalf of His sons whom He is seeking to bring to glory, that they may behold His glory, and that the glory which He had might be theirs. Here is undoubtedly that which is represented by Aaron and his sons. The High Priest is consecrating Himself, as He says, that they also may be consecrated. The rest of the prayer is a wonderful exposition of the inner meaning of this part of Leviticus 8. In the little while at our disposal we shall seek to understand it more clearly.

The whole man has come into that realm of consecration on both its sides; the death side, and the life side; the life poured out, and the life taken again; the life let go, and the life resumed, but on another basis; the whole man, represented by his ear, his hand, his foot. That has a simple and direct message to our hearts.

The Government of the Ear

We begin with the ear: "...upon the tip of Aaron's right ear." That means that the Lord is to have supreme control of the ear, that we must come on to the ground where the ear is dead to every other controlling voice, every other governing suggestion, and alive unto God, and unto God alone. It is quite clear that the governing faculty of every life is the ear in some way; not necessarily the outward organ, but that by which we listen to suggestions, that, as we say, to which we "give ear." The suggestions may arise from our own temperament and makeup; the constraining things in our life may be our natural inclination, the pull and the draw of our constitution, deep-seated ambitions, inclinations, interests, which are not cultivated nor acquired, but which are simply in us because we are made that way. To listen to these is to have our lives governed by our own interests. Or it may be other things, such as the suggestions, the desires, the ambitions of others for us, the call of the world, the call of human affections, consideration for the likes of others. Oh, how many things may come to us like the activity of a voice to which, if we listen, we shall become slaves and servants, and the ear, and the life with it, be so governed.

This illustrative truth in Leviticus 8 says definitely and emphatically to you and to me that that shedding, that slaying, was the slaying of our ear and our hearing in respect of all such voices, and that sprinkling meant that we now have an ear only for the Lord, and He is to have the controlling voice in our life. The right ear, as the right hand, is the place of honour and power so far as the hearing and the speaking are concerned. Then you and I, if we say that we are consecrated men and women, mean that we have brought the death of Christ to bear upon all the governments and domination of voices which arise from any quarter save from the Lord Himself. We are not to consult the voice of our own interests, our own ambitions, our own inclinations, or the voice of anyone else's desires for us. We must have an ear only for the Lord. That is consecration.

It is a solemn and direct word for everyone, and perhaps especially for the younger men and women, whose lives are more open now to be governed by other considerations, because life lies before them. It may happily be that the sense of responsibility about life is uppermost; the feeling is that it might be disastrous to make a mistake, and along with it there is a strong ambition to succeed and not to have a wasted life. Here is your law for life, and although the course of things may be strange, and the Lord's ways ofttimes perplexing, and you may be called upon in a very deep way to give ear to the exhortation addressed to us in the book of Proverbs, "trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding," nevertheless in the outworking you

will find that God's success has been achieved, and, after all, what matters more than that, or as much as that. The course may be very different from what you expected, or thought, or judged would be the reasonable way for your life, but that does not matter so long as God is successful in your life, and your life has been a success from God's standpoint. This is the secret, an ear alive only unto Him and dead to everything that comes from any quarter other than the Lord Himself.

Chapter 17 of John's Gospel is an exposition of that. "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." If we were of the world we should take the judgments of the world for our lives, what the world would suggest to be the course of greatest success, prosperity, advantage. The spirit of the world does sometimes get into our own hearts and suggests to us that it would be fatal for us to take this course or that. To give heed to that voice is to become conformed to this age. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service": and from the outset the point of supreme government is the ear. Put your ear under the blood, to be God's vehicle of government. It means that we must have a spiritual ear. As children of God we have, by reason of our new birth, a spiritual faculty of hearing, and we must take heed to develop it as the Lord would have us.

It means that the ear must be a listening ear. Many people hear, and yet do not hear; they have ears and they hear, but yet they hear not because they do not listen. The Lord says many things to us, and we do not hear what He is saying, although we know He is saying something. There must be a quiet place for the Lord in our lives. The enemy will fill our lives with the voices of other claims, and duties, and pressures, to make it impossible for us to have the harvest of the quiet ear for the Lord. That ear must be an ear that is growing in capacity. The child has an ear, and it hears, but it does not always understand what it hears. A babe hears sounds and you notice the signs of the babe having heard a sound, but that babe does not understand the sound that it hears. As it, grows it begins to know the meaning of those sounds. In the same way there must be a spiritual ear, a consecrated ear, marked by the same features of growth and progress. Then, further, this ear must be an obedient ear, so that hearing we obey. Thus God governs the life from the outset.

The Work of our Hands

Then we come to the thumb: "...and upon the thumb of his right hand..." The order is quite right, the ear first and the hand next. The Lord must have the place of honour and strength in the activities of our life, in the work of our life. Now this all sounds very elementary, but we must listen for the Lord's voice in it. The point is that in whatever we are doing, or about to do, in all our service, there must be death to self; no self serving, no world serving, no serving for our own gratification, pleasure, advantage, honour, glory, position, exaltation, reputation. In the death of our offering we died to all that, and now our hand, in whatever it does - and it may have to work in this world's business, to do a multitude of uninteresting things of a very ordinary character - whatever activity of life it has to engage in, is, on the one side, to be dead to self, and, on the other side, to work with the Lord's interests in view.

"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might..." (Ecclesiastes 9:10). You will remember how much the Apostle warned about service being done to men, as by men pleasers, and not as unto the Lord. He was speaking largely to the slave of those days. When the slave system obtained, and the slaves had to do many, many things that must have gone much against the grain, he said to the slaves: Fulfil your service, not as unto those men who are your masters, but as unto the Lord. We must question ourselves as to why we are in any given place, or what it is that moves us to desire any particular place or work. What is the governing motive of our ambition for service? Before God we must be able to say that any personal or worldly consideration is dead, and that our service now is not only not a reluctant, nor resigned, giving of ourselves to do what we have to do, but there is a ready applying of ourselves to even difficult, hard, unpleasant and uninteresting things for the Lord's pleasure.

Do write this word in your heart, that the Lord will not, indeed cannot, exalt you and give you something else, something more fruitful, more profitable, more glorious for Himself, until in that least, that mean, that despised, that irksome, maybe even revolting place and work you have rendered your service utterly as unto Him, even if it has meant a continual self-crucifixion. That is the way of promotion. This is the way in which we come into a position where the Lord gets more out of our lives than we imagine He is getting. There is a priestly ministry in doing that difficult and unpleasant thing as unto the Lord, but we do not see that we are priests at the time. The idea of being girded with a linen ephod at the time when you are scrubbing floors and washing dishes, and other like things, is altogether remote from your imagination. Yet there is a testimony which is being borne which is effective, of which maybe you have no consciousness. It may

come to light one day. Someone may say: I proved that Jesus Christ is a reality simply by seeing the way in which you did what I knew you naturally hated doing; it was wholly distasteful to you, you had no heart for it, but you did it in such a way that it convinced me that Christ is a living reality. That is no imagination and sentiment, it is true to life. The Lord has His eye upon us.

The Directed Walk

Next we consider the toe, "...and upon the great toe of his right foot." That means that the Lord is to have the direction of our lives, that all our outgoings and our stayings are to be controlled alone by the Lord's interests. We are not always being bidden to go. Sometimes the going is a relief, but it is staying which is so difficult. We are so eager to go, and yet often the Lord has a difficulty to get us to go in His way. However the case may be, it is a simple point, it is a direct word. Our going has been rendered dead to all but the Lord, and our staying also. Our life has been poured out, has been let go, has been taken away, that is, the life which is for ourselves, of ourselves. Life has been taken up on another level.

The Supreme Ensample

Apply that to the great High Priest. Had He ever an ear for Himself or for the world? Had He not an ear for the Father alone? Trace His life through again. Satan came to Him in the wilderness, and began to speak. We do not know how this took place. We know that the Lord must have spoken of the matter secretly and confidentially to some, for no one had been with Him, He had been alone. We do not know whether Satan appeared in physical form, and spoke with an audible voice, but the probability is that it was not so and that he wrought rather by inward suggestion, the strong bearing down upon the Lord Jesus of certain other considerations, every one of which was in His Own interest. There was no doubt whatever that Satan spoke to Him in some way, and He heard what Satan said, but His ear was crucified, and the power of that voice was paralysed by His consecration to the Father. In effect He triumphed on this ground: I have no ear for you, My ear is for the Father alone!

Satan came in other forms, not always openly, but under cover. Thus a beloved disciple would sometimes serve him for a tool: "Be it far from thee Lord: this shall never be unto thee" (Matt. 16:22). The Lord turned and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan"; that is the voice of self-consideration, self-preservation; I am

dead to that; this is the Father's way for Me; I have an ear for Him only. And so it was all the way through.

Was it true of His service? Did He for a moment seek His Own ends by His works, His Own glory by what He did? No! Even in tiredness and weariness and exhaustion, if there were interests of the Father to be served He was alive to those interests, never consulting His Own glory, or His Own feelings; and I have no doubt that His feelings were sometimes those of acute suffering. We read of Him as "being wearied." We know what that is, and how in weariness we would not only sit on the well, but remain sitting on the well, even though some demand were being made upon us. If we are the Lord's we must be governed by the Lord's interests, and brush aside all the rising suggestions of looking after ourselves. So it was with Him in all His goings. He submitted His going or His staying to the Father. His brethren would argue that He should go up to the feast, but He does not yield to their persuasions and arguments. His one criterion is, What does the Father say about this? His mother entreats Him at the marriage in Cana, and says they have no wine. His unlooked for reply is, "What have I to do with thee." In other words, What does the Father say about this? So His whole life was, on the one hand, dead to self, to the world, and, on the other hand, alive only to God. And what a fruitful life, what a God-satisfying life!

There is a oneness with Christ in consecration. "For their sakes I consecrate myself, that they may be consecrated in truth." "I beseech you therefore... present *your* bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your spiritual worship..." That is our priesthood.

Will you listen to that word? Will you take that word to the Lord in prayer? Will you get down before Him with it? Perhaps it is a word to bring about an end to a struggle, a fight, a conflict, an end to restlessness, chafing, lack of peace, lack of joy. You may have been fretted, you may have been thinking of your life as being wasted, and you are all in a ferment. Are you reaching out for something? Are you being governed by your own conception of things, by what other people think of you, by what the world would do, or what others would do if they were in your place? These are not the voices for you to heed. What does the Lord say? Wait in that; rest in that. You may not understand, but be sure a life on this basis is going to be God's success. Do you want God's success? God may do something through you for which you are temperamentally, constitutionally, altogether unfit, and for your part you have thought that because you are made in a certain way that must govern your direction in life. Not at all! Come, then, let

us get down before Him on this matter, to deal with consecration, if needs be, all anew.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jan-Feb 1937, Vol 15-1

The Unity of the Spirit

"Giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Ephesians 4:3.

This unity is that which is resultant from the indwelling and dominating control of the Holy Spirit.

The illustration is that of the head and the body. Every limb or member, every faculty of the body is controlled by the nervous system, and this nervous system works from and to the head where it has its base.

In the Body of Christ the Holy Spirit is the great nervous system, and only as there is an immediate response to every intimation of the will of the Head, and the life unbrokenly in correspondence with His mind, can there be an expression of the unity of which the New Testament speaks.

Three things must be clearly noticed.

1. We cannot "keep" what does not exist. The admonition presupposes our having received the Holy Spirit into our lives in a vital way and having surrendered ourselves entirely to His control and direction.

2. We cannot create this unity. It is essentially spiritual. Creeds, organizations, the social spirit, compromise on matters of interpretation and practice can never achieve it.

3. There is the paradox of unity. "Peace" in the scriptures means harmony. But while Christ is called "the Prince of peace" and while that harmony has been created in many lives and spheres where He has been enthroned, He clearly said that one result of His coming would be not peace but a sword.

It is clear that wherever His Cross has been fully presented, there has been trouble and upheaval. All the things against which His Cross stands have at once created a state of war. The world, the flesh, in all their forms and expressions, make spiritual unity impossible; and in so far as even Christians are influenced in their judgments, their standards of reckoning, their conceptions, as well as in

their motives, methods and means, by the world-spirit or the Adam nature, these things likewise make spiritual oneness impossible.

The fuller the presentation of the Cross, the greater the arousing of the elements of the fallen nature and therefore - on the one hand, the greater peril and possibility of discord, and, on the other hand, the call for a more complete capitulation to the life of the Spirit as against the life in the flesh.

This work of separating will be carried out in ourselves personally, in our homes, in our local churches, and in Christendom at large.

On this basis of flesh and spirit the "house divided against itself" will fall.

True unity has its birth at Calvary, where the world and the flesh - with the Devil working through both to maintain his discord in the universe - were dealt with and forever ruled out of the new creation.

This unity which Calvary creates calls for our diligence for its maintenance.

Certain things might well be borne in mind:

(1) The Holy Spirit is of one mind, and never leads in two ways which contradict each other in principle.

(2) The Holy Spirit is unchanging in truth. With Him there is no variableness from time to time.

(3) Differences of degree should never be a ground of division. The different ages and degrees of maturity in our family need never throw the family into schism.

(4) Basic contradictions or inconsistencies will ever result in arrested fellowship, and be fruitful ground for the satanic sower of seeds of discord.

(5) We must never act on a principle of expediency, policy, or prejudice, in order to try to advance the Lord's interests and safeguard the truth. It is better to have a more limited sphere of usefulness - as men regard it - than to keep doors open by compromise. This, at length, brings a breach with the faithful.

(6) Spiritual oneness is "in Christ," not in ourselves. The ascendancy of Christ

over self is the only way to this oneness.

(7) Let it be ever recognised that in the Lord's spiritual house there are His order and appointments. To be out of our place, to assume a position or ministry which is not ours, to interfere with others who are the "Lord's anointed", to mentally ignore, despise, or set aside such, to be negligent of our own ministry, or in any other way to disturb the Divine order is to upset "the unity of the Spirit", and to throw the Body into a disturbed and conflicting state.

There are many things to be discerned in our "giving diligence to keep the unity", but if the Cross has been truly applied to our own life, and we are really walking after the Spirit, we shall know within ourselves what these things are.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jan-Feb 1954, Vol 32-1

"A Very Deep Concern..."

The Church of God is passing into, or through, some very big changes, and there is much "overturning, overturning, until he comes whose right it is" (Ezekiel 21:27). While there is very much confusion in every realm, the lines of demarcation and definition are being drawn in Christianity. Categories are being made manifest and destinies fixed accordingly. While the great net of evangelism spreads, the haul will be sorted out and the winnowing fan of reality and utterness will test "of what sort it is". Perhaps one of the most testing discriminations will be between the *big* and the intrinsic.

There is one thing that is giving me a good deal of anxiety and apprehension. In this time when a twofold movement is taking place on a wide scale: that is, on the one hand the great movement toward union (not unity), as in the World Council of Churches, on the policy of the combine and monopoly, with all the necessary compromises and sacrifice of distinctiveness of message; and on the other hand the unrest, dissatisfaction, and loosening of ties with the established system of churches and institutions, resulting in many leaving their old associations and either meeting in groups, or drifting without anchorage in their disappointment - my disturbing fear is that there will be a movement, or some movements, toward the formation of another undenominational or interdenominational denomination, this coming about also by *policy, expediency,* or *seeming necessity*. Such a movement would only be another tragedy and incipient sectarian calamity, which history would show to have been not of God but of man, although with the best of motives. May the Lord save from this so serious mistake! It would be a starting at the wrong end; a *trying to form something*, instead of an organic growth from a living illumination, a revolutionary encounter with an unveiling of the true nature of the Church. For this latter God would have to lay an apprehending hand upon a man, or body of men, and, by a devastating showing of the true, universal, and spiritual significance of Christ, as effectively emancipating them from all the historic *accretions* of Christianity as the Apostle Paul was emancipated from historic Judaism. The growth of this organism would be as other emancipated men sprang from the essential root, and not just adhered or sponsored. The power of such an organism would be the all-conquering life of resurrection: "The power that worketh in us." There is nothing artificial, imitation, or manufactured about

this, and it requires no propaganda. The Holy Spirit is the great Propagandist of what is of heaven.

The above is written out of a very deep concern; a longing and a fear. It should be remembered that when God made His "new thing", His "new cruse" as the foundation of this dispensation of the Spirit and the Church, He did so with a nucleus of deeply disciplined men who had been broken by the Cross and reunited by the Resurrection. These two things were wrought deeply into their very constitution and were the ground upon which the Holy Spirit built in every place. This is the only *positive* ground for the Church and the churches. Anything other will be negative. They were men who had *seen!* It may be that, if the Lord is to have such a spiritual impact as was then made on the world, it will be necessary to sift down to that basis the conglomeration of the man-made and start - or go on - with the small but intrinsic seed-plot.

This may be like "a voice crying in the wilderness", but perhaps some wind of God would carry it as a guide or warning where it is needed.

It has always been contrary to our principle to advise people to leave this or that; rather have we said: 'Stay until your very spiritual life is at stake'; but, as things are, it is becoming more and more evident that God *must* "do a new thing" if His full end is to be reached. May He raise up His Prophets to *"show* the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed"; and may some Josiah (personal or corporate) arise to lead to such a taste of the real thing as to result in the leaving of all that is false. We can only resort to prayer!

From the Editorial published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Nov-Dec 1966, Vol 44-6

The Way Of Recovery

"David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave of Adullam: and when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him. And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men" (1 Sam. 22:1,2; ASV).

"Now these are they that came to David to Ziklag, while he yet kept himself close because of Saul the son of Kish; and they were among the mighty men, his helpers in war" (1 Chron. 12:1).

"And these are the numbers of the heads of them that were armed for war, who came to David to Hebron, to turn the kingdom of Saul to him, according to the Word of the Lord" (1 Chron. 12:23).

Spiritual Weakness Must Be Made Manifest

This was a period during which Israel was particularly menaced by the Philistines. These latter were always the shadow over Israel's life, and the instrument by means of which Israel's weakness and helplessness were brought out and made manifest. The Lord usually has some particular thing by which a state or condition is revealed. It is not always recognizable as a state in itself; there has to be something that brings it out. Because of this or that, the real condition of things is manifested as it would not be apart from that instrument that the Lord uses for its uncovering. It becomes positive, rather than abstract, by reason of certain things. The Lord will, for instance, raise up a situation, an experience, a difficulty, a concrete challenge, and then the inability to meet it and deal with it shows that that particular thing—which in other circumstances, had things been different, would have counted for nothing and would have at once been conquered and subdued—has now become the Lord's means of showing how bad the spiritual state is. The Lord has a way of doing that. When Israel came into right position and condition under David the Philistines did not count for anything, they lost all significance. But here they are very significant; they occupy a very dominant place; and that is only because of the spiritual state

of the Lord's people. So spiritual weakness is here made manifest by means of the Philistines.

We have to ask, Why was it that Israel was helpless before the Philistines? Why was it that their deplorable condition of weakness was manifested in the presence of the Philistines, who otherwise would not have signified anything? When you look closely for your answer, you find that it was because deep down there was so much in common between Israel and the Philistines. The Philistines are known to us by a certain epithet—the 'uncircumcised Philistines'. David used that phrase concerning Goliath of Gath (1 Sam. 17:36). Now when you look at Israel, that was really their spiritual state. They were uncircumcised in heart. They were called the Lord's people, and traditionally they were such. They had the ordinances—even the ordinance of circumcision—but it was all outward. Paul draws that very distinct line of discrimination between the outward circumcision, which he calls the concision, and the inward circumcision of the heart. He says it is the latter that makes us Israelites in truth, not the former (Rom. 2:25–29). Here you find Israel in exactly that position—uncircumcised in heart. The fact that they said, "Make us a king... like all the nations" (1I Sam. 8:5) showed that the thing which was common to the nations had come into their hearts. They wanted to be like the other nations. That is to say, the spirit of the world had come inside, and thus they knew nothing of what Paul called "the circumcision of Christ", not "the putting away of the filth of the flesh" (1 Pet. 3:21), but the putting away of the old man entirely. There was deep down in Israel something quite in common with the Philistines, and that being so, the fact had to be exposed; and the world exposed their weakness.

It is like that with a church, with a Christian community, or with Christendom, when it is really worldly in spirit, in principle, in method. It is the world that exposes their weakness and shows how helpless they are. The world, like the Philistines, laughs at them, and says, 'You don't count for anything, you are not to be taken seriously.' The world laughs at the church or the Christian who in principle has that which is in common with itself, and the world can say 'We can do your job better than you can.' So we find that the world is very largely the instrument of exhibiting or exposing the weakness of Christians, simply because there is that common basis.

The Way Of Spiritual Strength

(a) A Life Of Faith In Separation Unto GOD

At that point in their history, when things were like that, David is introduced. Over against Saul, who is a type of the world principle in the Church, David is brought into view, and we have these three gatherings to David; and they are very significant in relation to what we have just been saying. David, then, represents separation unto God and a life of faith. Israel had said, "Make us a king... like all the nations". 'We want something visible to rest upon, something we can see and take account of with our senses, something tangible, something altogether contrary to the life of faith.' The Lord said, "They have rejected Me, that I should not be king over them" (1 Sam. 8:7). They turned from a life of faith. David comes in as God's principle of faith calling for separation from the world principle, the world spirit, the world mentality. Then it is not long before David, having been quite clearly indicated and signalized by God as the one with whom God was and to whom He had committed Himself, is, by the sovereignty of God, put into a position which is going to be the testing situation for the people of God. He provides a supreme test as to whether these people really are going on with God, or going on with Saul; going on with heaven, or with earth; going on in the Spirit, or in the flesh. David becomes the test now of spirituality —real spirituality.

In the first place, we find him in the cave in the wilderness—that is, the place outside, spiritually outside, in rejection; the place apart from that worldly system which had captured the Lord's people; apart from that merely traditional order of things which was only outward, in form and ordinances, but not a thing of the heart. David was put right outside of that in the wilderness, and of course he was repudiated by that whole official system, and it was positively against him—if possible, for his destruction. So that the very first thing that arose for the people of God was the question of their discernment, discernment as to where God really was—with Saul or with David—and as to where their deepest spiritual needs would be met. I think it is very unfortunate that the Hebrew word has been translated "discontented" in the text. It would have been far better to keep the marginal rendering in the text—"bitter of soul". It has been made use of by a lot of people who speak disparagingly of a place as a 'cave of Adullam', implying that it is the place of a lot of discontented and disgruntled people who cannot get on with anybody else. But to give it that kind of meaning is to sweep aside the whole spiritual significance of this. God has had to do this sort of thing again and again. When the Church has departed from a purely spiritual, heavenly position, a true life of separation unto Himself, it has been found that the majority were not ready for such a position. It has only been a minority who were ready for it, and then people have said of them, 'Oh, that is a cave of

Adullam, a lot of discontented people'. No, they were bitter of soul, and unable to meet their spiritual liabilities; in debt because the provision for spiritual competency had been lost on account of something quite false having gained the position amongst the Lord's people. That is quite a true position spiritually.

But here was David outside of that whole world system that had captured the Lord's people, and it was a question of whether the Lord's people could discern; and those that did discern went out to David to a place of faith.

(b) Union With Christ In Death

What I want to say here in the first place is that this position in the wilderness, and all that it involved for David and for those who went out to him, clearly and positively represents the believer's union with Christ in death. These others have been glorying in this wonderful fellow Saul, glorying in this idea of their's of a great kingdom. It was a worldly thing, according to the nations. Paul said, "Far be it from me to glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6:14). It is that union with Christ in death to the whole world spirit and system, to the whole world tendency that is constantly invading the Church, like the Philistines who came in again and again with their worldly principles, causing trouble and bringing the Lord's people into a place where He could not go on with them nor commit Himself to them. Those who went out to David took a position outside of that, and represent the truly spiritual people who take their place in that aspect of the Cross which means death to that whole thing. David's life was being sought, and those who joined him became fugitives with him and really, from one standpoint, it was a laying down of their life to the whole world. They lost their position and all their hopes in that kingdom. They laid down their life, and took all the risks bound up with associating with David.

(c) Union With Christ In Resurrection

The second passage, at the beginning of 1 Chronicles twelve, brings us to Ziklag. We will not stay to rehearse how David came into possession of the city, but here we find that in Ziklag there was another secession to David. What we do know about Ziklag is that while David and his men were away one day, the Amalekites made a raid on the city and captured everything, wives and children and all possessions, and then burned the city with fire and went off. When David and his men came back, they found everything gone or destroyed. They wept, it says,

“until they had no more power to weep”. It was a very serious and critical situation. It was the death side in very truth. But then it says, “David strengthened himself in the Lord his God”, and he inquired of the Lord whether he should pursue after the Amalekites, and the Lord said, ‘Yes, pursue.’ The Lord sovereignly facilitated his overtaking of the Amalekites, so that he recovered everything (1 Samuel 30:1–31).

This is another stage in true spiritual life and fulness. To me it corresponds to the Letter to the Romans. In the first chapters of that letter you find everything being lost. From the very first verses, you mark this movement to discover something that has been lost in Adam, and when you get to the end of chapter five, you have reached the point where everything is lost. Chapter six brings in the Cross, and from then onward you find everything is being recovered. Everything that was lost is recovered through the Cross. In chapter eight, you have a full recovery, and you find that the whole creation, which was subjected to vanity, is recovered. All that was lost through Adam’s sin has now been recovered, and this is the resurrection side of the Cross. The death always goes with it. The Lord never overlooks the death side—that in Adam, in the world under judgment, everything is lost. In the case of David we carry over from the wilderness to Ziklag on the death side, but then we take a further step here to the recovery of everything in resurrection. David strengthened himself in his God. The Lord said, “Pursue... overtake, and (thou) shalt without fail recover all”. That is the other side. There is resurrection union with the Lord Jesus as well as death union. It would not do for us to take the death position with Christ and leave it there; we must come on to the other side. Spiritual progress means the apprehending of Christ risen for the recovery of all that has been lost: and it has been recovered. It was a very full recovery.

(d) Union With Christ In The Heavenlies

Pass to the third passage, in the second part of 1 Chronicles twelve. “These are the numbers of the heads of them that were armed for war, who came to David to Hebron”. The third stage—Hebron. The name means League or Fellowship. It says of Hebron that it was a very ancient city. Its history lay right back in the mists of antiquity, as though outside of this world. This is a very advanced position spiritually. Where do we come to through death and resurrection? What is the next position? Surely it is in the heavenlies. The sovereignty of the Lord Jesus as enthroned now comes into view. It is here they make David king. The whole question of His heavenly exaltation and government as outside of this

world comes before us when we come to Hebron. I think you see quite clearly what this means. We pass from ‘Romans’ now into ‘Ephesians’. It is “the heavenlies in Christ Jesus”. GOD “raised Him from the dead, and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named” (1:20,21). David is coming to the throne now, and there gathered to him many to turn again the kingdom to him—at Hebron. It is the Church in the heavenlies that, in type, we see here—the fellowship that is outside of this world, of a truly spiritual nature; union with Christ in ascension in the heavenlies where He is absolutely, unquestionably Lord. He is made King. He is “Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him That filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22,23). Well, here it is something more than an earthly society or institution, something more than a company of the Lord’s people like a congregation on the earth. It is that thing which is brought out from the antiquity of “before the foundation of the world”. “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4)—the Church of the eternal counsels of God. It is a heavenly position, a heavenly thing, a heavenly fellowship, which has broken its contact in spirit with this whole world system even as it is found in the Church.

And there we find at Hebron they had a very good time. Seven days they feasted, they ate and they drank, and they wanted to have another seven days. With anybody who tastes real, heavenly fellowship, there is no question of ‘What do you belong to, what denomination, sect, association?’ They have left all that behind. They have come into a realm where it is Christ as sole and absolute Lord. If you taste that sort of fellowship you want to go on. You are ready to excuse Peter for wanting to make three tabernacles! ‘Let us not go back to business, let us stay here forever!’ That is how we ought to feel. We have, of course, to go back to our business, but what we are thinking of is not of a conference for seven days “in the heavenlies” and then of our leaving our heavenly position and resuming the old earthly one. No! This is to be the constant consciousness of the life of the Lord’s people. You have to go back to business, but you can still be in the spiritual good of the heavenly fellowship of the Lord’s people, and you must stand for that.

The next stage would be Jerusalem. When the Lord gets on earth something such as we have been speaking of, you may expect the Lord's coming before long. Jerusalem will be the next thing.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Vol. 28-2, 1950

The Way Of Spiritual Growth

Before we can or will consider the laws of spiritual growth, we need to have a real concern for that growth. There must be in us a strong sense of its importance and necessity. We must realize in a living way that:

1. The measure of our ultimate satisfaction to the Lord will be the measure of the fulness of Christ.

2. The measure of our value to others will depend entirely upon our own spiritual measure: not merely upon what we believe, or think, or say.

3. The measure of our own joy and satisfaction will be according to what fulness of Christ we know and live in.

Because these three things constitute the whole nature of, and reason for, our being called *"into the fellowship of His (God's) Son"*, the New Testament is ninety percent occupied with the growth and maturity of believers.

As there are definite laws of growth in the physical and mental man, so there are in that of the "inward man". Some of these are quite obvious, such as proper and suitable food, pure air, regular exercise, and systematic self-discipline. To violate or neglect any of these laws of body and mind is to arrest development, limit capacity, and open the door to adverse and destructive elements.

There are corresponding laws—the counterpart of the above—in the spiritual life, with similar effects for good or ill in observance or neglect. We are not taking up these particular factors here, but are specifying three other—although related—laws of spiritual growth. The first of these is

That Unattractive Thing—Obedience.

No one naturally likes that word. It is unpleasant from infancy onward. Its very essence seems to imply the presence of—at least—a peril of disobedience, and the universal natural dislike of it more than implies—it proves—the presence of a wish to be free from any obligation or law. Yes, that primeval revolt, and break

from God which was the beginning of actual sin has entered as the Serpent's poison into the very blood-stream of the entire creation, and the very mention of obedience stirs a secret dislike, if not resentment.

It would take too much space to show how, through all time, the one thing which has been God's supreme obstacle to man's relationship with Himself has been this inherent disobedience as the active expression of unbelief. On the other hand, it would take volumes to show fully how every movement into fellowship with God in His great purposes has been based upon a demanded obedience of faith; a test, a challenge and a conflict issuing in a willing capitulation to the Divine will in some general or particular direction. Here, our only intention is to point out and emphasize the fact that there is no possibility of the slightest true and genuine spiritual progress and growth beyond the point where light received, the Lord showing His mind, has not had a definite response in practical obedience. Time does not change this, and no matter how long we go on or imagine that the matter is passed over, when at length the real question of approval for particular usefulness arises, we shall be brought right back to the hindrance of that reserved obedience. It is like the presence and secret working of some injury in the physical system which flares up when a particular demand is made years after. God does not live in time. All past and future is present with Him.

But there is a realm of obedience which is not law but love, and love transforms the unlovely to delight. Hence the Apostle Paul, in calling for an obedience which would make possible a spiritual enlargement, puts the matter on the basis of love, and then gives the supreme Example of the obedience of love. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ, Who... became obedient" (Phil. 2:5). It is those whose love for the Lord leads to swift actions in relation to light received, who make swift progress, and are seen to grow up in beauty before the Lord. On the other hand, those who are careless or rebellious when the Lord has spoken, and tardy in response— practical response—are marked by repeated defeats, recurrent bouts of spiritual cloudiness, and inability to meet an emergency demand when it arises. Too often this lack of obedience, or positive disobedience, is due to its origin in Satan—Pride.

The second thing to be mentioned here is

That Unrecognized Thing—Adjustableness.

One of the most common causes of spiritual stultification is fixedness. It is peculiarly common in the realm where Christian truth has been reduced to a fixed form, order, system, and creed. The doctrines of Christianity are such and such; so many. The accepted and established ideas of Christian service and methods are so-and-so. Peter had his fixed position as to Jews and Gentiles, and, because of it, came perilously near missing the larger purpose of God, and presented the Lord with a real battleground in his Christianity. It has so very largely resolved itself into a finality of position, which results in a closed door to fuller revelation as to what God means by His Word. The fact is, that God only gives us enough light to get us to take the next step, but when that step has been taken, we are in the way of being shown that much more was meant by the Lord than He showed then. The first expectations of many servants of the Lord in the Bible, expectations resultant from something said by the Lord to them, were later seen to have been not all that He really meant, but there was something more, and perhaps other than they thought.

Can anyone really dispute that full light very often means a shedding of things and ideas that *we thought* were of God? Is it not true that, as we *go on,* we find that certain leadings of the Lord were tactical, intended to get us to a certain place where alone we could learn of a greater necessity? There is very much of this kind of thing in relation to both doctrine, practice, and service—its nature and ways, and while Divine *principles* will never change to all eternity, the clothing of those principles may vary and change with both dispensations and generations and stages of our own lives.

In all this—while *Truth* remains unalterable—the only way to grow is to be adjustable and not static and fixed. Do your religious traditions bind you in such a way that you are not free to move with God? If He sees this to be so, He may not give you the light necessary to enlargement. But if He sees that, although you may be in a *comparatively* false position, your heart is really set on His fulness at any cost, He may present you with light which will test your adjustableness severely. See the case of the disciples of John the Baptist transferring their discipleship to Christ. See the case of Peter and what happened in the home of Cornelius. See also the case of Apollos in Acts 18:24–28; as also the disciples mentioned earlier in that chapter.

Our third principle of growth is

That Crisic Point Of Committal.

Very often the whole mounting avalanche of Divine working in our lives—an avalanche built up as silently and slowly as the added snowflakes in the Alps—just waits to move with power and overwhelming for that final—yet all-inclusive—act of committal. We wait; we think, wrestle, contemplate, analyze, go round-and-round; we reason and argue; we recognize that there is nothing else for it, and even say so; we even come to the point when the matter is settled in our conviction and acceptance, and we think that we are over the hedge, but nothing happens, nothing eventuates. Why is it? The Lord knows more than we do about the deceitfulness of our hearts. A covenant has two sides, and in the Old Testament two sacrifices were connected with a covenant; one representing God, the other the offerer; *both* were killed and the two parties to the covenant were represented as passing between the two (See Abraham in Gen. 15). There has to be a slaying of something *on our side!* In other words, God is waiting until we have burned our boats behind us. Though we may have approached the shore of His will and way for us, there will be nothing from God's side while our boats are just left on the shore so that, if things don't go quite as we expect, we still can retreat. That boat is an evidence of doubt or reservation. It must be burned, so that—whatever the consequence—we have no alternatives.

The young believer will not grow unless he or she makes a committal in testimony, so letting others know where they stand. The law holds good in every stage of development and progress. If *policy* governs, or fear, or how such a step will affect our prospects, or any consideration which conflicts with what we know in our deepest hearts is the way indicated for us—for *us*—those things are boats or bridges representing a false "Safety-first" policy. As when the bleating lambs were preserved by Saul—the finger of God will point to them and say, What mean those boats? God will wait for the full and final capitulation without a reservation, and to defer is only to be involved in confusion, and either becoming a misfit, having missed God's first best, or losing out altogether.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Vol. 24-1, 1946

The Way

“But Saul, yet breathing threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and asked of him letters to Damascus unto the synagogues, that if he found any that were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (Acts 9:1,2).

“But when some were hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them” (Acts 19:9).

“And about that time there arose no small stir concerning the Way” (Acts 19:23).

“I persecuted this Way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women” (Acts 22:4).

“But this I confess unto thee, that after the Way which they call a sect, so serve I the God of our fathers, believing all things which are according to the law, and which are written in the prophets” (Acts 24:14).

“But Felix, having more exact knowledge concerning the Way, deferred...” (Acts 24:22).

“The same following after Paul and us cried out, saying, These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim unto you the Way of salvation” (Acts 16:17).

“This man had been instructed in the Way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spake and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, knowing only the baptism of John: and he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the Way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:25,26).

“Enter ye in by the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many are they that enter in thereby. For narrow is the gate, and straitened the Way, that leadeth unto life, and few are they that find it”

(Matt. 7:13,14).

It is very interesting, to say the least of it, to recognize that in New Testament times the Christian life and walk became resolved into a term like this, to be spoken of as “THE WAY.” It would seem strange in our ears, no doubt, if we heard people talking about us as “the People of the Way,” but that is evidently how it was then, and it would be interesting to know just how that came about; and I think we shall not be very far wrong if we come to an opinion about it. Evidently people in those days were very much like people today. They were given to summing things up in a terse, brief manner, and affixing labels.

You see, the very word “Christian” was their way of summing it all up. At times we have that word mentioned. “The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” (Acts 11:26). Then the Apostle says, “If a man suffer as a Christian...” (1 Pet. 4:16). Clearly, it was outsiders who gave believers that name, and, as we know, it simply means *‘Christ-ones,’* and it was shortened into Christians; it was the world who coined that title for believers in the Lord Jesus. ‘They are Christ-ians!’

Evidently it was something like that that resulted in Christianity becoming known as the Way, but it was apparently the result of something they were always saying. They, or at least the chief men among the Apostles at the beginning —Peter, James, John—had heard the Lord Jesus say, “I AM THE WAY... no one cometh unto the Father but by Me” (John 14:6); and they had gone out preaching to the world and proclaiming that Jesus was the Way and that there was no other way. So people had taken it up and said, These are the people of the Way. What an admission! Whether or not they meant it as a slight and said it with a sneer, what a lot there is in it for truth! ‘These *Christ-ones* are the people of *the Way*.” And in both cases, whether it is Christ-ones or the Way, the result is that it is all bound up with, and inseparable from, the Lord Jesus. If we are right in surmising that that is where the phrase comes from—“I AM THE WAY,” and these men had preached Jesus as the Way—then it comes right back to that— *Christ-ones,* people of Him WHO IS THE WAY; that is, not people who just have a way of their own, who take a way different from others, but people of a Person Who is the Way. It is the Person Who gives character to the Way. It is the Person Who makes the Way, it is the Person Who has pioneered that Way and blazed that trail. They are in the Way of the Person.

And do you not think that is probably why the Devil hated it so much? It is

strange how many ways people can take with seeming success and without very much trouble. Think of all the ways that people take today, even religiously. You cannot cope with all the fantastic courses that people adopt. They go all their strange, peculiar ways—ways that you think no commonsense person would ever look at—but they go and they get crowds to follow them; and nobody bothers to oppose them. But here it is different. We come to that in a minute.

We are not going to say a great deal about the Way—what it came to mean so far as the Church and believers were concerned. We just look right on the surface of it, at one or two things that are very simple.

An Exclusive Way

First of all, seeing that it was the Way which was that of a Person, and not just a system of truth and doctrine, it was a very exclusive Way. There is a sense in which we can use that word safely and rightly. I think it was to that that the Lord referred when He said, “Narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, that leadeth unto life, and few are they that find it.” It is a very exclusive way. The Lord has an illustration for that, the illustration of the camel and the needle’s eye, the name for the little gate at the side of the main entrance to the city. A merchant has arrived with his camel after sundown, and the gates are closed always at dusk. Somehow he has to get in with his camel, and so, after a good deal of argument, the porter says, Well, if you can get your camel through that lych gate, you may come in, but I must not open the main gate. So the man strips his camel of everything—everything comes off and is left outside. Then he tells his camel to go down, and the man tugs and squeezes the camel through. The camel is stripped of everything and he is right down as low as he can get. Here the illustration about the Way means this. There are a lot of things that cannot come in, and you will never get in if you try to bring those things with you. You will be stripped of everything of your old world and your old life if you are coming into the Way. Was it not that that caused the offence to the man known as the rich young ruler? “Go, sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow Me” (Matt. 19:21). He went away grieved, for he had great possessions. It was simply the test of the “needle’s eye,” and he could not stand up to it. It is an exclusive way, and the Lord never hid the fact from anybody who was coming after Him. Except this and that and that, He said, ye cannot be My disciples. Yes, it is narrow. Well, that is only the world’s view of it. That is what the world says about the Christian way, the Christian life—it is “narrow.” That is how it is viewed from outside.

They call Christians narrow-minded. Have we found the life narrow? Well, yes, lots of things have gone, but when you have got inside, what have you found? It is only narrow from that outside standpoint. It ought not to be narrow inside. We have missed something if the Christian life is a narrow, mean, poor, thin thing. We have missed its meaning. Oh, what a vastness, what a wealth, what a fulness we have entered into!

An Inclusive Way

Yes, it is exclusive in a sense, but it is inclusive in the Divine sense, from heaven's standpoint. It is tremendous for those who really become children of the Way. While it was exclusive at a certain point, the entering of the gate, it has become inclusive when you are inside. The Lord really is not a debtor to any man. "Every one that hath left houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for My Name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold" (Matt. 19:29). I ask you, with all that it means on the side of difficulty and trial to be in the Way, would you go back to the other way, would you leave this Way? If you really would, well, I do not know what has happened to you. You really have not come to know the meaning of being in the Way, for it is a large, a full, a wealthy place. Oh yes, we do know all the testing, we do know what a lot has had to go; but oh, we would think more than twice before exchanging our present lot for the lot of those outside of the Way. Have we not had to sit down sometimes when things were getting a bit too much for us and the pressure was tempting us to think back—have we not sat down and said, Can I go back? Can I exchange this for the old life that I left? And every time it has been No, oh no! We cannot do it, it is unthinkable. There is in the Way, after all, a wonderful fulness. It is not all loss, there is a great deal of gain. The Thessalonians were people of the Way, they suffered the loss of all things; but read again the opening chapters of the two letters, and hear the Apostle speaking about the overflowing joy and the overflowing love which was amongst them. They suffered joyfully the spoiling of their goods. Why? Well, not just for the pleasure of being very Spartan, and enduring a lot of suffering for the sake of showing what tremendous grit they had. No! They found in the Way a greater compensation for all their loss.

A Contested Way

But, saying that, there is no doubt about it, it is a contested way. Strangely, all the passages in which the phrase occurs are passages relating to opposition. Paul

is saying that he persecuted the Way, and the first mention of the Way is in connection with his persecuting. "...that if he found any that were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem." He did not carry it out in Damascus, but he says later that he used to do that (Acts 22:4)—he threw men and women, bound, into prisons (note the plural). He had been on some other expeditions wherever he could track the Way. Several passages speak of how the Way was contested—as we said earlier, not simply because it was a new doctrine but because of WHO THE WAY WAS. You can be a Christian of sorts, you can bear the name of a Christian, you can have a kind of profession of Christianity and not know any of the persecution. It is the temptation of many to try and be Christians but to avoid the persecution bound up with it, and there are today a lot of Christians, so-called, who are not in the fight of the Way. They are evading it by some means, they are hiding what they are, they are not coming out into the open with it; but here you notice it was when the Way was out in the open it was so challenged, antagonized, contested. They were proclaiming JESUS AS THE WAY, and so they met the antagonism of the prince of this world through his subjects; and if we are really going to be true to the Way, which is only saying to be true to the Lord—to be loyal to our Master, not to hide where we stand, let it be out in the open—well, we are going to meet the conflict. We had better make up our minds about it. But there is our opportunity, and there is the Lord's opportunity, and it works good all round. It makes for tremendous spiritual increase and growth. You look for the people who have grown spiritually and become strong, and you find that they are the people who have let it be known Whose they are and Whom they serve, and they have accepted the consequences of open and positive antagonism. They are the people who have grown. Look for the people who are small and weak spiritually, and you will find they are the people who are not right out in the open with their testimony. It works for our own spiritual increase and strengthening—the Lord sees to that. Then it gives the Lord the opportunity of finding out where there are those who are wanting the Way. There are a lot wanting the Way, but they will not find it until there is a lamp that shows the Way; and "Ye are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). If the Lord has us in a clear, open place, it gives Him the opportunity of discovering and getting hold of those who will come into the Way. That is gain. So it is so necessary for us to be right out in the open, letting it be known that we are of the Way—taking the consequences, but to very great gain all round. Yes, it is a contested way.

The Entrance To The Way

What is the entrance to the Way? How do we get into the Way? What is the gateway? It is the Cross and what the Cross means. It is there that the laying down of our lives with Christ takes place; it is there that the stripping of this world from us takes place; it is there that the all-inclusive meaning of the Way is faced and accepted. The Cross stands there and no one gets into the Way except by that Cross and what it means. If we want not only to get into the Way but to make good progress in the Way—not all the time to be coming to a halt, then getting on a little and another halt, making very jerky and irregular progress which is most unsatisfactory—if we want not only to get in but to go on and keep on going on, then let us recognize the fulness of the meaning of that Cross, that in that Way all questions are settled as to who is going to be Master and Lord. This is what the Lord was suggesting in principle when He said that if the Master treads the way, the servant must tread it too (John 15:20). We have it in a hymn— "It is the way the Master went, should not the servant tread it still?" But He introduced that suggestion. 'I have gone this way, the way of an utterness of letting go. Satan offered Me all the kingdoms of this world and the glory thereof as a gift outright, and I said, No!' Satan will never offer that to you, he will only offer it to you in bits, fragments; he offered the whole to Christ. The Lord said, No, not a bit of it on your terms! He accepted the way of the Cross wholly and utterly. Well, you see what happened. It was not at all necessary for Him, for Himself, to go to the Cross. He was glorified on the Mount of Transfiguration. For Himself He could have gone right through at once. He only went through the Cross for us, not for Himself. The Cross means that this world is ruled out, set aside, and all its prizes, and its tinsel, its so-called glories, have nothing for us, we are utterly for the Lord. We are here on this earth, in this world, for the Lord, cost what it may in this life. Well, that is both the way in and the way on. If we are pausing, to count the cost and to discuss the terms: if we are like those disciples before they came to the place where the Cross to them was not the loss of all things but the gaining of all things: if we are saying, as one did, "Lo, we have left all, and followed Thee; what then shall we have?" (Matt. 19:27): if there is anything of that we shall not get on very far. "What shall we have?" Rather must it be, when we have done all— "We are unprofitable servants" (Luke 17:10). Really, the Lord has not got very much out of us when we have done all. Well, the gate is the Cross, and it is just in the measure in which we accept what the Cross represents that we shall go on in the Way—and that is only saying in figurative language that only in that measure shall we come to the appreciation of the fulness of Christ, make spiritual progress and be of real value to Him as pioneers in the Way for others to come on. "Those of the Way." Well, with all the cost and with all the contesting, may the Lord give us that glorying

in our hearts— after all, we are people of the Way.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Vol. 26-1, 1948

What Will God Do Next?

This is an inquiry, not a prophecy. That a new thing needs to be done by the Lord is a growing conviction of many of His servants and people. But is there any reason why we should expect a new movement or further step on the part of the Lord? The answer could be given in various ways. From time to time in the world's history there have been definite and distinct movements in relation to spiritual interests. These movements have usually, if not invariably, been when conditions were very similar to those which exist at such a time as this. The tide of real spiritual lifestyle has run well out, and things spiritually had become very shallow and superficial. What there was of activity was work by its own motive-force. That is to say, it was carried on by human energy and interests, it was producing its own dynamic. By various and many forms of organized enterprise, with their interest, appeal, and propaganda, that which was called "the work of God" was kept going.

Then, the things of God had become very set. A tradition became established, and everything was according to the tradition, the accepted and recognized order, way, teaching, and means. There was no way for God to do what He would, because anything not according to the established custom was suspect. Thus He was fettered by the fixed traditions which governed His people's minds. The Lord was straitened in His people by their own finality of position, while at the same time they were aware that all was not well. The result was that, in most instances, the new Divine reaction had to be made outside of the recognized order and system of things; and, for a long time, the living thing had to go on in face of a strong and serious opposition, not from the world, but from those who were supposed to stand for God on the earth.

This involves a matter of the most vital concern to our main inquiry - What will God do next?

God has never yet moved from any other standpoint and position than fullness and finality. Man's first day on the earth was the Sabbath, which was at the end of God's work. Man did not start with God in the fragments and bits of His work. When the new corporate Man came in on the Day of Pentecost it was upon a basis of fullness and finality in Christ exalted. The history of God's specific movements with the Church is not the history of His adding something, but of

His bringing back to the primal fullness with which He filled His Son. Look at the epochs in the Church's history and you will see that they represented the recovery of something which had been lost. God can therefore never be satisfied with something which only represents an elementary, or more or less, degree of the fullness of Christ. Any movement of God which is taken hold of by man and made something in itself as an end, whether it be evangelism or a fuller message of life, and truth, or whether it be an advance in order or method of Church life and procedure, must sooner or later become a tradition and a legal system, bereft of life and heavenly fullness.

God ever seeks to carry His people on to "full growth" which, with Him, is the timeless fullness of Christ. If there is yet to be an advance made to a position beyond what has been, those (they may be comparatively few) who will make it will be brought to a deeper realization than ever of the failure and impotence of traditional Christianity as it exists. They may strain and strive and hurl themselves into it to try to improve it, but they will break themselves upon it, and will eventually, in the mercy of God, come to see that the old wineskin; cannot be given the new wine. God must do a new thing, and He must have a clear way for doing it.

So we ask, are we not being hedged up to something untraditional and extra to what has been? Is not God bringing much of that which has been used in the past under the hammer? We have to admit a question as to whether God is willing to revive that which has taken the mold of men's various and conflicting religious orders and systems, or whether He will not transcend all such and move apart from it. It will be a costly business for all who are a part of it, especially the instruments used for it, and they will have to be very broken and emptied vessels.

"Wherefore... Let Us Press On"

Hebrews 6:1.
The Tremendous Importance of Spiritual Maturity

The Apostle is distressed. As he writes this letter it is as though from time to time he meets something that almost pulls him up dead. Three times at least he suspends his main theme and puts in a parenthesis. The section from verse eleven of chapter five to verse three of chapter six is such a digression. What is this thing, that makes his going so difficult and strenuous?

It is not the theme that is difficult!

It is not in the writer himself! It is certainly not a lack of urgency or importance! The issues are paramount. The whole significance of the Person, Incarnation, Cross and Worth of the Lord Jesus is at stake!

No, the difficulty is in those to whom he writes. Not that they do not know the Lord. They "have been enlightened"; they had "tasted of the heavenly gift"; had "been made partakers of the Holy Spirit"; had "tasted of the good Word of God"; and "the powers of the age to come"; and yet, and yet, there is an immaturity, a failure to "go on," a spiritual infancy which threatens to be fatal in respect of all the ultimate purposes of their heavenly calling. It is this arrested growth, prolonged babyhood that holds back the spirit and the pen of the Apostle, and would even put restraint upon the Holy Spirit. (See the paragraph mentioned.)

The trouble was seen by their being always occupied with those matters - "principles" - which are meant to be built upon, not toyed with. Perhaps the trouble was deeper than that; it was a dwelling upon the *things* as such and a failure to discern their real spiritual meaning and implications. There are two maxims which it will be well for us to have settled quite early. One is that we can only "go on" in the Holy Spirit. The other is that the Holy Spirit can only take us on as the foundations and "principles" are laid and settled. There are many of the Lord's children who, after many years of being such, are under arrest, paralysed, ineffective, and almost counted out because they are in a state of unsettlement about the "first principles." With some it is a matter of "faith toward God"; with some it is the matter of baptism; with some it is "eternal

judgment." Let it be clearly recognised that on all such matters the Holy Spirit Himself will demand an absolute settlement and will not take us on to "full growth" until the "principles" are established. Why are there so many old-aged infants, elderly dependants, spiritual "Peter Pans," amongst the Lord's people? Why is it that after years of work and service so many come to a place where they are beaten and helpless because of being "without understanding" in that sense in which the words are used? Col. 1:9; 1 Cor. 14:20; Matt. 15:16.

It may be - and certainly sometimes is - because at sometime the Spirit's requirement as to some basic principle was unheeded, argued aside, discussed, passed, or definitely refused. That is a sin against the Holy Spirit - while it may not be *the* sin - and that sin is bound to find us out sooner or later. What we have to say here as we proceed will make clear what we mean by this being found out. The letter to the Hebrews marks the transition from the fragments of the Prophets to the fulness in Christ, this fulness is spiritual and is consequent upon spiritual revelation which leaves all the "earthlies" behind and comes into the "heavenlies," even in the matter of Divinely constituted institutions, which nevertheless were but as "schoolmaster" to lead to Christ and maturity. We can still go on with the "things" and stand still as to the "meaning." For instance, it is *impossible* to have a *revelation* of the true nature of the Church - the Body of Christ - and remain a denominationalist or sectarian without joining issue with the Holy Spirit. It is equally impossible to remain a Jew as such (in the matter of Judaism) and be a member of Christ. Once the Holy Spirit has spoken or enlightened, tremendous crises are reached on foundation principles, and these crises if not settled soon will come up later. The Holy Spirit never moves a fraction from His original premise.

Now, while this is all so important, it but opens up for us the way to a closer consideration of what spiritual maturity is.

There are three letters which deal especially with the matter of unduly delayed maturity, or spiritual childhood continued in too long. They are: "1 Corinthians," "Galatians" and "Hebrews."

Corinthian Immaturity

The believers at Corinth had evidently made some inquiries of the Apostle Paul concerning certain particular matters which they thought were the cause of trouble and bad spiritual conditions. The Apostle postponed his dealing with

these until he had dealt with what he himself was convinced was the cause of the trouble. This was not the particular "problems" about which they were concerned, but that which lay behind them and much more. They were occupied with the externals of the faith both as to personal, domestic and church affairs. The Apostle goes to the heart of things and makes it perfectly clear that their trouble was arrested spiritual development. Thus he mentions some of the symptoms which prove this. The first one was partisanship. They had men in their eye. Human selection, favour, preference issuing from temperamental reactions caused them to "hive off," form circles, parties around the mannerism, 'line of things,' or make-up of this man and that. Some would prefer the mystical and poetical to the practical. Others the opposite. Some would take up with the subjective line of things and decline the objective and vice versa. And so on and on. Then there would be the men themselves with what was liked and what was disliked. Concerning all this, the Apostle says "I could not speak as unto spiritual but as unto babes, I fed you with milk" (3:1,2). The fundamental fault with all this was that with them the Lord Jesus had not become pre-eminent; it was not Him always in view, to whom they gathered, whom they were seeking. It was not a matter of what of the Lord Jesus had this one and that one to impart. It was the vessel not the treasure; the channel not the stream. In effect the Apostle says that it is a mark of real spiritual growth and maturity when the Lord's people are not influenced by the instrument as such, but have their hearts directed toward Himself, and are asking all the time, "What has this one and that one of the Lord?" So in this matter as in all others the remedy presented is a putting of the Lord Jesus in His place, which is the supreme place, and the place which excludes all human obtrusions, for or against.

The heads of these Corinthians were projected toward the servants of the Lord instead of their hearts being set on the Master. Divisions are so often childish, and when looked at from a point of greater spiritual advancement are seen to be so. Then it is perfectly clear that human elements played all too great a part, and if only the Lord Himself had been the dominating reality and object of concern, things would have been different.

Then these Corinthians were all too much taken up with "gifts," experiences, demonstrations, manifestations. "Tongues," for instance, had come into prominence in a manner out of proportion to the general work of the Spirit. The display gifts were holding the stage of their interest and concern. This also is related to their immaturity. Infants like outward effects. Children like sights and sounds. The Apostle again implies that this means that the Lord Himself is not

the object, but the things. What a test this is! How many there are who must have "signs and wonders," sensations, evidences, outward proofs, things seen and touched and proved by the senses. This is all infancy, and as we go on with the Lord He woos us from this realm and personally takes the pre-eminence. It was in relation to all this that the Apostle appended or concluded with that which has become such a common form of "benediction" - "The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," over against works; "The Love of God," over against or deeper than signs and "gifts" as such; "The fellowship of the Holy Spirit," over partisanships, and distinctions among men. If in the relationship and connection of these words as originally used they were a little bit as effective as they are now so largely employed as a formula, what a difference there would be in the testimony of the Lord Jesus in the world.

Oh, beloved friends, let us put the Lord Jesus in His place, and keep our eyes on Him and off men and things, and the enemy will have less ground upon which to dishonour His Name among men. In this matter "let us press on to full growth."

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jan-Feb 1930, Vol 8-1

Ye Are... A Holy Nation

Reading: Matthew 21:42-44; 1 Peter 2:7-10.

These passages refer, as you see, to that very solemn and, in some respects, tragic thing: the truth that all that could and should have been the inheritance and the vocation of Israel was lost by them and to them because of their unbelief, and was transferred to the Church. The Church is here designated by Peter as "a holy nation".

It is Peter who has taken those Old Testament words, and the words which the Lord Jesus Himself took from the Old Testament and transferred to Himself. Peter has a peculiar place in this transition, an interesting and very instructive place. The Lord had said to him: *"Thou art Peter* [piece of rock], *and upon this rock* [of Peter's testimony, undoubtedly] *I will build my church"* (Matthew 16:18). There is no doubt that in Peter's mind "the stone which the builders rejected" and which "was made the head of the corner" was identical with the rock upon which the Church would be built. Peter was the one who heard that statement from the Lord, and it was Peter who so many years afterward took up the thought here in his Letter - the stone, the rock, the building of the Church thereupon and therearound. The Lord had, in that very connection of the rejected stone becoming the head of the corner, said: *"The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof"* (Matthew 21:43). To Peter He had said: *"I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 16:19), and here is Peter using this very phrase "a holy nation", answering to that which was in the declaration of the Lord Jesus as Israel was set aside: "The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a *nation".* Now Peter speaks of "a holy nation" to "s*hew forth the excellencies of him"* corresponding to "*bringing forth the fruits thereof".*

Now Peter opens this Letter by indicating that he is addressing the scattered saints of the Dispersion all over the world: the "s*ojourners of the Dispersion"* in all these many nations and places, or parts of the earth, and he says: 'Ye saints, scattered in the nations, dispersed over the earth, ye are a holy nation.' Not 'ye are going to be', but *'now,* as scattered everywhere, you are a holy nation in the nations, but you are different from the nations'.

Our present emphasis is upon this one word: *"Ye are... a holy nation"*. It was upon that word 'holy' that the tragedy of Israel took place, and the transference of all the divine intention was effected. It was upon that one word that the Church inherited all that. The whole change-over, the terrible tragedy and loss of Israel, and the glorious inheritance of the Church hung upon one word - holy. Everything rested upon that. If Israel's loss of the divine intentions for that people as a nation was all due to this one thing - failure in what God means by holiness - and if the Church comes in only on that ground, then this matter of what the Lord means by holiness is a very governing thing.

The Church is "sanctified in Christ Jesus": Israel rejected Christ Jesus.

We could go as far as to say that there is no guarantee of the Church retaining its inheritance and vocation beyond its holiness. It could very well be said of people, even in this Christian dispensation: 'It shall be taken from you and shall be given to those bringing forth the fruits thereof. Holiness is the only ground. You, no more than Israel, can claim to stand and abide on mere tradition, mere history, mere externals, or practice and teaching.' The basis with God is holiness and what He means by that.

No one can contemplate the awfulness of Israel's tragedy over these two thousand years without feeling that they are in the presence of something very great and important, and, in a sense, of something very terrible - this matter of holiness. And you know that there are other words into which this one word is translated. It simply means - as we often say - sanctified, separated, set apart for God. There are many ways of expressing it, but that is what it is. It denotes something which belongs to God, solely and wholly, and, belonging to God, it is sacred, holy, sanctified, separated from all that is contrary to God. That is holiness.

For light in this matter we have to go, of course, back to the Old Testament, and we begin with the realisation that after man's disobedience at the beginning - and that is the heart of the trouble of all unholiness, as is here stated - the whole world (to use the phrase of an Apostle) fell into the arms of the wicked one: *"the whole world lieth in the evil one"* (1 John 5:19). That is the revelation of the early chapters of the Bible. We need not stay to emphasise, illustrate or to cite. It is there. God beheld, looked down, and saw that all men had gone astray - "the whole world lieth in the evil one". And then God moved to extricate from that world in the lap of the evil one a people of a different kind.

We have His move with Abraham - and here, dear friends, with all your interest in the life of Abraham, in your reading and study of that life, remember that the heart of everything where he was concerned was this one thing: to separate him from this world. So the word came to Abraham: *"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house"* (Genesis 12:1) ...'Get thee *out'!* This is a literal, geographical movement, but it contains a spiritual principle - a getting out of that realm lying "in the evil one". So Abraham went out of Ur of the Chaldees. In a typical sense, he went out from this world that was lying "in the evil one".

Then God promised Abraham a son. He made promise of Isaac, and then went away and left him, as He so often seems to do when He has made a promise. He leaves us for a long time - but, you notice, with one object. Why did God promise and then not fulfil His promise for so long, and leave Abraham to be so tested and tried by His word? For this one thing only: that son had to be different from all other sons, He could not come the natural way, could not be like other sons of this world. He must be born peculiarly by God's act. And so God saw to it that, although He promised, the natural way was impossible. It simply closed down. There was no hope along that line. When at length Isaac was born, he was God's miracle, something not of this world but of God. Even so, God was going to ratify and confirm that principle. The day came when the lad had grown to youth and God said to Abraham: *"Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest... and offer him"* (Genesis 22:2), and so Isaac must go to death. All the natural ties were severed and broken and Isaac, being brought back, in figure, in resurrection from the dead, was simply put on supernatural ground again. The heavenly, divine, supernatural ground of things was confirmed by God in that event.

You see what God was doing? He was putting everything on to holy ground. God can give us things, and He undoubtedly does, and we know it at the time, but then we lay hold and impinge upon them, holding them to ourselves: our natural life comes right in on this matter. The Lord takes us through drastic experiences to sever our natural selves from divine things to keep them holy, because even our affections are not always pure and holy. God puts everything on that ground, outside this corrupt, devil-ridden, devil-governed world. And who will say that that is not the state of the world today?

God did it with Abraham, and that is where He made His start toward a holy nation. He laid the foundation in holiness. Then His promise and covenant with

Abraham reached the stage of a nation being in existence, and Israel is in Egypt - in the world. There is no doubt about it. They were in the lap of the devil, the evil one, for Pharaoh is a type of the prince of this world. You notice that the Lord takes pains to show what a tyrant he is and how evil he is. I venture to say that there are few people in this world who would endure half of what Pharaoh endured before he let those people go! God went through plague after plague, right up to the tenth, which was death itself, for one purpose. On the one side, He was showing the nature of the evil one. On the other side - well, He met Moses, as you know, in the desert, at the bush alive with fire but never consumed, and this is the man who is going to bring that people out of the power of darkness, out of the bondage of the prince of this world, out of this evil kingdom. God met him there, and what did He say? *"Put off thy shoes from off thy feet for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground"* (Exodus 3:5). The instrument, in figure, in type, must be separated from the evil ground, the evil earth, the evil kingdom. No one who is still in bondage himself can lead another soul out of bondage, and no one who is not separated from this world himself can help other people into a life with God. So the very instrument, Moses himself, has to go on to holy, consecrated, separated ground. With what? *Fire!* Between this world and that, between God and the evil one, there is a fire which never dies, a fire which draws the line of distinction between what is holy and what is not holy.

And so Moses goes to Egypt with his commission and we know the story. Yes, the people are in a kingdom, in a world which has to be repudiated, and they have to be brought out, but it is by virtue of precious blood, the blood of the lamb and the blood of the Passover - by the mighty, efficacious blood of a lamb without spot or blemish. Separated by precious, holy blood - and this is Peter speaking again: *"Ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold... but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"* (1 Peter 1:18,19).

You would think that that had effected it! But they were in the wilderness for forty years, and what is the one thing that came out so clearly during those forty years? Although they are out of Egypt, Egypt is not out of them. Although they are separated geographically, spiritually their hearts are still back in Egypt. They are talking about Egypt, hankering for Egypt after all. And so we come to Jordan, the mighty overflowing Jordan, lying between them and that life as a nation which is to satisfy God, fulfil a holy vocation. They go over - and at last their hearts are out of Egypt.

You see, the principle is working all the time. God is carrying this thing very deep.

You pass on to the later history of that nation, when they go into captivity and exile, and a remnant comes back. Do you remember that crisis in the Book of Ezra, when the remnant comes back and the house is being restored, beautified? It was over one thing - the people had married foreign wives, and the whole work was spoiled and came under arrest. It was as though God said: 'We are not going on with this'. You read again what Ezra did over that matter! He brought everything up short on this question of mixed marriages. Again, all this is a figure of spiritual mixture, which God will not have: it is unholiness. The mark and line of distinctiveness between what is of God and what is not of God is drawn hard and fast.

Well, what are we going to say to all this? That is a very brief and imperfect survey, but, dear friends, do you see that the very beginning of the Christian life rests upon this one historic law of God, which He cannot overlook? The beginning of the Christian life is called 'being born anew', or, more correctly, 'being born from above'. What does it mean? It means all that Isaac's birth and resurrection meant in figure - that by our very new birth we are "delivered out of the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of the Son of his love" (Colossians 2:13). Our birth, our conversion, the very beginning of our Christian life is an absolute separation of two kingdoms, the transference from one to the other. The one is an unholy realm into which we are born and to which we belong by nature. The other is a holy realm - "Ye are... a holy nation", a nation separated from this world unto God.

New birth means that, and, oh! that that should be made clear to all! What an utter thing this is, at the beginning, right through! The Lord Jesus left no doubt about this. There must be a cleavage, utter and absolute. He would take risks with people. You would say. 'Why put people off? Why run the risk of offending them? Why discourage them, saying Except, except, except... all the, time?' He was taking all the risks necessary over this because of its awful reality. You cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven while you cling in any way to this kingdom which is inimical to God. The two things cannot go together. The one is unholy and the other holy. At new birth we cross a line, a line as broad as the Red Sea and the Jordan, and as broad as the Cross of the Lord Jesus. At new birth we have entered into a life of holiness, of complete separation unto God. It is to be a walk in holiness - and how much the New Testament has to say about

this! We are to be separated unto God in heart, spirit and life from this world, and, if we knew it, a very large degree of our spiritual education and our discipline in the Christian life, under the hand of the *Holy* Spirit, has to do with those things in us which are mixed up. We are trying to make the best of two worlds, trying to keep together in compromise things which do not belong before God and which are going to spell disaster for us as truly as they ever spelt disaster for Israel. We are going to lose the kingdom. It is a tremendous thing! The Lord calls for distinctiveness of life and destiny. Is our life, dear friends, in this world, in our connections and associations, quite distinct? Is there no mistaking to what realm and to whom we belong? Or are we mixed up, compromising, keeping on good terms with this world and its people under the devil's hand? If so, we stand to lose terribly.

What sort of testimony have you where you work, in your business and its associations? What sort of testimony have we in the church? Are we really registering and making our mark in the church? Do we count, or are we passengers? Is there something about our lives which says: 'This man, this woman, is utter for God. There is no doubt about it. You see it all the time. He, or she, is not playing at things. There is no compromise in him or in her.'?

This sounds hard, but it is necessary. You see what is involved - the secret of power is holiness. If our lives are powerless it may be due to a lack of this utterness for God, separation unto God; due to compromise somewhere, somehow, with the prince of this world who is robbing us of our spiritual power and vitality on his own ground. The secret of power is holiness. The secret of a testimony that counts is a holy life. It is not our teaching, our truth, our practice, religious ordinances, our forms, in the first place. Our real testimony is the testimony of a holy life. It counts far more than all our words.

And remember - this is the secret of divine support. The Lord will commit Himself to His own ground - holiness. The Lord will stand by those who stand for Him in His nature. The Lord will look after such. Mark you, whatever we may have in this life, in this world - and we may have a lot - if we have not got the Lord with us at the last it is no gain, but a terrible loss. Israel had the ordinances and the oracles, the tradition and all that. They had a mighty lot, but at the last they lost the kingdom. It was no gain.

Well, now, what are we concerned about? I can focus it all down to one thing - the Lord being with us and committing Himself to us, and I am concerned about

a testimony in power, a life that counts for God, leaving a mark for God, being remembered for what was of God. This is the only justification of our having come this way at all, and, as I see it, all that depends upon this utter separation unto God, gathered into this word: holiness. "Ye are... a holy nation."

May we answer to the description, and to us will be the preciousness.

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Sept-Oct 1964, Vol 42-5