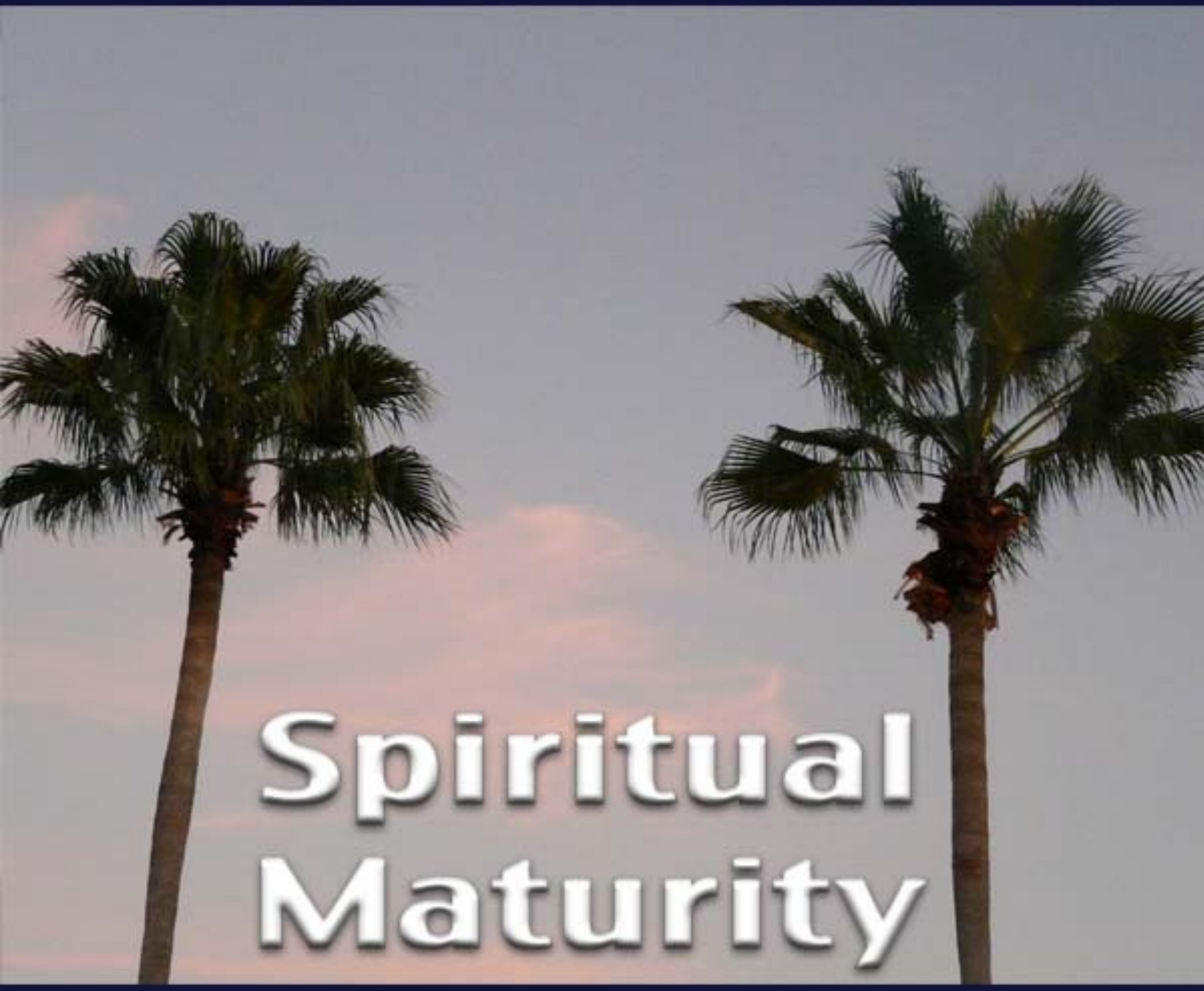
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Spiritual Maturity

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Spiritual Maturity

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Chapter 1 - The Foundation that is Laid

Reading: Rom. 8:19,29: 1 Cor. 3:1-3; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 3:26-27; 4:6,19; Eph. 1:5, 18-19; 3:18-19; 4:13; Phil. 3:12-14; Col. 1:28; Heb. 5:12-14; 6:1.

This selection of passages is quite sufficient to show that the dominating objective of the Lord for His people is full growth, the full measure of Christ. Every apostolic letter has that object in view, and every one of these apostolic letters deals with some factor related to full growth. If that is true, then surely it is incumbent upon us as the Lord's people to have His goal before us, and to be found in the same spirit as was the apostle who said, "…that I may apprehend that for which also I was apprehended of Christ Jesus". The force of that statement may not have come to our hearts. The apostle has there said in very clear and precise language that when the Lord Jesus laid hold of him, it was for something more than that he should just become a saved man. It was in relation to a goal with which there was bound up a prize, and unto that there was to be an attaining. He said that everything for him was regarded as of value only in so far as it would help him to reach that goal, and nothing was of value at all which in no way contributed to that end. So should the Lord's people be, at all times, on full stretch for the purpose for which they have been apprehended. Everywhere in the Word of God His thought for His people is set forth as being that they should come to a full measure, to full growth, to the measure of Christ.

A Fact of Great Significance

It seems to me that the New Testament assumes that increase, along the line of expansion, that is, the adding to the church, comes by spiritual increase in the church along the line of spiritual growth amongst the Lord's people. I say, it seems to be assumed, for it is a very impressive thing that the New Testament is so very largely occupied with this one thing. The fact that all these letters — every one of them — were addressed to believers with one object, that of their spiritual growth, and so many of them embody the actual word "full growth" (often in the Authorised Version translated "perfection" or "perfect"), does not mean that the church ceased to be an evangelising instrument. They were going on with their work in relation to the unsaved, but the fact is that very little is

actually said about that, and what we have here as the record is all to do with the church's own spiritual increase. That is tremendously significant, and its significance is of great importance to the Lord's people. It would almost seem that the church has forgotten this. In a very considerable circle there is a great concern for the evangelism side of the church's life and work — a concern which is right and proper, and should never be less than it is, perhaps always more — but so often and so largely the essential background of that work is overlooked, namely, an indispensable building-up and teaching ministry. The result is that the church is seeking to move out to meet the world situation with inadequate spiritual resources, and is very largely weak in face of the difficulties, and the results are of such a character as hardly to be an expression of the real power of God and fullness of Christ. That by the way, however.

It is that you and I might come to recognise this, that the Lord has set before us in His Word an overwhelming amount of evidence and proof that His dominating objective for His own is full growth, and that every child of God should have that always before him. We should be concerned about spiritual maturity, and should give it the place in our hearts, in our consideration, in our concern which it evidently occupies in the heart of the Lord Himself. We have referred to fragments in the letters of Paul, which bear directly upon this matter of spiritual full growth, showing that it is the Lord's will for His people. We have said that each of these apostolic letters deals with some factor which is immediately related to that divine object, full growth. We are not going to attempt to go through all the letters at this time, but we are going to make a beginning as the Lord enables. We are coming to feel something of what Paul felt when he wrote those words, "…admonishing every man and warning every man, that we may present every man perfect (full grown, complete) in Christ".

Christ Our Righteousness

Let us look for a moment at the letter to the Romans in this very connection. We remind ourselves of the words which are in chapter 8 verses 19 and 29. This letter to the Romans lays the foundation for all the Lord's work in His own people and in relation to this end which He has in view, and which is governing all that He has to say to them, and to do with them. This letter provides the ground upon which the Lord can go forward with His work in perfecting the saints. We ask, What is that ground? We know what the theme of the letter to the Romans is, the object for which the apostle wrote it. We know that its great outstanding truth is that of righteousness by faith, or, as it is sometimes called,

justification by faith. What, then, is the issue of such faith? In this letter faith is set forth as that through which we are brought to the ground of what Christ is in resurrection. He “rose again for our justification”. Christ in resurrection provides the ground of our justification and our righteousness. In death He has dealt with all unrighteousness, and therefore with all that alienated and separated from God and meant condemnation, judgment and death. Having dealt with that in death, in resurrection the ground is clear of all that. Sin has been met and dealt with and all its consequences, right to the end, and in resurrection God’s way is open, and there is righteousness where there was unrighteousness, communion where there was alienation, fellowship where there was distance. Christ in resurrection is the ground of our righteousness, and faith in the Lord Jesus is here shown to be that by which we are brought on to the ground of what Christ is in resurrection, and so the relationship with God is established in Christ risen, and is established unshakeably. That is the glorious issue of this chapter, as you observe.

We want to get the full force of the words at the end of chapter 8. Verses 35 to 39 must be taken in conjunction with verses 31 to 34. Now you see this unshakeable ground, this inseparable union, this indestructible life is because of what the Lord Jesus has done in His death and resurrection, and of what He is in His Person at God’s right hand. I think there may have been times when we have been rather hesitant in quoting these words at the end of Romans 8. We have had a little tremor within as we have essayed to say those words and follow up: “… neither death nor life…” wondering whether we were being a little over-bold, a little overconfident; whether at some time we might not be put to the test and find that, after all, our use of the words was not unlike Peter’s self-confident assertion — “I will follow thee even unto death” — we have had a catch in the declaration. I confess that has been true of me, but now I am glad to say that there is no need for hesitation. There is a ground that is settled and fixed, unshakeable in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. That ground is the expression of the love of God in Christ Jesus for me; not my love for Him, not anything that I have done or can do, not anything that is in me or that I can produce, but it is all what He is, what He has done, what He has given, and what He has established in His own Person at the right hand of God. That is divine love, and that has been made to rest upon you and upon me “whom he foreknew…”. He has done it all in relation to us, the thing is finished, and there is not a power in God’s universe that can alter it, that can change it, that can shake it. It is something which God has done. It is a manifestation of His own love in Christ, which nothing in the creation can touch, and it is bound up with God’s elect. Therefore: “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?”

This chapter reaches the point where we have put faith in God on that ground. That faith brings us onto the ground of what Christ is as risen, and that means that there is not a being that can lay anything to our charge. What a position! You can find many faults in me. I may find some faults in you. We may see much that is yet of the imperfections that are ours, but you cannot bring me under condemnation and separate me from the ground of my justification. You can find all the faults that there are to be found, and can go on doing that for the rest of your life, but you cannot upset the ground of my justification before God, you cannot touch that position of my experience with Him. The blood of Jesus Christ has settled and ratified that forever. If you can tear Jesus Christ from His place at God's right hand, then you can destroy my ground of salvation, of justification, but you cannot do that. It is fixed in heaven in Him.

To be Firmly Rooted in the Foundation Essential to Full Growth

The Lord lays that as our foundation. It is a security which is ours through faith by the grace of God. That is the message of the letter to the Romans. The grace of God to us in Jesus Christ provides such a ground that no part of the creation can lay anything to our charge, can bring us under condemnation. There is no power in this universe that can disturb what God has done for us in Christ. The Word tells us to take our place in faith upon that. Do not say, Oh the trials, the difficulties, the adversities, the sufferings; life, death, principalities, and all these things! They do make such a difference to us. They come upon us. They affect us, and upset us, and we come to feel that we do not love the Lord as much as we did the other day, that we are not so much in fellowship with the Lord as we were once, and we feel that is the upsetting of things. It is nothing of the kind. You and I must come finally to the place where we recognise that God is unchangeable, without variation, and that in the work of His cross our salvation will not move one hair's breadth; it is as surely established as His throne. On that ground our salvation rests, and faith must take hold of that. Then we are able to say, "If God be for us…" and He is for us like that. Oh, the wonder of that word, "…God… for us"! He delivered up His Son for us, and with Him gave us all things. Through His cross He has justified us from all our sins, our iniquities, and in His Son there sees us as without sin, perfected! He says, Now, if only you will let your faith come and rest upon that, and will not move away from your faith onto your own ground of what you are in yourself, but will stay there, Satan's power is destroyed over your life, and there is nothing whatever in this universe that can prevent your reaching My end. Nothing that arises, be it life, or death, or things present, or things to come, or height, or depth, or principality, or

any other creation — nothing in this universe can prevent you reaching My end if you will keep your feet there in faith. That is the foundation for God, and He can never get us anywhere until we have come to that position. You know how true that is, that if there is any question, any uncertainty, any variation in any one of us at any time, we stop dead, and God is arrested, the Spirit of the Lord can go no further. While we believe God He goes on, no matter what He has to deal with. It amounts to this: Are we going to believe God or not? If we are not, then we may as well abandon everything, for everything depends upon that, upon whether we are going to believe God.

Now here is the foundation for faith. Full growth rests upon that foundation. You never make one bit of progress toward God's end until that foundation is settled. It is important that we stand upon the firm foundation of God. Do let us seek to get to this position. It is a word for believers, and more than ever perhaps a word for today, that we should come to the place where we recognise how altogether apart from variation God is. Of course, there are some people who do not vary a great deal, but there are others who know all the variations of this natural life; the variations of feelings, the variations of thoughts, the variations which come about by the circumstances around them. We find ourselves very largely influenced by how we are physically, or how circumstances are, or for some other reason; in different moods, in different states, as we think spiritually. We vary, sometimes from day to day if not from hour to hour. God is not like that. God's work is not like that. What God has accomplished in His Son by the cross and resurrection is not subject to influences of change; it stands, it is fixed. God has taken that attitude. He is not variable. If only we would come back and recognise that God is a God of infinite grace, that grace has been demonstrated to the uttermost, and it is unchanging! If we go from it, that makes no difference to it. It is the same. We come back and find God just there where we left Him. He has not moved a little bit.

This is not said to justify weakness, but to bring to a certain settled position as to the grace of God. Everything is by His grace, because of His grace, the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. If we get settled there, God can go on with His work. Full growth? Yes, when you believe God fundamentally, when you trust God, and when your trust in God is on the ground of that perfect justification which He has granted, the removal of every obstacle in the way of His full purpose. The letter to the Romans tells of that. The foundation is laid in faith for all God's purpose, and after that you move on to the superstructure. The other letters have to do with factors in full growth when the foundation is laid.

Chapter 2 - Spirituality

Reading: 1 Corinthians 2

We now pass to the first letter to the Corinthians, and you will notice that the point in the letter marked by chapter 3 begins with the definite statement that the trouble at Corinth, the inclusive trouble, was spiritual immaturity. They were babes, when it was time they had passed out of babyhood. That was the trouble at Corinth.

The Spiritual Man Constituted of God

So the whole letter deals with the causes of too long delayed maturity, and with that which is the basic factor for such people with regard to spiritual growth. We can at once state what this factor is. It is the key to this whole letter, and is "spirituality". Being the key to this letter, it is, therefore, in all these circumstances, the key to full growth. Spirituality is, of course, set over against carnality. Spirituality is essential to full growth. The second chapter is full both of the fact and of the necessity. If we ask what spirituality is, that chapter will answer the question by telling us that it is a life wholly governed, taught, illumined and led by the Holy Spirit; but not as from without. This is just where we need to recognise a difference. Here it is not a matter of the Holy Spirit as an objective person or power coming along and, so to speak, putting His hand upon us and telling us things and turning us about, and giving us direction of that kind. What the apostle clearly shows in this part of his letter is that it is the kind of person we are. He speaks in this chapter of two kinds of beings, the one whom he calls the natural, or the soulical man, the other the spiritual man; one, the man who is governed by his own soul in every way, the other who is governed by the Holy Spirit through his spirit, and thereby becomes a spiritual man as over against the soulical man. So that the spiritual man here is a kind of person, and that kind of person has particular and peculiar kinds of capacities, powers, abilities. He has faculties which are not possessed by the other kind of man, the soulical man, the natural man, and he is, therefore, endowed with capacities which take you far beyond the highest range of the natural man in apprehension, in knowledge, in understanding, as well as in accomplishment.

That point must be made perfectly clear, because some people have a kind of

mentality that to be wholly Spirit-governed means that the Holy Spirit in some way does all the turning about and governing, and directing, almost objectively, as from the outside. The spiritual man is not here represented as being in that position at all, but rather as having been constituted a kind of being in whom the Holy Spirit is. He is constituted a spiritual man of spiritual intelligence, who is able, by spiritual faculties and endowments, to come into a wonderful knowledge of, and fellowship with, God Himself. That is spirituality, and that is the very heart of full growth.

It is wonderful how the chronological order of these letters is entirely upset in favour of a spiritual order. In Romans you have the foundation of righteousness by faith; then comes 1 Corinthians, and it is as though you got right to the heart of the Person concerned, and having set Him in a position, you begin to constitute something in Him, to build up in Him. So that you find that it is a matter now of having been placed in Christ by faith; Christ is in you, and that is the beginning of everything, if Christ is to be fully formed. And that is the meaning of spirituality.

It is seen in this letter, on the contrary, that carnality is a mark of immaturity, and, more than that, it is a positive hindrance to spiritual progress. With that you move through the letter and you see the many marks of carnality which are marks of immaturity. We might note some of them, and this will help us to come to an understanding of what spirituality really is.

Six Marks of Carnality as Seen in 1 Corinthians

1) Leaning to natural wisdom

Here in chapters 1 and 2 especially you see that carnality is a leaning towards, and being governed by, what is natural, what is of account according to man's own natural estimate. These Corinthians evidently had a great admiration for human wisdom. They were in a centre of human wisdom, and their national life was marked with much of this admiration for the wisdom of men. They were much occupied naturally in philosophical pursuits and speculations, and so it was a part of their very nature. It was Corinthian to be always leaning toward the superiority of human wisdom, and the Corinthian believers were evidently indulging in that kind of thing. We are still very greatly influenced by the strength, the power of human wisdom — and, of course, that carries power with it! With the Corinthians knowledge was power. That was their philosophy of life.

The more human knowledge you have, the more you come into a place of ascendency in this world. It is a thing which puts you in a position of advantage. Human knowledge is a real vantage ground for success in this world.

The apostle strikes some very hard blows at that natural and, at the same time, carnal thing. It is natural, but when it comes into the life of a believer it is a carnal thing. The carnal is something more positive than the natural. We are what we are by nature, but when you begin to take up what we are by nature in the realm of what we are by grace, and make something of nature in the realm of grace, then you have become carnal: and that is evil. So these two chapters are very largely occupied with a tremendous unveiling of the utter foolishness of the very thing in which these believers were glorying, and the utter weakness of it all. Knowledge? Power? Getting an advantage in this world? Very well! The world in its wisdom, and in the wisdom which it called its power, crucified the Lord of glory. What do you think of that? They did it blindly. That is ignorance!

We are not going to pursue that line further. We indicate it, because it shows us a state of mind. It was the apprizing of values according to natural and worldly standards, and they were influenced by that, and that for them was carnality, and therefore immaturity. That very thing was the hindrance to their spiritual growth. Now, apart from the thing itself, the principle is this, that a leaning toward that which is natural, and, in so leaning toward it, making it a factor in our lives as the children of God, is a mark of spiritual infancy, babyhood, immaturity; but moreover, it is a positive hindrance to anything else. You may say it is hardly necessary to stress that amongst the people of God today, but I am not so sure. You know, as well as I do, that this is one of the failings of the human heart in principle. We may be perfectly convinced that the Corinthians were all wrong and that Paul was perfectly right, that it was utter foolishness in this wise world to crucify the Lord Jesus, an altogether false idea of wisdom, of knowledge, and of strength: well, we may be quite convinced of that, and it may be that we might not fall quite in that way, but in principle this thing is found in all of us.

There is a tremendous amount of trying to win a way for the Gospel, for Christ, for the Christian life by being even with the world in some way. A young man, for example, thinks that if he has something of a sportsman’s training, and his achievements in the sporting world are known, that he can use that as an advantage to win men for Christ. So he does it, and he plays that off to try and win the respect, the esteem, the hearing, the ear of men, and in a way he is all the time going onto their ground and thinking that he is going to win converts in that

way. It is this same thing in principle. If men can only be won along such lines they are not worth winning; you will not get the right thing. The only ground upon which a man may be really saved is upon the ground of such a need in his own heart, and recognised by him, that he will come to Christ as a matter of life and death. If he has to be won by your putting up something which appeals to him on his own ground, there will be a permanent weakness in his Christian life. Let us be careful that even in our eagerness we do not compromise a little, do not step over onto natural ground, which for us would be sheer carnality. That is Corinthian ground; it does not get beyond babyhood, the standards of men, the world's values of things; wisdom, and power, and such like.

That was the first thing in this whole matter of spirituality. Spirituality has nothing to do with that. What does Paul really mean? What does he say, in effect? He says: After all, you may go down to men, with all your worldly wisdom, and try to win them for Christ, but the natural man cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God; he is labouring under an absolute ban. Before a man can understand the things of the Spirit of God he has to be born again, and be a spiritual man in the very beginnings of his new life. He must have something that no man outside of Christ has. You are in a hopeless position if you try to get down there onto his ground: "…we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God" (1 Cor. 2:12). These Corinthians had the spirit of the world, and were trying to be Christians with the spirit of the world; therefore they were limited in their knowledge, their understanding, their apprehension, and remained like little babes who had never yet come to any kind of personal knowledge. All that they had was what they had been told.

2) Selectiveness on natural grounds

The next phase of this carnality is seen in chapter 3 and chapter 4. There you have selectiveness on natural grounds. It is another phase or form of the leaning toward what is natural. One says, I am of Paul; and another says, I am of Apollos; and another says, I am of Peter; and another says, I am of Christ. The apostle deals drastically with it in these two chapters. Carnality is set forth as that kind of thing where you lean toward your own natural likes and dislikes amongst men, amongst teachings. I like Paul as a man! I like Apollos as a man! I like Paul's line of teaching! I like Apollos's wonderful eloquence! I like Peter's line! They were, according to their natural likes, selective on natural grounds, dividing up the Lord's servants and the Lord's Body. Who will be bold enough

to say that he himself has never fallen into that failure? It is quite natural to have such likes and dislikes. It very often means that we have to put something to death in us to listen to some people, to have anything to do with them. We have to take ourselves in hand, and say: I must seek if there is not something there that is of the Lord, and for the time being shut my eyes to the other that offends. It is quite natural to say: I like so-and-so, and I would go anywhere to hear so-and-so, but as for the other man I cannot get on with him at all. That is carnality. "For whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal, and walk after the manner of men? For when one saith, I…" — Oh, we need not go further! That is the heart of the matter, "I". It ought to be "Not I, but Christ". Is there anything of Christ here in these men? That is what we should be after. The vessel may trouble me, may sometimes give me bad times, but my natural inclinations are not the point in question at all in such a matter; that is carnality for me. It is all right for some people who do not profess to be the Lord's, but for me it is carnality, a bringing of the natural into the realm of the spiritual, and making it a governing thing. Spirituality means that I am after whatever is of Christ, no matter in what vessel it is brought to me. Again and again it is clearly to be seen in the Word of God that, had men taken account of the means by which God came to them, they would have lost the blessing, and some were dangerously near that, and some did lose it.

Israel lost the blessing for that very reason. They were offended with the Man Christ Jesus. "Is not this the carpenter?…" Had He been some glorious potentate from heaven they would have received the message! Let us be careful. God tests us very often as to the reality of our hearts, as to whether they are set upon Himself, by bringing us a great blessing wrapped up in a very unacceptable wrapping.

Spirituality is the opposite of leaning toward natural selectiveness, likes and dislikes. If you and I desire to go on to full growth, this is one of the things that has to be recognised and dealt with. It is a case of just setting aside our natural life in the interests of the spiritual. Such an opportunity is with us every day. Spirituality is determined by how far we are ready to be led.

3) Lack of moral sensibility

We pass on to chapter 5. It is a terrible chapter. Carnality is here shown to us in a defectiveness of moral sensibility. We are not going to stay with it, and yet we should not just ignore it. Spirituality must work out in real moral sensibility,

sensitiveness, in such a way that there is a mighty reaction in us from those tendencies of nature that are downward in the moral sense. We are not talking about not being tempted. Everyone is tempted. The very fact that we carry with us a nature which is not wholly purged from the roots and fibres of sin and the fall, constitutes a ground upon which temptation comes to us. There is no sin in temptation. At times there may be some weakening; we may be more open for various reasons to weakness than at other times, but the point is this, that spirituality represents in us a revolt and a reaction that in the presence of moral weakness turns round, reacts against that. That is the work of the Spirit of God in us, making us spiritual. At Corinth there was not only the one who defaulted (we are not going to judge that one), but what the apostle was troubled about was that the assembly had not sufficient moral sensitiveness to deal with that thing, and he had to write them a strong letter to pull them up sharply upon moral grounds, to cleanse the assembly. They did not do it until Paul practically made them do it. There was a low and inadequate moral sensitiveness about the assembly; there was not a sufficient measure of spirituality to react violently to that thing, and say: We are defiled, we must put this away; we must purge ourselves; we must stand before God without judgment in this matter. They did not do it; they tolerated it, they let it go.

We are not applying this in any assembly way just now, but are just saying that spirituality means a strong reaction to the encouragement of anything unclean. I do not know how necessary it might be to say a thing like that. There are various forms of low moral sense, but in a spiritual person, and in a spiritual assembly there will be something which reacts against that, in conversation, in talk, in looseness of any kind. Spirituality lifts onto a much higher level. That again, then, is carnality, and no individual life and no assembly of the Lord's people can grow to the fullness of Christ without that spiritual sensitiveness which feels bad in the presence of anything morally loose.

4) A spirit of variance

We are not going to take up this next point at length, but we notice that Paul in chapter 6 comes to that kind of carnality which shows itself in wronging one another, and then trying to obtain one's rights by lawsuits. He commences by speaking of the lawsuits in verse 1, but he gets behind that as he goes on and says that they are robbing one another. Any kind of suit before the world, or in the church, ought to be rendered unnecessary by the getting rid of this wronging of one another. What a low level amongst the Lord's people is revealed when

they rob one another.

There are more ways than one of robbing the Lord's people, but it is the principle that is in view, the failing to recognise the rights of the Lord's children. If it is wrong for a child of God to stand up for his rights, and to fight for them, it is equally wrong that the rights of the Lord's people should be ignored or set at naught. There is an honouring of one another, and that of which Paul speaks elsewhere, a looking of everyone, not upon his own things, but upon the things of others; that is, taking into account that others also have a right to be honoured, to be respected, to be given a place. It seems that the spirit here at Corinth was that of the individual seeking to have the advantage, even at the expense of another believer. It is the spirit of the thing that is the trouble behind it all. Spirituality would be just the opposite of this, that even if one were wronged one would not fight for one's rights, especially before the world. Spirituality would mean, in an assembly and amongst the Lord's people, and on the part of each individual, a mutual recognition and holding in honour because — as Paul leads this whole thing out, as we shall see in a moment — we are members one of another, members of the Body.

I like the wisdom of the Holy Spirit through His servant Paul, as this whole matter is headed up to chapter 12. Just imagine one member of the Body going to law against another member of the same Body! What sense would there be in one hand fighting the other hand, or in my fist assailing any other part of my body? That is perhaps a crude way of putting it, but Paul now applies the point in that way and says: You are all members of one Body, and you are all interdependent, you cannot do without another, and that member that will go to law with another is but robbing himself. It is so foolish, so senseless, so weak! All such things are evidence of a poor level of spiritual life. Spirituality will show itself in recognising the value of every member, and, rather than in doing a member harm, in respecting and honouring that member, because of the necessity for that one. We need one another, and therefore it is the utmost childishness in a spiritual sense to be at variance with one another. Spiritual maturity will never condone that course. If we did but know it, our attitude towards another child of God comes back upon ourselves, and becomes our attitude towards ourselves. That is how God orders it, because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit who governs and balances the whole Body.

I think there is no realm in which the laws of God operate more immediately and directly than in the Body of Christ. "He that soweth unto his… flesh shall of the

flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth unto the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap everlasting life". "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap". Within the church of God those laws operate in a very immediate and direct way. Spirituality takes all that into account and says: I am not going to injure my own spiritual growth by doing harm to another member of Christ; I am not going to be robbed of God's end for me by failure to recognise that another also should be helped towards that end.

5) Failure to discern the Body

In chapters 10 and 11 we come to the failure to discriminate (discern) the Lord's Body. It is all wrapped up in the long discussion of things offered to idols, and that point where one thing ends and another thing begins. The Lord's Table in the apostolic days was not like our Table of the Lord. We gather to the Lord's Table and there is something quite distinct, quite by itself; there is no mistaking what that represents. In apostolic times they took their meal together, and at a certain point in their meal time they stopped and worshipped, and for the purpose took of the same food as they had been eating and drinking; they turned their ordinary meal into a corporate worshipping of the Lord. The apostle here says, You may come in hungry to your meal, and sit down and eat heartily, and just overstep the line, and in so doing confuse the two things and make that which represents the Lord's Body and the Lord's Blood a part of your feasting to the gratification of your own appetite. We are not in the same position to fall quite into the same snare, but there is a principle bound up with it upon which the Lord through His apostle puts His finger.

Terrible things resulted from that in the Corinthian church: for this cause many were sick, and not a few died. There was this other element, as we have noted, that a good deal of what they were eating and drinking in the ordinary way had already been offered in the shambles, and had already been offered to heathen gods, and they were not discriminating. But the principle underlying is this, that this loaf, this cup speak of two things. Firstly, they speak of the covenant relationship with the Lord, in which everything in our lives is for the Lord, and in which the Lord is everything to us; we have gone out, and Christ has come in, and for us Christ is the centre and the sphere, the sole object of our lives. They also speak of this, that Christ's Body, the church, has taken its place in our interest as that upon which the love of Christ is set, even unto death. "Christ loved the church, and gave himself up for it." It is "the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood". Again, it is written, "Husbands, love your wives,

even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing…" The attitude of the believers toward the church is to be the attitude of Christ toward the church. Spirituality is that which, on the one hand, gives Christ His place over all that is personal, and enables us to subordinate everything to His interests. There was a failure in this respect at Corinth, and a yielding to personal gratification, instead of glorying in the Lord. Spirituality is just the opposite of that, and so spirituality is a mark of growth. We shall never come to full growth spiritually if we are just going to be governed by our natural appetites.

Then, on the other hand, spirituality is marked by love of all the Lord's people. At Corinth, again, there was failure to recognise Christ's love for His church. Their attitude one toward another was therefore anything but that of Christ for His own, and so they did not discern the one Body as represented at the Table. Paul says, "The loaf which we break, is it not our common participation in the body of Christ? Seeing that we, who are many, are one loaf, one body: for we all partake of the one loaf." The Lord's Table is the Body in representation. We must recognise that Christ's object of love and devotion is His church, and have the same love and devotion to His people and for His people as He had. Let us put that quite simply. A truly large spiritual life is marked by a great devotion to the Lord's people, to the Body of Christ, as over against an undue measure of individualism.

6) The coveting of spiritual gifts for personal ends

The last feature of carnality which we will note is that which comes up in chapter 7 in connection with spiritual gifts. It is strange that this matter should come up into the realm of carnality and spiritual immaturity, and yet it does. I do not see how we can get away from the fact, if we honestly read this chapter, that the apostle was dealing with this very matter of spiritual gifts from the same standpoint as he was dealing with the other things at Corinth. What was the trouble? It is one which perhaps we think we need not fear. The first part of chapter 12 indicates where the trouble was. We cannot stay with verses 1-3, to consider them in detail, but there is a great deal there that it would be very much to our good to recognise. On the face of it there is this: these Corinthians before they came to the Lord were pagans to this degree that they were occupied with spiritism, and in spiritism (often termed "spiritualism") there is a definite system

of counterfeit Holy Ghost activity. Spiritism as we know it today can produce speaking in tongues, and all the other things, such as powers, miracles, and so on. The whole system here is counterfeited in spiritism. I believe that spiritism is going to be the great ally of Antichrist, the counterfeit of Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and thereby many will be carried away. The paganism of these Corinthians is seen in their being carried away to those dumb idols, and in connection with idol worship there were spirit manifestations, and they came under a false Holy Spirit (if we may use that term). The Greek is striking there, and it is perfectly in keeping with the thought of coming under a spiritual power, so that you act and speak as under control. The apostle is here using it concerning people who are under the control of a power. If you are under the control of an evil spirit you will not say, “Jesus is Lord”. The evil spirit will not say that.

The point is this, that there was not amongst these people at Corinth a clear discrimination between spiritism and the Holy Spirit. Here you have come to the heart of the trouble. They had been in the false thing, and had now come into the true thing, and were not discriminating. Why were they not discriminating? Because they were so taken up with experiences, manifestations, demonstrations, sensations, that which is apparent evidence of something. That is the danger. The danger is of wanting an experience, wanting a proof, wanting to have a sensation. That is carnality, and you will mix the Holy Spirit up with spiritism if you are not careful along that line, and multitudes are doing it. The devil is getting his advantage along that line in many people. They think it is the Holy Spirit when it is a false thing, simply because they want something. That is why the apostle goes so steadily at this matter. He says in effect: “Be careful; do not put things in their wrong place; do not give importance to things which are not so important as you think they are. Speaking in tongues is not so important as you are making it out to be. It is one of the least of the gifts.”

Do you see the point? You have to recognise the meaning of these first three verses in chapter 12. It was failure to discriminate between the true Holy Ghost and the false.

Then as to the rest of the chapter, we see from verse 12 to verse 27 that they were not recognising the relatedness of gifts. That is the safeguard, to recognise that. There are the gifts of the Holy Spirit, real, genuine, and true; we are not going to put them aside because of false gifts. At the same time we have to watch the balance, we have to have spiritual understanding, spiritual wisdom in

this matter. The Corinthians were taking the things as personal, in a detached and individual way, and making something of them because it was a wonderful and marvellous experience: and with them it all ended there. Why did Paul write the whole of that section on the Body of Christ, and why did he come into it so livingly? “There are diversities of gifts, *BUT* (now comes the check — everyone is glorying in that phase of the diversity that has come to them) the same Spirit…” “There are diversities of ministrations, but the same Lord”. “There are diversities of workings, but the same God who worketh all things in all”. You need to weigh every fragment — it is “the same God who worketh all things” in all the members, in all the Body — “To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit to *PROFIT WITHAL*”. Then when you have enumerated the gifts you come to this statement: “For as the body is one… so also is the Christ.” The article is used there. You have got to the heart of things. Spiritual gifts? Yes! What for? For me to glory in, to be gratified by, to talk about *MY* experience? Ah, this is the test. Is the whole Body profiting? Is the one Lord being glorified? Is this whole matter related and working out to mutual increase? This is a corporate matter, not an individual matter at all. If you detach it and take it out of its relatedness, you divide its end, which end is the building up of the whole Body and the mutual increase. What is the result at Corinth? They have made this whole thing an individual, personal matter, unrelated, in which they themselves glory. They came perilously near to a most awful sin in failing to discriminate between spiritism and the Holy Ghost, all by reason of their desire, their love for something that brought a sense of satisfaction to themselves, pleasure to themselves, gratification to themselves. That is carnality. That is immaturity.

All that may be in a measure instructive or enlightening, but you see how strongly this letter comes down upon the need for real spirituality, and what spirituality is. Spirituality does not hold anything of the Lord’s for itself, and never makes anything from the Lord the ground of its own pleasure and gratification, and personal, individual, unrelated glorying. Spirituality holds everything in relation to all saints, unto the increase of Christ. It sees no value in anything apart from that. So the apostle goes on with his corrective.

Two things stand out when you have taken the whole of this letter.

The Natural Man Wholly Put Away in the Cross

First of all right at the beginning the cross sets aside the natural man absolutely.

“I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified”. Paul acted upon the principle of the cross when he said, “I was with you in weakness and much… trembling…” There was nothing in Paul naturally, had he desired to come on to that ground, that would have enabled him to be amongst them in anything other than of weakness and fear and much trembling. But he was acting on the principle of the cross. He says it was deliberately done in order that their faith might not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. What they needed to know was the difference between natural power, wisdom, and all that is of nature, and the true power of God in the Holy Ghost. The cross sets aside the whole life of nature, and opens the way for spirituality and full growth.

The Essence of Spirituality is Love

Secondly, when all has been said, the essence of spirituality is love (chapter 13). “Though I speak with the tongues of men (terrestrial voices) and of angels (tongues not known amongst men, heavenly language), and have not love” — I am a most spiritual person? Not at all! — I have made a great deal of progress in spiritual life? Not at all! I am what? “I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal.” So much, then, for an entire want of spirituality, even though you may have tongues. Paul writes the word “nothing” over a great many things that we naturally would think were very important: faith to remove mountains, the giving of the body to be burned, and so on — he writes “nothing” over every one of them. Not that they are of no account in themselves; these things are of account in their place, and in their connection, but if they are without love they are “nothing”. The essence of spirituality is not the gifts, it is the grace. We are not going to choose between gifts and graces, between gifts and love. That is not the point of all. The apostle does not intend us to take this attitude: Oh well, give me love; I do not want gifts. I let go of all the gifts if you will only give me the love. Paul is trying to make it clear that these things in themselves can be held carnally. Really to reach the end for which God gives them they must be held spiritually, and the essence of spirituality is love. It covers everything.

We go back to the beginning now, and start again: Wisdom, strength, divisions, schisms, lusts, all of them go out when love comes in. So he closes thus: “The grace of the Lord Jesus and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” That is what you Corinthians need. Undoubtedly the apostle summed it all up in what we call the “Benediction”.

Chapter 3 - The Way to Divine Knowledge

Reading: 2 Cor. 3; Rom. 8:19,29; 5:17-19; 3:12; 4:6; Gen. 2:17; 3:4-7.

In those passages you have the parts of a wonderful revelation. First of all, there is God's thought and intention: His Son, His image, His fullness; the standard, the model, the completeness. Then you have believers conformed to the image of His Son, and the whole creation brought into being in relation to that purpose, its very meaning and object found in the intention of God as to His Son, and man's conformity to His image. So that the whole creation is, as it were, made to hang upon one central purpose, man in the image of God's Son.

Life and Light

Two things become the great governing factors and principles by which the purpose was to be realised; the one life, the other light. "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness," planted a tree of life, open to man, and a tree of light (the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) which, while man was under probation, was kept from him, under a prohibition. It is well to remember that true light only comes along the line of the obedience of faith. It was not that God was withholding essential knowledge from man, but was testing him as to his faith in Himself, and as to his obedience of faith.

We have seen how things proceeded. Man ceased at a certain point to believe and obey God, and believed and obeyed God's adversary instead, and man's disbelief and the disobedience were in the direction of having knowledge and light for his own ends and glory, that he should have the seat of glory and power and wisdom in himself, and become something. When you have recognised that you have got to the heart of everything, for God never intended man to have that in himself, but only in His Son. The glory and the wisdom, the knowledge and the power are all bound up with His Son, Jesus Christ, and never to be had apart. Man essayed to possess it all himself, to have it in himself, so that he would become independent in God's universe. So he struck for light and knowledge, for self-glory and empowerment, and exaltation. The result was immediate death. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die". There was no

postponing of things. Death took place that day, and the evidence of the death from that day onward is blinding, darkness or ignorance; just the opposite of what they aimed at, and struck for. Even when we come to Israel in the wilderness in the presence of a great revelation of God's glory, we read that their minds were hardened, and a veil was upon their hearts; and that veil remains.

All that, of course, is the working out of a deeply laid plot, a plot to defeat God in His purpose, to cheat Him of His end, to frustrate the realisation of His intention concerning His Son. The history of this world is the history of a rivalry between the Son of God and Satan; divine purpose fixed in Christ, divine purpose assailed by Satan, and the assault always directed against the Son of God, revealing that Satan's great object is to have the place which God has given to the Son. So that this is just the outworking of that plot, that evil device.

Now we come to this second letter to the Corinthians. It has a tremendous background and you will see how very great is its significance and its value. Oh, how much there is behind this letter. Here is a man sitting down to his spiritual correspondence, writing to believers a personal letter, and as he writes the Spirit of God takes him back into the past eternity and into the counsels of God, touching all the deep, mighty elements of the drama of the ages. When you read the letter for the first time, it looks like so many personal things said by one man to a few friends, but if you dwell upon it, meditate upon it, it expands, and expands, and you find yourself taken right back into the heart of God before times eternal, and on through the past ages and up to the cross of the Lord Jesus, and out from the cross on through this dispensation, and still on to the consummation of all things. It is all in one simple letter.

We come, then, to this letter, and with but a few touches there flash out these great thoughts of God. We commenced with the verse so well-known in chapter 5: "Wherefore if any man is in Christ, there is a new creation: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new" (verse 17, R.V. margin). God is here seen beginning all over again. The creation missed its way. Its course was foiled, the purpose of God in it was interrupted, it went astray. Creation is bound to a divine purpose, but even if in the straight way of that divine purpose it has not the urge of that purpose unto consummation, while if it has gone out of the way it is like a person within whom is a groaning to get back. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth…" What for? "…waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God." "The earnest expectation of the creation" is still bound up with God's purpose. That creation has gone astray. The purpose of God cannot be set

aside, and therefore there must, if needs be, be a new creation, and that in Christ Jesus.

“God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness…” (We are back at the creation.) For what purpose was this? That His Son, the fullness and the express image of His thought and intention for man, should give character to the race, and that we should be conformed to that image. God said light should shine out of darkness, and that was His first act in the direction of that purpose. Now you leap right into it here, without ages between: “…hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”. You have all the divine thought and intent, and the divine end, reached in Jesus Christ. There is a new creation, a creation with a purpose, which is conformity to the image of God’s Son. How is it to be reached? By life. Put your pencil line underneath each occurrence of the word “life” in this second letter to the Corinthians. You will be surprised how many times that word occurs, and you will notice that it is always life out of death. The apostle is speaking much of his own experience. “We despaired even of life.” Ah yes, but there was an object in God’s bringing him there. What was the object? “…that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead.” “Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.” Life works in you as the result of our dying! There is much more about life coming out of death with which we will not stay at this time. Then there is light out of darkness: life and light in relation to the new creation, with this end in view, conformity to the image of God’s Son.

All those elements are quite clear, and you can piece them together. Our purpose is to bring it down to quite a precise application.

God’s Purpose and its Realisation

Firstly, God’s intention. An attaining unto the full measure of Christ as God’s standard is His intention. We are told definitely that “whom he foreknew, he also foreordained” to that end, “to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren”.

Secondly, the way to its realisation. The apostle sums all up in one central thing in the creation, giving the creation its meaning and its value, namely, the revelation of Jesus Christ in us.

Now you see the movement. In Romans relatedness to God is secured anew through the work of Christ in His cross; righteousness, which is by faith. Those who were separated, afar off, alienated through sin and wicked works, are made nigh by His blood, and union with God in Christ is established; deliverance from all that which had come in to frustrate the divine purpose, deliverance from the dead man: “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” So the relationship is renewed and established through faith on the ground of righteousness.

In the first letter to the Corinthians a man indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and endowed with spiritual capacities for knowing the things of God, is seen. As the apostle says, “We have not received the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God, that we might know the things which are… given us by God.” That is enablement, empowerment, that is faculty for spiritual knowledge, for spiritual things; the man is there. Now that is what is to go on in that man. What is the central thing that is to be the object of those faculties? For what are those faculties given? They are given for an apprehension of Jesus Christ. In a word it all amounts to this, that to reach God’s end, to come to that fullness of our foreordination according to His foreknowledge, there must be that inward revelation of Jesus Christ which is constantly expanding. All growth is bound up with that, and so the apostle bases the whole of this argument upon the one point, namely, that “God… hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”. I take that phrase “the face of Jesus Christ” to mean that Jesus Christ is an image or portrait of God’s glorious thought. It is only a figurative word, which does not mean actually his countenance. The face is the representation: it is the man. The knowledge of the glory of God is in the face of Jesus Christ, and that has to come into us by revelation. Every inch of ground in spiritual progress that you and I will cover, every bit of advance in spiritual increase will be upon the basis of some fresh revelation of Jesus Christ in our hearts — not truth to our minds but the revelation of the person in our hearts. God has bound up everything with His Son in person, and there can be no light, no knowledge and no life leading to God’s end apart from the revelation of Jesus Christ. Thus spiritual progress, spiritual increase just resolves itself into a question of the unveiling of Jesus Christ in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, so that as we go on we are able to say: “I am seeing more and more of what the Lord Jesus is, and who He is in the divine thought, and that seeing for me is enlargement, is increase, is strength, is life, is power.” It is all such a thing as that.

The Proof of Experience

You see the apostle takes an illustration. He takes us back to Israel at Horeb, and tells us of Moses going into the Mount, of his receiving the law and coming down with some of the light on his face, and standing before the congregation and reading the law, and of the glory being too much for them to look upon, so that he had to put a veil over his face. He read a law which itself was in glory, given in glory and accompanied by glory, albeit a glory that was departing. What was the effect? It was, as we have said, written by the finger of God, it was accompanied by glory, it was an unveiling of the divine mind for His people. Everything was very wonderful; it spoke of God, had all the accompaniments of heaven with it: but what was the effect? Death! Condemnation! That very generation perished in the wilderness, and never came to the end which God had fixed for it. God had referred to the land flowing with milk and honey, with fullness. That was His thought, His intention, His purpose. He covenanted to give them the land. Then came the revelation of His mind as to the way in which they could come into His thought and intention for them, and they perished in the wilderness and never reached the land. Why? Because there was not only a veil over the face of Moses, but there was a veil over their hearts. They had not had the eyes of their hearts enlightened. They had not received a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.

The apostle takes that right up and comes immediately to the question of the new creation, and says: “Things are different now; there is no need that anyone should perish in the wilderness today. Here is the so much greater advantage which secures God’s end.” What is it? It is not something presented to you in your impotence and helplessness, but a revelation given within you, Christ who is God’s full intention revealed within you. It is not something objective to which we are journeying; it is Christ within, the hope of glory. It is not something into which we have to strive day by day, but an inward reality. Christ is revealed within, and when you see Him, you are in the land. You have come right into living touch with God’s end. What remains? Only that what is within you should be expanding from day to day, growing, increasing, until Christ (as the apostle puts it) is fully formed in you, and you, not now beholding Him in some objective way, but by the Holy Spirit in your own hearts seeing the Lord Jesus in a growing way, are changed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, conformed to the image of God’s Son. It all hangs upon this: “God… hath shined into our hearts…” God has made this whole thing in His purpose now an inward thing by the Holy Spirit. How near we are to it. How

marvellous is the possibility of reaching God's end. The apostle here says, in effect: "That is the basis of all our ministry. We are not talking from a book; we are not, like Moses reading from tables of stone; we are not just reciting something which God has written; we are now living out something that God has done within". That is ministry. "We have this ministry." That is something that is coming from the inside.

Now let us see how far we have, for real practical ends, grasped the significance of this. Let us start at the beginning. Can you really associate yourself with these words: "God… hath shined into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"? You can put it in other words if you like, if that seems too wonderful. Can you really say, I know the Lord Jesus in a living way within my own heart? Then you have all the fullness summed up in that, and all that you need to reach God's end is that you should discover what you have; not seek that God will give you more, but that God will show you what you have in Christ, what Christ is. There is such a fullness in Christ that it will take so much longer than the longest life that we could live here on this earth to discover anything worth while comparatively of what Christ is. I am quite certain that the one effect left upon us of a growing knowledge of the Lord Jesus will be that we feel we are only on the edge of things all the time. However long we live, and however long that goes on, we are only on the edge of things. I am sure that is true in the case of those who are discovering something more of the Lord Jesus. I can say that my most recent discovery of the Lord brought me to the place where I wondered if I had ever known Him before. It almost makes you feel that you have been wasting your time when you get a new revelation of the Lord Jesus. That is how it will always be. It is a wonderful thing to have a revelation of God in Christ in your own heart, and it is a wonderful thing if that revelation is opening out, growing from day to day as you go on. Do believe that, while it may sound to you a thing altogether too high for you, it is meant to be of the greatest and simplest help to you.

You young people have a high standard put before you, the whole thing seems so immense, and so difficult, that you wonder if ever you will reach it, and sometimes you perhaps feel the burden of it all, and do not feel you will ever attain. Now let us get rid of all that burden, and all that worry, and come right back to the secret of everything that God ever intended for you. It is this: "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Have you despaired of reaching that glory? Well, the hope of glory is Christ in you. There is hope. If you look upon the old creation, that old creation of which you are a part, and which is in you, you despair. Christ

in you is the hope of glory. There is a new creation in Christ Jesus. If you have the basic thing you have the root of the matter. We do not mean that thing of which a great many people are talking in their modernism, about the Christ in every man. We mean that definite act of faith in Christ Jesus, and His work on the cross, by which you receive Him into your life and are thereby born again and made a new creation. If that has taken place, and you know that Christ is in you, you have the root of the matter. Everything in the outworking of divine purpose related to that is simply a matter of your seeking to know the Lord Jesus Christ in all that He is as your fullness for every day.

The Path of Discovery

As you look at this second letter to the Corinthians, you see that it begins another chapter in this very thing, and you look at the apostle Paul himself there, because he is brought into view as a practical example of this truth. You will see what is implied when we speak of learning to know what it means that Christ has been revealed within. See this apostle, in whom Christ is, in whom Christ has been revealed, taken into definite situations, trying circumstances, deep waters, through much suffering, and as he passes that way I see that all that upon which he might count and reckon in himself and in this world to get him through is breaking down. He comes to a place where he himself cannot go on any further, and he knows it; he cannot take another step, he cannot put forth another effort. If this man had ever acted upon the strength of his own will — and, you know, some people can do an immense amount by their will power, and I think Paul did something in that way sometimes — if ever he had been so actuated by his own will as a strong-willed man, making up his mind that he would do it if he died in the attempt, he got to the end, where he could not make another effort, he despaired of life. Then it was that he made a discovery, that that was not the end but the beginning. When he got to the end himself there was “God who raiseth the dead”.

He discovered Christ in him as the risen One in the power of resurrection, and to have made that discovery had a wonderful result. In what way? “We have this ministry.” The whole of this second letter to the Corinthians is on the ministry. What is this ministry? It is the ministry of life being ministered, the life of the risen Lord who has been discovered as life, discovered in the hour of death. The energy of His risen life was discovered in the hour when all his own energy had come to an end. Yes, the light of that risen life breaking upon him when he was in a corner and did not know which way to turn, and felt that he was shut in and

there was no way out. He discovered that the Lord had a way out, the Lord had ways of which he was entirely ignorant, the Lord knew more than he did.

To make that discovery sometimes is good. Somehow or other we are always coming up against the fact that the Lord knows more than we do, and knows better than we do. That is discovering what Christ in you is. It is very practical. It is something for every day. Believe me, the Lord is taking you and me along such a path with the one object (Oh, let this be written in our hearts!) of making us discover what a Christ we have; and as we discover Him, what He is to us in every circumstance, in every need, in every hour of despair and weakness, and helplessness, that is the increase of Christ. That means that something more of the Lord has become our life, and that kind of thing goes on. That is why the Lord presses us so much, deals with us as He does. The greatest discoveries have been made in the greatest trial, and the deepest distress of heart. We have come out with a fuller measure of the Lord. That is what constitutes ministry, Paul says here. “We have this ministry”, and “We have this treasure in vessels of fragile clay…” and that is necessary in order that “the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God and not of ourselves”. It is all of God. It is revealed in Christ.

We have touched upon the mere fringe of this whole glorious matter. We see that “the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing” of this that God is today doing in secret, under cover. The world is not seeing, and we ourselves do not always see what God is doing in us, but there is going to be a day of manifestation. It is the day when sonship is manifested, and sonship is not just some kind of formal relationship to God. Sonship is a nature developed, a likeness produced. The day of the manifestation of that likeness to His Son is coming, and the whole creation will heave a great sigh of relief and say, We have arrived at last!

That is God’s end, the revelation of His Son in us, our conformity to His image, the hope, the assurance. “God… hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

Chapter 4 - The Incentive to Maturity

Reading: Romans 8:19,29; 1 Cor. 3:1-3; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 3:26; 4:6,19.

We have already pointed out how much there is of strength and urgency in the New Testament concerning full spiritual growth. Indeed, more than ninety percent of the New Testament is addressed to believers for that very purpose. Every letter of Paul's is a strong urge in that direction, and was written specifically for the increase of Christ in the believers, that they might come to full growth, to the stature of the fullness of Christ.

We observed that this is not only true in a general way, but that every letter of the apostle deals with the matter of spiritual growth from a different standpoint, or has a particular aspect of that matter to deal with, which, of course, has its occasion in the situation existing in the different places to which the letters were sent.

Then we began to consider the letters of Paul in their bearing upon this matter, and we got to the end of the second letter to the Corinthians. If the Lord wills, we will presently review that ground as we approach the letter to the Galatians, but we want to say another word first concerning the urgency of this matter.

Why Maturity is so Vital

It does not require argument and evidence to be produced to convince you that this is a matter of very great importance from the Lord's standpoint. It is quite impossible to read the New Testament and fail to see that it is to this end the Lord is by His Word and Spirit urging believers all the time, making it perfectly manifest that the Lord's thought is not just the salvation of men from sin and from judgment. The greater emphasis with the Lord is what they are saved unto, rather than what they are saved from. It is divine purpose which is always governing, and the calling by His grace is according to His purpose: "according to the eternal purpose". We must remember that salvation, from start to finish, at every point, is related to divine purpose, is toward an end, is with something in view, and in order to reach that which is in view in divine purpose a going on with God unto full spiritual measure is necessary.

There again it needs to be said, that to have full grown people is not an end in itself. The end in view is that they may be prepared and fitted for the purpose unto which He has called. No mere spiritual infant, who is such beyond the point of time where infancy ought to have ceased, can come into the divine purpose, and that is the reason why there is this tremendous emphasis placed upon the tragedy of immaturity when it ought to be otherwise, and upon the necessity for maturity. It is with something of a groan that the apostle writes these words to the Corinthians: "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes". Now it is all right to speak to babes when they are rightly such, but when it is time they were more than babes it is a terrible thing to have to go on speaking to them thus.

So that we must see what the purpose of God through maturity is, before we can feel the real weight and recognise the real importance of full spiritual growth. What is the purpose of God? What is that eternal purpose to which we are called by His grace in Christ Jesus? There are several words in the New Testament which are very full words, and very significant words. There is the word "adoption", a very misunderstood word by us, because it means something entirely different in our Western language from what it means in the New Testament. There is another word "sons"; and, again, another word "inheritance". If you look at those words you will find that they are always related to a particular thing. They are related to a position in the ages to come, and that position is definitely stated to be dominion over the inhabited earth. That governs everything in the thought of God. You will remember that in the second chapter of the letter to the Hebrews that is clearly and definitely stated: "…not unto angels did he subject the inhabited earth to come, whereof we speak. But one in a certain place hath testified, saying, What is man that thou art mindful of him — *puttest him in charge?*". The inhabited earth to come will be subjected to man, and it is that particular man which is God's object in this specific dispensation. It is the corporate man in Christ; the church which is His Body, conformed to the image of God's Son, of whom He is the firstborn, as the firstborn among many brethren. Thus the letter to the Hebrews goes on to say that in bringing many sons to glory the Author of their salvation was made perfect through sufferings.

Galatians and the Day of the Adoption

That brings us right to this letter to the Galatians. You will notice in the course of this letter that the apostle Paul lights upon Abraham, and takes up everything in

relation to Abraham, and in so doing he throws back our horizon tremendously. To begin with, he gets rid of a whole dispensation, the Jewish dispensation, which came between Abraham and Christ. He leaps right over it, pushes it on one side, and gets back into the universal. He says, in effect, “That was a merely local thing, a merely temporal thing. It came in, it served a purpose, and it is now done with. Now let us go back to Abraham, and take things up there. That is where things began, and we come in with Abraham.” “Know therefore”, he concludes, “that they which be of faith, the same are sons of Abraham”.

You will know that there is a great similarity between this letter and the letter to the Romans. The subject is almost identical, the object the same. The letter to the Romans is a more thorough-going treatise (if we may call it that) on the subject of law and grace. The letter to the Galatians is an impassioned outburst of righteous indignation. The spirit of the apostle is aflame at the outrages against the work of God which were being perpetrated, to which we will refer later. The object is the same, and if you go back to the fourth chapter of the Romans you have this remarkable word: “Now the promise to Abraham that he should be heir of the world…” You have no such thing recorded in the Old Testament. Nothing in the Old Testament says that God made promise to Abraham that he should be heir of the world in this sense. It is there that the apostle takes things up with Abraham. In his letter to the Galatians, he deals with everything along the line of sonship, adoption, heirs of the promise made to Abraham. That is inheritance. When you have grasped that, and recognised what that means, you are getting into the flaming heart of the apostle. We cannot get into this letter unless we understand and recognise the tremendous background of it. In a word, what we are presented with is this: God made a promise to Abraham that he should be heir of the world. Upon that we are told that Abraham looked for a city whose builder and maker was God, and we find Abraham refusing all the cities of this world, choosing to dwell in tents with Isaac and Jacob who were also the heirs of the promise; repudiating this world and its cities, because he looked for a city whose builder and maker was God, with the promise that he should be heir of the world.

Now we look at the apostle’s argument in this letter to the Galatians. Who is a Jew? Not he who is one naturally. He is a Jew who is linked with Abraham’s seed by faith. “Not unto seeds”, says the apostle, “but… to thy seed, which is Christ.” Abraham’s seed is Christ. Faith in Jesus Christ constitutes us the seed of Abraham. One of the last clauses of this letter to the Galatians refers to the Israel of God, and leading up to that is all this about the “Jerusalem that is beneath, that

is in bondage with her children, and the Jerusalem which is above and is free, which is the mother of us all". He looked for a city. We are Abraham's seed by faith in Jesus Christ, related to a city, and that city is to govern the world. The end of the Word of God makes it perfectly clear that the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, is the church, and in this whole dispensation the church is the object upon which God's heart is set, in order that she may govern the inhabited earth in the ages to come. That is the purpose. That government demands full spiritual growth, and because of the greatness, the seriousness, and the importance of God's eternal purpose as to the government of this world, if in heart you enter into that with God, you also will become aflame as did the apostle, when you discover there are things which are working insidiously against God's purpose in the saints, to frustrate spiritual full growth. Get the range of the thing, and then it goes to your heart. Everything that stands athwart God's purpose is to be met with indignation, with uncompromising zeal, for this matter is so important. It is our loyalty to God. It is our oneness of heart with God's purpose.

God has a cherished purpose concerning His Son. In His infinite grace He has called us according to that purpose. The fact of what we are, as it breaks upon us so continually, is perhaps the thing which discourages us most of all from believing in a thing like this, and yet it is true that you and I, despite what we are, our utter worthlessness — ah, more than that, despite all the enmity that is in us against God by nature, all that is there that is so utterly contrary to God's nature, all the rebellion against God by nature, of which we are so capable under provocation — we are, by God's infinite grace, which comes down to us in Jesus Christ, called to govern the inhabited earth in the ages to come, for God, with God, in His Son. That is the purpose. That is what God is seeking in this dispensation, that instrument, that vessel for coming world-government.

When you and I recognise what the grace of God is, grace which finds a way for our forgiveness, and our deliverance from judgment, grace upon grace, ever mounting up until it sets us on the throne with Himself, in accordance with the word which He has spoken, "…shall sit with me in my throne, as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in his throne"; such grace coming home to our hearts surely would make us intensely jealous for God and deeply loyal to God. Surely if we felt that grace our attitude would be: "Oh, if anything dares to touch God's purpose, God's interest, that which is dearest of all to God's heart, I for one will have no compromise with that, I for one will show that I am utterly with God." That surely ought to be our reaction to the grace of God. It was because the apostle Paul had such a deep, deep sense of the grace of God in

eternal purpose calling him that you find him so burning with zeal, so mightily stirred to white heat when there rose up something to interfere with God's purpose.

That explains the letter to the Galatians. Listen to his words in the first chapter. There is no compromise about this: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema." That is very straight language. Let him be accursed. Why? Because he is interfering with God's purpose when he seeks to subvert the saints, when he interferes with their going on to full growth.

Sonship, adoption, is something which lies ahead. The adoption has not yet taken place. We are children of God, we have the Spirit of sonship, but the adoption is not yet; that is coming. The word "adoption" would help us more if it were translated literally; for it bears a different meaning in the New Testament from that which obtains among us today. The word simply means placing as sons, the installation as sons. It is rather the official element than the element of relationship. It occurs only five times in the New Testament, and these are all in Paul's letters, and every occurrence is very interesting and helpful.

So that is ahead, and it is that to which the apostle refers in his letter to the Romans: "The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God." That lies in the future, and that is the day when the government of the inhabited earth to come will be taken up in the saints conformed to the image of His Son, in the church as mature.

Now you see, I am sure a little more of the importance, and why there is given such a place of importance to this matter of full growth. It is in maturity that the inheritance is to be possessed, that the placing of sons is to take place, that the subjecting of the inhabited earth to come is to transpire. Hence the need for going on to full growth. Government is important to God, and it is the full meaning of grace in the saints. So much, then, for our further emphasis upon the importance.

A Retrospect of the Letters to the Romans and Corinthians

We have said that these letters of the apostle Paul are each dealing with some aspect of spiritual maturity, or dealing with the matter from respective points of view. The letter to the Romans, as we have already pointed out, represents the

work by which relatedness to the Lord is brought about unto His full purpose. The purpose is brought into view right at the outset, the manifestation of the sons of God conformed to the image of His Son. That is the purpose. Then everything is dealt with in order that a relationship shall be brought about, so that God can begin His purpose and proceed to its realisation. Thus, in the letter to the Romans you have a revelation of God's attitude toward men by nature. The whole race is taken into view, and the verdict is, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God", and therefore lie under judgment and death. "There is none righteous, no, not one." Gentile and Jew are all in the same position before God. It is a startling fact, nevertheless clearly and positively stated; irreligious and religious; those who were without and those who were with the oracles of God. The natural difference that the oracles of God are seen to have made is that they have proved how helpless man is, and how deeply sinful he is by nature. The law came in, and, far from saving man, it only accentuated the natural condition of human weakness and sinfulness, and made manifest how impossible it is for man to stand up to God's requirement. So that universally man by nature is proved to be hopeless and helpless, under sin, condemnation, judgment and death.

Then the cross of the Lord Jesus is brought into view as the place where God's verdict concerning man universally was put into effect in the representative person of the Lord Jesus, who was made sin in our stead. The whole race passed under the actual judgment of God in the cross, and when Christ died, from God's standpoint, the race died under judgment.

Then the resurrection of the Lord Jesus comes in, as marking God's new beginning, a new relationship, where sin has been destroyed in judgment, and now, on the ground of sin having been destroyed and removed, there is a new relationship with God in Christ risen, in which relationship the Holy Spirit is given, the Spirit of the new creation. A new life is given — "…the law of the Spirit of life in Christ…" — and then in that new relationship, the purpose is embarked upon by the indwelling Spirit. Conformity to the image of His Son is the end. The call is that believers should apprehend that position of union with Christ in death, in burial, and resurrection, and by faith take their place therein. That becomes the foundation of God's purpose. Without that God cannot even make a beginning.

That is the letter to the Romans in brief. Our position by faith has to correspond to Jesus Christ crucified, dead, buried, risen and receiving the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of sonship, to be led into God's purpose.

The first letter to the Corinthians takes us one step past that, and shows us the kind of person who will move on to God's end, to God's purpose, and what is necessary in believers in order that there may come about full spiritual growth. The key word in Romans is "in Christ": "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus…" That is relationship. The key word to the first letter to the Corinthians is: "He that is spiritual…" The whole of that first letter has to do with spirituals in men and in things. The first letter to the Corinthians, then, has to do entirely with what a spiritual person is, how a spiritual person will act and speak; or, by contrast, how a spiritual person will not act and will not speak. The whole letter, chapter after chapter, sets carnality over against spirituality, and says, "Now this is carnality, and it blocks the way to God's end, and is the cause of spiritual arrest." It is necessary that a man shall be spiritual in the innermost reality of his being, that he shall be spiritually minded, and that this spiritual mind, the mind of Christ, shall govern him in every consideration.

One mark of the carnality of the Corinthians was their divisions, their natural preferences, likes and dislikes amongst people. Paul says, in effect, "If you were spiritual there would be none of that. If you are going on to full growth then you have to get clear of all that." So you go through the whole letter, and find that the finger of the Spirit lights through the apostle upon point after point, revealing carnality, and how it works out to spiritual arrest. They are seen to be full of contradictions, and full of denials, and full of limitation. He that is spiritual is not like that. Spirituality is essential to full growth.

In the second letter to the Corinthians the key word is "the face of Jesus Christ". By inference we are taken right back to the first creation. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness…" (the first act in the creation), "…hath shined into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ". What is the object of the creation? Jesus Christ is the object of the creation. Through Him, and unto Him, and by Him all things were created. But that object was not realised in the first creation, and whereas light came first, darkness soon followed on the disobedience of man, and so God's purpose in the face of Jesus Christ was not recognised; it was shut out. Now God begins His new creation: "If any man is in Christ, there is a new creation." What is the first thing that governs the new creation? "God… hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." That is the key to everything.

How shall we reach God's purpose, God's end? How shall we grow in grace? By the continuous unveiling of God in Christ in our hearts. It has to go on, and so the word there heads up into this: "We… beholding (the word indicates continuous activity, maintaining our gaze, fixing our eyes) …are changed into the same image…" We are coming to God's end, the image of His Son, by the Holy Spirit keeping in our hearts a growing unveiling of the Lord Jesus.

We have the purpose of God set before us, we know what the calling is, we understand why we are urged to give diligence to make our calling and our election sure. We know that, while we may not fall from salvation, we may fall from the inheritance. We know that we may lose God's full purpose by not going on. Otherwise why this urge? We receive our salvation through grace, and I am quite sure that it will be the grace of God that carries us through unto the purpose; for who of us would get through, but by the grace of God? Nevertheless, for the inheritance unto the adoption as sons, coming to the government of the inhabited earth to come, there has to be an attitude of pressing on to full growth, lest we fail of the calling. It is the failure to recognise that which has led so many people into a fog, and into perplexity, and I think, into false teaching concerning certain things in the New Testament. It is the inheritance which governs. Until we are really governed by God's full purpose we do not understand a great deal of the New Testament. In the purpose of God we are "foreordained unto the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ", the placing as sons for governmental purposes in the ages to come.

Chapter 5 - Christ Formed Within

Reading: Galatians 3.

"…I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you" Galatians 4:19.

The Resistance to Divine Purpose

As we continue our meditation in relation to spiritual growth, spiritual full growth, recognising, as we have sought to do, the very great and serious place which the matter occupies in the Word of God, and how important the Lord evidently regards it, there is the other side to that fact which must impress us, namely, the way in which this matter of spiritual growth is fraught with opposition. Whenever you touch upon it you find yourself in the presence of something set against it. It is never presented in passive conditions. It is always encompassed by active opposing elements and forces. You find that the exhortation, the encouragement, the admonition is all of the most positive character as over against something. Whenever God has moved in the past towards spiritual increase, there is always present some counter-move, some antagonistic element. You can see it through the Word of God again and again.

When the Lord would bring Israel from the bondage and limitation of Egypt, at once there was bitter conflict. When Israel was at last brought into the land, almost immediately there was an Achan to arrest the whole movement and bring to a standstill that development unto the fullness of which the land spoke, and for the moment it was effectively done. So you may see it in a great number of instances in the Old Testament.

When God brought His Son into the world, which was a great movement towards spiritual fullness, there was to begin with a Herod, and then the Jews in their prejudice. Let us take note of the fact that prejudice is always set against spiritual progress. Prejudice never does give God a chance. It is a closed door. If one thing more than another marked the Jews, in the days when He who was God's fullness came amongst men, it was prejudice, and it was that which limited them, and robbed them of God's full purpose.

When the Day of Pentecost was fully come, and a mighty move towards fullness

was made — that which the apostle later refers to as “the fullness of him that filleth all in all” — hardly has the church started upon its course before you find a suitable instrument to the enemy’s arresting work in Ananias and Sapphira. Then you move on to the great apostle Paul, and always dogging his steps everywhere are the Judaisers.

So it is, that every movement of God is met by a counter-movement. Every step towards spiritual enlargement finds something present from the other side to check it, to arrest it, to frustrate it.

The Letters of Paul

Thus these letters of Paul bring up into view a large number of things which Satan has produced, very largely through the flesh, as counter-movements to God’s end — full growth. As we have seen, in Corinth it was carnality, and also in Corinth, as is made perfectly clear in the early chapters of the second letter to the Corinthians, and among the Galatians, it was the Judaisers. Theirs was a very unworthy way of going to work. One of their great strokes against what God was seeking to do, was doing through His servant Paul, was their attack upon him in person; that is, their attack upon him as the vessel being used by God, an attack in ways unworthy of those who professed to be seeking the interests of God.

It is always so. When God moves and takes up a vessel for the increase of Christ in His people, for spiritual enlargement, Satan raises up an attack upon that vessel, and seeks to frustrate the purpose by prejudicing that purpose through the vessel in some way. He will misrepresent, lie — oh, he will use every kind of movement to discount the instrument, so that the divine object may fall into disrepute or be brought under arrest.

Now here is a letter (the letter to the Galatians) which is full of terrific conflict. Martin Luther was a fighter if he was anything, and he said he had betrothed this letter to himself. But what did Luther say further in relation to that? “Beforehand I was in quietness and comfort, in rest and acceptance, but since I have surrounded myself with a solid block of enemies”! That is significant because of what this letter stands for. Would to God that Martin Luther had seen all that it stands for, instead of only its beginnings. However, here we are in the presence of conflict, and the point is for us to recognise that if God is moving towards the enlargement of the measure of Christ in the saints, that movement encounters all hell’s antagonism, and the vessel used by the Lord to that end will come under

the massed assaults of the enemy, both vehement and malicious. He will stop short at nothing in seeking to render that vessel inoperative, to paralyse it, so that it cannot fulfil its divine mission. I always take the apostle Paul as a personal representative of the truth which was committed to him, as a vessel, one in whom all that related to that truth was wrought out in his own history; and in this point, as in so many others, it is quite manifest that Paul was raised up as a special vessel in relation to the full, eternal purpose of God concerning the church, and there was not another man in the dispensation who so met the force of hell, in its endeavour to paralyse and destroy, as that man. He stands to show us in his own history, and in his own person, what we may expect if we are linked with God's full purpose.

This should be enlightening and encouraging, looked at from one standpoint. It should explain things, and it should set us on our feet. The danger so often with us, when there is a mighty uprising of spiritual antagonism and we are made to suffer, and are suffering intensely, is that we should regard that suffering as something in itself, seek to attribute it to natural causes, to feel that it is something in the course of life which has come our way. We think we are just sufferers, and fail to see that, however the thing may appear to be like that, it is related definitely and directly to the purpose with which we are occupied.

It may be that you are not able to enter into this, because you are not in the experience of it, but others will understand. Believe me, that if you have betrothed God's full purpose to you, if you are married to God's full thought for His people — for yourself and for others, especially for the church — you are going to meet the Devil's attempted frustration of it in every conceivable way; the frustration of yourself, the frustration of your ministry. You are going to meet it physically, you are going to meet it in your soul, and you are going to meet it spiritually. You are going to meet it inside yourself, and you are going to meet it outside yourself. You are going to find yourself in a battle. And what is true of the individual will be true of any company that is standing in relation to God for that purpose.

The Form of the Attack Among the Galatians

So we find ourselves in that very atmosphere immediately we open this letter to the Galatians. Paul wastes no time here. He uses very few words by way of nicety. He introduces himself, and his introduction is an attack. He opens the battle in his first sentence. "Paul, an apostle (not from men, neither through

man…)" That is an attack. The battle is joined. Judaisers have been at work, and they have persuaded these Galatians that Paul was not an authentic apostle, but had set himself up as something; he was not one of the twelve, but was self-appointed. "Paul, an apostle (not from men, neither through man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead)." You see, that is accepting the challenge. How it goes to the heart of things! It takes hold of the sword of the enemy and turns it right round and pierces himself. The Judaisers say I am not an apostle by recognition of Jerusalem; I have not been ordained at headquarters; I am not one of the authentic twelve; I have not received my credentials from the ecclesiastics, those who are called pillars. I agree! But I take my apostleship higher; I received it "through Jesus Christ, and God the Father…" What can you say to that? How are you going to handle that?

Now that is only just to point out that you are in the presence of conflict, and to establish the fact that where God is seeking to move towards the bringing of His Son to full formation in the church, Satan is always most active to defeat that end by any means possible. Bear that in mind at all times. The Lord help us to do it. If we remember that, it will be to our salvation.

What the Judaisers sought to do is perhaps something which we need not consider in detail. Had they had their way, this is what the effect and the outcome would have been, namely, that the Galatians would have returned to, and have become settled and fixed in religious formality, in ceremonial and ritual, in tradition and external religious works at the cost, firstly, of life, and ultimately of God's eternal purpose. The apostle takes up the battle for life in this letter, and makes it an issue of life.

We can clearly see that the method of the enemy was not restricted to the Galatians, for it had gone on before their day, and it goes on still: formalism, religious formality, ceremonial, ritual, religious traditions, many outward works in the name of God, all that in the place of, firstly, spiritual life, and then, finally, in the place of God's full intention for His people. That is very true. Of course, the enemy always knows where he has a salient point, where he has a vantage ground. These Galatians were mainly Gentiles, and they had come out of paganism, and in their pagan religious system there were many rites and ceremonials, many religious ordinances. There were all those performances and outward activities which constituted the form of worship of their gods, and to the natural man, the man of the soul, such things are indispensable. He must have what is tangible, he must have helps in religion; he must hear something, see

something, do something, handle something. All these accompaniments of religion are essential to religion, and his religion would be a poor, starved thing if you took those away. Take the artistic away, take the aesthetic away, take away all the externals that come to our senses, and those means by which we express our sentient life, and what is religion? This pure, spiritual life of faith without anything of that is an uninteresting thing to the soul, and is very vague. Yes, what an unreal thing it is! These Galatians had come out of all that other thing, and had turned to the Lord. Then the Judaisers had come along with the Jewish order, and said, “Except you are circumcised you cannot be saved, and what you need is to come back to the Jewish ordinances”. If you are at low ebb spiritually you are not able to stand up to that sort of thing very well, when there are plausible arguments and strong constraints, and when there is a turning upon the instrument which has been used for you and the pointing out of all the flaws and weaknesses in that one, and the showing of how that one has set himself up to be something which is contrary to the accepted position at Jerusalem. These leaders in Jerusalem had known Jesus Christ personally, in the flesh; they had been with Him, and they did not agree with this sort of thing, they still believed in these Jewish ordinances. “So you see Paul is all wrong; he is just one by himself, no one agrees with him”, was what they urged.

It was all so subtle, and thus Satan had his point with them in relation to their old form of life, working on that uncrucified soul-life, and they came under the spell. “O, foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?” As we have pointed out, the literal words there are, “Who did cast over you the witch’s spell?" A spell is a nice sensation, till you wake up. A spell is usually cast over a person in order to rob him of something, and that in fact is what happened in the case before us.

Spiritual Apprehension of Christ

Let us, then, recognise the point, namely, that in Christ we are called out of that whole thing. That is earthly, that is of man, tradition, religious system of rites and ordinances, of days, times and seasons. We have been called out of that into a heavenly life in Jesus Christ by faith. When you really do get through you never have any inclination towards that other thing again, you are spoiled for it. But that is just the point of Galatians 4:19: “My little children for whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you.” Paul was not saying at this point that he was in travail in relation to that end when Christ should be fully formed in them in the purpose of God. Of course, it had its bearing upon that, it was related to that ultimately, but that is not what he means here; not that full

conformity to the image of Christ, not that full development of Christ in them. What he is saying here is this: “I am in travail until Christ takes definite shape in you.” It is the difference between the embryo and the fully formed child. He said he was in agony about that. The trouble with them was that they had not clearly seen Christ, not clearly apprehended Christ; Christ was not distinctly defined in them, the meaning of Christ had not become definite in them. Something had happened. They had been begotten from above, they had received the Spirit, by faith they had turned to the Lord Jesus, but it has become evident that they have not grasped the significance of Christ. Paul said, “I fear lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.” What is labour in vain? Oh beloved, in relation to God’s purpose, in relation to God’s full thought, it is far from being enough that we should just believe on the Lord Jesus; it is essential that we should see who and what Jesus is, and what He means.

If you want proof that this is the point here between Paul and the Galatians, recognise this, that the personal name of the Lord Jesus Christ occurs forty-three times in this very brief letter. It is not the descriptive title, as so often elsewhere. It is the personal name, the Man Christ Jesus thirty-nine times out of the forty-three in this letter. Why? Why should he bring such a tremendous number of references to Him into this letter? Well, it is self-evident. Hear his exclamation, to this effect: “Before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth, crucified”, placarded openly, and you have not seen! Four times in this letter the Cross of Christ is referred to in relation to the biggest things with which we have to do. We are not going to stop now with them, but those four statements about the Cross of the Lord Jesus in this letter are the greatest things that could be said about the Cross, and they all have reference to the end of the personal ego: “I have been crucified…” — the all embracing fact; then, by the same means, severance from the law — “I… died unto the law”; severance from the flesh — “They that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof”; severance from the world — “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.” “Before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth crucified”, and you have not seen the implications.

If you had but believed (Galatians and all others) you would have once for all been delivered from earthly religious systems, earthly orders, rites, ceremonies, traditions, and all that sort of thing, and you would be in a heavenly place; for Christ crucified means that. To apprehend Christ means absolute emancipation out of everything here, even in a religious way, after a religious kind. It is that

which represents the whole question of maturity and immaturity. You ask, What was it that constituted immaturity amongst the Galatians? It was that, under persuasion, influence and argument, they were ready to drop back so easily and so quickly into an earthly religious order with which the Cross of Christ had finished, which the Cross of Christ had brought to an end. Oh yes, the law of Moses, and all his order, and his ritual ended in the Cross of the Lord Jesus. It served a purpose, but reached its fulfilment in Christ, and Christ crucified marked an end. In Christ risen, all that it pointed to is taken up in a spiritual way to heaven, and now we are united with Christ in heaven. He fulfils all the values of that for us. He is our High Priest, our sacrifice, our precious Blood, our meeting place, our righteousness, our approach, our access to God, our acceptance. Everything shadowed in the types and figures is carried up into Him risen and exalted, and we have it all in spiritual value. Yes, you say, but it is all so far away, and unreal, and we want something that we can handle and see and hear. Ah, that is immaturity, that is spiritual infancy. Children always want something (and rightly so) that they can see and hear. But the apostle in this letter plunges the Galatians right into the place where all those infant things are finished with. He says, “You must begin sonship from the beginning”. It is remarkable how far advanced he is in his point of view in this letter.

While the placing of sons lies in the future, while the inheritance lies there, the apostle says, we are all sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ, and we are expected now to begin to live upon the sonship principle. We do not want toys to play with on the earth, picture books to look at, object lessons, but we have come in spirit immediately to an apprehension of Jesus Christ, and a living fellowship with Him, so that all that kind of thing is passed. The Cross of the Lord Jesus in this letter is not set forth merely in relation to what we would call gross sin, but is set over against all religion in the flesh, and when Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me”, he further adds: “and that life which I now live in the flesh, I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God…” You notice the context. It is the difference between life in the law and life in the risen Christ; not the difference between the religious life of the Jew as such and the religious man as such. All that is one thing, and the Cross cuts that off, and the “I” that is in that is brought to an end. Now I live, he says, “yet no longer I, but Christ… and that life which I now live I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God…” It is a kind of life. The Cross brings out to that kind of life which is the life of the Son of God lived by us through faith. That must be reserved for further consideration. We will stay with the more obvious points in the letter.

Christ Formed Within, A Question of Supreme Importance

I think we can be content to dwell for a little while longer upon those words in chapter 4:19: “My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you.”

It is the anguished cry that believers should come to a place where they are fixed — “Christ be formed”. It is the place where there is some definiteness in them as to the Lord Jesus. It is a settled thing. They have *SEEN* the Lord Jesus and they are settled. You cannot move them; that is, they have the root of the matter in themselves. Christ has taken shape in them.

Now, if Paul agonizes, groans, travails in that connection, how important it is, and what serious consequences must be related to a Galatian condition. The crying need amongst the Lord’s people is that they should come to a fixed and settled place and position in consequence of the meaning of Christ having come home to them in clearness and in definiteness; that they should be settled and grounded, not easily moved away, not easily falling under the witch’s spell. They know the Lord, and you cannot move them. You do not have to nurse people like that. You do not have to keep picking them up and putting them on their feet. You have to supply no crutches. You can count on them. You know that they have that basic knowledge of the Lord, that they will not be moved away easily, that they will go right on. They see what this means; they have grasped the significance of Jesus Christ, and you can count on them to go on. You will agree that this is a very necessary state to God’s end, which is full growth; to have an initial and fundamental grasp of the significance of Christ, and to have become fixed in relation to Him. It is because that is lacking that there is such spiritual poverty and limitation, weakness, defectiveness and defeat everywhere. It is a matter of seeing the Lord Jesus.

That is why the apostle uses, with all his might, his own personal case as a case in point. He opens this letter, and takes up the battle. He declares his apostleship as from heaven, and not from men. Then he goes on with his own case, and before long he will say, “It pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me.” When that happened, he says, in effect, “I went not up to confer with flesh and blood at Jerusalem; I had the root of the matter in myself by direct act of the Holy Spirit.”

All is by the Spirit

Go through this letter again and count the number of times that the Spirit is mentioned. You will find everywhere it is the Spirit, and it is this inward work of the Holy Spirit in the heart that makes him see the Lord Jesus. I am not talking about seeing a figure, not about seeing a person as such; I am talking about seeing the meaning of God's Son, the meaning of the Man Christ Jesus, how He gathers up everything that has ever been, or ever will be, in His own person, and becomes the embodiment of all God's thought, intention, and the fountain-head of every resource in relation to that purpose of God: and He becomes that to him. Paul needs no Jewish altars, no Jewish priests, no Jewish blood-shedding and sacrifices, no Jewish temple or tabernacle. Jesus Christ is all that and infinitely more to him. Paul does not live by those things, Jesus Christ is his life. He does not need guidance from those things, Jesus Christ is his guidance. It is what the Lord Jesus is to him that is the sum total of it all.

When you have that, you are out, you are free. Oh, no one need say to you, You must do this, and you must not do that. That is the law. You are out, you are free, you have no life in that; you have rest, and liberty, and power, and peace in Christ, in communion with Him, in fellowship with God in Him. Think of the terrific fall this was on the part of the Galatians. Paul appeals to them: "Oh you, who began in the Spirit, do you think now you can be perfected in the flesh? You who came into the way of all that by the Holy Spirit, do you think you are going to reach God's full end, be made perfect by coming down to fleshly religious activities? It is unthinkable. No wonder you find Paul amazed, perplexed, bewildered and vehemently angry that anybody would so undo the Cross of Christ, so set aside the life in the Spirit. Spiritual maturity is that the Holy Spirit has revealed and is revealing all the meaning of *CHRIST IN US,* and we are living on Him. Spiritual immaturity is that we must have all these external religious things to help us to be good, and with a very unsatisfactory result. Do you see the point? Read the letter again in the light of this word: "Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba…" In the original languages of the Bible, the Hebrew and the Greek, when you read that particular clause you are using exactly the word that the Lord Jesus used when He prayed to the Father. When He prayed He did not say in English, Father! He said, Abba! I do not see any particular value in it coming down to us like that, but it is strange that the Holy Spirit has preserved that, and given us the original word and then the translation, as though He would bring us right into the closest touch with this thing, bring us there in spirit to the very heart of the Lord Jesus.

Just as Jesus Christ said to the Father, Abba! so the same Spirit as in Christ is in

us causing us to know the same relationship with the Father as He had: “Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba…” That is where life in the Spirit begins — Father! It is by the Spirit of His Son.

You see God’s purpose, God’s end, that we should be conformed to the image of His Son. The Spirit of His Son in us crying “Father”, revealing Christ in us. “It pleased God… to reveal his Son in me.” That puts everything on the inside from start to finish, the beginning and the end; the first step and the fullness is bound up with that. “Reveal his Son in me”! That stands over against all externalities of religion. The difference is between life and death, earth and heaven, time and eternity. And so Paul calls this liberty, “the liberty of the sons of God.” “Stand fast therefore in the liberty…”

May the Lord make this all clear, and bring it home to our hearts, that we may know Christ.

Chapter 6 - The Unveiling of Jesus Christ in the Heart

Reading: Galatians 3; 5:13.

Paul was continually growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, but it was a comprehensive knowledge or revelation which took him immediately away into Arabia for an extended period, that he might be occupied with its implications, and when he came back it is quite clear he had grasped the significance of that revelation; he had seen what Jesus meant in God's thought. One of the things that had happened was that, with that revelation, he had gone back over the whole of the history of the people with whom he was joined by birth, right back over Jewish history, right back over his own relationship with Judaism, and he had seen very clearly that the Lord Jesus was the centre of all that in the thought of God, that He took up all the spiritual values into His own person, and that Judaism as a religious system, traditional, historical, no longer obtained in the thought of God, but that what did exist in the place of it was Jesus Christ in heaven. All that Judaism meant which was of spiritual value was centred in a living person, and no longer to be had in a system, in a tradition, in an outward order of things, all of which was lifeless, ineffective, incapable of bringing about heart satisfaction and the realisation of heart longing, deliverance from sin and the quietening forever of conscience. What Paul had now come to see was that all that to which Judaism pointed, but which it was incapable of realising or fulfilling, was to be had and that he had it in the living, risen person, in Jesus Christ.

Liberty a Fruit of Revelation

That is only one thing which Paul saw, but that had a tremendous effect upon him. It did what nothing else in all this universe could have done. It absolutely delivered Saul of Tarsus, the rabid, vehement Jew, from his Judaism. It emancipated him from the whole of that system as an earthly system, although it had been given of God for a purpose. Nothing could have delivered Saul of Tarsus from that but a revelation of Jesus Christ. It is always futile and dangerous to advise people to leave one thing until they have a revelation of the fuller, and only such a revelation will accomplish the true emancipation. The

word liberty and similar terms in this letter is what is meant by that. It is the absolute emancipation from the limitation, the bondage and the tyranny of an earthly religious system which constantly says, Thou shalt! and, Thou shalt not! You must! and, You must not! bringing under the hammer of law all the time. This deliverance emancipates completely from that into glorious liberty, in which you may do exactly as you like, because your lives are all lifted into the heavenlies.

In so saying let us be careful, because there are those who take cover under grace, under emancipation from law, for doing the desires of the flesh. There are many people who serve their own pleasure on the Lord's day, and argue that they are not under law but under grace. Be careful, because Paul says here, "For ye, brethren, were called unto liberty; only use not your liberty for an occasion to the flesh." If you do that, remember you are undoing the work of the Cross of the Lord Jesus, and are violating the work of the Holy Spirit, and are not at all in the realm of grace as set forth here. So let us not think that because we are not under the law of the sabbath day in which we are forbidden to do a lot of things we can just do as the flesh likes; for the difference here is between the flesh and the Spirit. It is not a new bondage, but a new liberty, the liberty of an entirely new power of life and direction in life.

Paul says that his emancipation, the effecting of that glorious deliverance, was by the inward revelation of Jesus Christ. That is where we begin in our spiritual maturity. We must come there. That is rest. People who are still under law, even though it be Christian law, hedged up by, Thou shalt! and, Thou shalt not! are people who are usually very limited in their spiritual capacity, in their spiritual measure. Those who have really seen by revelation of the Holy Spirit what Jesus Christ is, have been set free, and have been put in the way of a great capacity for spiritual enlargement. They are at rest, and rest is a basic factor for spiritual growth. There is nothing which limits and defeats increase like unrest. That is a law in the physical realm. If in the physical realm you are without rest, then you do not make progress, you do not grow, you do not develop. It is those carefree people who arrive at the large physical proportions in the natural realm. It is like that in the spiritual realm with regard to our spiritual life, that it grows apace once there is basic rest. The law is a distressing thing, a wearying thing, a fretting thing. Whatever the law is, whether Jewish or Christian, it is an irritating thing, saying, You must do this! and, You must not do that! The Lord would have us to be stripped of that, and not be brought under that yoke of bondage as His children, but be living in the enjoyment of the Lord Jesus. We shall not do

less because of that. We shall not refrain on that ground from many things which we do by compulsion. The matter of going to the gatherings of the Lord's people may serve us as an illustration here. You can go legally, or you can go in liberty. You can go because you are expected to, because people will wonder if you are not there, and the Lord will be grieved if you do not go. That kind of constraint is legal, and the Lord, if you only knew it, does not want you to gather on that ground at all. You will not gain very much if you do. It will all become a great burden, and you will be wishing there were not so many meetings. If, however, you are living in the enjoyment of the Lord Jesus you will not put in fewer meetings; you will be there, but you will be there in life, in enjoyment; you will be there unto gain, unto real good. That is liberty.

I simply take that as an example, by way of illustration. It applies to everything else. If you are really living in the enjoyment of the Lord, no one will have to say to you, You must not do that! Were they to do so you would reply, "I do not want to, I have no interest in that, I have something better." Liberty is the transcendence of the Lord Jesus, the infinite realm into which we have come, the greater, the heavenly, the more glorious, and we are out of all the other.

That is exactly what happened with Paul in this great matter of deliverance from Judaism. He saw what those Judaisers were doing, that those who had been led to Christ through his instrumentality were simply being brought down out of that glorious realm of liberty and fullness in Christ, on to the old legal basis again, that the Judaisers were destroying all the work that Christ had done for their emancipation. They were in fact setting Christ aside. So Paul brings Christ into full view again and makes this the issue — and it is a tremendous thing, it is the old issue, it is the continuous issue — Christ or law, Christ or Judaism, Christ or merely traditional, historic religion; the living Person or the system.

Now, he says, I was delivered from all that burden and nothing but that revelation of Jesus Christ would have delivered me. He goes on in this letter to speak of his life in the Jews' religion. He waxed zealous above those of his own age, more exceeding zealous. He was a devotee of Judaism, and he would go all lengths for that system of things. Nothing would have changed him, but he saw Jesus Christ. God revealed His Son in him, and that brought it to pass.

It may not be applicable to many of us, but the principle is what I want you to recognise. You may not need to be emancipated from anything like Judaism or legalism, but the principle is this, that for all increase, progress, enlargement,

growth, maturity, it is essential that there should be in the heart a continuous unveiling of Jesus Christ, and you and I will never get to the end of that unveiling. It is possible for some of us to say with truth that this year we have seen more of the meaning of the Lord Jesus than in all the previous years of our lives. Can you say that? It is the most blessed and most wonderful thing to be able to recognise that there is a growing revelation of Jesus Christ within; you see more and more of what He means from God's standpoint, and as that is so, there comes this increase of the Lord Jesus, this increase to which this letter moves towards its close, the fruit of the Spirit, love. An increase of the revelation of Jesus Christ in the heart is an increase of the love of the Lord Jesus, the fruit of the Spirit. You are conscious that your heart is coming more and more under the constraint of His love, and that unloveliness is becoming subordinate to His love. There is more joy in the Lord Jesus today than ever, because you are seeing more of what He is. It is practical. That is spiritual growth: "It pleased God… to reveal his Son in me…"

The Relationship of Revelation to Falling Away

Let us lay the emphasis upon that principle as we pass on, the necessity that every one of us should have a personal and individual revelation of the living Christ by the Holy Spirit in our hearts. If we do not have that, then we shall be a prey to anything else that comes along. These Galatians fell a prey to the Judaisers, and I see so many of the Lord's people who have fallen a prey to some doctrine, to some theory, to something which is altogether a sideline. Whether it be truth, or not, is not the point, but people get carried away by universalism, for instance, or British Israelism, and become absorbed in these things. In some of these there is no truth at all; in most there is sufficient truth to make them a positive deception. But even supposing they were entirely true, the point is: Are they leading straight to God's end or are they something just up in a corner to hold us away from reaching that end? These Galatians became locked up in a side-issue of theories, of teaching, and they were not going on towards God's end.

How did that come about? An answer which is more often true than not is this, that they got into a low spiritual condition. There was not a continuance of inward, living seeing of the Lord Jesus. They had grasped Christianity at its beginnings, but Christ was not formed in them in this sense of taking shape, and because they were in such a position, with Christ not formed, not taking clear shape, not clearly defined and apprehended in the Spirit, these other things came

along and captured them, sidetracked them, and now there they are in these little side-interests and you cannot touch them. That thing is everything to them, and it has kept them back from God's full purpose.

Revelation must be Continuous and Progressive

It is so important that there should be this continual, living unveiling of Christ in the heart if we are to reach God's full end.

Paul came to that revelation right at the beginning. It was initial, but also a directive revelation continuously. It was the basis of the direction of his life. "When it pleased God… to reveal his Son in me… immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood, neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me…" Why did he not do that? If he had accepted a system of teaching he would have gone and discussed it with other people who were interested, and who were in that system of teaching, to see if he had grasped it aright. He would have compared notes and said: "Now, look here, I have accepted this teaching; you are interested in it, and I want to know whether I have been right in my understanding of this teaching." Is this what it means? That would be conferring with flesh and blood. He would have sought out the authorities at headquarters on the matter. But no, "I conferred not with flesh and blood, neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me…" If you follow this letter through, you will find that here is a movement which is not a wrong kind of independence, but is the true movement of a personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus. It is directive throughout his life. He speaks of going up by revelation of Jesus Christ; a revelation of Jesus Christ was given to direct his movements. Mark you, it was not a revelation which took the form of a dictation: Paul, you go here, you go there, you go somewhere else. It was a revelation of a Person.

You may find difficulty in understanding that, but if the Lord should open our understanding on that matter we should see that all the movements of the Spirit of God are in some way bound up with the person of the Lord Jesus. They are an expression of Christ in some way. He is continuing His doing, and His speaking, He is going on with His work to the end of the dispensation. He has not abandoned the field, not left the scene of activities and withdrawn, and given it to us to go on; He is going on. He is the chief worker, the one who has all in His hands. But what He has in His hands is not a multitude of things that He is doing, it is an expression of Himself in some way. The Lord Jesus is putting Himself into things, and bringing things into relation with Himself. You look to

the end of God, and you find that universally Jesus Christ is to be expressed in a spiritual way. What He is will at some future time fill this universe, and you need to know what the Lord Jesus is in order to have your life directed. You need to be governed by what He is; you need a revelation of Him.

We can take an illustration from the tabernacle in the wilderness. That tabernacle is a comprehensive expression in type of the person of Jesus Christ, and if we look at it at any point, whether of its constitution or of its operation, we see something of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we look at a pin of the tabernacle, we shall see something of Him expressed. So that the tabernacle becomes a great spiritual system, and Christ is that. Christ is not only a person, Christ is, in effect, in outworking, a great heavenly, spiritual system. When we come into Christ we come into a heavenly order. That is not some manual of instructions but a living person. If the Holy Spirit gets a real hold upon you and me, so that we are moving by the Holy Spirit, all our movements, on the one hand, will in some way be an expression of Christ, and, on the other hand, a bringing of things into relation to Christ, so that Christ becomes raised up in them. The question is not, Shall I go here? Shall I go there? Shall I do this, or shall I do that? The question is, Is Christ going to express Himself in some way? Is He going there? Is He going to manifest Himself there? Then I go with Him to be His instrument, His vessel. It is a matter of the person, not of a lot of things to be done.

That is a very difficult thing to explain, but Paul does make it clear that his life was governed by revelation of Jesus Christ. He went up by revelation of Jesus Christ. He recognised in the spirit that Christ was on the move in a certain direction, for a certain purpose. That was revealed to him, and so he moved by the Spirit because it was a case of the goings of Christ. That is how life is to be governed. Our prayer must not be, Lord, shall I do this, and shall I do the other? Shall I go here, or shall I go there? Our prayer is, Lord, art Thou going there? Art Thou going to do this or that? Dost Thou want me for Thy purpose here and there? It is all related to a living person. Otherwise you build up a great system of activities which we say are for Christ, instead of it being the direct, pure work of Christ. There is real value and meaning in that. It is a governing factor. What was initial in the life of the apostle was continuous; that is, his whole life from beginning to end was governed and actuated by a revelation of Jesus Christ.

A Position of Complete Dependence

It all amounted to this, that Christ had become everything for him. It was not a

new religion, and it was not a new life work. It was not a new mission on the earth. If you have not got there already, you will, if you go on with the Lord long enough, come to the place where you do not want any more life-missions or work, or any more commissions; you will come to the place of such utter weakness and dependence and helplessness and self-emptiness that your whole attitude will be, Oh Lord, do save me from ever attempting anything unless Thou art going to do it. Lord, if Thou art not going to do that, then in mercy keep me from putting my hand to it. Paul was not out in some new enterprise; Paul was bound up with the person of Jesus Christ, and he says, "that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God…" Christ and His life actuates the apostle. It is Christ's mission, Christ's purpose, not his. It is what the Lord is doing, and not what he is doing for the Lord. That is what it means; Christ becoming everything. So that for this we have no life apart from Christ, no strength, no wisdom, no knowledge; we have nothing, not even ability to live apart from Christ, to say nothing of ability to do; all natural energies and resources reduced by the sovereign act of the Lord, so that it shall be no longer I, but Christ, to live and to do.

That represents a position that is painful to us naturally, exceedingly painful. Even though we may sometimes come to the place where we say to the Lord: "Well, Lord, we are prepared to have infirmity and weakness and suffering if only it is made a background of Thy more exceeding power", we say, at the same time, "If it can be, deliver us from our infirmity." There is always a kickback from that utterance. Here is the man whom we are taking as a personal representation of the truth which came in through him. If ever there was one man who stood in the light of God's full purpose in this dispensation it was the apostle Paul. Here he is and he is saying very much about his infirmity, the weakness which was in his flesh. He tells these Galatians that because of the weakness and infirmity of his flesh they did not despise him; nay, that they would have plucked out their very eyes for him could they have done so; showing what that infirmity was, something which made him despicable. I think there is a close resemblance between this statement and that in 2 Corinthians 12: "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me…" He says that it was given to him lest he should be exalted above measure. Here is a statement that the infirmity, the trial, the temptation that was in his flesh they despised not. At the close of his letter he said: "See with how large letters I write unto you with mine own hand." Now all that is the human background of this work of bringing the saints to maturity.

Maturity demands that there shall be ever a lessening of the human element, the natural element of the flesh, of our own strength, our own wisdom, our own competence, our own self-reliance. We must be brought down, so that we cry to God: “Do not allow us to be brought into things unless Thou art going to do them”. When you get there, you are in the way of being a vessel unto the maturing of the saints. It is true that the more there is of us the less there will be of Christ through us to others; the less there is of us the more there can be of Christ through us to others. It is the way of maturity. That is what is meant by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

What is the nature of our revelation of Jesus Christ? We have found Him our strength in weakness; we have found Him our life in death; we have found Him our wisdom in difficulty, in problem, in mental defeat; we have found Him our rest in trouble, our joy in sorrow. We have found Him. It is the revelation of Jesus Christ to us by the Holy Spirit. That is the way of growth. That is the way of a ministry of growth. This is emancipation, this is liberty, this is life-union with the living person by revelation of the Holy Spirit. Paul shows that there are a good many other things which come out of this revelation. There is deliverance from the flesh along this line. You remember he cried, as recorded at the end of chapter 7 of his letter to the Romans: “O wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Deliverance is through our Lord Jesus Christ: “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Now Paul says to these Galatians, “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts”; they are delivered from the flesh by revelation of Jesus Christ. “I thank God…”; I see the way out; it is through Jesus Christ. He sets this over against the law. How did they, under the law, hope to get deliverance from the flesh? By all kinds of rites, and ceremonies, and forms, and religious practices, and observances, by the “Thou shalt”, and, “Thou shalt not”; and it never came. When the Holy Spirit reveals the Lord Jesus there is that deliverance. There is no spiritual growth and fullness until there is the deliverance from the bondage and tyranny of the flesh.

Now that requires a great deal more time than we can give to it at the moment, but we have so often said that if we really do see the Lord Jesus, the one in whom the whole question of sin was fought and finally defeated, and the power of the flesh was entirely overcome by the power of the Spirit; and we see Him because of the full, complete triumph which took place in Him over the flesh by the Spirit at God’s right hand, there is a virtue in what He is there for us as victory over the flesh. We gather round the Lord’s Table and eat and drink of

symbols of His Body and His Blood. What does that mean? It is an act of faith that we take Him to be our life down here. This Blood is the incorruptible life of the Lord Jesus, sinless, deathless. It is for me down here now until my work is done, to maintain me in the midst of these conditions. There is a living Lord to minister to me, to maintain me against the working of infirmity until God has finished with the vessel. There is something in Jesus Christ for our deliverance now from the working of all the old creation.

Let us pray on the ground of His victorious humanity, and let us live on the basis of His victorious humanity; He is there for us. All the virtue of what He is in glory is to be ministered to us by the Holy Spirit now. By revelation of Jesus Christ we are delivered from the law, from the flesh, yes, from all things. If you do not understand that, nevertheless it is important and valuable. Ask the Lord to make it so for His glory.

Chapter 7 - The Place and Work of the Holy Spirit

There is one line running right through this letter to the Galatians which seems to reveal perhaps the main factor in spiritual growth: the place and work of the Holy Spirit. We should do well if we were to follow that line through at this time. There are some thirteen references to the Holy Spirit in the letter. We shall not refer to them all, but confine ourselves to several quite distinct features or factors connected therewith.

It is quite clear from this letter, and, of course, from other parts of the Word, that the Holy Spirit is essential and basic to the realising of all the purposes of God in the individual believer and in the church. It may help us to come to quite a simple presentation of that truth as it is unfolded in this letter.

The Receiving of the Spirit

In this connection read chapter 3:1-2: “O foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth crucified? This only would I learn from you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”

Those words in verse 2 touch the matter right at the beginning in the simplest, most elementary form. They have to do with the receiving of the Spirit. We must pause for a moment to recollect the connection between this interrogation and the whole purpose of the letter. It would seem that the apostle is doing something like this. He is saying, “Now you Galatians responded to the message of the gospel, and in doing so you made a tremendous move from one realm to another. You came right out of that whole pagan realm with its externalities of religious observance, all its practices. You forsook all, and you took the position of simple, definite faith in the Lord Jesus. When you did so, the seal of your acceptance, the seal upon your faith attitude, the mark which God gave that you were a new creation in Christ, was that you received the Holy Spirit; and you received the Holy Spirit from God, that all God’s purpose in you should be realised, now that you had come into a living relationship with Him in His Son, Jesus Christ. That receiving of the Holy Spirit was basic and all-inclusive. It was

the seal, the earnest, the guarantee. With the Holy Spirit you had the assurance of everything, you had the dynamic of everything; there was nothing more to be anxious about. Receiving the Spirit, the inheritance is secured unto you, you are sealed. It was a tremendous thing for you to receive the Holy Spirit, because it meant that God had started His work and had got the ground in you for carrying His work right through to completion. Yes, the Holy Spirit was everything for the purposes of God."

"How then did you receive the Spirit? You know quite well that you did not receive the Spirit by all your religious observances in paganism; they never got you through to that. It was when, upon hearing the message of the gospel concerning God's Son, you stepped out of that whole system of religious activities by a definite act of faith, and reposed your trust in the Lord Jesus. It was then that you received the Holy Spirit, 'not by works of law'." (You must drop out the article there. The margin corrects it. It is, "by works of law". There was the pagan law, just as there was the Mosaic law.) "It was not by works of law in your pagan religion that you received the Spirit, but by hearing the message of faith. It was a tremendous thing for you to receive the Holy Spirit; everything was included".

"Here are these Judaisers, coming along and telling you that you must observe the Mosaic law; that you must come back, not to your pagan law, but to Jewish law. To give heed to them is to be in danger of going back behind the Holy Spirit, back behind the gift of the Holy Spirit, back on to a ground which never issued in your receiving the Spirit".

Now that is the connection of the question. You can see how big a question it is, how much is involved. Thus the simple fact is the point for the moment. The receiving of the Holy Spirit includes all that God intends as to purpose, and power to realise that purpose; and all the light, and the guidance, and the knowledge, and the understanding, and everything that will bring about spiritual maturity unto God's end, is with the Holy Spirit. Receive the Spirit and you have all that in Him. It has to be worked out, but there it is. There is no work or effort of any kind whatsoever on our part bound up with our receiving the Holy Spirit. That is basic. We receive the Holy Spirit on exactly the same ground and basis as we receive justification, as we receive forgiveness, and that is by faith in the Lord Jesus, the hearing of faith, the message of faith. How did we receive forgiveness? We know that we never got forgiveness by struggling after it, or by working for it. How did we come into the blessed place of the justified? Never

by any works of ours, but by faith in the grace of God. Not until we came to that position of simple, positive and definite faith in the grace of God in Jesus Christ did we receive forgiveness and justification. In exactly the same way we receive the Holy Spirit. That makes the beginning of this thing very simple: too simple for a great many people; too simple for this active, practical disposition of ours.

We do so often find ourselves in the attitude and position and state of mind that we must somehow do something in order to receive the Holy Spirit. Well, let us give heed to the apostle's challenge. The Holy Spirit is basic and all-inclusive for the purpose of God, you can have nothing greater. With the Holy Spirit you have everything, and all that on the simple, definite act of faith in the grace of God. We must remember that just as eternal life is spoken of as the gift of God to faith, so the Holy Spirit is also spoken of as the gift of God to faith. When you had forgiveness through the exercise of definite faith, did God give you instantly the witness that you had forgiveness, that you were a new creation? Were you not put to the test as to whether it was really faith or feeling? Were you not compelled to stand your ground very often without a sensation? "God for Christ's sake has forgiven you your sin, has justified you, has imputed unto you Christ's righteousness, has accepted you". Against a good deal of challenging you had to hold that ground. You found everything rising up to deny it, but faith called into operation became the ground of the ultimate assurance and the life which has issued therefrom, that you today know you are the Lord's. In exactly the same way the Holy Spirit is received, not in sensation, not in feeling, but in faith.

That is very elementary, but that is where the letter begins in this matter of the Holy Spirit, and you see what a lot is bound up with it. We have spent all this time in these meditations stressing the tremendous issue involved in that. How far-reaching this matter is! How heaven and hell are locked in a terrific conflict in relation to these souls, in relation to God's full purpose, and how the soul of the apostle is in travail because of the issues involved! Now right at the outset all that is brought to hang upon the simple yet definite receiving of the Holy Spirit. If you have truly recognised the ground upon which God gives the Holy Spirit you can never return to law, the law of carnal commandments contained in ordinances; you can never return to any ground of works; you can never return to any place where the externals of religion become the ground of your acceptance with God. It begins in faith, and it goes on in faith.

Let us recognise that everything begins with its beginning, everything hangs

upon the first thing, and perhaps it is often necessary even for veterans in Christ to return to their beginnings. I am not sure that the next point does not find us out.

Continuing in the Spirit

“Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh?” (verse 3).

The margin renders it thus: “Do you now make an end in the flesh?” Having begun in the Spirit are you going to reach the end in the flesh? The apostle says quite clearly that the whole life has to be sustained and maintained by the Holy Spirit through faith, just as the beginning had to be made through faith in the Holy Spirit. The fact is that we do not change our position from one of abject need to one of personal ability when we become children of God. Having received the Spirit by faith, and having become the children of God, we are no more competent in ourselves to go on than we were to make a start. It is no more possible for us to reach the end now in ourselves than it was for us to make the beginning in ourselves. To change the basis at a subsequent point of time to the beginning will prove fatal. That is what happened here. The word to us, therefore, is that just as we made the beginning by the Spirit through faith, so shall we reach the end, and only so shall we reach the end; by the Spirit through faith. The Spirit has to do every bit of it, and we cannot do one fragment. Our only position is one of abiding faith in the Holy Spirit to carry it through to an end. But, seeing that, that is how it is done. There is not a fragment that God presents to us relative to all His full purpose but what the Holy Spirit given to us, is given for the purpose of making that real and actual, and not one fragment of it all can ever become real and actual apart from the Holy Spirit.

Now what is presented to you? A standard that is too high? Oh, that is far too high a standard, that is an ideal to which we can never attain, it is a life beyond us! It is all very wonderful, but it is not for simple folk like ourselves! Is that how you talk? Do you realise what you are doing? You are guilty, on the one hand, of unbelief, and you are setting at naught the Spirit of God. If God has set before us any goal, no matter how high, how great, how wonderful, then the gift of the Holy Spirit is to the end that we should reach that goal and not fail in one fragment of all the divine will and purpose. So our attitude should not be: “It is not too much for me; it is not too high, too great, too wonderful”; our attitude should be: “I have the Spirit, He can do it; I trust the Spirit implicitly to make it

all good". We start in the Spirit and we go on in the Spirit; we cannot reach the end in the flesh. We can no more maintain our life than we can start it. It is with the Spirit.

The Spirit and Power for Service

"He therefore that supplieth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Gal. 3:5).

The Revised Version margin says, "…doeth he it by works of law, or by the message of faith?" Here we come beyond the beginning of the Christian life, and beyond the question of the maintenance of the Christian life, to that of service, and of power for service. What is the basis? I think there is no more helpful way in which this could be put than the way in which it is put here: "He therefore that supplieth to you the Spirit, and worketh… among you". This, of course, refers to the Lord. The Lord supplies the Spirit to you, and works among you. It is the working power of the Holy Spirit in you and amongst you, that work of God, which is the evidence of His presence in service. He supplieth the Spirit: and in what way? How are we to find power for service? In what way shall we receive it? By nothing whatever that we can do. Oh, how many people are doing something to get power for service; doing lots of things very energetically, very patiently, with all the strength of their mind, in order that there may be the manifestation of God's power. They are making a tremendously strenuous business of it, and that is always a very dangerous thing to do. Here the apostle says that power in service is on exactly the same basis as the two previous questions we have dealt with, namely, that of the Holy Spirit as the seal of our acceptance, and of the Holy Spirit as the means of our maintenance. The Lord does not supply the Spirit in response to any energetic exercises of ours; He supplies the Spirit in response to faith, the same kind of faith as we exercised for our salvation, and as we are called upon to exercise in relation to reaching God's end.

The workings of the Spirit amongst us are gifts, and the Spirit is supplied through faith. Do you realise that? It will save us a lot of trouble, a lot of stress, and it may save us from a good many deceptions; for if there is one thing patent it is this, that a terrific soul-stress, soul-projecting, soul-concentration upon receiving power for service, is responded to by other powers, whose very vehicle of expression is our soul. We get the psychical in service, psychical powers and manifestations by other spirits, through this tremendous outgoing of soul-force

in relation to power for service. It is a very dangerous thing. Perhaps we have touched something with which we should not go further, but it is a matter of much exercise of our hearts in these days to see how Satan is governing the world along that line. If you want the explanation of dictatorships it cannot be found in the natural realm. They are not men who are naturally capable of doing what they are doing. Their early life finds them as nonentities, something at a discount, and here they have come to be world factors with marvellous powers and phenomenal influence over the masses, so that they literally control and hold nations as slaves in their own hand. You look at their history and you find that it is the history of a projecting with unspeakable intensity of their own soul-force, providing the very platform upon which the powers of evil alight to carry out the work of Satan.

Now that is in the wide range, but you find this in what are called spiritual realms too. People begin to concentrate or project their souls upon spiritual things, and you get a manifestation of a false Holy Spirit, signs and wonders. It is psychical, and satanic through the psychical. The question of power is much simpler than that. “He that supplieth the Spirit and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of law, or by the hearing of faith?” Is your exercise and effort on the basis of what you do, or on the basis of faith? Power for service is on the basis of faith. It brings faith into a place of tremendous prominence and importance, but it shows that it is the Holy Spirit keeping things in His hands, and not putting them into our hands, not letting go to us. It is His work, not ours.

Let us cherish that little fragment, “He that ministereth (or, He that supplieth) the Spirit”. It is the Lord who does it, and He does so in response to faith.

The Spirit and the Inheritance

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith”. (verses 13-14).

This is a very wonderful statement. The blessing of Abraham in Christ is for us. It is a tremendous thing that we who are Gentiles should receive in Christ this blessing. This promise has two parts to its fulfilment: firstly, They that are of faith are Abraham’s seed. Christ is Abraham’s seed. “He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one. And to thy seed, which is Christ.” Thus faith makes us

one with Christ as Abraham's seed to receive the covenant promise. The second part to its fulfilment is, "That we might receive the promise of the Spirit…" So that the Holy Spirit in the fullest sense is secured unto us in Abraham through faith. The receiving of the Spirit embraces all the promises in Christ; for, "How many soever be the promises of God, in him is the yea: wherefore also through him is the amen, unto the glory of God by us." How far-reaching this promise to Abraham was is hinted at in Romans 4:13: "For not through the law was the promise to Abraham or to his seed, that he should be heir of the world, but through the righteousness of faith".

How is the promise that he should be heir of the world to be fulfilled? In Christ. By what means? By the Holy Spirit. Thus in Christ, by the Holy Spirit, we come into that which was first promised to Abraham, namely, the possession of the world. It is a wonderful thing. We are getting the purpose in view through the Holy Spirit. We are moving from beginnings, step by step. The progressiveness of things in this letter is remarkable. Here we come right in full view of the purpose: "heir of the world". The covenant was with Abraham; the covenant was fulfilled in Christ; the means by which the covenant is made good is the Holy Spirit, and we are the receivers of the Spirit. What, then, do we receive? The promise of heirship to the world, inheritance in the ages to come. Elsewhere the apostle speaks of the Holy Spirit as the earnest of our inheritance. "That he should be heir of the world"! How great a promise that is, and we are partakers of it.

How are we going to inherit the world? God has called us to that. How are we going to enter into it? By works of law, by efforts of our own, by our external activities of a religious kind? No, we must come back again to the simple foundation of faith. The Holy Spirit has come to bring us into that inheritance. The inhabited earth to come shall be placed under man according to God's mind, and that is the issue of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Oh, Lord, it is a great thought, too wonderful for us, that we should inherit the world, that we should reign over the earth, that we should be in governmental union with Christ in world dominion in the ages to come. Can it be? The Lord answers, I have given you the Holy Spirit, and He is the earnest of it. You put faith in Him, and He will bring it to pass.

World dominion is not such a strenuous thing, after all, as it is made out to be. It is a question of faith in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the sum of all the

promises, and all the blessings made and promised to Abraham.

The Witness of the Spirit

“And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father”. (Galatians 4:6).

Here is the progressiveness in view again. We have seen the end, the inheritance. Who are they that inherit? Heirs. Who are heirs? Sons, firstborn sons. How are we constituted sons, and therefore heirs? He has sent forth His Spirit into our hearts, the Spirit of His Son who is the heir of all things. When the Holy Spirit constitutes that cry in our hearts, “Father”, that very expression, as born in us of the Holy Spirit relates to the inheritance. It not only signifies that we are in the family, it relates to the inheritance. It is the Spirit of sonship. This is not the sonship of regeneration, but it is the sonship of full union with Christ and all that this means.

Walking by the Spirit

“But I say, Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh”. (Gal. 5:16).

You see how all this is linked with spiritual maturity, full growth. Here is the whole secret of sanctification. I say, Face your besetments manfully, and wrestle with them courageously, and set yourself not to be beaten by them, but to master them! What poor advice, what tragedy is linked with such a course. It is much simpler than that. “Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh”. Oh, to give men something stronger! Yes, all right, here is something stronger: “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other; that ye may not do the things that ye would.” (verse 17). It just amounts to the question of who is the stronger, the Spirit of God or the flesh. Yes, the flesh lusteth against the Spirit. Is that a hopeful prospect for the flesh? No, for the Spirit is dead-set against the flesh, and working against it.

How does this work out to victory? The Spirit lusts against the flesh. You walk in the Spirit. What is it to walk in the Spirit? You take sides with the Holy Spirit, you cooperate with the Spirit, you let your exercise be in relation to the Holy Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. The Spirit will get the upper hand of the lusts of the flesh as you take sides with Him; not as you struggle and

fight against the lusts of the flesh, but as you cooperate with Him. It is only when you and I lean towards the flesh and take sides with it that we fail. There is present an energy and a power, and if we will deliberately take our place with that energy, that power, that person, there will be deliverance. It would be a hopeless thing otherwise, but that is the secret of sanctification, and that is the way of spiritual full-growth. The bringing in of the Holy Spirit there makes such a big difference. “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh…” I have an idea that instead of “and” the word should be “but”. If that is true it makes a lot of difference. It puts hope into the whole. Whether the word is there like that or not, the fact remains.

The Fruit of the Spirit

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control: against such there is no law”. (Gal. 5:22-23).

The peculiar form of those words must be noted. “The fruit (that is singular) of the Spirit is (then you get plurality) …” The correct grammatical form would be, The fruits of the Spirit are — The fruit of the Spirit is love, and love comprehends all the rest, and all the rest are love in expression in different forms. You can test that. If you really have the love of God in your heart, what do you have? You have joy, love exulting; peace, love trusting; longsuffering, love enduring; gentleness, the refinement of love; meekness, love, as someone has said, with a bowed head; goodness, love in action; temperance, love in restraint; faith, love confiding.

All these things are included in love. The fruit of the Spirit is love. If you want to know what love is, it is all there. This is the outworking of the Holy Spirit. Has this anything to do with maturity, faith, growth? Of course it has. Spiritual maturity comes by the Holy Spirit bearing His fruit in us. The fruit of love working out in joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, meekness, goodness, temperance, faith.

Persevering in the Spirit

“If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also walk”. (Gal. 5:25).

This is our voluntary and continual relationship with the Spirit actively. If we live by the Spirit — and from beginning to end it is all by the Spirit — then let

us also walk by the Spirit. It is a voluntary handing over to the Holy Spirit and going on with Him continually. After all, we have everything by the Spirit from start to finish. Seeing that it is so, let us go on with the Spirit. But notice, it is not a passive life, it is an active life, an exercised walk. The point is the Spirit seeks that we shall be of moral and spiritual character. It is not a question of His taking it all out of our hands, doing it all apart from us, so that we simply recline and say, “Well, we have the Spirit and we need not do or think anything about it, it is all going to be done for us”. Everything truly is by the Spirit in our life, but let us be active, not passive; let us walk by the Spirit. He is seeking to produce spiritual character, and that can only be through exercise, and our exercise must be towards the Holy Spirit, and as that is so we shall come to God’s end, full growth.

Chapter 8 - The Cross and Conformity to Christ

Reading: Romans 6.

"What we in glory soon shall be
It doth not yet appear;
But when our blessed Lord we see
We shall His image bear."
["Behold, What Love" by M.S. Sullivan]

The words upon which we have based our meditations correspond with those words. "The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God"; "Conformed to the image of his Son"; "We shall His image bear". We have covered a great deal of ground in connection with divine thought and purpose, passing through four of the letters of the apostle Paul.

In all of those letters there is one note struck upon which we have not dwelt particularly, although we have mentioned it from time to time, and it is that of the cross of Christ; and to go on from this time without recognising the place of the cross, in relation to God's purpose of conforming us to the image of His Son, would be to make the greatest of mistakes and to leave out the most fundamental thing. We will, therefore, briefly consider its place in these four letters of the apostle Paul, from Romans to Galatians. That does not mean that we are going to deal with every reference to the cross in each letter, but rather with the place given to it and its specific connection in each letter.

The Cross in Relation to Sin

It is quite clear that the place of the cross in the letter to the Romans is its relation to the whole question of sin, and until that matter is settled there is no prospect whatever of conformity to the image of God's Son. Now the terms used here make it abundantly plain that it is a matter which is settled once for all. It is something that is done at the beginning. But let us hasten to point out that it is not sins that are being dealt with. Sins are not the subject, but sin.

Leading up to this chapter the whole question of sin and righteousness has been under review, and there has been a search through the universe for righteousness in man as man's nature. That search has extended through the whole pagan world, and then to the whole Jewish world, and when all the ground of Jew and Gentile has been surveyed the verdict is that, not only is man not righteous, but that he is unrighteous by nature. "There is none righteous, no not one". So that all men are by nature included under unrighteousness. There is, therefore, no foundation upon which God can build His purpose; for God must have a foundation suited to that purpose. If it is His purpose that the image of His Son should be reproduced in men and women, in a creation, then the foundation thing surely must be righteousness; for that is where you begin with the character of Jesus Christ, the nature of Christ. It is a matter of righteousness. How, then, shall God provide Himself with an essential basis without which He is defeated in His purpose? God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and, related thus to the unrighteous race, He was made sin. He took the unrighteous nature of man upon Him in His cross, in a representative way, although in Himself there was no sin. But as the substitute and representative of a race that is condemned, judged and lying under death, He, as a racial, inclusive representative, died under the hand of divine judgment, and in Him the race was caused to die from God's standpoint. That is how God views it. In Him sin is dealt with, unrighteousness is put away. In His resurrection He was "raised from the dead by the glory of the Father". There is no glory except where there is righteousness. In His resurrection you have a representative righteous one, as in His death you have a representative unrighteous one. In His death He is offered a substitute for the sinner; in His resurrection He is presented a substitute for the believer, for the saint. Now the challenge is, Who is righteous?

The whole of the argument in this letter to the Romans, as you know, has to do with that righteousness which is by faith in Jesus Christ. That is, as to whether, on the one hand, we will exercise faith toward Jesus Christ as our substitute in death, in judgment, under the hand of God for destruction, and will lay our hands upon His head in faith and say, That is for me, for my sin, that is my judgment, my death; and on the other hand, as to whether, viewing Him as risen, with sin all done away, we will by faith lay our hands upon His head and say, This Righteous One is accepted for me, this one is my representative before God, His righteousness is mine. That is exercising faith in Jesus Christ and God accounts His righteousness ours, places it to our credit, and so the sin question is done away in the death and burial of the Lord Jesus. As we identify ourselves by faith with Him in death and burial, we are found where the whole body of sin is done

away, and then, as by faith we identify ourselves with Him in resurrection, the whole body of righteousness abounds, and we are accounted righteous by God.

That is the simple element of the gospel. You are familiar with that, but that is where God begins, and that is the foundation. In the cross the whole body of sin, that which was interfering with God in the realisation of His purpose, is put away from God's sight. God Himself has put it away, and God has brought in righteousness by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and in that way provided Himself with the ground upon which to take up His work, His purpose of conforming believers to the image of His Son.

It is important, then, for us to recognise that the whole sin question was settled, the whole body of sin was done away in Jesus Christ, and by faith accept that position, as also that the whole body of righteousness in Jesus Christ has been brought into view with God in resurrection, and that this is for such as will believe. We are accounted righteous before God by faith in Jesus Christ. Until that is settled we can get nowhere. While we have questions about that, God cannot go on with the conforming. That is why we said the question at issue is not that of sins but sin. We shall find, after that we have reached settlement on the matter, that there are elements of that old creation still about us, but that now God begins upon the basis of righteousness to deal with those, to conform us to the image of His Son, so that righteousness overcomes unrighteousness, and the nature of the Lord Jesus overcomes the old nature. But the essential beginning of God's operations is that we accept the whole as already accomplished in His Son, Jesus Christ. It is as though God were taking from the full and the final store which is in the person of His Son and making that good for us as we exercise faith in Him.

We need not say more about the letter to the Romans. It may be that some have not yet got past Romans 6. Well, the call is very clear, the position is unmistakable. The apostle says that this position can be taken in faith, and baptism is the way in which testimony is borne to the fact that we have taken that position. In our baptism we took the position of declaring that we were planted together with Him in His death, and are also united with Him in the likeness of His resurrection. That is where we begin. We have righteousness to begin with, God's essential foundation. If ever you get back behind that you arrest the work of God. If ever you have questions again about your standing before God on the basis of divine righteousness, you at once put God's hand from you in the conforming of you to the image of His Son, but while you take

that position of faith, God's hand can do it. Do not argue about it; do not have all sorts of questions about it; do not allow the mere psychological elements to come into it, which say, "Well, is this trying to make ourselves believe something, an endeavour to take a position which is not actual and real?" Because we mentally take that position it is as a kind of subjective fact in us. Do not allow all that realm to come in, for it will certainly do so if you allow it. If you will positively and definitely reckon yourself, with regard to the sinful body of the flesh, to have been taken to death in the person of Christ, and if you will positively and definitely by faith reckon Christ's righteousness as yours, then God says, I will make that good to you, and will go on working in you towards My full end. You do the reckoning, and I will do the working, God says. You operate in faith, and I will operate in work. Thus God works on the basis of a settled thing in our hearts through faith. It is possible that we shall meet everything that can counter this possibly, as did Luther, the great exponent of this very truth of the letter to the Romans. He was continuously pursued by the enemy, who sought to bring him again under accusation and condemnation, but he always cleared himself by a strong and positive affirmation, right in the very face of Satan, that in Christ no sin was attributed to him; he was righteous. Thus it was he found the victory. That is to be our position; not to argue with the devil but to tell him the truth: and this is the truth, that in Christ we are by God regarded as sinless. We must honour Christ as our representative.

The Cross and the Natural Man

We pass from Romans to the first letter to the Corinthians, and here in chapter 2 verse 2 we have our reference to the cross: "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified".

That is a definite resolution, a determination. When Paul says a thing like that, he has made up his mind to take a certain position, and we may be sure that he has very good reason for doing it. The reason is perfectly patent as you read this letter. Here were believers in the Lord Jesus, Christians, who were nevertheless bringing into their Christian life all the elements of nature. These elements are very many, as the letter discloses. They are seeking to live in relation to the Lord Jesus on a basis of natural life, natural wisdom (that is the subject of chapters 2 and 3), natural strength; nature's preferences, nature's likes and nature's dislikes. The apostle does not say that they are unregenerate. He calls them the Lord's people, but he says of them that they are carnal; that is, fleshly Christians. They talk as men naturally talk. They think as men naturally think. They desire and

choose, and select as do men naturally, and in every way they are doing what men do by nature. He sets that over against what men think, and say, and do, and feel, and desire, and select when spiritual. So he sets two men in opposition here, the natural man and the spiritual man. The one he calls the man of soul, the man of nature; the other he calls the man of spirit, the spiritual man. The word used for the latter is a very interesting word when you break it up — "pneumatikos" man. "Eikos" is likeness, form; an icon is a form, a likeness, an image. "Pneuma" is spirit. So that the word you have when you piece it together is "formed after the spirit", or "made suitable to what is spiritual". The other man is formed after nature, after the soul. Now that is why Paul determined not to know anything amongst them that was merely natural knowledge. That is to say, he was not coming down to their level, that everything should be known by natural ways on a natural basis. He saw that this was ruining the interests of the Lord in their life and destroying their testimony. Ah, but he knew this, that the cross of the Lord Jesus had not only dealt with the whole sin problem, but also with the whole problem of man himself. The natural-man question was settled as well as the sin question. In the death of the Lord Jesus, not only had man died as a sinner, but he had died as a man, a kind of being, a sort of creature who thinks like this, who speaks like this, who feels like this, who likes like this, who chooses like this. It is all according to nature, and in the cross of the Lord Jesus that man died, and in the resurrection of Jesus Christ another man, a man of spirit is brought in, who is spiritually minded, who thinks and desires and feels, not as natural men do, but as the Lord Jesus does: one who has the mind of Christ, who has the sensibilities of Christ, who has the inclinations of Christ, who has the tastes of Christ; and all that is so opposed to what you have here at Corinth.

The cross of the Lord Jesus, then, brings an end to a kind of man, namely, the natural man, and makes way for another man, a spiritual man. If you have any difficulties about that term "spiritual man" just remember the word means "one formed suitably to things spiritual". If you want to know what that is read on here: "Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God… he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things…" (1 Cor. 2:14-15). That is a man who is so constituted that by new divine faculties he is now capable of understanding divine things, and having communion with divine things, and living according to divine things. He is constituted, formed for that which is of God. The cross of the Lord Jesus cleaves between those two kinds of men. On the one hand it brings an end to the natural, and on the other hand it brings in the spiritual man. That is absolutely

essential to God's end. God can never reach His end of conforming us to the image of His Son on natural grounds, in a natural man. If you and I come down on to that carnal level of life, so that we are thinking, feeling, speaking, desiring, choosing and acting upon a natural basis, God can get nowhere with us. That has all to be brought to an end. We are to be fashioned after the Spirit and the spiritual, and then God's end lies full in view, conformity to the image of His Son.

The Cross, the Divide Between Two Creations

Now we pass to the second letter to the Corinthians, and we find our passage in chapter 5 verses 14-18. This is but an advance upon the position in the first letter. There we have seen that the cross brings in the spiritual man in the place of the natural man. The same thing is said here, but the matter is carried further, and enlarged. Its scope is now that of a whole creation. What is clearly before us here is this, that the individual believer through the cross of the Lord Jesus is constituted a new creation, a member of a spiritual creation, and that everything in this creation in a related way is spiritual; that is, there is a new race, and the natural relationships of all members of that new race are lifted up into the Spirit. The distinction is drawn between that which is after the flesh, and that which is after the Spirit; between anything that is according to the old creation and anything that is according to the new creation; and the cross stands between. "All died", says the apostle; but he says here that all died in Christ in relation to all others. Formerly we knew one another after the flesh, our relationships were carnal relationships, the relationships of an old creation, and we apprized one another according to old creation standards, we judged one another on an old creation basis, our relationships with one another were all along that level of nature, the old creation. Therefore, seeing we have all died in Christ, and have risen, on the new basis we no longer know one another after the flesh, but our relationships are brought into the Spirit; that is, we have been lifted into a new creation realm, into another creation and our fellowship has as its basis the fact that there is a new creation life in us. The fellowship of God's people would not exist five minutes if we were to drop on to the level of nature. It would be in fragments. What is it that holds the people of God together and makes up that very blessed fellowship which is one of the strongest testimonies to the victory of the cross of the Lord Jesus? It is the fact that they share one Spirit, a new creation life, where all is of God. The old things are passed away. We have to act on that basis. We have to adjust ourselves to it.

You notice that this second letter very clearly follows on the position of the first letter. In the first letter you have this: “Ye are carnal; and the proof that ye are carnal is this, that one says, I am of Paul! and another says, I am of Apollos! and another says, I am of Peter! When everyone says ‘I’, that proves ye are carnal”. Is not that the very hallmark of the old creation? All our relationships in the old creation do secretly seem to be gathered round the “I” interest; just where we figure in the matter; how the thing affects us; what we are going to gain or lose; our satisfaction. If a person in the old creation does not like us we just wash our hands of them and say, “Well, all right, it does not matter, you can go.” That is commonly how it affects us. If, on the other hand, people like us, then we hold these to ourselves. We like to be liked, and we have no interest in that which does not gratify that “I” in some form or another. It is shot through all our social relationships. It is shot through our commercial relationships. It is shot through the whole of the old creation. Somewhere you will find that “I” element which governs.

The apostle says that the cross of the Lord Jesus has brought an end to that, and our relationships are on a new basis altogether. No longer are the personal benefits from our relationships our consideration, but we know one another after the Spirit, and minister Christ to one another. You are no longer an object upon which I fasten my attention in order to get some benefit from you; my attention is directed towards you in order that I may be of help to you, may minister to you. You hate me; I love you all the more. You work against me; I will pray for you. That is the line of the new creation. It is a different kind of thing. Henceforth we know no man after the flesh.

I am not saying that we always live up to that level, but I am saying that is God’s way of conforming to the image of His Son, and when you and I feel that the attitudes of others against us are tending to provoke us to revenge, we have to bring it to the cross, and say, Calvary forbids that. Whenever there is a provoking of what is of the old creation, we have at once to flee to the cross and see to it that it is dealt with then and there: for Calvary means that one died for all, therefore all died, and henceforth we know no man after the flesh.

The Cross and Two Spheres or Modes of Life

We will close with a word on Galatians. What a lot there is in Galatians on the cross. As we have said, there are four great references to the cross in the letter. Of these one passage is especially familiar to us: “For I through the law died

unto the law, that I might live unto God. I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me; and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me". (Gal. 2:19-20). The cross of the Lord Jesus, in which I have been crucified! What is the connection of the cross there? It draws the line of distinction between two kinds of lives. You notice what the apostle is saying here. He is saying, in effect, "When I was under the law my quest was for life. I was reaching out for life. I wanted to live before God. I wanted to know what life in fellowship with God was, and in order to know that life of fellowship with God I pursued the law. I followed its injunctions minutely and carefully, I devoted myself to all its commands and its claims. When the law said again and again, 'Thou shalt not', I sought to conform that I might know; and when the law said repeatedly 'Thou shalt', I did all that I could to see that I followed the law. But in my devotion to the law, as that law loomed before me and set such a standard, I discovered that the life in me was contrary to that law. The kind of life that was in me could not correspond with that law, but was always working to the contrary, so that the law became a burden I could not bear, something which ground me down. Instead of saving me, it only made me feel how bad I was. Instead of bringing into life, it only made death a greater reality, because of the life that was in me. I had not the life in me that could reach to the end for which I was seeking, and stand up to God's requirements. The law awoke and I died. How was I to be saved? I shall only be saved if there is another life put into me. If another life is put in me then I shall not need to be told, 'Thou shalt', and, 'Thou shalt not'. I shall have another standard altogether. If only I could have God's life then I should have God's nature, and no one need tell me, "Thou shalt", and, "Thou shalt not", and keep plying me with commandments. I should find that I had in me that which was of God Himself, another life, making everything possible". So the apostle saw the meaning of the cross. "The cross of Jesus Christ", he says, "meant the end of me in that old life, the end of that old very devoted life, that old life that could never get anywhere, that old life that could never stand up to God's requirements. I was crucified with Christ to that life, and therefore, when that life died I died to that realm of things, to that law. Over a dead man no law can operate. Thus through death I escaped the law. But now I live, and yet not I but Christ lives in me; a new life, divine life, Christ Himself lives in me. That is what the cross of Christ has done for me. I had a life which was entirely and utterly incapable of bringing me to any position of rest and satisfaction. It was a life which was no life at all. It was a living death, and I was kept conscious of the fact by the very presence of the law of God. Now, I died with Christ to that life, and died to that law, and I have been raised with

Christ, and it is Christ that lives in me now, and by the indwelling life of Jesus Christ I have come to know what Christ is".

It is life upon which the apostle is placing the emphasis here. "That life which I now live in the flesh (*THAT* life) I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me". Blessed be God, that is the way of deliverance, the way of emancipation, the way of victory.

We must mention the other three references without dwelling upon them very much. Galatians 3:13-14 so much corresponds to what we have just said, that it would be almost like a reiteration. It is part of the same argument. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith". Here you have through the cross of the Lord Jesus not only a new life but a new power, and that power is nothing other than the personal presence of the Holy Spirit in the life. We spent much time on that in our last meditation, and need say no more about it, but simply that if the Holy Spirit, God the Holy Ghost, is resident within us on the basis of our resurrection-union with Christ, on the basis of what the death of Christ meant, then all God's purpose is made wonderfully, livingly possible. The Holy Spirit resident within will surely be the power by which we shall come to God's end. This quite naturally works out to the next point in chapter 5 verse 24. "And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof".

Here is the cross again, and in this connection it tells us that those who have been crucified with Christ, those who have come into that union with Him in His death and His burial and His resurrection, have a new disposition, "have crucified the flesh with the passions and lusts thereof". They have a disposition against all such things, and have things which are according to Christ. It is a new disposition, or, if you like, a new nature.

Finally, in chapter 6 verse 14: "But 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".

It is interesting to notice the particular way in which the apostle speaks of the world here. That term is a very comprehensive term, and includes a very great deal. Here Paul gets right down to the spirit of the thing. You notice the context.

It is well for us to take account of it. “For not even they who receive circumcision do themselves keep the law; but they desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh” (verse 13).

What does the apostle mean? They want to say, See how many proselytes we are making! See how many followers and disciples we are getting! See how successful our movement is! See what a power we are becoming in the world! See all the marks of divine blessing resting upon us! The apostle says, That is worldliness in principle and spirit; that is the world. He sets over against this his own clear spiritual position. Do I seek glory of men? Do I seek to be well-pleasing to men? No! The world is crucified to me and I to the world. All that sort of thing does not weigh with me. What weighs with me is not whether my movement is successful, whether I am getting a lot of followers, whether there are all the manifestations outwardly of success; what weighs with me is the measure of Christ in those with whom I have to do. It is wonderful how this at the end of the letter comes right back upon these Galatians, and the whole object of the letter. We recall the words in which that object is summed up. “My little children, for whom I am again in travail, until Christ be formed in you”.

Christ formed in you, that is my concern, he says, that is what weighs with me, not extensiveness, not bigness, not popularity, not keeping in with the world so that it is said that this is a successful ministry, and a successful movement. That is worldliness. I am dead to all that. I am crucified with Christ to all that. The thing that matters is Christ, the measure of Christ in you.

You see how the world can creep in, and how worldly we can become almost imperceptibly by taking account of things outwardly; of how men will think and talk, what they will say, the attitude they will take, of the measure of our popularity, the talk of our success. That is all the world, says the apostle, the spirit of the world, that is how the world talks. Those are values in the eyes of the world, but not in the eyes of the risen Christ. In the new creation, on the resurrection side of the cross, one thing alone determines value, and that is, the measure of Christ in everything. Nothing else is of value at all, however big the thing may be, however popular it may be, however men may talk favourably of it; on the resurrection side that does not count a little bit. What counts is how much of Christ there is.

You and I in the cross of the Lord Jesus must come to the place where we are crucified to all those other elements. Ah, you may be unpopular, and the work be

very small; there may be no applause, and the world may despise, but in it all there may be something which is of Christ, and that is the thing upon which our hearts must be set. The Lord give us grace for that crucifixion. There are few things more difficult to bear than being despised; but He was despised and rejected of men. What a thing is in God's sight must be our standard. That is a resurrection standard. Now that is the victory of the cross. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ…"

So you see that at every point the cross is related to God's full end, conformity to the image of His Son. The Holy Spirit must maintain the cross in operation in us, and we must maintain our attitude and relationship with the cross, to keep the way open and clear for God's end, the image of His Son.