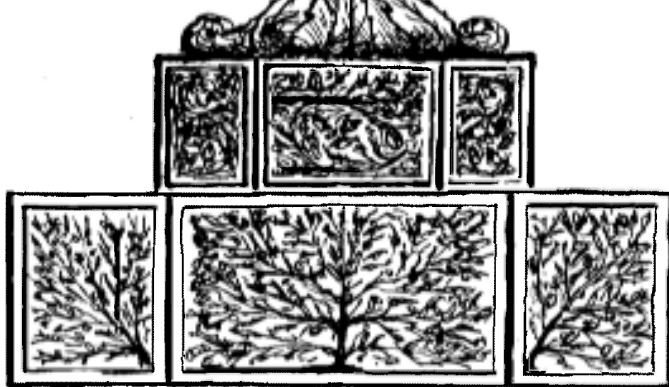


"A Candlestick of Pure Gold: of Deaten Work" Exodus 25. 31.

**A WITNESS  
AND  
A TESTIMONY**

"The Testimony of Jesus" Rev. 1. 9.



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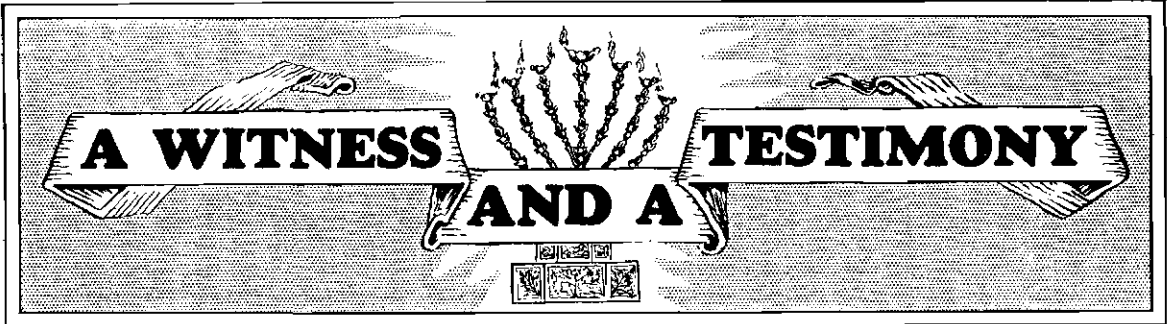
## THIS MINISTRY

**T**HE OBJECT OF THE MINISTRY of this little paper, issued bi-monthly, is to contribute to the Divine end which is presented in the words of Ephesians iv. 13—" . . . till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge (literally—*full knowledge*) of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we be no longer children . . . "

It is not connected with any 'Movement', 'Organization', 'Mission' or separate body of Christians, but is just a ministry to "all saints". Its going forth is with the prayer and hope that it will so result in a fuller measure of Christ, a richer and higher level of spiritual life, that, while bringing the Church of God into a growing approximation to His revealed will as to its 'attainment', it may be better qualified to be used of Him in testimony in the nations, and to the completing of its own number by the salvation of those yet to be added by the Lord.

This ministry is maintained by the Lord through the stewardship of those who value it. There is no 'subscription', but gifts can be sent to the Editor, 'A Witness and A Testimony', 13, Honor Oak Road, Forest Hill, London, S. E. 23, England. All cheques should be made payable to 'Witness and Testimony A/c'. The paper is sent only to those who personally desire it, and we count on friends to advise us if this is no longer the case, or if they change their address.

'Personal' letters should be addressed to  
Mr. T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.



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EDITORIAL

WHEN WE CANNOT SEE THE WAY

*"Thy way was in the sea, and thy paths in the great waters" (Psalm lxxvii. 19).*

You will notice that the above words are taken from one of the eleven Psalms bearing the name of Asaph. You will also know that "Asaph the seer" (II Chron. xxix. 30) was one of David's leaders of music; he was both choir-master and composer of words and music as well. But in this Psalm we meet the choir-master in doleful mood. He has lost his song and his music.

Asaph is deeply and heavily depressed; he is having a bad time. As he looks out on the situation (whatever it was), and contemplates his predicament, he goes deeper and deeper into the Slough of Despond, and begins to ask questions about God Himself—His mercy, His faithfulness, His kindness. The lights are all out along that street, and there is—apparently—no way out.

But, as is always the case with a true servant or child of God, there comes a point at which a reaction sets in.

The Sun will be found shining again and the song will return; but, as in the natural, so in the spiritual, the new day is first heralded by faint streaks of dawn, declaring that the turning-point between night and day has been reached. Verse 10 seems to be that point of crisis: "I said, This is my infirmity". 'This is really not the Lord. This is not the beginning and the end of the story. This is myself! I am making God after my own miserable image. I am reducing God to my own temperamental complexion.' We, too, may do that sort of thing, and indeed we often do. It may be very real. But, however real, we must always take account of our "infirmity", our constitutional or temperamental or dispositional limitation.

But even before that lifting of the eyes from the earth to a larger horizon, Asaph had taken a step toward the sunrise. "I call to remembrance my song in the night" (v. 6). By that, he did not mean that he would call to mind the fact that he had been more cheerful in the past, and would remember

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

that he had sung even in the night. It was not just the fact that he had sung; it was *what* he had sung. There was a night—either literal or spiritual—when, his eyes being held waking (v. 4), he had composed a song for the choir. What was the song about?

Well, what is all the *trouble* about? The focal point of, and the key to, the whole situation was this matter of a “way” (vv. 13, 19). No *Way!*

Asaph was saying, ‘In my song in the night I portrayed Israel’s dilemma and predicament at the Red Sea. Behind them the pursuing army of Pharaoh. On either side desert and mountains. Before them the deep and dark waters of the sea straddling their path. There was no way! The question was: ‘Where can God place His feet? There is no way, even for God.’ “Thy footsteps were not known” (v. 19).

‘Then’, says the leader of song, ‘I said that, sea or desert or mountains notwithstanding, God knows no embarrassment; He has to make no detours: He goes straight on and through, and the sea is as if it were not.’ “Thy way was in the sea, and thy paths in the great waters.” The Israelites knew no way for His feet, but He knew! The song that Asaph had once composed for others, now became the way of deliverance for the singer-poet himself. How often our ‘doubting castles’ have to be broken out of by applying to ourselves lessons that we have passed on to others—by believing our own beliefs! To call to remembrance—“I will remember”—may be the first streak of light for a new day.

How often has this same issue of a ‘way’ arisen in the history of God’s people, God’s servants, and God’s work! And Heaven—only Heaven—has had the answer. A prophet was confronted with such a situation, and his servant cried: “Alas, my master, how shall we do?” (II Kings vi. 15). But Heaven had the answer. So it was with a king—Hezekiah—when a mighty host compassed the city and cut off every way. Heaven had the answer! (II Chron. xxxii. 21, 22).

We are told that, just before the Church goes out, the nations will have no way out. In Luke xxi. 25, the Lord Jesus speaks of nations being “in perplexity”. The most literal meaning of the word is ‘without passage’, ‘having no way through’. How appropriate are those words to our time! But then the Lord said: “When these things begin to come to pass, look up . . . your redemption draweth nigh”—i.e., ‘*your way out is near*’.

It may be the sea of tribulation in the nations; it may be mighty waters of testing for the Church; but—

“*Thy WAY was in the sea, and thy PATHS in the great waters*”.

EDITOR

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 SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

“When . . . by the exercise of tact and sympathy, by prayer, spiritual power and sound wisdom, one Christian worker is able to influence and enlighten another, so that the latter . . . is led to alter one course and adopt another, that is true spiritual leadership.”

“The faculty of keeping an open mind until all the facts and circumstances bearing upon a question have been ascertained is by no means common, and yet for the right guidance and management of complex affairs, it is obviously essential.”

“. . . the practical point is . . . really men and women of prayer, deeply distrustful of their own judgment and impulses, only forming opinions and expressing them as taught and guided by the Holy Spirit. We come back to the holy and fundamental truth that it is the spiritual that is the practical.”

Extracts from *The Life of D. E. Hoste*. (C.I.M.)

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## THE ISRAEL OF GOD

## VII. THE OBJECT OF HIS TRAVAIL

**I**N this concluding message, beyond bringing forward a number of fragments from the Word of God, I shall do little more than make some statements, and leave the Lord to speak out of those statements Himself. The message itself will lie deeper than anything that can be said.

First of all, we will recall the passage that has been running through this whole series:

*"Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isaiah liii. 10, 11).*

Then:

*"Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? shall a nation be brought forth at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children" (Isaiah lxvi. 8).*

*"So the angel that talked with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts: I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy" (Zechariah i. 14).*

*"And the word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great fury" (Zechariah viii. 1, 2).*

*"But ye are come unto mount Zion" (Hebrews xii. 22).*

(Note those two statements: "I am jealous for Zion"; "Ye are come unto mount Zion".)

*"And he saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death . . . And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass away from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; remove this cup from me: howbeit not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark xiv. 34-36).*

*"Christ . . . loved the church, and gave himself up for it" (Ephesians v. 25).*

## ITS INFINITE VALUE TO GOD

All these passages, in principle and in ultimate meaning, relate to one thing. In them and by them

certain things, in themselves altogether inexpressible, incomprehensible, are somehow brought to our hearts. In the first place, you notice that they all have to do with the travailing love of God in Christ, the passion of God in Christ. Therein lies a mystery—the mystery of the infinite value of the object of His travail. There *must* be something that justifies it; there must be something of unspeakable preciousness to Him that would lead to this—the travail of His soul. "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death". "I am jealous for Zion with a great jealousy . . . I am jealous for her with great wrath". Because of this tearing of the heart of God to its very depths, something of infinite preciousness and value must be in view.

Of course this is all centred in the Cross, as we know. The Cross forms the link with that which is of eternal, supreme importance to the Son of God: it links with His inheritance in the saints. It is not some inanimate, insensate 'thing'; it is not that God has an objective interest in some *thing*. It is quite clear that a heart-relationship is here involved—the kind of thing that just tears your very being to pieces. It is as though this inheritance were a very part of Himself. That is borne out, as you will see, by these Scriptures. Not to have it would mean that a very part of Himself would be missing. It is a heart matter, a soul matter; it is something that touches all the sensibilities of God. The inheritance is, in fact, a *living* thing. Paul speaks of it as corresponding to the wife. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it"; and the law that governs the husband-wife relationship is: "And they twain shall become one flesh" (Matt. xix. 5). Divide them, and you tear apart and in pieces something that is one thing; and that is the relationship here. But, of course, such a character transcends any human analogy. We are here touching the eternal.

All this, then, about His love, His suffering, His travail, His anguish, at least implies, if it does not declare with a very loud voice, that the object of it all is of infinite value to Him. What is it? "He shall see *his seed* . . . He shall see of the travail of his soul". It is this of which we have been thinking all through these messages; this that is represented by that phrase, "his seed"—a people for Himself. It is beyond us, altogether beyond us. We might hear it, and have some kind of objective acceptance

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of it as truth—yes: but the wonder is that this comes right down to us—to you, to me. *We* are in this. It is a question of the infinite preciousness and value that you and I are to Him. I say, it is beyond us.

## OUR DIFFICULTY IN BELIEVING IT

That is one thing—I speak at least for myself over this—one thing that gives the greatest difficulty to believe when it comes to oneself. Is it not so? Perhaps there are two things, in the main, that constitute our difficulty in believing a thing like this.

The first is, just what we are in ourselves. We know something of ourselves—our sinfulness, our worthlessness. When it is really true, and not put on—not just language, not feigned or pretended, but really true—that we know our utter worthlessness, realise how abjectly worthless we are; and then we are told that all this is true, that it relates to and applies to *us*: ah, then we are presented with a problem; we are called upon to believe something that is not easy to believe! But I could take you through the Bible and show you how, after all, it is so. I wonder what you find the most comforting fragment in the Bible. May I tell you which I do? “Faithful is the saying . . . that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (I Tim. i. 15). It is brought right down to the personal. Yes, there are many comforting things in the Bible, but you cannot get deeper than that, you cannot get behind that. All this infinite passion and travail for such as we! The Bible says it! I said that I would simply make statements, without attempting to define or explain.

That is one reason why we find such difficulty in believing and accepting. The other probably is the mystery of God’s ways with us. So often, in the mystery of His ways, we are sorely tempted to wonder whether anything like this can be true. It may be true, we feel, of some people, but His ways with us do not seem to bear it out at all. A love like this? unto death? An estimate or valuation of a soul to this degree? Is that really borne out by these strange, mysterious dealings of God with us?—by these darkneses, these perplexities, these problems, these disappointments? Satan is always at our elbow to say, ‘That is not His love for you!’

I am not attempting to argue that out philosophically, or even from the Scripture; I am simply making the statement: *The Bible says . . .* Here it is! What is all this—this about the travail of His soul? What is it for? *His seed*. Who are His seed? *Those who have believed on Him unto eternal life*.

No more than that, no less than that. And they become enwrapped in this unspeakable thing—His soul’s travail. Oh, that we could believe it, at all times!—that you and I could believe that, behind all the mystery of His ways, the strangeness of His dealings, the bewilderment and perplexity as to what it is that He is after, there lies such a love as this!

That is the second thing—and, again, it is only a statement. But, oh! the infinite suffering behind our belonging to the Lord, the infinite suffering behind a soul’s salvation—a soul that might be yours or mine. What suffering! Peter draws this contrast: “Ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold . . . but”—here is the contrast—“with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (I Pet. i. 18, 19). As you know, the word ‘blood’ is a simile for ‘soul’. In biblical symbolism, the soul is in the blood (Lev. xvii. 11, mg.). And so, when He poured out His blood, He “poured out his soul unto death” (Is. liii. 12). His soul is set forth by Peter as something that is infinitely, transcendently more precious than gold or silver; and He has given that for our redemption! Behind your belonging to the Lord and my belonging to the Lord there lies that whole travail.

In saying this, I am trying to redeem this whole thing from cheapness. We have made our salvation too cheap and too easy; we have pulled it down to such a low level. We need to ponder the infinite cost and suffering which lies behind the salvation of one soul.

## CHRIST’S INFINITE LOVE FOR HIS OWN

Further, there is the infinite love which Christ has for His own when He has got them. Paul seems to make some tremendous statements. Sometimes they almost sound like exaggeration. “Who shall separate us from . . . the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus . . . ?” he asks (Rom. viii. 35, 39). He catalogues every conceivable thing that might be thought to be capable of doing that, and then, lumping them all together, he says: ‘Nay, I am persuaded that *none* of these things . . .’: in them all and over them all the love will triumph. The love that He has for those who are His own, when He has got them, is a tremendous thing, is it not? Sometimes we are prepared to believe, or inclined to think and accept, that the Gospel of our salvation is based upon all this in order to get us; but then, as we go on a bit further, we may sometimes feel tempted to wonder whether He still loves us as much now as He did at the beginning, whether

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He is still as concerned to have us now as He was then. I trust that that statement will not be misunderstood.

There is a wonderful picture of this in the Old Testament, in that Temple that Solomon built—perhaps the most magnificent structure that had ever been built up to his time. The predominant feature of that Temple was gold: everything was overlaid with gold: there was pure gold everywhere—gold, gold, over everything. It symbolizes the obtaining by the Lord, at last, of something that He had set His heart upon. At last the Lord has got that toward which He has been all the time working with His people: a place in which He can dwell. Now gold is always a figure of the Divine love; and so everywhere His dwelling-place is simply covered and smothered with gold. He has got what He wanted, and it is to Him exceedingly precious; and so He writes that preciousness everywhere, lavishly. Oh, the lavishness of that gold in the days of Solomon! It is just a picture of God's love for and in something long desired, when He has come into possession of it. No, His love does not change after He has come into possession. It is still the same.

#### THE INFINITE IMPORTANCE TO HIM OF THE CHURCH

So we are led to the next thing: the infinite importance attached by the Lord to His Church. The word 'Church' is only another title for that which is elsewhere referred to as His Temple, His Wife, His Bride. They are all in reality the same thing, and they all emphasize the infinite importance of the Church in the eyes of the Lord. There are many people, I fear, who think that 'Church' is 'teaching'. It is what they call 'Church teaching'. There is nothing that makes me shudder more than to hear people use that phrase, 'Church teaching'! I have even heard people speak about 'the Church teaching of Honor Oak'—'Church teaching'! The Lord pity us, the Lord save us! The Church is not a truth, it is not a teaching, it is not an idea. The Church is a Gethsemane—the Church is a bloody sweat. The Church is a Golgotha—the Church is the cry of a broken heart from the Cross, the pouring out of His soul unto death. The Church is the great sob of God in this universe.

I am not exaggerating; that is not just words. I could take you to the prophets, and show you from them that all that is true. Oh, go back to some of those prophets and hear them! Do you not hear the sob of God as they speak? "O Ephraim . . . O Judah . . . How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" (Hos. vi, 4, xi. 8). God is broken-hearted, just broken-hearted; and that broken heart is reflected

in the words of the prophets, as they cry and weep over the Lord's people, as an unfaithful bride, a wayward daughter, a prodigal son, a family repudiating the best of fathers. Do not talk about 'Church truth', 'Church teaching'—oh, no, "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it". "I am jealous for Zion"—that is only a title for the Church—"with great jealousy . . . with great wrath".

He loved the Church—there is an infinite importance to Him in His Church. Again I say, I cannot explain it; but there is the truth. Oh, that you and I might see *through* the truth and the doctrine and the teaching, to the *reality*, might see that *this* is the thing involved in that ruptured heart, in that agonized cry, in that sweating as it were great drops of blood. It is the Church that is involved. That is not a 'thing', not a 'theory', not a 'line of truth'. It is something tremendous.

#### THE INFINITE MOTIVE FOR OUR RESPONSE

What, then, does it lead to? Surely it leads, finally, to the infinite motive for our response to the Lord. To a first response, yes, for any who have never yet responded to Him: there is an infinite motive for your responding to Him—no less a motive than all this that we have seen. But then, there is the infinite motive for our own response—His own people's response to Him on all matters. Why should I settle any controversy with the Lord, why should I set aside my own personal interests, why should I do this and that? Why . . . ? In the light of all this, *why not?* ! Is there anything that can really be set against this? For going on with the Lord, for responding, being obedient, giving Him everything, we have an infinite motive.

And this is the infinite motive for service. Why should we give Him our life in service? Just for this reason. In the first days of the Moravian Brethren, when everything was so pure, so true, the Lord used them marvellously over this world. It was a wonderful thing that happened. At the Edinburgh Conference in 1910, John R. Mott said that, if the whole Christian Church had proceeded on the lines of the Moravian Brethren, the entire world would have been evangelized long ago. They had one missionary for every ten members of their fellowship. Yes, it was a wonderful story of sacrifice, of suffering, of giving themselves. What was the secret? They had a motto, which was written on everything and which they took with them wherever they went. It was this: 'To win for the Lamb that was slain the reward of His suffering.' That is the infinite motive—the reward of His suffering for the Lamb that was slain.

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I make the statement—that is all. It is something that is altogether beyond us; but this is what is here. That is the heart of Isaiah liii, and of all these other Scriptures. If this is true, He is not going to give us up easily; He is not going to abandon and forsake His purpose. He is going to return to it

again and again. He will say: "I am returned unto Zion" (Zech. viii. 3); He will come back again and again for what He has set His heart upon. But oh, may we have something of this same love of God shed abroad in our own hearts by the Holy Spirit.  
T. A-S.

(concluded)

## "COUNTED WORTHY OF THE KINGDOM"

(II Thessalonians i. 5)

*Reading: Daniel vii. 9-14; 21-27.*

SINCE the chapters of the book of Daniel are not in chronological order, we must believe that they have been arranged with a spiritual sequence. Those who know the Scriptural significance of the number seven will not be surprised to find that it is the seventh chapter which gives us a comprehensive and final meaning of it all. The first six chapters are concerned with narrative, describing for us the experiences through which God's servants passed or with which they were associated. What was the meaning of all these experiences? It is Chapter Seven which gives us the answer.

## THE COMING OF THE ETERNAL KINGDOM

In this chapter the 'judgment is set and the books are opened'. Everything comes under review in the light of eternity; everything is placed according to Divine values, the issue being nothing less than the Coming in glory of the Lord Jesus, and His possession of the universal Kingdom of God. "And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom . . ." (v. 14). If Daniel asked what was the objective of all his life's work and witness, or if we ask what is the goal of ours, the answer is the same. It is the crowning of Christ, His crowning as literally Lord of all. Whatever contributes to that end is vital and valuable to God; whatever has no relationship with that glorious end will really mean nothing at the final casting of accounts. This explains the sufferings of the saints, and justifies them; this is the inclusive purpose in every experience through which we have to go in the will of God.

We need to look closer at this matter of the setting up of God's eternal Kingdom. The One to whom it is committed by the 'Ancient of Days' (v. 9) is said to be 'like a Son of Man' (v. 13). We know that this means the Lord Jesus, for He Himself quoted this reference when answering the High Priest's charge (Matt. xxvi. 64). And He was

careful to use the correct title, i.e. 'The Son of Man'. This title emphasizes His representative capacity, and implies the existence of human sharers in His life and destiny. That others are called by grace to share His rule is not only borne out by much that is in the New Testament, but it is distinctly stated in the interpretation of Daniel's vision. "And the kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High" (v. 27); "and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom" (v. 22). This means, in other words, that the issue of this dispensation and of the ages is the committal of the Kingdom to 'saints' in association with their Lord, the 'Son of Man.'

CHARACTERISTICS OF THOSE WHO  
REIGN WITH CHRIST

This, then, is the answer to those who ask what is the meaning of all life's spiritual battles. The end in view is the return in glory of the Lord Jesus and the summons to suffering but triumphant saints to share with Him in the administration of the eternal Kingdom. There is abundant confirmation of this in the New Testament. Our present enquiry concerns what the book of Daniel can teach us with regard to those practical conditions of character and conduct which will capacitate us for this high calling. What has been leading up to the crowning day? If the seventh chapter gives us the climax, what have the first six to say in the light of it? We shall see that each of these six chapters has its own emphasis, and each seems to set forth an essential qualification for reigning with Christ.

## CHAPTER I. NON-DEFILEMENT

The key verse of this chapter is: ". . . Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself . . ." (v. 8). We need not consider the actual point at issue, for it is the spiritual principle which



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is being stressed, not the legalistic commandment. The Holy Spirit, working through our conscience, will make us know what is the Lord's will, and what is compromise or 'defilement'. He will make the matter clear, provided we already have a heart determination to be obedient at all costs.

Purity of spirit is fundamental. That is why it is dealt with in this first, foundational, chapter. A superficial reading might suggest that the actual matter was one of small importance, but there is an arresting statement at the end of the chapter which connects this first victory in his private life with the final triumph of the purposes of God for Jerusalem. "And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus" (v. 21). Daniel *continued*. He continued because he had begun in the right way. He continued on this same basis, maintaining this purity of spirit, and witnessed the triumphant climax. He continued even through much adversity, because he had a right relationship with the Lord. So many begin but do not continue.

Purity of spirit is possible. Daniel's experience proved this (vv. 9, 14, 16). He must have been tempted to doubt, as we often are; to reason that in this world of insincerity and compromise it is not always possible to keep true to one's highest ideals. His livelihood, his opportunities of usefulness and his standing with those in authority seemed to demand some sort of lowering of the standard. Others were doing it, and being blessed, so why not he? Such arguments are familiar in every age, to us as much as to him. Daniel, however, was not led astray by them, but made his simple, dignified request, and the Lord did not let him down. The impossible happened.

Purity of spirit is profitable. This seems to be one of the main lessons of this chapter—not only that one can be true to God, even in Babylon, but that it pays to be so. No one need pity Daniel, for his way of utterness proved to be a way of great blessing. He was "fairer . . . and fatter" (v. 15), he was "ten times better" (v. 20) than all the rest. There is nothing negative about devotion to the Lord, though at times to onlookers it may seem so. At the moment Daniel may appear to be a man of abstinence, but in the long run he can stand comparison with the best of them.

It may be helpful to repeat that this kind of decided committal is essential for those who wish to know what the will of God is. Many people are not in a position to judge what that will is, because they reserve to themselves the right to withhold obedience if the outcome is unacceptable—either to them or to others whose opinion they value. God has never promised to show us anything on these

terms. He does not give His guidance 'on approval'. The simple fact is that the Lord's children cannot know His will in certain cases because they are not prepared to give Him a prior undertaking that they are determined to obey the light when it is given.

## CHAPTER II. DISCRIMINATION

The second chapter enlarges on the subject of perception of the will of God, for spiritual intelligence is necessary for those who would reign with Christ. For our present purpose we are not concerned to identify or comment on the various empires. After all, the man of God has much more important concerns than those of history, geography or international politics. For him there are only two essential kingdoms: the kingdom of this world (and therefore of Satan), and the Kingdom of God's Son.

In the spiritual realm and in connection with the worship and service of God, what is the significance of the contrast between the image of human glory and the "stone . . . cut out without hands" (v. 34)? What is the kingdom that we are to beware of—the kingdom universally admired (or feared) but doomed to utter destruction? And what is the true Kingdom, undefined by man, but shaped in secret by God, to be revealed from Heaven and to inherit all things? Like Daniel, we need to know. And, like him, we may find that the knowledge is a matter of life or death.

Clearly this was a matter which required help from God. It was prayer, not study or discussion, which gave the revelation. Much emphasis is devoted to this point: so much so that the Lord is called the 'Revealer of Secrets' (v. 47). Since, then, this was no merely rational distinction which all could perceive, but a difference revealed by the Spirit in answer to prayer, we can exclude the obvious contrasts which are familiar to any observer. We are in search of an inward discrimination. What it amounts to is this: that the true Kingdom is not a human institution but a spiritual experience. The Church (in the sense in which the New Testament uses the term) is not an earthly institution but a heavenly organism. Something of this heavenly organism can sometimes be found within an institution, and, conversely, any group gathered on a spiritual basis can, alas, easily degenerate into another earthly institution. The Kingdom is primarily a nature, a spiritual experience. It is not just a case of being 'in' this heavenly kingdom, but also of having the kingdom 'in' us.

This should make us deeply dependent on the

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Holy Spirit, if we are to be saved from that other kingdom, the kingdom of man's glory, of earthly values and human arrangement, and if we are to be conformed to the Christ-like character of the Kingdom of Heaven. The discrimination is much more than theoretical. It is of supreme importance. It may decide our usefulness to God in eternal ages, and it will call for constant obedience every day in practical concerns.

### CHAPTER III. FAITHFULNESS

Here we see the practical implications of spiritual discernment. This is the chapter of the burning fiery furnace. The three men no longer had their leader, Daniel, to speak for them as in chapter one, or to impart light and understanding as in chapter two. They had to prove the Lord for themselves. Faith is intensely personal, and above all else the man who is called to the Kingdom must be a man of faith and faithfulness. Perhaps the key words of this chapter are: "But if not . . ." (v. 18). The chief concern of the man of faith is not his own well-being but the honour of the Lord's name. These men had great confidence in the Lord's ability to deliver them, but they were not allowing their conduct to be governed by the immediate outcome. God had revealed to them the reality of the eternal Kingdom as well as the frailty and doom of the earthly. They knew the truth, and the truth made them free.

Their souls were subjected to every test that man can devise, for Nebuchadnezzar had little to learn about mass psychology. The chapter takes pains to impress us with the imposing list of important personages as well as the constant effect of the musical instruments. Great names, majority decisions, popular movements, cheers and gibes and threats; all these were used, and still are, to make a few weak men realise how absurd it is to stand true to the Lord in a world like ours. Let us make no mistake, Satan did not want them thrown into the fiery furnace, nor does he want us to go into the fires. What he wanted, and what he still wants, is compromise, weakness, shame upon the Lord and conformity to the spirit of the world. The fiery furnace is only his instrument to force men into spiritual defeat. If they will accept his terms they can lead a quiet and comfortable life. Thousands of Jews probably proved this. The faithful minority, however, preferred the scorching flames to the shame of grieving their Lord, and they found that, after all, hell has no power against those who walk in fellowship with God's Son.

In some countries the threats may still be as

crude and harsh as they were in Babylon. Mostly, however, the flames are not literal ones, but faith still has to face the fiery trial, and it sometimes seems to us that the furnace has been heated seven times more than usual. The early Christians were told not to count such trials as strange things (I Pet. iv. 12). The strange thing from Heaven's viewpoint is when the Lord's people come to terms with the world in a sort of 'peaceful co-existence'. The early saints were also instructed as to the meaning of their sufferings: 'to the end that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer' (II Thess. i. 5). It would be a double tragedy, first to miss the precious companionship in the fires, and then to miss the glory of the Kingdom as well.

### CHAPTER IV. HUMILITY

The key verse here is: ". . . those that walk in pride he is able to abase" (v. 37). In this case it was not Daniel who passed through the experience, but Nebuchadnezzar. Nevertheless Daniel was a close observer of the whole incident, and by it he was shown how God deals with men in mercy. For mercy is an outstanding feature of this calamity—mercy and patience. How much easier it would have been for the Lord to have destroyed Nebuchadnezzar at one blow. Instead of that, He warned him, waited twelve months for him, dealt severely with him for seven years, and after all that was able to restore him to the throne. There would be little hope of a place in the Kingdom for any of us if God were not long-suffering, patient and persistent in His dealings with us.

We are not told that Nebuchadnezzar contemplated any special act of defiance. There is no suggestion of his boasting to an audience, as Herod later did. It may well be that he spoke arrogant words to himself as he walked around his palace. We do not know. We do know that it is into the heart that the Lord looks (I Sam. xvi. 7b), and that there can be no place in His eternal Kingdom for the proud in heart. It is as though the Lord were saying, Never again! The satanic kingdom began with pride of heart, and for that reason God is said to hate pride more than any other sin. Well may we ask, then, what He can do with us, for we are all proud by nature. He will have to do what He did with Nebuchadnezzar: humble us to the dust.

The king was warned. He was warned from Heaven, and the warning was reinforced by the earnest pleading of Daniel. So often it seems that speaking is somehow not enough, even when it is

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God who does the speaking. The human heart is so fixed in its pride, and so blinded by its own conceit, that it seems unable to profit by the lessons or warnings of others. So the Lord had to deal with Nebuchadnezzar—to handle him roughly, to strip him, to crush him, and to let the lesson be carried to the full limit—before the humbling work was really effective. And shall we claim to be any better? Peter, at any rate, had to be mercilessly sieved by Satan before he was of any use in the Kingdom of Heaven. Paul had to suffer the distress and humiliation of the ‘messenger of Satan’ (II Cor. xii. 7) to prevent him from becoming puffed up. So the emptying work is really due to the Lord’s loving wisdom and enduring mercy.

“He is able to abase.” This use of the phrase, ‘He is able’, does not sound so agreeable as the well-known words: “Our God . . . is able to deliver us” (iii. 17); but really it is just as wonderful—perhaps even more so. It is nothing to Almighty God to quench material fires, but it represents a great triumph to give men inward deliverance from themselves.

This chapter should comfort us. It should interpret some of those perplexing trials that seem to contradict His love and care. So often we do not learn by what we are told, and so we have to learn by suffering, by being taken down into the very depths to be purged of every contradiction to the Christ-like lowliness which is essential for the Kingdom. Even if we do not need correction we shall not be spared the suffering, for our meekness must be tested and proved, until we, like the Babylonian king, can truly confess: “All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing . . . and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (v. 35).

#### CHAPTER V. SOVEREIGNTY

“An excellent spirit” (v. 12) was found in Daniel. This story reveals, more than might be thought, how excellent that spirit was. The chapter is mainly remembered for its story of the folly of Belshazzar and his condemnation by the writing on the wall. It may be profitable, though, to look at it from Daniel’s standpoint, for it shows how marvellously God’s sovereignty worked to restore him to his position in Babylon, just—but only just—in time.

When the story began, Daniel was in obscurity. His former greatness was forgotten; his place of authority, gained only by his faithfulness to God, had been taken from him. Was this mere chance? Was it the work of intriguing enemies? One thing

is certain, and that is that so complete was his eclipse that, when the need arose for an interpreter, only the old Queen Mother thought of his name; and when the servant of God was brought into the royal presence, the king, not recognising him, had to ask: “Art thou that Daniel . . .?” No doubt it was typical of those capricious times that such a great man could so easily and so quickly sink into obscurity; but does this not remind us of other servants of the Lord who had to wait His time before they could enter on their ministry? Joseph languished, forgotten, in a prison; Moses spent forty years at the back of the wilderness (Ex. iii. 1; Acts vii. 30); Elijah had to hide for three and a half years (I Kings xvii. 3, xviii. 1; Jas. v. 17); John the Baptist was “in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel” (Luke i. 80); and nobody really knows where Saul of Tarsus was until Barnabas went and fetched him to Antioch (Acts ix. 30, xi. 25, 26).

All this seems to express a spiritual feature of those who serve in the Kingdom. They must prove that God is the God of resurrection, the One who can place them or reinstate them by His own wisdom and power. No true servant of God has to make a way for himself. He may seem for a time to be neglected or forgotten, in the wilderness or on the shelf. This is particularly painful when a man knows, like Daniel, that he has a work to do which no one else can do. The inactivity is most irksome, the obscurity painful to the flesh, the temptation to try to extricate or advance himself almost too great to bear. If, however, he is a servant of the living God, he must learn to rely only on his God’s sovereign power. Unhappily the Christian world is all too familiar with self-advertisement, appeals for influential help, doubtful place-seeking, fighting for personal rights, and the rest of it. Daniel was not that kind of man. If he was the Lord’s servant, then the Lord must reinstate him. It was not his responsibility to make his way or keep his position; that was his Master’s business. All he had to do was to beware of self-assertiveness and maintain his ‘excellent spirit’. And how right he was!

The story describes the amazing wisdom by which his recovery was brought about. Daniel assured Belshazzar that he neither desired favours nor sought a place, but the dissolute king insisted on clothing him with purple, putting a chain of gold about his neck and proclaiming him third ruler in the kingdom. It was his last act. That night he was slain. So that, only just in the nick of time, Daniel had been brought back to his place when the new dynasty took charge of the empire. It seems likely that Darius was glad enough to find such a man,

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and a foreigner at that, to govern the new dominion. The very next chapter reveals how quickly Daniel gained favour with this king. What a lesson this gives us in Divine sovereignty, and what a proof of how well the Lord is able to look after His own interests and His own servants, if they are prepared to wait only upon Him.

### CHAPTER VI. PREVAILING PRAYER

This brings us to the final chapter. It describes an incident which came towards the end of the prophet's long life. In actual chronological placing it seems to follow Chapter Nine, the chapter that deals with Daniel's intercessory prayer for the restoration of Jerusalem.

Doubtless the original time of humbling, confession and intercession was costly to Daniel. Such prayer is always costly. Yet, as is so often the case, the severest test came afterwards, as Daniel, with his windows ". . . open towards Jerusalem", sought three times a day to "continue stedfastly in prayer, watching therein with thanksgiving" (Col. iv. 2). Satan was determined to close that mouth, or at any rate to close those windows, and it was he who inspired the clever plot against Daniel with this end in view.

The plot failed. The prayer went on, and Daniel lived to see the answer in the reign of Cyrus (v. 28). This was done, not by any earthly position which Daniel held, but solely by his spiritual authority as a man in touch with the heavenly Throne. In his early life Daniel had been delivered from temptation by a fixed heart-determination to be true to his God. In his old age he was again delivered by the

same setness of purpose. He kept his eyes on the Divine purpose, and the Lord looked after him.

There is something deeply moving about his dignified ignoring of his enemies, as he "prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime" (v. 10). To his friends it must have seemed rather pathetic. What was one weak, lonely old man against "the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not" (v. 8)? Darius himself spent a miserable day and a worse night worrying about it. Daniel does not seem to have worried at all. He knew of a power greater than the law of the Medes and Persians: the power of the Name, used as a weapon in prevailing prayer. Those windows opened towards Jerusalem never were closed! Daniel never yielded. The Medo-Persian empire had to yield, the hungry lions had to yield, all the enemies had to yield, but he stood firm, and triumphed in simple faith.

This is the final picture given to us of one who was promised a place in the Kingdom (xii. 13). We see him now not as a prince of the seed royal, not as a leader, a seer, a public figure, a counsellor of kings, but just as a simple man. A man looking on in faith to the Divine objective. A man beset by many foes. But a man on his knees, a man convinced of the supreme importance of prayer. This is the kind of man we can all be; the kind we must be if we are to count for God. There are no dens of lions in our day, but there are many fierce and determined attempts to silence prevailing prayer. Big issues in the Kingdom may be decided by whether we capitulate or whether we win through. Thank God that the "God of Daniel" (v. 26) is still with us.

H. F.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE CHURCH, AND THE NATIONS

### II. THE PERSON, AND THE WORK, OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

AT the end of our introductory section, we asked the question: What is the ground of the Holy Spirit's work? For this should give us the answer to our previous question: Why, at a certain point in the early history of Christianity, was His work arrested? We must therefore now ask the further questions: Who is the Holy Spirit? and what is the Holy Spirit?

#### WHAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS NOT

First of all, what the Holy Spirit is *not*, and what the Holy Spirit did *not* come to do. Here, a very

serious error is to be avoided: that error of making the Holy Spirit impersonal, and making everything of the *effects* of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not, in the first place, an influence. He may exercise an influence, but in the first place He is not an influence. He is not, in the first place, a 'sense': we may sense Him, but He is not just a 'sense'. The Holy Spirit is not, in the first place, a 'principle', though He may work by principles. Nor is the Holy Spirit in the first place a 'power'. We are always in danger of making the 'effects' of the Holy Spirit everything. These things are just characteristics of the Holy Spirit.

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## WHAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS

The Holy Spirit Himself is a Person, just as truly a Person as are the Father and the Son. The Lord Jesus did not refer to the Holy Spirit as 'it'. Although the word for 'spirit' in the Greek is neuter, the Apostle John always reports the Lord Jesus as speaking of the Holy Spirit as 'He', in an emphatic way: "He, when he is come . . ."; "when he, the Spirit of truth, is come . . ." (John xvi. 8, 13). Now you may feel that this matter does not require such emphasis, that it is accepted and recognised by most evangelical Christians. But we can get into difficulty if we are not careful—if we put more upon the characteristics than upon the Person Himself. In the Person of the Holy Spirit we are reckoning with God Almighty. We may ask for spiritual sense, consciousness, light, wisdom, power, influence, but we must always keep in mind that what we are really seeking is this Divine Person Himself, who with the Father and the Son is one God. It is God present; it is as truly God present Himself in Person, as ever Jesus Himself was God present in Person.

If you go through the book of the Acts, you will see that neither in the Church nor outside of the Church were people having to do with some abstract thing—they were having to do with a present, living Person. To Ananias and Sapphira, Peter said: "Why hath Satan filled thy heart to *lie* to the Holy Spirit?" (Acts v. 2). You do not *lie* to an abstraction. It was like that in every connection: people were dealing with a living present Person—God Himself. When the Apostle spoke about strangers coming in to the assembly, and giving expression to their feelings, he did not say: 'They will say that there is some powerful influence here! I am conscious of a strange atmosphere here!' He said: 'They will say—*God* is in the midst of you!' (I Cor. xiv. 25). 'They will relate everything to God, and will say—It is God that I meet here!' It is a very important thing that the registration should be of none other than of God Himself. If that is true, there are far-reaching implications. The Holy Spirit is not an 'it'; He is a Person.

WHAT THE HOLY SPIRIT  
DID NOT COME TO DO

The Holy Spirit did *not* come to start a new religion. Let it be very carefully noted that Christianity was not a new religion. It was not something set up over against, or alongside of, other religions, so as to become a subject for the academic discipline of 'Comparative Religions'. It was quite

a long time before some of the leading apostles themselves realised the implications of their new position. They did not at once come to the conclusion that their Jewish religion, as such, was finished, and now they were in the 'Christian' religion. There was no such dividing line in their consciousness. The implication of their new position did not immediately dawn on them; it did not become clear-cut in a moment; they grew into it gradually. They found themselves moving in spirit in a certain direction—gradually moving away from something, feeling themselves to be more and more 'out of it'—out of something that they had been in—and more and more involved in something altogether other: but what this 'something' was, was not at first clear to them.

Think of Peter and the house of Cornelius. Peter was not at all clear as to the implications of this strange departure, this innovation of God. If Peter had had the idea that Judaism was now wound up and finished, and that Christianity had now come in to take its place, there would have been none of that battle in his heart over the Gentiles at all. In Jerusalem there were others, leading Apostles and elders, who took a very long time, if indeed they ever managed, to get quite clear on this matter. The Holy Spirit did not come to set up a new religion, called the 'Christian' religion. It is very important for us to recognise that.

The Holy Spirit did not come to launch a new 'movement' in this world. If that had been His object, then we should have found in this book records of committees, consultative and executive, being set up, and plans being laid for the evangelization of the world, with all its attendant machinery and organization. But the impressive thing about this whole book is that you never find anything like that as the basis upon which the work was initiated. No thought-out campaigns existed. The Apostles and their brethren were so often taken by surprise; they were compelled to do things that they had never thought of doing, nor ever intended to do; they found themselves altogether beyond their depth. Many things that they had planned never took place, or were set aside. No, it was not a new 'movement'—not a 'Movement' at all (spelt with a capital 'M')—that the Holy Spirit came to inaugurate.

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit did not come to inculcate a new 'teaching'. We need to be well informed and instructed on this matter. There is no ground whatever for asserting, there is nothing in the whole story upon which to rest an affirmation, that the Apostles went out into the world

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with 'the teaching of Jesus'. It may surprise you, even startle you, to hear that said. But there is absolutely nothing to warrant the notion that these men went out to spread 'the teaching of Jesus'—as though to say, 'Whatever Confucius may teach; whatever Buddha may teach; whatever the other great religious teachers or leaders or founders may teach, *this* is the "teaching" of Jesus.' That was not their idea at all, and that was not the Holy Spirit's idea. They were not in any way propagating a 'system of doctrine'.

Our New Testament 'teaching' was made necessary by what was 'happening'. All the things 'happened' before the explanation was given—the teaching came after the event. Things happened, and then explanations followed. It was not: Now, this is the 'teaching'—now go and put it into practice, constitute everything according to it; here is the teaching—therefore have everything conformed to 'it'. That would be the wrong way round. You do not get a New Testament church like that; you do not get a moving of the Holy Spirit like that. The Holy Spirit took things into His own hands, launched the Church right out into the deep, and landed it far beyond its own understanding and comprehension; and it was not until afterward that He raised up anointed or endowed men to teach the believers the meaning of their experiences, of what had happened to them. We have got to get things round the right way. Would that we could get back there—where the Holy Spirit *does* something, and we do not understand what He is doing, or what He means; and then we go to the Word and find—"This is that . . .!" (Acts ii. 16). *This* is the explanation—here in the Word of God!

Lastly, the Holy Spirit never came to make some 'thing', called 'the Church'. It is true that the Church was born on the Day of Pentecost. But here we need to get our ideas a little clearer, a little straightened out. Our mentality in relation to that word 'church' may be a bit confused. We may have an 'object' in view in our minds—a 'thing' called the church, or going by that name, among many others. But the Holy Spirit did not come to make a new 'thing' by the name of 'the church'.

## WHAT THE HOLY SPIRIT CAME TO DO

Now, if the Holy Spirit did not come for any of these things, what did He come for?

*The Holy Spirit came to reproduce Jesus Christ in the lives of men and women.* The Church is that or it is nothing; the teaching relates to that, or it

has no meaning. Any movement of the Spirit is in that direction, or we have entirely misunderstood. He came to reproduce the Lord Jesus in the lives of men and women! Everything has to be tested by that. All our activities and efforts and energies and expenditure; all our sacrifice and machinery, our movements and our teaching; everything that has become a part of 'Christianity' has to be tested by one rule: Is it resulting in the reproduction of Jesus Christ in the lives of men and women, so that it is demonstrated from heaven that Jesus is as truly here in this world now as ever He was in history? He should, indeed, be present here, not only as powerfully as then, but even more so, because He spoke of Himself as being limited until the Spirit came. He should be present, not only in works such as He did then, but, according to His own words, in "greater works than these" that believers should do, "because I go to the Father" (John xiv. 12: cf. vv. 16-18; ch. xvi. 7-15; Luke xii. 50).

That is how it was in those first thirty years; that was the thing that men everywhere realised. The presence of Christ was the great impress. "They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts iv. 13). That was why the believers were called 'Christ-ians'—'Christ-ones'! It was the only way of explaining. It is Christ! The Holy Spirit came for that. And if there is to be any continuation or repetition of those experiences, it will only be—it will *only* be—not merely through a belief in Jesus Christ, His Deity, His sinlessness, His atonement, as doctrines, but as by the Holy Spirit He is livingly present in us. In those early days it was just that: that, by the Holy Spirit, *Christ* was present in these believers in a mighty way. When you think or speak of being 'filled with the Spirit', what do you mean? What do we really mean by that expression? Well, what the New Testament means by being 'filled with the Spirit' is simply being filled with the Lord Jesus.

I will stop there for the moment. But we are now getting near to the meaning of the Holy Spirit: this is just the point where we move over into the real significance of Pentecost. It is, so to speak, the bringing of Christ back again, in a new mighty advent; not externally, this time, but inwardly. And I repeat that everything has to be judged according to that. Yes: when He has His place, the place that He ought to have, the measure that He ought to have, in His people, things will happen; they will happen as spontaneously and mightily as they did then. It is all resolved into the matter of Jesus being glorified!

T. A-S.

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## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S COMING AND PRESENCE

WE must now ask ourselves the question: Where, and to what, does God commit Himself? For this is not just theory; it is something very practical for every child of His. We all need to know God's committal of Himself to us as a reality. We are all intended, in God's purpose, for some reflection of His glory, some expression of Christ; and without the Holy Spirit we can do nothing, for we are nothing. We all need that which the Lord has for us, up to our measure, so that we are happy people, not those who are fumbling and defeated and dissatisfied, always having to rely on external things—meetings and so on—to keep going. Every one of us ought to *have* something—that measure of Christ which is His measure for us; so that, without any self-satisfaction, we have satisfied hearts, and the deep assurance of His peace that all is well.

### (I) GOD'S COMMITMENT TO HIS SON

To what does God commit Himself? First of all, He only commits Himself to Christ. You will remember the Scripture: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. iii. 17). The Apostle John tells us that the Baptist saw the Spirit, as a dove, not only descending upon Him, but also "abiding upon him" (John i. 32, 33). A little later, he tells us that: "He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for he giveth not the Spirit by measure"—that is, to the Son (John iii. 34). This means that God had wholly committed Himself to Christ. Jesus is the One whom God, without reserve, has anointed with His Spirit. The very word 'Christ' (like 'Messiah') means 'Anointed': it denotes 'the One who has the Spirit'. God only gives His Spirit to the Man of His delight. It is no good, then, for you or me to say, 'Oh Lord, do give me Thy Spirit'—that is, as ourselves. May we not have the Spirit? Yes, indeed: when we believe on Jesus, when we come into Christ, we do receive the Spirit, *but only because of Christ*. It is not to the old creation in Adam that God gives the Spirit.

Of course, we are always helped into the understanding of the reality by the illustrations in the Old Testament, and you will remember the passage in Exodus concerning the holy anointing oil. "Thou shalt make it a holy anointing oil, a perfume compounded after the art of the perfumer: it shall be an holy anointing oil . . . Upon the flesh of man shall it not be poured, neither shall ye make

any like it . . . it shall be holy unto you" (Ex. xxx. 25, 32). God does not give His Spirit to any man but Christ. But is it not wonderful that, when we come into the Man of His delight, the Holy Spirit comes? Moreover, not only the initial gift of the Holy Spirit—the new birth, the gift of eternal life—but every fuller measure of the Spirit, is now available to us in Christ. "All things are yours", because "ye are Christ's" (I Cor. iii. 21, 23).

### (II) GOD'S COMMITMENT TO THE CROSS

Secondly, God commits Himself only to the Cross. We have seen that, when David got right with God, God committed Himself; and we have read of the committal of God to that altar of Elijah. Herein lies a matter of great importance.

The Cross is the place where that which is wrong is removed—the place of the removal of sin. "The blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin . . . If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father" (I John i. 7; ii. 1). Where there is sin, there is no place for the Holy Spirit. Now, is it not true in experience, that, if there is something wrong between us and the Lord, or between us and another child of God, there is restraint—there is no life? The Holy Spirit just does not come in. But what a wonderful faithfulness the Holy Spirit shows, in not letting us off until we have put things right, because He wants to get His full place. And the only place where the wrong can be put right is the Cross, the altar.

And not only is the altar the place of the putting away of sin, it is the place of judgment of all that we are by nature. As we have seen, the Spirit cannot come upon man's flesh. What are we to do with man's flesh? Paul tells us that "they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof" (Gal. v. 24). Why is there not a tide of life in our personal experience, and in our life together? Why are there not rivers of living water? Why is there not salvation on the right hand and on the left? Because there is still something in our natures which the Lord has to break through: because there is so much 'self' in the way. We sing in our hymn: 'Break through my nature, mighty, heavenly Love'. But it does not all happen at once, does it? No, it happens bit by bit, and every real breaking of our nature is a big issue.

Even the letting go of something we think important, when God has said that it is not, may

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involve a tremendous crisis; we may make a great fuss about it. Suppose the Lord requires the giving up of a friendship that is not helpful: how often do people refuse, and argue that it must be all right. So, the Holy Spirit does not go on any further, and that life is bogged down. How then are we going to get through? Only by coming to the altar, and saying, 'Lord, even if it kills me, I am finished with this.' When that happens, something is released, and the Spirit has His way. Whether it is a small thing or a great thing, it will be only as the altar is continually applied in our lives that the Holy Spirit will have His way. The altar is not only one great crisis, it is a continual process in our lives; it is continually clearing the ground for God. Paul says: "I die daily" (I Cor. xv. 31); and, whatever else that means, it means a crucified life. It is where the Cross is a reality that the Holy Spirit is a reality; it is only where the Cross is working that the Holy Spirit will really be working.

You know, this explains many of those false experiences, that are sometimes called 'experiences of the Holy Spirit'. There are people who know nothing of the Cross, who get a kind of spurious 'blessing'. They may even have the experience of some power taking hold of them, and making them do things. But the end is going to be a tragedy, a crash, because the thing is false. It is only where the Cross has dealt with self-hood, in its pride and ambition and desire for something for itself, that the Holy Spirit begins quietly and steadily to take fuller possession of the life, until the fulfilment of that word is reached: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Rom. viii. 14); and that is a Spirit-governed life.

But there will never be a Spirit-governed life unless there is first a crucified life. How are we to make a way for Christ to be glorified in us by the Spirit? We have to face the crisis of the Cross. We must each one of us come there, and say: 'Lord, all that I am must go.' This is a big thing. Even my pride of Christian knowledge and grasp of Christian truth must go. So many of God's children are keenly interested in spiritual things, if we may put it that way. They are always thrilled about the latest thing they have read, and full of questions about it. They know all the language about the Cross, and much else: and yet all the time it is mere talk. When things are real, you know, you do not talk much about it: you have just got it. "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak" (Jas. i. 19). Do not let us trade in holy things; do not let us be glib in the deep things of God. The Cross must deal with our Christianity and our Christian mentalities, until it is not Christianity nor our

Christian ideas, but *Christ*. And Christ is a Man—a Person—full of grace and truth. We ought to meet grace and truth in one another: and truth is not just Bible doctrine—truth is reality, truth is the real measure of Christ in us. When the Lord turns the light on, how ashamed we are of ourselves! We just become aware of how much of it is theory. As we recognise this, and say, 'Lord, I do not want any more of this unreal self; I want everything to be really of Christ', the Holy Spirit will work by the Cross, and will begin to show us how it can be real.

## (III) GOD'S COMMITMENT TO THE CHURCH

God commits Himself, thirdly, to the Church. We all love that Psalm about 'brethren dwelling together in unity'—Psalm cxxxiii: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Yes, but what is it like? "It is like the precious oil upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard; that came down upon the skirt of his garments". As you look at that picture, you see one great Man, one glorious High Priest, and upon Him, without measure, the anointing. And then, because that anointing is on the Head, it is flowing down to the uttermost hem of His garments: it is as though every part of His Body, every remotest member, comes into the value of the anointing of the Head. We read in the Acts that, when the disciples were "all together in one place . . . suddenly . . . they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (ii. 1, 2, 4). It was not a question of 'I was filled', but of 'we were filled'; everybody forgot themselves. It was not a personal blessing; it was a corporate baptism.

This is, indeed, the only correct place in which we can use the word 'baptism' of the Holy Spirit. The only 'baptism of the Holy Spirit' in the New Testament is that which took place on the Day of Pentecost, because that was the day when there was a plunging, a baptizing, of those who were the Lord's into this new life in the Spirit. Of course, the Scriptures are very clear on this. Paul says: "In one Spirit were we all baptized into one body" (I Cor. xii. 13). Peter also, speaking of his experience at the house of Cornelius, said: "As I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, even as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost" (Acts xi. 15, 16). There was this one great plunging of the Church into this realm of the Spirit. After that, every believer, on being joined to



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Christ, becomes a partaker of the Holy Spirit. "We . . . were all made to drink of one Spirit" (I Cor. xii. 13). We come into our share of the Church's immersion in the Spirit. So that is the only correct and true way of using that expression.

There are other words also. We read, for instance, of being "filled with the Spirit" (Eph. v. 18). Now that is very important; it is not the same word. We will come back to it in a moment. But our immediate point is this—that God commits Himself to the Church. "He is the head of the body, the church . . . that in all things he might have the pre-eminence" (Col. i. 18). Because the Holy Spirit, the anointing, is upon Christ as Head, and because we are in Him, we are all partakers of the same Spirit, we are all in the same anointing. But perhaps you are thinking, 'Then what about my personal experience?' God has for us, as individuals, our share in the great anointing that is upon the Head, and for every member his own function in the Body, in virtue of that anointing; that is all. Every one has, by the Spirit, that which God intends for them.

And note—it is not necessarily what they would like. He sets the members in the Body as it pleases Him (I Cor. xii. 18). It is only safe for Him to commit Himself in the matter of our own personal function and usefulness in the Body, when our self-interest has gone; when we no longer want to have some wonderful gift, but just to be what He wants. Are we prepared even to be nothing? Of course, if the Lord has you, you will not be nothing, in the sense of being a useless cipher: you will be nothing in yourself, but there will be something of the Lord that is a blessing to everybody. You may only be a 'help' (I Cor. xii. 28), but a 'help' can be a great thing. You may only have a 'word of wisdom' (xii. 8), but it is great to have someone who lives so close to the Lord that they say just the thing that you need. It is not some great preacher, but someone quite ordinary: just one of the saints—possibly a young person.

How wonderful! the Lord really has something of Himself for each one of us. I believe that He wants us to stop straining after 'the blessing', or whatever it is we are worrying about or trying to get, and to say: 'Lord, I am in the Body, and I trust You to make me what You want.' Then He will say: 'That is all I want. You have the Spirit.'

#### GOVERNED AND FILLED BY THE SPIRIT

We close with a twofold emphasis. We have already touched upon the fact of the Spirit's in-

dwelling. Now, are you sure that you have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you? If you have been uncertain about that, and somebody has tried to make you claim Luke xi. 13, for instance, will you go to the Lord now and say: 'Lord, I am glad that the Holy Spirit is in me because I am Yours'. And if you have a doubt about it, because you are not sure that you are really born again, will you tell the Lord Jesus that you trust Him now to give you His Spirit, that you may be a real child of God: that you do believe on Him and receive Him into your life, and thereby, His Spirit. "The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. vi. 23). But if you are a believer, then thank Him that you have His Spirit.

The fact of the Spirit's indwelling leads on to me need for the Spirit's government: that is, for a life, first of all, of absolute committal to the Lord for His will. When, by faith, we take the position of full committal to the Lordship of Christ, the Holy Spirit will begin to do things in our lives and in our circumstances that will raise practical issues of obedience. So, the Spirit's government will be—not wonderful leadings and feelings and guidance—but the very practical matters of faith and obedience. Then, the Word of God will begin to be very practical with us, and not just something indefinite. If we want to know what God wants, we shall have to live by His Word: not just by looking for isolated bits of information, but by committing ourselves to a life which is in accord with its principles and laws. As we live close to the Lord, the Spirit will begin to show His government in our lives. He will place us, and fit us into His plan, as we trust Him.

Then, because the Holy Spirit is here that we "may be filled unto all the fulness of God", His word is: "Be filled with the Spirit", or 'Be filled in spirit' (Eph. iii. 19; v. 18). That means that we are to be committed to the Holy Spirit to fill every part of our being, and that we must draw continually—not just once but continually—upon the life of God.

Let us, then, respond to the fact that the Holy Spirit has been given. Let us come to the Cross, and there let go all the struggle of self, as well as the sinfulness of self; let us trust Him to put 'us' out of the way, so that Christ may be all; and then let us trust Him to take charge, to guide us into an ever-increasing knowledge of Christ, and to bring forth His fruit in our lives. We can never separate the Spirit from Christ; for, when the Spirit is come, He always seeks, in us and through us, to glorify Christ.

(concluded)

C. J. B. H.

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

## A SURE FOUNDATION

AT Jackson Minor's school there was a large workshop, usually called 'The Manual', where the lower forms spent two periods each week in practical training. It had several departments: Book-binding (not very interesting), Carpentry (all right if you were good at it), Wood and Metal Lathes (very popular) and also a Forge and small Foundry. One term Jackson Minor was given a chance to be one of the few who were allowed to work in the Foundry, and when the boys were asked what they intended to make he decided to cast a pair of dumb-bells. This was an artful choice, for, since a wooden pattern had first to be made, it also gave him the chance to use the wood lathe, a thing which he had been wanting to do for several terms but without success.

The first task was to draw the dumb-bell, in order to fix its dimensions. An unnecessary task, in the opinion of Jackson Minor, who was itching to get to work on the wood-turning. However, it had to be done, and to be passed by the Instructor, so that several weeks of term had passed before he actually had his many-sided block of wood turning away on the lathe. His friend, Forbes, warned him that wood-turning was not so easy as it looked. Of course he laughed at the warning, but when he saw how alarmingly the wood peeled off if he pressed too hard on the tool, and how difficult it was to make the handle the right shape, he soon realised that it was a slower job than he had expected. As a matter of fact he had to alter the drawing to suit the finished result, for the dumb-bell did not turn out quite as he had intended. The trouble about taking off shavings is that you cannot put them on again; the only remedy seems to be to trim up all round. So, what with getting it the right shape, and then smoothing and sand-papering it, a few more precious periods had slipped by before the time came for him to move into the Foundry.

Here, too, Jackson Minor found that there was quite a lot of preparation to be done before the molten metal could be poured into the mould. This mould consisted of two iron frames, which had to be packed tight with sand, and then placed together, with the wooden model half embedded in the lower and its other half protruding into the upper frame. It was not so easy to get this work of embedding done exactly, and particularly as there had to be a special lining of fine sand around the wooden dumb-bell. When he took the two frames apart, to

remove the wooden pattern, the sand started to crumble. It had not been packed tightly enough. So another week passed before he could get to work to set the mould in order again.

By this time Forbes was prophesying that term would be ended before the dumb-bells were cast. Although Jackson Minor had some equally biting retorts to his friend's sarcasm, he began at last to realise that it would be a near thing. So near that he finally admitted that it was too late to make a pair and that he would have to be content with one. This naturally gave his cronies plenty of subject matter for witty remarks about one-armed athletes, which only made Jackson Minor the more determined to produce at least one fine specimen of a cast-iron dumb-bell.

It was zero hour. One of the two furnaces had been heated up, the molten iron was ready for pouring, the perfectly prepared mould stood by on the floor of the Foundry, with its wooden pattern safely removed and a small channel made through the sand into the carefully shaped hole. Much to his regret Jackson Minor was not allowed to do the pouring. The Instructor thought it safer to do this himself. Jackson Minor, pink with excitement, stood by while the liquid metal was carefully poured into the mould. This was the moment for which he had worked and waited all the term.

But instead of a trim dumb-bell, all that he ever saw for his many weeks of labour was a nasty mixture of sand and metal and a gaping hole. The mould had been perfect, but instead of being placed on the concrete floor it had been put down on top of the grating of the other, unused, furnace. The grating was firm enough, but it was not solid. When the molten metal was poured into the sand, it was not properly supported, so that metal and sand broke away and fell through the bars of the grating. So, as we have said, all that Jackson Minor ever saw for that term's work was a mixture of sand and metal and a gaping hole.

All this goes to show how important it is to have a solid foundation for our life's work. All the rest was wasted just because the mould had been thoughtlessly set down on that grating. All our life's work will be wasted, too, if it is not resting on a sure foundation. "For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3. 11).

This true story is coming at the beginning of a

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new term, and of a new year. Make sure that Jesus Christ the Saviour is the foundation of your life,

for only so can you be saved from disappointment and sure of success. H. F.

## THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA

*"I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, which is and which was and which is to come, the Almighty" (Revelation i. 8).*

*"And he said unto me . . . I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end" (xxi. 6).*

*"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (xxii. 13).*

ONE of the titles which the Lord takes to Himself in resurrection is: "the Alpha and the Omega". The Lord Jesus here presents Himself as "the Living one", who was dead, and is alive again—alive for evermore (i. 18). Those two letters, Alpha and Omega, are, as we know, the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet. The one is the same in form as the first letter in our own alphabet; the other is unlike any of our letters. Alpha and Omega—First and Last. In every alphabet there is something which corresponds to an 'A' and a 'Z', an Alpha and an Omega, a beginning and an end. It does not matter how complicated the alphabet may be, or if it only contains a poor twenty-six letters as in English: everything is bounded by the 'A' and the 'Z', the Alpha and the Omega. You cannot get anything outside of that; all is within that. The Alpha and the Omega comprehend all speech; there is no speech possible in any language outside of what comes between those two letters. All that can be said has to come between their compass; outside of their compass nothing can be said.

### NO KNOWLEDGE OF GOD OUTSIDE OF CHRIST

Now Jesus says that of Himself: "*I am the Alpha and the Omega*". The Word of God tells us that Christ is the fulness of God, and that God will sum up all things in Him. What is more, it shows us that God will never speak to anybody outside of His Son, Jesus Christ. He has bounded all His speech to man by His Son; He has made Christ the compass of all; He has nothing to say, and He will say nothing, outside of His Son. "No one cometh unto the Father, but by me", said the Son (John xiv. 6). "And no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him" (Matt. xi. 27). The apostle who wrote the Letter to the Hebrews began by saying: 'In old

times, God spoke in fragments and in parts and in various manners, by different men and at different times; but at the last He summed up all that He had to say in His Son. In the end, He has spoken to us in His Son, whom He has appointed Heir of all things.' All that God will say, and all that God can say, to us, will be in Jesus Christ.

"I am the Alpha". The very first syllable of the knowledge of God is the knowledge of Jesus Christ. It begins with A; it is the first lisp of a babe. "God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. iv. 6). The first syllable of the Christian life begins with 'A'—'Father'. We do not know the Father until we know Jesus Christ: He it is who has revealed the Father. The beginning of all knowledge of God as Father comes to us through Jesus Christ. What He said in His prayer was indeed true: 'I have manifested unto them Thy name' (John xvii. 6)—and that name was 'Father'. Do you want to know God? do you want to know Him as Father? Do you want to know what He has to say to you, to make known to you? Do you want to know all or any of the vast wealth God would reveal to you? You can only know it in Jesus Christ; you can only know it in Him who is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega. There is no knowledge without words made up of letters (except perhaps for our Chinese friends!), and all the letters are between these two. There is no knowledge that is knowledge indeed, knowledge that is life eternal, except in Jesus Christ. "This is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send . . . Jesus Christ" (John xvii. 3). There is no knowledge outside of Jesus Christ.

And there is no communication from God outside of Jesus Christ. Set Jesus Christ aside, and God is silent—He has nothing to say to you. If you fail to give His Son His place, God is just dumb; He will communicate nothing. The more you honour the Son, the more the Father will come out to you and communicate with you.

### ALL NEED COMPREHENDED IN CHRIST

Secondly, Alpha and Omega not only comprehend all speech—they comprehend all need. You do not want anything outside of 'A' and 'Z'; you do not need to create any new letters; it is all there. It does not matter what big words you use—and

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there are some big words these days!—it does not matter how big the words, how long the sentences, or how great the utterances: you can meet the need of the biggest word, the longest sentence and the fullest utterance between Alpha and Omega. For all these big new words, you have no need to create new letters: all that you need are here.

We are told by the Apostle Paul that “in him”—that is, in Christ—“dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead” (Col. ii. 9); “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (ii. 3). “It was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fulness dwell” (i. 19). We are very fond of that word of Paul’s to the Philippians: “My God shall fulfil every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. iv. 19). Every need supplied on the scale of His riches in glory—can we fathom this, can we compass this?—but every need met according to that in Christ Jesus. In Him is all we need; He is Alpha and Omega. When Jesus says: ‘I am Alpha and Omega’, He is saying: ‘I am all you need. You never can have a need, you never can invent or imagine anything for which I am not sufficient. No situation can arise that exhausts Me: in Me all the fulness dwells. I am Alpha and Omega.’

## CHRIST: AGENT, PATTERN, AND GOAL OF CREATION

Christ is the first and the last in creation, so says the Word. In that Letter to the Colossians, to which we have just referred, the Apostle tells us clearly and precisely that “in him were all things created”, and that “he is before all things” (i. 16, 19). The Apostle John, at the beginning of his Gospel, tells us the same thing, that “all things were made through him” (i. 3). He is the beginning in creation. In the Letter to the Hebrews, we are told that the ages were made through Him, they came into being through Him (i. 2). In this book of the Revelation, we read: “These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God . . .” (iii. 14). He is the Alpha and Omega in creation; here He is the Alpha, the very Agent and Instrument of creation.

He was creation’s design, for all things were made to be a temporal and material expression of spiritual and moral realities in the Son of God. If we had eyes and understanding to see the deeper secrets of an unfañen creation, a vast universe from the hand of God, we should see, in everything, something that speaks of the Son of God—His spiritual, His moral character, and His supreme place in the whole system of God. He is the pattern

of creation: “of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things” (Rom. xi. 36); and He is declared to be the completion, the finish, of the creation of God. He is the Alpha and the Omega.

## CHRIST: FIRST AND LAST IN REDEMPTION

All this is by way of setting the Lord Jesus in His rightful place in God’s universe. But we may feel that it is not very helpful to us. What comes nearer to us is this: that He is the Alpha and the Omega in redemption. He is the First and the Last in redemption. In that Letter to the Hebrews again, we have this familiar word: “Looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith” (xii. 2). He is, then, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, of redemption.

Christ is, of course, the beginning of redemption in this simple sense, that there is no redemption until we come to Him. Just as there is no speech, no communication, no knowledge until we come to the alphabet, so there is no redemption until we come to the Lord Jesus. There is just nothing before ‘A’; there is nothing before Alpha: that is just where everything begins. And what is true in language is true in redemption: there just is no redemption, there is no salvation, until we come to the Lord Jesus. But when we come to Him, there is a new beginning. It is the beginning of everything—a whole new compass and range of possibilities, whether of communication, of knowledge and understanding, of wisdom or of pleasure.

What a wealth there is in Christ! what a wealth there is in Him as the Redeemer! When you take Him as the beginning, the Alpha, of salvation, what a marvellous world opens up! When you pick up a dictionary, and begin to turn the pages, what a world opens up! As you go on and on, through the many thousands of words, in all their different shapes and forms, what a world is there! I cannot understand any person who cannot revel in a dictionary! But you see what I am getting at. When you come to Jesus as the Alpha, a new and vast and wonderful world begins to open up, a world that you never thought of. It is like coming upon new words in the dictionary—words that you never knew were there, and that open up to you altogether new vistas. It is like that with the Lord Jesus: when He becomes your Beginning, an inexhaustible world opens up. Wealth, fulness, riches of knowledge—there are limitless possibilities when you begin with ‘A’.

And there is no end to it! Just as there is something more being added every year to the diction-

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ary, so it is in the Christian life. I am not exaggerating. My experience through the years, and perhaps especially in recent times, is that Christ is just inexhaustible. There is more and more and more coming, all the time, that we did not know before. But it all began when we began with Him, and it has gone on ever since, and it is going on for eternity; for the Word says: "Of the increase of his government . . . there shall be no end . . . upon his kingdom" (Is. ix. 7). No end! What a kingdom of fulness His is! But we have to begin with Him, we have to make Him our beginning before we can have any of it. He has got to be our 'Alpha'. But when once He is that, I say again, a new world opens up; a new fulness—and such a fulness!—begins to disclose itself. It is all in Him as our Redeemer.

This is what we have in the first chapter of the Revelation: titles of the Lord connected with Him in resurrection. And then we have words about what He has done in redemption. He 'purchased unto God with His blood . . .' (ch. v. 9); He "loosed us from our sins by his blood; and he made us a kingdom, priests unto his God and Father" (i. 5, 6). It is the work of redemption which has opened up everything new—wonderful fulness! He is the Alpha of Redemption.

#### "THE AUTHOR . . ."

Christ is not only the Beginning: He is the Beginner. It says here "the author": "looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter . . ." (Heb. xii. 2). He is the Beginner—the One who takes in hand this matter of beginning all over again and bringing us into a world that we have never known before. He is the initiator of it: it is in His hands: He does it. He has taken the initiative in our redemption; that is the point. I am so glad of that—so infinitely glad of that. With all that may be said about our quest—man's quest for God, man's search for God—that is nothing compared with God's search for man. What Jesus has come to reveal, and has revealed, is that God is the Seeker. Those wonderful and familiar parables about lost sheep, and lost pieces of silver, and lost sons (Luke xv.), and other lost people: they are all meant to show us that God is the Seeker, that the initiative is with God. "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke xix. 10).

Yes, He began this thing: you and I would never be rejoicing in salvation if He had not begun it. He said: "Ye did not choose me, but I chose you" (John xv. 16)—and that is why we are now numbered among His saved ones. And if we are now

among those that belong to the Lord, it is simply because He sought us. Whether we were seeking or not, He was the Seeker; He was the Beginner; He began. No one else can begin to redeem us; no one else can save. 'There is no other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved' (Acts iv. 12); only His Name. There is no beginning of redemption without Him.

#### " . . . AND PERFECTER "

And Christ is the Last, the Omega, the end—in this sense, that, when He begins a thing, He finishes it. 'The Lord', says the Word, 'will perfect that which concerns us' (Ps. cxxxviii. 8). "He which began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. i. 6). He finishes what He begins. And He is not only the Beginner and the Perfecter, but Himself the Beginning and the Ending—the Finish. God is working all things to the end that we should be "conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. viii. 29). Christ stands, so to speak, right at the end; and God is moving and working in us, His people, in relation to that One who stands at the end, that we should be conformed to His image. The servant of God cries: "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Ps. xvii. 15). It is that likeness that is the end: Jesus Himself is the End. All things under Heaven's government are working towards conformity to God's Son.

#### CHRIST MAKES SENSE OF LIFE

Furthermore: Christ, as Alpha and Omega, makes sense of life. I might have a tray with all the letters of any alphabet jumbled up in it. If I know what the letters are, and I know what I want, I can put them in an order so that they make sense. They express exactly what I want to express. All this that comes between 'A' and 'Z', between Alpha and Omega, makes sense when it is put in its right place. There are many people to-day who cannot make sense of life at all. The struggle of many is to try to make sense of life: What does it all mean? what is the explanation of it all? It seems all a jumble, a confusion, an enigma. Jesus makes sense of life: He puts the jumble into an order.

That is a description of the Divine design, the great purpose of God: to provide an explanation of everything. Yes, in Him we have the answer to our life's problems; in Him we have the setting in order of lives disrupted and confused. Has that not been true of so many? men and women whose lives were all mixed up and confused, distorted and

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

twisted, without any seeming design or pattern, meaning or explanation; they could not make sense of anything. And then they came to the Lord Jesus, and life made sense: a design, a pattern came in, and they came to realise what it all meant, what they were for. That is the testimony of those who are truly His. In the Lord Jesus, we have found a pattern, a design, for life; we have found a meaning in life, an explanation of life. He can bring into life a clear pattern, a new understanding. In Him, as Alpha and Omega, we have all that we need to make sense.

Let me repeat: Until you have your letters, your basic characters, there is no beginning, and there will be no sensible, meaningful end at all. Jesus just supplies that need—a beginning and a sensible end. He leads somewhere! When you and I at last reach the end, the end in glory, it will truly be a meaningful end, will it not? It will be an end that justifies everything, that gives meaning to everything, that explains everything. The thousand 'why's' of life-time will be answered, will all be explained. Why this experience and that? why this sorrow and that? why this disappointment and that loss? why these strange ways in our life? It will all be answered in the end—and Jesus Himself will be the End! Yes, it will be a 'sensible' end. We shall have no quarrel with God then, because Jesus will have put it all straight, and brought us to an end beyond our wildest expectations and altogether beyond our merits.

GOD SPEAKS TO US, AND THROUGH US,  
BY LIFE

Thus we may understand why, in the Bible, Jesus is called "The Word of God" (Rev. xix. 13). God speaks in Him and by Him; always and only, and finally, in His Son. Perhaps you say, 'That is all very interesting, but after all, how does He speak? Are we to hear Him with our ears?' No. If you come back to the context of these titles, you will find that it is resurrection life. "I am . . . the Living one; . . . I became dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore" (Rev. i. 17, 18). How does He speak? How do we know Him? How is life delivered from its tangle and confusion and brought into pattern and meaning? By His becoming our life! He makes us partakers of His own risen life. He puts that life into us which is an ordered life, a life of wisdom

and understanding: a life, not of confusion, but of pattern. It is a life-power within us.

When His life is within, that life answers the questions, explains things, gives meaning to life. And while, to natural ears, life may be inaudible, life is really a very, very powerful speaker. It speaks louder, much louder, than words. Some poor suffering child of God may not be able to say much in coherent speech, but you have only to be with them for a very little time, and the life speaks to you. The very life that is in them speaks far more powerfully than words. It is the life that is within us which is the communication, the explanation, the wisdom of God: the power of that life working in us. By that life, God speaks to us, answers our problems.

So often, the answer of God to us is not in something that He says, but in something that He does—in some new touch of life. It is strange how, if we get that new touch of life in our inner man, we cease to worry about the problem—the problem is solved! We may not have got the answer to our questions, but we have got the answer: it is in life! It does not matter about the problem now; it is answered in this new touch of life. Life is God's way of speaking to us.

And life is God's way of speaking through us. People may come into a meeting, and they may have no idea what the speaker is talking about; and yet they might go away and say—"I didn't understand a word, but . . . but . . . there was something there!" They may not be able to describe it, because they are not familiar with the language and the phrases and the terminology. But they feel that they meet something there—something that answers to a need. Well, if they only knew, they would say: It is life, life, life! And that is the way that God really speaks. We would sooner have it that way, would we not, than that people should be able to understand a lot of words and phrases, and not feel the impact and registration of life. Better, of course, if both; but if we have to choose, better this way—that they go away and say: 'There is something there that you cannot get away from; I can only say, it is God!' And what they mean is—it is Jesus Christ, the Living One!

That is the way God speaks through us. Oh that we may be, in this sense, the voice of God, the speech of God: the expression of Christ, who is the Alpha and the Omega.

T. A-S.

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## THE BODY OF CHRIST

*Reading: Romans xii. 1 - 5.*

**B**EFORE actually coming to the twelfth chapter of Romans, let us remind ourselves of the first eight chapters of that letter. I think we all know that chapters nine to eleven are illustrative or parenthetic; they could be put into brackets, making the twelfth chapter immediately follow upon the eighth. If we remember that these chapters are only a kind of parenthesis, and go on from chapter viii straight to xii, we find a direct connection.

The first eight chapters of Romans deal with two phases of the Christian life. We have the first four chapters and say ten or eleven verses of the fifth chapter as one section; and say from the twelfth verse of the fifth chapter to the end of the eighth as another. In these two sections the Apostle is trying to lead Christians to see how they were brought into God. This is followed by the exhortation to the consecration and presenting of the body to do the will of God, as we find it at the beginning of chapter xii; and then the Body of Christ is taken up. What does it mean?

This is something in the very heart and counsel of God, and the Christ of God was anointed to bring it about. It is called a 'mystery', a secret of God, which was hid from ages and only made known in this age (Rom. xvi. 25, 26). So we have to look to find the difference between our conception of salvation and the Divine conception of salvation; our thought about the Cross and God's thought about the Cross; our thought about the Holy Spirit and God's thought about the Holy Spirit; our thought about spiritual experiences, and God's thought about spiritual experiences.

We believe that the Cross is the central and most important work of God. Praise the Lord, that is true! But we must remember that the Cross is a means to an end; the Cross is not an end in itself. The Divine means is the Cross, but the Divine end is the Body. If you know the Cross in the way in which God means it to be known, you will inevitably find yourself in the Body. When the Cross has done something quite specific in your life, you will simply find yourself in the Body. It cannot be otherwise. If you are not there, it is quite sure that the Cross has not done its work, or at least has not completed its work. What does it mean?

Now, personal holiness, as stressed and sought by many believers, is really precious. Victory in living is really precious. Salvation is really precious.

Praise the Lord for salvation! Praise the Lord for forgiveness of sins, for justification before Him, for deliverance from the power of sin. But remember that God did not set Himself to save us, and to give us spiritual experiences like deliverance and victory in life, personal holiness, and so on, just so that we could be hundreds and thousands and myriads of individual Christians, all separate units dotted over this earth for God. That is not what God is after. It may be that the children of Abraham are as the sand on the seashore, but they are not Christians! The Lord never meant that Christians should be single units.

I do not know whether you have seen it or not. It is very easy to talk. I could talk once. I am almost ashamed to confess that for years I thought I knew what is the doctrine of the Body and even tried to apply the doctrine, without seeing the *thing*, the reality. Reading a guide about London could never take the place of a visit to London. Knowing a book on cookery could never take the place of being in a kitchen. Knowing the doctrine of the Body of Christ can never take the place of seeing it.

The whole trouble to-day is this. We think of Christians in terms of so many persons, individuals. We think of salvation as an individual thing; we think of holiness in terms of individuals; we think of victory and deliverance in terms of individuals. We are quite happy, as Christian workers, if our flock are going on with the Lord, reading their Bibles, knowing how to pray, living upright and righteous lives, knowing something of deliverance from the power of sin. But that is not the Body. One day something else comes along, and that day is for you a most blessed day—a terrific day. The Lord opens your eyes to see that salvation is in terms of the Body. Having personal holiness is in terms of the Body, having the power of the Spirit is in terms of the Body, having an experience of the Cross is in terms of the Body. You see that the Divine thought is one Man—not a host of small men. It is one Man: the Lord Jesus Himself and His people making up one Man before God. The whole thought of God is centred in the Christ, and we are in Him. It is not only a question of the Head, but of the Body. Praise the Lord, individual sinners are saved. You begin as an individual, but you must end as a member in the Body. That is the Divine thought. God is working toward that, and He will take nothing less than that. The

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Cross is for that—for that corporate Body, that corporate Christ; for that new Man comprising all who are in the Lord. That is what God is after. We become part of Christ, we become partakers of Christ.

You know I come from China. I have to preach in villages, meeting simple saints, and I have the habit of using simple illustrations. I was once in a simple meeting of believers in a village. I tried to tell them something about the oneness of the Body, that what God is after is the one Body. I found it was very difficult for them to understand. If the whole thing as to new birth is beyond Nicodemus, the question of one Body is altogether beyond any Chinaman! They did not know what it was. 'We are not one, we are individuals. How can be one?' I prayed much about it. 'Lord, you must give me something to show these people how they are one.'

One Lord's Day morning we were breaking bread. I said, 'Brothers, before we go on breaking bread, I want you to look carefully at this bread.' They did not know what I meant, but they looked quite carefully. After the bread was broken, I turned to I Corinthians, chapter x. We came to verse 17: "We, who are many, are one loaf".

Then I said: 'Are we one loaf? That loaf is one—at least it was one; but is it one now? It is still one, only that one is scattered in different ones. If you could put it all together, it would still be one, for it comes from that one loaf. You cannot say it is two loaves. You can break it into a thousand parts, but still it is one loaf. You cannot deny the fact of one loaf because it was one. It is impossible to make this bread to be in fact one, because it is material. But, please remember, as regards the part of the Lord Jesus that is in you, that part has in a sense never been parted, it has never been broken. That is the basis on which you are all one. It is because you are partakers of the one Lord. Every one is partaking of that one Lord; and that Lord can never be broken. He is still in the Spirit to-day. You can break the bread but you cannot break the Lord. Therefore you are one.' Praise the Lord, light dawned upon many of them.

God is not satisfied that we should simply be individual Christians. When you believe the Lord and partake of Him, it means that something has happened. You have been made a member of the one Body, which God is trying to build up. He is not satisfied with anything individual.

W. N.

*(to be concluded)*

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JANUARY — FEBRUARY, 1958

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## EDITOR

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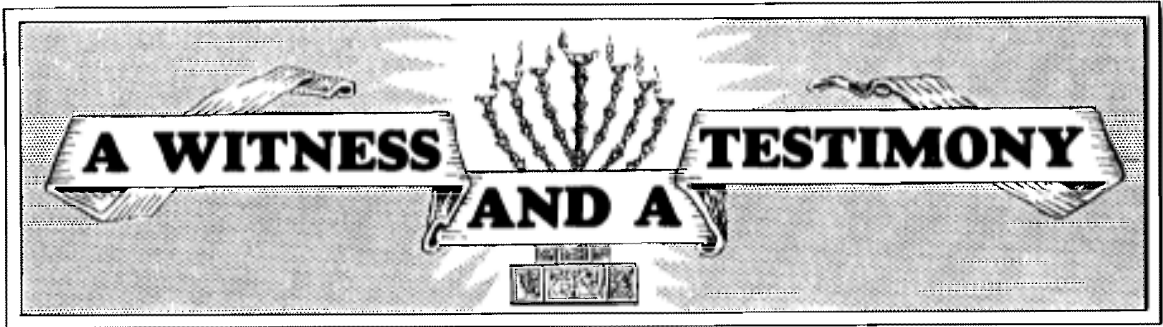
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MARCH — APRIL, 1958.

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EDITORIAL

Dear friends,

Among the many designations given to responsible servants of God in the Bible is that of ' Watchman '. The function of the Watchman is so well understood that the time need not be taken to describe it. In a word, it is to be aware of both movements and their portents, and to make these known for the well-being of those for whom he has a responsibility. This was one of the functions of the Old Testament Prophets, and this aspect of prophetic ministry is implicit in the anointing of all servants of God at all times.

But this particular aspect has meant, and will always mean, that the Watchman lives before the time when that which he sees will eventuate or materialise. The New Testament Apostles were of this kind. They truly lived for their own hour and day, but they lived even more for a day to come. As Watchmen they saw the trend and significance of certain ' signs ' or portents, and in this respect they lived before their time, and were only vindicated long after their departure from this earth.

We make no claim to prophetic foresight or Apostolic prevision or inspiration, but there are at the present time certain signs and indications, the significance of which, for various reasons, may not be immediately recognised ; and it could be that the declaration of their meaning, as by a faithful watchman, might mean the difference between salvation and disaster for multitudes of people.

If there is one thing upon which the Bible is clear and emphatic, it is that, in all His sovereign government, God works toward *reality* at the end. The end of *every* phase of the progressive purpose of God has been marked by a sifting, challenging, and testing of things as to their reality.

This can easily be seen as the eye is cast over the various stages of the Old Testament. It is manifest again in the crisis of Christ's first advent, which, in the first instance, was a consummation of the whole Old Testament dispensation, and His judgment of that is found most pronouncedly on the

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

very face of His life on earth. The test was that of reality, and in the balances of reality that whole system, as represented by its official class, was found so wanting as to be 'cast into the fire and burned'. The end of the New Testament sees an exact and final repetition of this judgment, this time beginning with Christianity—if you like, with the Church.

Thus, the 'eyes which are as a flame of fire' are looking for reality. They pierce through many things.

In the first place, they pierce through traditional and formal religion or 'Christianity'. Their interrogation is—Is your religion a matter of attachment or adherence to a system, a historical tradition, a family inheritance, and so on? Or is it born—is it a birth *in* you; is it something that has happened to you; is it your very life, your very being?

Secondly—and I concentrate more especially upon this for the moment—they pierce through temperament and disposition. They demand to know whether the reason why you are where you are, are concerned for what you are concerned for, are connected with what you are connected with, and are disposed as you are, is because your particular temperament leans that way. You are artistic and mystical in your tastes and constitution: therefore you choose or make your religion after your own image. Your temperament is melancholic, and so the more abstract, profound, serious, intense, introspective, and speculative, appeals to you and finds a *natural* response in you. You make God, Christianity, Christ, the Bible, after *your* image.

Or again, you are of the practical temperament. To you everything is only of value as it is 'practical'. You have no patience with these contemplative people. You are irritated by the 'Marys', for 'many dishes' are your concern. To you, how the end is reached is of much less importance than the end itself. You are not bothered much with imagination, and you would put all the value on things done—*how much* there is actually to *show* for your day. *Your* God and *your* Christianity are entirely, or almost entirely, of the practical kind, after *your* own image. And so we could go on with all the other temperaments.

But this will not do, for Christ is not any one of these; He is different. He may combine the good in all, but that does not wholly mean Divine nature. He is *different*. All this is the human soul, but the essential nature of Christ and true Christianity is of the Divine Spirit—it is heavenly! If new birth means anything, it means this, that another nature and disposition is born into the believer, so that he or she is 'carried whither they (naturally) would not'. In the hands of the Holy Spirit one thing becomes increasingly clear: it is that our temperaments or dispositions cannot carry us through the terrific testings and adversities which come peculiarly to Christians; and that another life, power, grace, is absolutely essential to our survival. The greatest, strongest, and most richly endowed servants of God have ever found this to be true.

Reality, with God, is more than sincerity, earnestness, devoutness. It is not *our* reaction to God at all. There could be no greater mistake, no more serious misdirection, no more mischievous counsel than to advise people to select the church association which best suits their temperament.

Christ and man (naturally) belong to two orders, and there is no passing from the one to the other by 'selection', or choice, or preference. And certainly not by natural affinity, for there is no such thing! With God, Christ is the only Reality, and that is not temperamental, mystical, not a matter of plain or ornate, ritualistic and ceremonial, or bare and simple. Christ, *revealed* by the Holy Spirit in the heart, as by a Divine fiat, corresponding to the "let there be light" of creation, is the only Reality!

For the present my space is gone. But I return to the governing issue. The end will be marked by an intensifying sifting, testing, fiery ordeal to find out what is real—that is, what is truly *Christ*—and to expose what are the artificial accretions and appendages of Christianity. This ultimate "judgment" has commenced and is verily moving over the earth. May there be found a maximum of "gold", "silver", "precious stones", and a minimum of "wood", "hay", "stubble".

More next time.

EDITOR

MARCH — APRIL, 1958

## THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE CHURCH, AND THE NATIONS

### III. THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST'S CHARACTER

*"John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence" (Acts i. 5).*

*"They were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts ii. 4).*

*"There is one body, and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians iv. 4).*

THE Holy Spirit is, of course, the Spirit of God, but in this dispensation He is particularly the Spirit of Christ. The very title 'Christ' (which is simply the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew 'Messiah') means 'Anointed'. The Lord Jesus said that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him, because the Lord had anointed Him (Luke iv. 18). And thus it is that He has become known to us as the Christ. The Holy Spirit and Jesus have, as it were, united, combined; they are two Persons, but you cannot separate them. They are like the figure of the oil upon the man: they have become joined together. The Holy Spirit, then, who, in the old dispensation, was in the general sense the Spirit of God, is in this dispensation particularly the Spirit of Christ.

#### THE HOLY SPIRIT INSEPARABLE FROM CHRIST

You have only to turn over the pages of your New Testament to see how often that connection is brought out. "Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts" (Gal. iv. 6). "The Spirit of Jesus" (Acts xvi. 7); "the Spirit of the Christ" (Rom. viii. 9b). The Holy Spirit was given to the Son for His mission in and throughout this dispensation. Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit for the particular work that He had been chosen by the Father to do, and especially in this dispensation. That work, that mission, did not end when He left this earth. There is a very true sense in which it may be said that when He left this earth it only began—not, of course, altogether; but, in a fuller way, a much fuller way, He began His real mission when He ascended to the right hand of the Majesty in the Heavens. It is an impressive thing to note how the Holy Spirit is always related to Jesus.

The preaching, at the beginning, was undoubtedly in the power of the Holy Spirit. They were filled with the Spirit, and then they were immediately constrained to proclaim the good news (Acts

ii. 4, 14). There is no doubt that they preached by the Holy Spirit—that it was the Holy Spirit who was inspiring the preaching. What did they preach? It was just all about the Lord Jesus: they were preaching about Him; the Holy Spirit inspired them to proclaim Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit was in those mighty acts that we find strewn throughout the early record. The 'Acts' were truly the acts of the Holy Spirit. Many were the forms of His activity—and not only in the miracles that were performed. An apostle essays to take his way in a certain direction, and the record says: "The Spirit of Jesus suffered them not"—"the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not" (xvi. 7). The same apostle, writing to a church, said that he was counting upon their "supplication and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil. i. 19). And that supply was for the accomplishment of his mission.

The Holy Spirit was in and behind all the teaching, fulfilling the promise of the Lord Jesus: "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth" (John xvi. 13). The truth that we have in the New Testament is wholly Spirit-provided truth; and it all relates to the Lord Jesus. The conformity of believers to the image of the Son of God is the work of the Holy Spirit: He is the transforming and conforming Spirit, and His model is Christ. The Holy Spirit is wholly and utterly committed to the Lord Jesus. We may say that the many-sided but inclusive work of the Holy Spirit is, first and foremost, to secure the place of the Lord Jesus wherever He can.

#### SECURING CHRIST'S PLACE IN THIS WORLD

We need to remember that. We must not put it in other ways; we must not think of it in other terms. 'The Holy Spirit will do this and that', we say. Yes, He will: *but*—'this and that', and perhaps a hundred or a thousand other things and aspects, are all related to one thing; they are not things in themselves. We must emphasize this here very strongly. The Holy Spirit may give light; the Holy Spirit may give leading; the Holy Spirit may do many many 'things': but we must remember that everything that the Holy Spirit does is included in one object, it is all to one end. That object is, primarily, to secure Christ's place in this



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universe—to secure the place of the Lord Jesus in men, in this world.

Our way of speaking may often mislead us. We would say: The work of the Holy Spirit is to save souls. Yes, quite—but why? just to have them saved? No; in order that the Lord Jesus may have His place. Those souls are to be the ‘residences’ of the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit may instruct believers and build them up—for what purpose? Just that they should be mature Christians? Not at all; but so that the Lord Jesus shall have a larger place. No matter what the Holy Spirit does, He has one all-inclusive object and end—the glorifying of the Lord Jesus: that is, the giving of the Lord Jesus His place, and then filling all things with Christ. Do not think of the ‘being filled with the Spirit’, of the ‘fulness of the Spirit’, in any other way than this. The Holy Spirit’s filling is intended to be a filling of all things with Christ.

THE REAL MEANING OF BEING  
‘ FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT ’

We can get these ideas—‘ Oh, to be filled with the Spirit!’ Then, what will happen? ‘ Well’, we think, ‘ we shall have such a good time; we shall have ecstasies, enjoyment; there will be power in our life’—all these things. We think about being ‘ filled with the Spirit ’ as a wonderful idea! But do remember that the ‘ filling with the Spirit ’ is in line with that eternal thought and purpose of God, that the Son shall “ fill all things ” (Eph. iv. 10). You can have these experiences, and these ecstasies, and these emotions, and all these things, and yet—and yet—be sadly lacking in the Lord Jesus! You can have all the teaching and the truth, and yet the measure of the Lord Jesus Himself can be so small.

It is terribly sad to go about the world and meet Christians who would lay down their life for the doctrine of the Holy Spirit—‘ I believe in the Holy Ghost ’—the Person of the Holy Spirit, and so on, and yet in whom you do not meet the Lord—you meet *them*: you come up against something that is ‘ themselves ’. You are hurt by ‘ them ’. It can be like that. No: Simply, but essentially, the Holy Spirit is committed to one end, and one end only—to fill all things with Christ. And if you want to know what it means when it says: “ they were all filled with the Holy Spirit ”—you can see by the effect. They simply talked about the Lord Jesus; they preached Christ. Everywhere they went, it was Christ; they were bringing Christ with them wherever they went. As far as they were allowed, as far as consent was given and openness of heart was provided, they so to speak ‘ filled ’ people

with Christ, filled companies with Christ, and filled places with Christ. That was the work of the Holy Spirit.

And, with that end in view, the Holy Spirit is always seeking a transformation in believers. Naturally, we are not a bit like Christ, and naturally we do not give very much place to Him; and so the work of the Holy Spirit is to transform us into His image. It is Christ, only Christ—“ the beginning and the end ” (Rev. xxi. 6).

## THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST

Now, in that connection, the great governing truth is that the foundation of the work of Christ, of the work of the Holy Spirit, is *the nature of Christ*. The measure of *Christ* is the measure of the Spirit. You cannot have more of the Holy Spirit than you have of Christ. And it is a question of the *character* of Christ. These two things are often so painfully overlooked. The presence and work of the Holy Spirit is detached from Christly character, and is thought of as something in itself. The Holy Spirit, the work of the Holy Spirit, the power of the Spirit, the works of the Spirit, working for the Lord—they are often just things in themselves, in the thoughtless mentality of so many. But the Holy Spirit is not thoughtless about this—far from it. The Holy Spirit only commits Himself to the Christ—let us be quite clear about that. He will not commit Himself to you or to me, to any institution or ‘ thing ’; He only commits Himself to Christ. And it is according to the degree of Christ that the Holy Spirit commits Himself: that is, according to the measure of the character of Christ that He finds.

For the whole Bible comes down powerfully and mightily upon that truth. In all the types and figures in the Old Testament relating to the Holy Spirit—the anointing oil, and so on—you will find, if you look more closely, that the symbols are always subject to certain Divine provisions and prescriptions. Take the oil, for instance: that oil shall not come upon man’s flesh (Ex. xxx. 32). The anointing requires garments that cover man’s flesh; God requires the fulfilment of certain conditions before that anointing oil can be applied. We could extend our consideration of the symbolism further afield. But when you understand, you see that that prescription of God—whether it be the garments, or whatever else may be required by God as the condition for the coming of the oil upon that person—is something related to the character of Christ.

It is thus foreshown that the Holy Spirit is only given to the Lord Jesus. And He will only be given to the Lord Jesus. And He will only be given to

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you and me in proportion to the measure in which the Lord Jesus has His place. Do we seek more of the Spirit—a greater fullness of the Spirit? Very well, then: we are asking for the Holy Spirit to displace *us*, and all that is of us; and we are going to have a bad time. We think that, if only we get filled with the Spirit, we are going to have a wonderful time of ecstasy! Well, that may be one side of it, but—make no mistake—it may be that we shall have to be taken through the fire and through the mill to come there. It depends on how much resistance there is to Christ. The clearer the way, the more selfless the motive, the quicker it can be done. The principle is that these two things go together: the work of the Holy Spirit and the character of Christ. We shall not get away from that. The character of Christ is the foundation of the work of the Holy Spirit.

#### “THE WORLD KNEW HIM NOT”

That, of course, brings us face to face with the fact that Christ is of an altogether different order from what we are. When He was here, He was a stranger. It is written: “The world knew him not” (John i. 10); and that, while of course it applies specifically to His Deity, applies also to His unique humanity. The world did not know Him, in the sense that it could not understand His mentality, His ways, His standards—they were different. It did not understand that by which His course and conduct were governed: the world does not do things like that! For one thing, the world does not act on principle—the world acts on policy. Anyone who does not do that, in some way or other, is a strange person, from another world! Jesus absolutely refused, from beginning to end, to be governed by what is politic.

No, the world knew Him not; He is a special and different kind of person, a different order of being from what we are.

That was the real explanation of what a difficult time He had in this world. He was differently constituted. He was, in fact, a *Holy Spirit-constituted* Being: both in His birth—He was begotten of the Holy Ghost—and by anointing in His mission. And, being so different in His constitution, upon that basis He was tested and perfected, in a contrary world. If you grasp the significance of that, it will explain very much. You see, when you and I are born anew, we are born of the Holy Spirit, begotten of God, and in the deepest reality of our being there is a difference of constitution. If that is not true of someone who bears the name of ‘Christian’, he is not a Christian. A Christian ‘born

anew’ has another constitution introduced in the innermost part of his being. It may be in an elementary form, as in babyhood, but it is something altogether different. It is the difference of *what Christ is* from all other people.

Now then, the whole of our life under the Holy Spirit is the testing and the trying of that ‘other constitution’ in a contrary world. As ‘born anew’ believers, we are now in a world that is contrary to our nature, contrary to our constitution; and that constitutes our difficulty, our suffering, our trial, our testing. But it is the basis of our perfecting. As we know, anything in creation that does not become subjected to adverse forces never acquires stamina or endurance. Hothouse plants cannot stand up to anything—you have got to nurse them all the time! Anything that you protect from adversity will suffer—suffer terribly; it will never come to that which can abide, that can stand up under test. The law of God is that stamina, endurance, strength, maturity—the power of abiding—come out of testing and trying and adversity.

#### ‘MADE PERFECT THROUGH SUFFERINGS’

It surely explains why the Lord allows the winds to blow so fiercely and so cold against His Church, against His people. What is the Lord doing? Well, here is His own Son in this world, with another constitution, being tested, tried, and perfected by the very difference between His own constitution and the world in which He was placed. He was ‘made perfect through sufferings’ (Heb. ii. 10), and the sufferings were of this kind: the conflict of two constitutions—that in the world and that in Himself. It is an awful thing to live in this world with a heavenly constitution, such as you and I are supposed to have; and it ought to become more and more awful. If we can settle down, become happy and at ease, in this world, we have abandoned the very constitution of Heaven. If it is true that we are finding it more and more difficult to endure this world, as being what it is, that is a good sign.

That, then, is what happened to the Lord Jesus. He was of a different order, and His suffering came along the line of testing and trying by reason of the foreign and uncongenial constitution in the midst of which He had to live. His own heavenly constitution had to triumph over the other that was all about Him and pressing upon Him; and thus He was made perfect, through suffering. There is no other way for you and for me. In the end, if we abide faithful, if we do not let go, if we do not ‘cast away our confidence’ (Heb. x. 35, A.V.), if

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our faith does not give way because of the difficulty and hardness of this spiritual conflict, we shall emerge a 'full-grown man' spiritually; the stature will increase 'unto the stature of Christ' (Eph. iv. 13). That is the history of the Church; that is the history of believers.

### THE CONFLICT OF TWO NATURES

Now, where does the Holy Spirit come in in this? Well, the Holy Spirit came from Heaven when that question had been fully answered in the Lord Jesus. I will put it in this way. There was, as it were, a question all the time through the earthly life of the Lord Jesus. In reality, of course, there was no doubt—but there was a question. A battle was going on; and when there is a battle, there is always a question as to the issue. The question was whether this that was of Heaven was going to gain the ascendancy, or whether the ascendancy was going to the earthly thing, under Satan's power. It was a big battle on this question. A heavenly Kingdom was opposed to an earthly kingdom, the Kingdom of God opposed to the kingdom of Satan—this was the conflict; and it all focused upon and centred on the soul of this one Man. Right to the end, to the last moment on the Cross, the battle raged, as to who was going to prevail; which side was going to win. The whole question was: Is the heavenly nature going to triumph over this evil nature outside?

That question was fully and finally answered when He reached Heaven. His being "received up" (Acts i. 2)—for that is the right way to speak of the ascension: being 'received', accorded a 'reception' in Heaven—means that the question is finally answered. The Heavenly Man has triumphed in His constitution, in a world that, in its constitution, is so utterly different. The question is answered, the whole thing is settled; and, when that is settled, the Holy Spirit comes. What does He come to do? He comes to bring into believers the very nature, the heavenly nature, of that Man—and then the battle starts up again!

That is the battle that you and I are in. After all, it is not a battle of outward things; it is a battle of spiritual things. The battle may take many forms, and involve many things, people, situations and circumstances; but, after all, it focuses upon our spirit, upon our heavenly life, upon our heavenly constitution. That is the centre of it all; that is the battle-ground. Are we going to yield to the Devil—is his constitution going to get the upper hand, in that irritability, in that bad temper, in that loss of good faith, and so on? Or is this other—

faith in God, the love of the Spirit, the patience of Jesus Christ—is this going to triumph? That is the form of the battle. The Holy Spirit has come to bring into us another constitution, and then so to work as to develop us completely according to that new constitution, until we too are perfected in Christ.

This comes back, all the time, to the measure of Christ, does it not? There is no substitute for the Holy Spirit. To put anything in His place is to open the door at once to that whole terrible change that came about so early in the history of the Church. It began even before the apostles had gone—the bringing in of substitutes for the Holy Spirit. There they are: the crystallization of Christianity into an earthly, man-made system; the composing of 'creeds' of Christian doctrine, to become the legal forms of government; clericalism, organization, forms, vestments, orders, and so on—they all came in so early. They were all substitutes for the Holy Spirit; they all represented a moving away from the spiritual to the ecclesiastical, the sacramental. The result? A vitiated, emasculated Church, a changed Christianity, which cannot stand up to the forces that are at work in this universe. The world triumphed—and the Devil laughs.

### THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH

Now, we are talking about what the Holy Spirit is. We have said that He is, inclusively, the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of the Christ; and we have said, further, that that means the character of Christ. Let us, therefore, now look at the character of Christ, as taken up by the Holy Spirit in His own nature, and therefore in His own work.

The Holy Spirit was called by the Lord Jesus: "the Spirit of truth" (John xvi. 13). Now, there is a very large place given by God in the Word to 'truth', He is very jealous over the truth. He is Himself the God of Truth (cf. Is. lxxv. 16). He desires "truth in the inward parts" (Ps. li. 6). He holds lies in abomination (Prov. xii. 22). He has consigned all liars to the lake of fire, says the Word (Rev. xxi. 8). He excludes from the New Jerusalem everything that makes a lie (Rev. xxii. 15). Jesus calls Himself the Truth—"I am . . . the truth" (John xiv. 6); and "The faithful and true witness" (Rev. iii. 14). On the other hand, Satan is called by Him "a liar, and the father thereof" (John viii. 44c).

### MAN A FALSE, DECEIVED CREATURE

Now, note this. When the lie entered in, the whole structure of creation collapsed. Satan in-

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jected a lie into man; man accepted it, received it. The result was the collapse of the entire structure of creation, and man himself became and remains a falsehood. He is not the man that God made him or intended him to be: he is a deceived creature; in the very constitution and nature of man as he is there is a lie. He is a misrepresentation of the man that God spoke of when He said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. i. 26). There is a lie in the work of man, and in all his works. He hopes and believes and works and tries, and in the end it comes to vanity—it is all in vain; disappointment awaits him at the end of all his works and all his strivings. He thinks and argues that he is free—but he is a prisoner. He thinks and believes that he knows; he proves to be a fool. He thinks that he can do, and he does many great and seemingly wonderful things: but all his doings lead to greater problems to be solved; and the greatest problem of all is satisfaction, is rest, is joy, is peace.

No; man is building, not on rock, but on sand. His world is run by lies. This may seem a terrible thing to say, but how rare in this world is downright honesty! What a welter of misrepresentation and deception, pretence and appearance, mixture and exaggeration, has to be drawn into the running of this world. Is it not true? Many a well-meaning man, who in his own soul revolts against it, will tell you that, if you are proposing to be honest, absolutely honest, you will find it impossible to be successful in a world like this. And the lie has got into religion. Our Lord's indictment of the Pharisees and the Scribes was: 'Hypocrites'—play-actors, pretenders! And therefore, because the race is shot through and through with a lying deception, it cannot stand. A false world is bound to collapse. If there is anything in 'Christianity' that is not absolutely true, 'according to God' (Rom. viii. 27b; cf. xv. 5b), it will go to pieces. Anything that has in it an element of untruth, has within itself the seeds of its own ruin. The Holy Spirit, therefore, is called 'the Spirit of Truth'. Jesus is 'the Truth'. Eternal values, the values which are eternal, are those which are absolutely true according to the standards of God. The value of the Gospel is that it is the 'truth' of the Gospel (Col. i. 5). The eternal certainty of Christ is that He is 'the Truth'.

Now this is a very challenging thing. It separates and discriminates—not always between the black lie and the transparent truth—but between the beautiful lie, the soulish lie, the sentimental lie, the formal lie, the religious lie, and that which is 'according to God'. John the Baptist said about

the Lord Jesus that He would 'lay the axe to the root', and that His 'fan was in His hand, and He would thoroughly cleanse His threshing-floor' (Matt. iii. 10, 12). What is the axe? What is the winnowing fan? It is *the truth!*

Thus it was that, as He spoke to the woman of Samaria, He looked on the temple on Mount Gerizim, and He looked, with His mind's eye, on the temple in Jerusalem; and then, to the woman who thought that one or the other—especially this one in Samaria, to which she was attached—was the truth, the true thing, He said: "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father . . . The hour cometh . . . when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth . . . God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John iv. 21, 23, 24). He is discriminating between the formal, the traditional, the historical—if you like, the symbolic, at best—and the real, the *true*. And He is saying: 'Only that which is spiritual, after the very essence of the Divine nature, is true. Therefore this temple and that temple will collapse—not one stone will be left upon another. They are not *the truth*.' The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth.

#### OUR NEED FOR ABSOLUTE TRUTH IN ALL THINGS

It is very, very important that our position should be a true position. You and I need continually to review our position, and say: 'Is my position a true one? Is it second-hand? What is it? The position in which I stand—how did I come to it? What is it that puts me in this position? Is it to me so true as to be to me absolutely a matter of life or death?' It should be true like that, so that you cannot give it up, you cannot resign from it, you cannot withdraw from it—it is your very self. To do so would be to commit spiritual suicide. That was how it was with the Lord Jesus. Go through His life again, and hear Him speaking. This Man has not just come to perform something, or to give some teaching, objectively; this Man *is* the thing! Because it is so real, so true in Him, He is going to that Cross to shed the last drop of His Blood. His position is that—it is *Himself*.

Our position must be true, or we shall not stand; we shall collapse, we shall go to pieces. If there is a lie, we shall disintegrate, as the creation did when the lie entered in. Our life must be true: our conduct must be true; our walk before others must be true; our walk before God must be true. Our life must be *true*. Mark you, it is going to be an agony for it to be so.

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Our testimony and our teaching must be *true*. Is it truth?

Our fellowship must be *true*—no feigned love! No pretence at fellowship; no trying to make believe; no merely outward thing. The Holy Ghost will be satisfied with nothing less than ‘the truth’ in the matter of fellowship. He will say: ‘Look here, you are trying to make believe in the matter of fellowship with that person; you are trying to bolster up something; you are trying not to let something collapse: that is not *true*!’ He will take you down deep until it is true.

Our church must be true—it must be the true Church. How much could be said about that!

Our business must be true—we must take this matter of the Holy Spirit into our business. Is your manner of business really true? When you are going to pay for something, are you quite sure that you are paying all that you ought to pay for it? that you are not getting it to your own advantage, that someone is not going to suffer in this transaction? Is that *true*? Even John the Baptist raised questions like that at the Jordan, about exacting more than should be (Luke iii. 12–14). Yes, in business we must be true; we cannot have one order of things in Christianity and another one in the world.

Our spirit must be true. We must never be less than we profess, God help us. We must never be more than we profess—God help us! The Holy Spirit is the ‘Spirit of Truth’, for that is the character of the Lord Jesus. To be ‘filled with the Spirit’ is a very, very exacting thing. Ananias and Sapphira tried to ‘steal a march’ on the Holy Spirit: but oh, no, He is not being taken advantage of like that! We cannot ‘hoodwink’ the Holy Spirit. This is very solemn. What do you have in mind when you talk about being ‘filled with the Spirit’? We hear the command: “Be filled with the Spirit”, and we all want to be filled with the Spirit. But we must understand that the Spirit is

the character of Jesus Christ. He is the Spirit of Jesus Christ—and especially in this one respect, as the Spirit of Truth.

To be ‘filled with the Spirit’, therefore, means that everything has got to be true, exact, right, real; no lie, no falsehood, no make-believe, no pretence, no exaggeration, no imitation; everything true, genuine. May God make us like His Son in this! Then the Holy Spirit would do things: through a church like that, through a people like that, and through lives like that, He would do mighty things. When conditions are such, you will not have to try to get things done—He will do them.

That brings us back to the point mentioned in our last study—why things changed at the beginning, when they had been so spontaneous, so mighty, so wonderful. The Holy Spirit was present as the Spirit of Truth, and anything untrue that He came up against was dealt with and not tolerated. Peter’s words seem fierce, I know, but he is jealous, with the jealousy of the Holy Spirit, for the truth: he sees that the Church can be wrecked and ruined if there is a lie getting in—“Why hath Satan filled thy heart?” (Acts v. 3).

We began by saying that we are concerned about this matter of a life of fulness and of powerful witness in the world, and troubled because that impact upon the world is not as it was at the beginning. It *ought* to be the same: the Holy Spirit has not changed, God has not changed, Christ is the same—then what is the trouble? Surely, if it is true that the Holy Spirit commits Himself to the Lord Jesus, then the answer is, once more, that we need more of the Lord Jesus. Which is to say, that we need more of Him in His *character*. This matter of the Truth is only the beginning—there are many more facets to His character than that; but truth is the foundation of everything.

T. A-S.

## WHEN GOD IS WORKING

“Who was I that I could withstand God?” (Acts xi. 17).

THE movements described as ‘The Acts of the Apostles’ were undoubtedly initiated by God Himself. It was the knowledge of this that put Peter in a strong position when he had to defend his behaviour at Caesarea. If God was moving, what did his critics expect him to do? To stand in God’s way? To refuse to have anything to do with the

matter? How can a man of the Spirit do that? Such a man neither dares nor wishes to hinder God. Indeed, if he is truly led of the Spirit, he only needs to perceive what God is doing to be found alongside, sympathetic and co-operative, like his Master whose own actions were governed by what He saw the Father doing (John v. 19).

Peter’s words were not only an apology for his own behaviour, but an implicit reproof of the Jerusalem fault-finders. It is true that what hap-

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pened at Caesarea shocked their traditions: when God is on the move we must expect everything static or earthly-minded to receive some shocks. It surprised them all. God's purest works usually do surprise us; and, after all, this even surprised the man who was the instrument of what was done. It was calculated to arouse great popular distrust and prejudice—but when did God ever allow His actions to be governed by popular approval or criticism? It had cost Peter much to stand before the Jewish rulers and insist that he must obey God rather than man. But it probably cost a good deal more for him to face his critics within the Church itself and to maintain that, whether they liked it or not, his intention was to co-operate with the Spirit of God. If it were a question of withstanding them or withstanding God, he had no option. For he was not taking a self-appointed way: God had set His heart on this work among the nations. Peter might have stood aside; but, if he had, God would have gone on and left him behind.

#### WAITING ON GOD

Although the movement was initiated from Heaven, it was made possible because Peter waited upon God. From the human side this seems to be the explanation of the mighty happenings described in the book of the Acts. The earthly introduction to Pentecost was a group of people waiting prayerfully on the Lord. Later on, the widespread work of the Gospel from Antioch began through a small group who "ministered to the Lord" (Acts xiii. 2). The work began from Heaven; it began by initiative from God; but it was possible because there were men attuned to Heaven, men who were sensitive enough and responsive enough to be told what the next step was and to co-operate with the Lord. Might we not, like Peter, be caught up far more in the goings of God if, like him, we were prepared to wait more upon Him?

Of course such waiting on God provokes spiritual opposition. Had Peter not continued up there on the housetop, or had he positively refused to obey the Lord, he would never have encountered the opposition which he met at Jerusalem. These suspicions and criticisms from those whom he regarded as brethren make strange reading after the early chapters of the book which describe Peter's spiritual power and God-given authority. Yet it is probably true to say that no one who has really waited on God and then moved out in harmony with His Spirit has escaped opposition and misunderstanding from one quarter or another. Those

who want no difficulties had better not wait on God. Those who do wait on Him had better decide from the first that there will be much antagonism to face. But what does antagonism matter if we are in partnership with God? Peter's position was a very strong one. He could claim that what happened at Caesarea was truly a work of God. What did his critics expect him to do? Get in God's way? Or even get out of God's way? No: when God is at work the man of the Spirit must co-operate wholeheartedly.

#### A PEOPLE BORN INTO NEWNESS OF LIFE

Having said this, we now enquire more carefully into the nature of this work of God, for what happened at Caesarea is what the Spirit is seeking to do throughout the whole dispensation. All-inclusively, we may say that His one purpose was to get a full expression of Christ in terms of life. That is how the story finished: ". . . unto LIFE" (xi. 18). Yes, that is it. That is the objective—LIFE, the fulness of eternal life as known in God's Son.

Life is the primary objective of the Lord, and everything else springs out of this. He is seeking to bring dead men to life. He gave His Son that men might not perish but have everlasting life. Nothing less than this will satisfy God. Could He have been content with less; could He have been satisfied with a company of people who feared His Name, read His Word, prayed and exercised charity—then there would have been no need to send Peter to Caesarea, for such a company already existed there. But that was not enough for the Lord, who desired something more than a group of well-meaning religious people, sincerely struggling along in the half-light of their own efforts to please Him. He wanted a people born into newness of life, a people pulsating with the risen life of His Son, that holy and perfect life which is well-pleasing to Him. He wanted, not only that they should do their best, but that they should begin an entirely new and satisfying life by being born again, born from above.

Of course it was really a matter of sharing the Lord's compassion. It is very sad to see men lost in utter worldliness. The heart of God yearns over such, and so will our own hearts, if we are in harmony with Him. But it is, if possible, sadder still when people are sincerely seeking to please God and yet utterly failing because they have not learned the secret that the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ. How the heart of God yearns over such. It is a sad reflection on

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Peter (and indeed on many of us) that he could be so cold, so doubtful, so unwilling, when his Lord's heart was burning with desire to shed the Spirit of Life into that household of Cornelius. Peter had been on the housetop, pouring himself out in prayer. We are not told what he was praying about, but we may be sure that it was about the Lord's work, and probably about his own part in it. When he had prayed himself to a standstill, then he was shown what God really wanted of him. Let us note that 'waiting on God' means more than praying about the things which we feel ought to be done. It was when Peter had exhausted that kind of prayer, when he had finished telling the Lord all that he wanted to say, that the Lord found an opportunity of saying something to him. When he heard it he received a shock. He was surprised, even scandalized, that the Lord should expect this of him. What did Caesarea matter to Peter? What did the Gentiles matter to him? Not very much, apparently, until he was faced with this challenge as to whether he really was ready to co-operate with the will of God in spite of himself. What a tragedy if bigotry and self-opinion can keep a man out of harmony with the heart of God—if a servant of the Lord so lacks the great essential of compassion that he can even contemplate withstanding his Master!

Gospel work is not only a matter of compassion for men, it is a question of sharing the longing of God's heart. 'My Name shall be great among the Gentiles' (Mal. i. 11) was the declared desire and intention of the Lord. How often Peter must have heard or read the words. Yet it seems that he would have been satisfied with a group in Jerusalem, with little companies in Samaria and Joppa, never appreciating that the Father could not be satisfied until His Son had the full inheritance among the nations for which He suffered. There may be some features of modern evangelism which do not commend themselves to us, but these must never be allowed to weaken us in co-operation with Christ in the seeking and saving of that which was lost.

Peter was a key man. Surely, when the Lord Jesus said to him: "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xvi. 19), what He really meant was that Peter was chosen to be the first to announce that that Kingdom was now open to all true believers. He began the task at Pentecost, when his use of 'the keys' was so mightily effective. But the work was only half done, for the vast multitude of the nations still stood outside, waiting for the door to be opened to them. This was Peter's special calling. There were

men moving down to Antioch at that very moment. There was Saul of Tarsus being prepared for his great work of apostle to the Gentiles. There were vast schemes afoot for the making great of the Name among the nations. The Spirit of the Lord was eagerly awaiting these new 'Acts'. All this was true; and yet on the housetop at Joppa was the key man, and, humanly speaking, everything waited on him.

Peter's task can never be repeated. He has no successor. In most cases we cannot even claim to be prominent servants of Christ. Who knows, however, whether we too might not be in a key position, whether great movements of blessing and expansion might not follow on our simple obedience to the Lord? So far as the narrative is concerned, Caesarea was soon left behind. Though undoubtedly the work there was established and grew, Peter's visit was not an end in itself. It was the opening of a door, of a sluice-gate, and from then onwards the great stream of life flowed out wherever new men of the Spirit could be found to co-operate with the Lord in this Divine task of producing a people born into newness of life. It seems that all God needed was a heart to share His concerns and a mouth that would magnify His Son. Peter's message was simply Christ. His success owed nothing to argument or soul intensity. He did not make an appeal, for he had not reached that stage in his message when the thing happened (x. 44). Even as he was speaking dead souls were quickened into life. Surely this is what happens when God is working.

## A PEOPLE BAPTIZED INTO THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SPIRIT

There is no doubt that at Caesarea something more happened even than the miracle of new birth. In one Spirit the group were all baptized into the one Body (I Cor. xii. 13)—the Church. From this story it is clear that the Church is something more than a kindly community, more than a group of people living together in happy comradeship and care for one another. Such a group already existed at Caesarea before ever Peter went there. The whole atmosphere of the house of Cornelius seemed to breathe community life at its best. If an association of like-minded godly people had been satisfying to God, He would not have needed to send this special messenger to them. The purpose of God, though, is to have something much deeper and more lasting than mere human 'fellowship', even at its best. He plans to have real unity, eternal unity, the unity of the one life in Christ, which

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is the outcome of a common sharing of Christ.

In this account we are told nothing of the founding or forming of an earthly institution called 'The Church'. We are simply left with a group who were enjoying a common experience and giving out a common testimony, by reason of their being all filled with the life and love of Christ. They did not form a 'fellowship'; they were baptized into the fellowship of Christ, the eternal fellowship of life and love with the Father and the Son. It was the extent of their fellowship with Christ which determined the extent of their fellowship with one another; they helped one another by giving what they had and knew of Him. Without any need of special premises, officials or forms of service, in a union deeper and yet far more potent than that conferred by any of the externalities which our minds associate with the word 'church', they lived Christ together, having been united in a fusion brought about by the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

It is interesting to note the stress on 'eating and drinking' in this connection. The critics did not complain of Peter's preaching to the Gentiles; the cause of their offence was: "Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them" (xi. 3). Later on, when Peter contradicted his own past and so came into conflict with Paul at Antioch, the whole trouble was that he was afraid to eat with Gentile fellow-believers. It was an outstanding feature of the marvellous joy and unity of the Church's earliest days that "day by day, continuing stedfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they did take their food with gladness . . ." (ii. 46). Is there some spiritual significance in all this?

We may get a clue to it by going back to the early days of Israel's history, when their seventy elders feasted together in the presence of the Lord. As soon as the Law had been given, and before the details of the Tabernacle had been revealed, Moses was commanded to take this representative party up into the mount where "they beheld God, and did eat and drink" (Ex. xxiv. 11). These men were representative of the whole nation. Their experience was an indication of what God could have wished all to enjoy. "They saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and as it were the very heaven for clearness" (v. 10). In this realm of heavenly purity and glory they feasted together with God's smile upon them. They were at home with Him, for there was an altar and shed blood under the mount (vv. 4-8). It was a time of precious fellowship; by virtue of their communion with Him they knew true communion with one an-

other. Their eyes were not for their own concerns; they were not on one another, nor even on their leaders: they looked on the Lord, and in a sense they feasted with Him. They were not seventy men who had formed a 'fellowship', but men who were tasting the joys of sharing life with God, feasting with Him. They themselves were transformed by the experience, for when they went up they were described as "elders" (vv. 1, 9), but later they were called "the nobles of Israel" (v. 11). Sitting at the King's table, they themselves had become princes.

It is striking that Peter witnessed to the gathered company that he with others "did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead" (Acts x. 41). This, of course, may be taken as a substantial proof concerning the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ, but there must be a spiritual meaning behind the factual evidence. Peter was a witness, not only of resurrection life freely given to the individual believer, but of a new community, constituted by reason of their common sharing of that resurrection life. They had fellowship together because they had fellowship with Him. How could Peter refuse to eat and drink with Cornelius, when the Lord had not refused to eat and drink with him? When men have this supreme experience of sharing life with Christ, they are fused into a vital union with one another.

This, then, was the effect of Peter's message when it was received in faith: it brought about a mighty baptism of men into a common life together. Local churches are not brought about by human arrangement; they must be born from Heaven, even as the individual Christian. This was what happened when God was at work. It happened at Caesarea, and then it happened again and again—at Antioch, at Thessalonica, and in so many other places. In every case, something was born from above, in terms of Holy Ghost corporate living. Wherever that happens there is some expression of the Church, and whenever that is lacking there is something lamentably short of the Divine plan, whatever men may think about it. We cannot form churches. Only the Spirit can do that. But we can wait upon God, as Peter did; we can travail for their birth; we can be bold in our testimony and obedient to the Spirit; we can pay the price, like Peter, and, like him, leave the consequences with God.

#### A PEOPLE EXPRESSING THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

Thirdly, God is seeking to produce a people who proclaim in life and utterance that Jesus Christ is



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Lord of all. It is the duty and privilege of the Church constantly to experience and express the absolute authority of its glorified Head. How wonderfully the Lord prepared Peter for establishing that authority at Caesarea! He could not have declared Jesus as Lord of all with effective power if it had not been true in his own case, and true right up to date. This was the preparation for his ministry; not only meditation or study, but a new, deeper and more thorough-going challenge as to the reality of what he believed. The challenge found him out, revealing that after all he still had reservations in his absolute submission to Christ. There was one call for which he was not really willing. When that had been put right, when he was prepared to obey, whatever the outcome and the cost, then he could announce: 'He is Lord of all' (x. 36), and find the Holy Spirit making the truth operative in his hearers.

One is reminded of another centurion, who recognised the Lord Jesus as a Man invested with heavenly authority because Himself subject to the Father. He knew that the secret of authority is to be, oneself, 'a man under authority' (Luke vii. 8). How true this was in Peter's case! At first Cornelius made the mistake of imagining that Peter was some great one in himself. He wanted to fall down and worship him. He had to learn, as we must all learn, that spiritual authority is not possessed by the servant of Christ, but only works through him as he himself abides in his Master. The vessel is nothing; Christ is all. Peter made it clear that he was not in charge of the situation: so much so, that Cornelius brought them all to the point by inviting Peter to tell them "all things that have been *commanded* thee of the Lord" (x. 33). Things were completely out of man's hands. The rest of the story proves that. Not only Cornelius, but the Jews with Peter, and even Peter himself, were witnesses of how absolute and how marvellous is the Spirit's working to show that Christ is indeed Lord of all.

This is what the Church is for—to impose the supreme authority of Christ over every other power in earth or hell. The book of the Acts shows how it is done. To those early Christians the sovereignty of Christ was more than a topic, or an article of a creed; it *worked*. They themselves came so under His absolute Lordship that they became a people of authority. The very next chapter gives a heartening illustration of this, when Peter himself was delivered from prison and death through the prayer-ministry of such a group baptized into the mighty Name of the Lord Jesus. So often the Church of to-day seeks influence and standing with men but has no power with God. That band of prayerful saints had no recognition from the authorities, but they knew how to express the supreme authority of Christ. Instead of forming committees to discuss ways and means, instead of organizing protests or drawing up petitions, they claimed the authority of the Name. And, because they themselves were utterly submissive to that authority, nothing could withstand them. Chains fell off, guards were powerless, a cell was opened, a great iron gate swung back on its hinges—yes, and Herod, the cause of the trouble, was hurled ignominiously into the dust. HE is Lord of all! Nevertheless, only a man wholly yielded, as Peter was, can effectively communicate that power to others, and only a church completely subject to the Holy Spirit can wield the mighty power of the Name.

This, however, is just what happens when God is at work. If only He can obtain whole-hearted co-operation from the human side, He will constitute such churches, baptized into new life, into heavenly fellowship and into spiritual authority. Let us not, by our slowness, our blindness or our unwillingness to pay the price, be found withstanding God; rather let us seek to co-operate to the utmost of our ability. We have yet to see what can happen *when God is working*.

H. F.

## THE ARM OF THE LORD

## I. THE SITUATION AND THE NEED

*Reading: Isaiah lii. 13 – liii. 12.*

*"Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?"*

THE word 'arm' is used symbolically many times in the Scriptures, to signify that upon which man relies for strength and support. The arm

represents the person: sometimes the person is in weakness, and his arm is described as being weak: sometimes it is in strength. The arm is the symbol of the person, or sometimes of the people or the nation, but always indicating the state of strength or weakness. This phrase, therefore, "the arm of the Lord", when used in relation to men or nations, implies the giving of His strength and

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support to that which is according to His mind, the showing of Himself in power on behalf of it.

To whom, then, will the Lord show Himself in power? To whom will the Lord 'make bare' His arm (Is. lii. 10)? "To whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

### BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

Now, while in the Bible there are very many incidents in which the arm of the Lord is shown, there are particular occasions characterized by this phrase. For instance, in the bringing of Israel out of Egypt we find repeated reference to the baring of His arm, the stretching forth of His arm. That incident is so often referred to as being an outstanding occasion of the Lord's showing of His arm, the 'lighting down of His arm' (Is. xxx. 30). To bring them out, the arm of the Lord was 'revealed'. If you read and consider that whole story of God's dealings with Pharaoh and Egypt on behalf of His people, you find that it is all gathered up in this: it was the revealing of the arm of the Lord. Of course, it is but an illustration—the emancipation of an elect people from the kingdom of this world and of darkness; but, for that, the arm of the Lord is revealed.

Again, take Israel's deliverance from Babylon: that was another occasion when the arm of the Lord was revealed. How often was it so regarded: the arm of the Lord, stretched out over Babylon, brought down her rulers and overthrew her forces, in order to bring the people back from captivity (Is. xliii. 14). And again, that was symbolic—the recovery of a pure testimony amongst the Lord's people, a testimony that had been lost. If the question is asked: "To whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" or in another tense: 'To whom will the arm of the Lord be revealed?'—the answer is there: it is for that purpose, in relation to that.

But it is in the raising of Jesus, and in His exaltation to the right hand of the Majesty in the Heavens, that we surely see the supreme example of the revealing of the arm of the Lord. And in those succeeding early days of the Church, how wonderful was this revealing of the arm of the Lord! In the events narrated in those first chapters of the book of the Acts, we see His arm stretched out again and again. When they were suffering persecution, a few met together for prayer, and they prayed: "Grant unto thy servants . . . boldness, while thou stretchest forth thy hand . . . and that signs and wonders may be done . . ." (Acts iv. 29, 30). Herod came under the impact of that arm; Saul of Tarsus came under its

same impact; many things happened, in many places, because the Lord was revealing His arm.

And before we are at the end of the New Testament, the whole of the nation of Israel has met the arm of the Lord. It was revealed in the complete overthrow and scattering of Israel as a nation, and so thorough was the overthrow that her original integration has never yet been recovered. More still—Rome unleashed all her forces against the Lord and against His anointed, but met the arm of the Lord, and was completely destroyed, ceased to be an empire and a nation. These are just a few examples in history of the revealing of the arm of the Lord, in answer to this question: "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"

### COMMON FEATURES

Now you will notice that many of these instances have certain features in common.

Firstly, there was the exalting of world powers against God: the lifting up of the head on the part of the powers of this world against the Lord and against His anointed.

Secondly, there was the involvement of the Lord's glory and the Lord's purpose, through conditions of weakness or apostasy amongst His own people. It was not to the Lord's glory to have Israel in Egypt. After the covenant that the Lord had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, it was altogether contrary to the revealed purpose of His heart, that He should have the sons of Israel in bondage in Egypt, giving their strength to the powers of evil. It was entirely contrary to the glory of God to have Israel in Babylon; it was dishonouring to Him and contrary to His revealed intention. How often it was like that—that the Lord revealed His arm because of a condition amongst His own people.

And then, thirdly, there was a cry from within on the part of an instrument of intercession. There was Moses, in touch with God right from the inside in relation to that situation in Egypt; there was Daniel, and a few others with him, right on the inside of the situation in Babylon, crying to God; there were those prayer meetings recorded in the book of the Acts—the cry of the elect to be avenged. This was a feature common to the intervention of God again and again—a cry from the inside.

Some questions arise in relation to all this in our own day. Is there a situation in our time which corresponds to these situations, in that three-fold connection? Is there a condition like that today? I think the answer is obvious. Are world powers lifting up their heads against the Lord?

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Was there ever a time when the throne of God was more challenged by world powers than to-day? Is there a condition in Christianity which brings much dishonour to the Lord? Is the Lord's true testimony to-day involved in a spiritual state which is contrary to His revealed mind? The answer again is self-evident. It is impossible in these days to move about this world without meeting these two things and being almost overwhelmed by them. The tremendous force of evil that is set against God! You feel it, you meet it, it comes out at you everywhere. And if that is distressing, without exaggeration even more distressing is the state in Christianity generally, which is such a contradiction to what God has revealed as to His purpose. Sometimes you are almost compelled to say that the greatest enemy of Christianity is—Christianity. I am speaking, of course, very generally. The honour and glory of God is deeply involved to-day in a condition amongst His people which is very dishonouring to Him. These two conditions undoubtedly obtain to-day.

What about the third feature? Is there a cry from the inside? It is difficult to say much about this—perhaps Yes and No. There is a growing sense within the heart of many children of God that things are not right—a real sense that this is not what the Lord meant; and there is, I believe, a cry deep down in many hearts for some changing of the spiritual condition among His people. With all the very general satisfaction with so little, there is here and there a cry, even a discerning and understanding cry, born of a conviction that the Lord meant something other for His Church than this. *This* could never answer to God's standard! It may be that this consciousness is stronger and its expression greater than we are able to assess. The Lord must have it, if He is to be able to do anything; but even if it is only a Daniel and three or four others in Babylon, that is enough for Him. I would lay great emphasis upon this last point: the urgent need of a deepened, strengthened cry to God. I come back to that again presently.

### WILL THE LORD AGAIN REVEAL HIS ARM?

These three things, then, surely do obtain to-day. Is it not therefore time that the arm of the Lord should once more be revealed? 'To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?' Have we in the Scriptures anything to justify an expectation that, at the end, the arm of the Lord will again be revealed, as on these former occasions? Is there something that would support our prayer and our expectation? Surely there is much! For instance, on the

day of Pentecost Peter quoted from the prophecies of Joel; but he broke off the prophecy before he finished it. And the fulfilment of the prophecy on that day also stopped at a certain point: it stopped at the outpouring of the Spirit. Peter said: 'This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel' (Acts ii. 16). But Joel's prophecy, from which Peter quoted at some length, did not have its complete fulfilment on that day. If you look again at Acts ii. 19–21, you will see that some mighty things were included in that same prophecy, which were suspended on the Day of Pentecost for a later day. Those things are held in reserve for another time.

Again, you remember the incident when the Lord Jesus, returning from the wilderness in the power of the Spirit, went to Nazareth and entered into the synagogue on the sabbath day (Luke iv. 16–19). The roll was handed to Him, and He opened it at Isaiah lxi, and began to read. But at a certain point, before He had finished the prophecy, He stopped. At the words: "... the acceptable year of the Lord", He broke off, and sat down. He did not finish with: "and the day of vengeance of our God"; He left that part of the prophecy unread. That is suspended; that has yet to be.

Then we have a passage such as Matthew xxiv, from verse 29 onwards, pointing to what will happen at the end, at the day of the coming of the Lord. It is full of the marks of the baring of the arm of the Lord, the intervention of God at the end time. It is impressive, is it not, that some of the statements in that passage are identical in language with the remainder of Joel's prophecy. These things have not all been fulfilled yet; they are suspended for a later day.

And what are we to say about the Book of the Revelation? Whatever interpretation you accept of that Book, historicist, futurist, or whatever it might be, you cannot get away from the fact that it all focuses upon the Day of the Coming of the Lord. It is full of interventions of God—in the life of the Church, in the life of the nations, and in the kingdom of darkness. Yes, I think there is much in the Word that would justify an expectation that, at the end, there is going to be a very great revealing of the arm of the Lord.

### THE NEED FOR THE REVEALING OF THE ARM OF THE LORD

#### (1) AMONG HIS OWN PEOPLE

Later, we are going to ask the question: What will be the principles upon which the arm of the

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Lord will be revealed, at any time, for any people, or against any situation? For the moment we confine our attention to the fact of the very great *need* for the revealing of the arm of the Lord in our time. That need exists, firstly, very strongly and urgently amongst the Lord's own people. Indeed, it becomes a personal and individual matter. It is of very great consequence whether the Lord can stand with each one of us, individually—stand alongside of us with His power and with His might; show His arm on behalf of you and of me, personally. It is of tremendous importance whether the Lord can commit Himself to you and me, and say, 'I can be with that man, I can be with that woman, with My strength. I can put My power alongside of them.'

Again, it is a very important thing whether the Lord can put His power behind us as local companies of His people—whether He can stand with us in strength, and say: 'This is something I am going to look after; this is something that I am going to defend; this is something for which I am going to exercise My power: I am with this; I am in this.' That is an ultimate question. What is the good of anything at all—all our striving, all our teaching, all our expenditure of time and energy—if the Lord is not with us, not free to exercise His power, to show Himself mighty on our behalf?

And what is true for the individual, and for the local companies, is true for the people of God in this world. For the entire people of God are involved in this world situation, and nothing but the arm of the Lord can save them. Only one thing can meet this present need and situation amongst the Lord's people, and that is, that He should make bare His arm; that there should be the 'lighting down' of His mighty arm.

## (2) IN THE WORLD

But if that is true in these three senses amongst His own people, what about this world, this iniquitous, evil world? Perhaps it is just there that we sometimes get nearest to having our greatest controversy with the Lord. I confess that, as I have moved over great ranges of this world, and seen things, sometimes the question has arisen in my own heart: 'Oh Lord, how can You bear to allow this to go on? How can You, being in the position that You occupy, tolerate this?' I am not exaggerating. In a few hours from London I could show you something that would so horrify you as to make you cry out, 'Oh, God, bring this creation to an end soon!' The evil, the suffering, is such that nothing but the arm of the Lord can meet it.

This is a word for the hour, and we are going to ask this question, and seek to answer it, as far as possible, later. *What are the principles upon which the arm of the Lord will be revealed?* For we must recognise that that arm is, in a sense, governed; its baring is conditional. There are times when the arm of the Lord is, as it were, paralysed; it is bound, it cannot move, it is not free. It was the cry of the prophet that He was like a bound man in the midst of His people, unable to move (Jer. xiv. 9). There are principles, spiritual laws, which govern the arm of the Lord. And whether it be our own personal need of the arm, or the need in local companies, or in the Church, or in the world, we must understand the ground upon which the Lord will exercise the might of His arm; the conditions upon which He will lift it, stretch it out, and perform His mighty acts.

As I have said, I am not answering that question immediately; that will come later. For the present I just want to bring into view the whole matter of the *need* of the arm of the Lord to be revealed. I want you to be gripped afresh by that need. This word was exercising me for many weeks, especially as I moved about in the Far East: 'Arm of the Lord, awake!' (Is. li. 9). How great is the need for the arm of the Lord in this many-sided world situation. It could be put in other ways: Oh, that the Lord would do something—really *do* something! If the Lord would bring upon His people in these days a new sense of this need for the revealing of His arm, and move us, firstly to send up a cry, and then to get into line with those laws which govern the moving of His arm, this message will have been worth while, of very real consequence.

## THE NEED FOR A HEART-CRY

First of all, a cry against spiritual iniquity on this earth, I would that I could tell you just a little of what I have seen and heard resulting from the spiritual iniquity that is at work in this world—the lives stripped and rent and harassed; the families broken up—oh, it is a terrible story. It is sheer, diabolical evil—nothing but Satanic ingenuity and cunning; and it is all concentrated upon ridding this world of God, and of all that is of God, as represented in men and women. It is utterly evil. The sorrow and the suffering that we have met and touched day after day, and that we know is still going on in parts of this world to-day, is indescribable—utterly inhuman. Language cannot express the devilish character of that which is at work on the earth to-day. Oh, for a cry to Heaven that will

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bring the Arm of the Lord against this spiritual iniquity—for it is *spiritual* iniquity. I do not think that man, even at his worst, could, if left to himself, conceive these things.

Then, for a cry against the dishonour of the Lord in the general spiritual state of those who bear the name 'Christian'. There again is a terrible story. Yes, the real difficulty for the Lord is amongst those who take upon them that name 'Christian'. There needs to be a cry raised to Heaven against the dishonour done to the Name of the Lord by that which is called the 'Christian Church'.

And then, a cry against the too easy satisfaction that goes with a superficial apprehension of the great purpose of God. Again and again, my soul has been stirred with anger at the superficial and easy-going attitude that prevails towards the great purpose of God. Here is revealed this immense purpose of God 'from eternity to eternity', and yet the attitude toward spiritual things so often is: 'Oh, well, a modicum is sufficient.' The most limited measure seems to be all that is required to bring a great deal of gratification. If you have any idea at all of the greatness of God's purpose, and give expression to it, it is heart-rending to find how it can be all carried away by the most superficial, glamorous kind of Christianity; as though this noisy, jazzy thing corresponded in any way to that vast purpose of God concerning His Son. It makes you indignant; it stirs you to the depths. There needs to be a cry against that which would become a substitute for, would usurp the place of, God's great purpose, in the hearts of His people.

When the prophet Isaiah became oppressed with the evils found among the people of God, Israel, and with the evil in the nations outside, he cried with a great cry: "Oh that thou wouldest

rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence . . . When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down . . ." (Is. lxiv. 1, 3). "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens"! You have only to move about in this world, sensing things, sizing things up, for that cry to be born in you. But ask the Lord to put within you such a cry, to make you a part of this 'inside' cry, for the glory of God in a day like this. Ask Him to make you part of that essential instrument and vessel, like the Daniel company, or Esther, or Moses, or the 'prayer meeting' in Jerusalem, or many other such vessels, that will reach Heaven with a cry, and bring forth that Arm. For that is a vital principle: "For this . . . will I be enquired of by the house of Israel" (Ezek. xxxvi. 37). The Arm of the Lord will not just 'happen'; the Arm of the Lord will only be revealed in response to something that is crying to Him. "Shall not God avenge his elect, which cry to him day and night . . .? I say unto you, that he will" (Luke xviii. 7, 8). He will—but He must have a crying elect.

The Lord make us like that. This is, I know, a solemn word. But this is a day for being serious, a time for facing the real situation, not just going on in a fool's paradise, as though all were well. God must be reached with a cry in these days; I can only say this out of very close touch with this great need. No one who has seen something of conditions in the Far East could help being stirred in this way, or come back other than with this in their heart: Oh, that the people of God would get to crying to God about this situation! I therefore bring this emphasis at the outset, and afterwards we may see something of the ground on which the Lord will move.

T. A-S.

## THE BODY OF CHRIST

**WE** come now to the practical side. God has first to give us the revelation, so that we see what He is after. But what am I after? Do I seek spiritual experiences—so-called—for myself? Do I seek to make converts for my society, for my denomination? Do I try to make converts for the sake of their being saved from hell, so that they can enjoy Heaven? Or have I seen the vision of the heavenly thing, the heavenly Man, and am I working toward that? Oh, it is a different thing. Every-

thing changes—even the question of deliverance from sin, of sanctification, of victory. Everything takes on a different viewpoint. I become a part of the whole.

It is not just a matter of the doctrine of the Body. Even in Rome, you will find the Vatican is teaching that. They believe in one church, because they say the Body is one; but they have their own head. That is the trouble. They have not seen it. You cannot just practise it as a principle—you

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## THE PLACE OF THE CROSS

cannot simply try to take it on. You have to *see* it. But when once it is seen, then it makes a mighty difference in everything.

## THE PRACTICAL SIDE

Now, as to the practical side. What constitutes me a member of the Body? If the Lord gives me a revelation concerning the Body, what will be the effect on me? Is it simply that I have seen something which I have never seen before, that I have the knowledge of certain truths which I never had before?—or is that revelation going to be revolutionary? Will that revelation be treated by me as a teaching, as a doctrine?—or will it become something really subjective in me, producing some real change in me? Let me assure you that, when you have seen it, it is going to be a revolution. Something is bound to happen.

What constitutes me a member of the Body? It is not something I can do, it is not something I can experience. The thing that constitutes me a member of the Body of Christ is *Christ in me*. That entitles me to be, and that actually makes me, a member of the Body. If you do not mind getting down to material illustrations, remember again that loaf of bread. It is not anything of you, it is not some part of you, as a man, which is a member of the Body of Christ. It is, in figure, that piece of bread in you that constitutes you a member of the Body. The Body of Christ is *Christ*. Paul did not say anything wrong grammatically or spiritually when he said: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is the Christ" (I Cor. xii, 12). I think some of us would like to correct him. Grammatically, or logically, it is wrong. He ought to have said, 'so also is the Christ and the Church'. He only says, "Members . . . body . . . so also is the Christ." So the Head is the Christ and the Body is the Christ. Both are the Christ—the Head and the Body.

So the Body is the Christ. Everything that comes from Christ constitutes that Body. Then anything that does not come from Christ can never get into the Body, and must be ruled out. It is not a question of 'plus', it is a question of 'minus'. That is all the difficulty. It is not a question of what you must be, or must experience, in order to make you a member. No, you are a member, but because you are one, therefore many things have to go. If you see the spiritual constitution of that Body, the heavenliness of that Body, the divineness of that Body, you will see that nothing from you can be attached to it. Anything that is not Christ can never be in the Body.

That is where the Cross comes in; that is the reason why we emphasize the Cross. The Cross is the practical outworking, and the principle of the Cross is the only Divine means of ruling out anything that is of ourselves—anything that can never stay in the Body. So we find the Lord dealing with us in many things. I do not mean to say sins; I think that would be too low a level. I hope we have, in a sense, got through that. But the point is that we can never bring into the Body the things of ourselves—our temperament, our make-up, for instance. You will find that God will touch you there.

Some of us have very keen brains. We think that, by the keenness of our brain, we can have a better mastery of the Word of God, and that so we can be better ministers. But no. You will find that what you have is only dead knowledge, whereas some old woman, maybe, sitting at the back of the meeting, without much of worldly education, knows something of the Lord. You may be pastor or minister, but you find, when standing before her, that there is something more of Christ in that old lady than there is in you. You find that what you have got is altogether outside of the Body.

May the Lord save us from ministering simply because we have a keen brain! How many of us need salvation from our head—salvation with a helmet! We need it. Your ability, your natural power, has nothing to do with the Body; it has to go out. God wants us to see that the strength of nature, the backbone of the strength of our own nature, must be broken. It has nothing to do with the Body. When you see that, spontaneously you will see that it cannot go on: that thing has no place there, it has to go out.

I would like to ask you to go through Ephesians once more, asking the Lord so show it to you. 'Lord, what is Thy thought concerning this age?' Do you think you will be able to find anything other than the Body? You will find that that is *the* thing God is building to-day. So whatever is of me must go. The Cross points me straight on to the Body, and the Cross keeps the Body cleansed from anything that is natural, anything that is from Adam. Praise the Lord, nothing that is of me has a part in Him. How good it is to see that I am out altogether! We have nothing to be proud of. If we are proud, we have got to be humbled. Nothing that is in us or of us has any place there. We may think much of ourselves; we may be self-confident, self-conceited, assuming and presuming a great deal; but remember, nothing of us has any place

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

there. The Cross has to work. It is very costly, because it is going to touch the very spring of your life. It may touch something you are holding on to very dearly, and then you find it has to go. That is the Body.

## NO 'FREE-LANCING'

And then you find that the whole question of your movement as an individual member, just by yourself, has to cease. There cannot be 'free-lancing' in the Body. The Body will not allow it. If I move my finger, the muscle of my hand cannot refuse to move, it has to follow. If I move my arm, my finger cannot stay where it is, or take an individual course. The whole body has to respond to the movement of the head. I have to come to a place where I see I am an integral part of the Body. I cannot move as by myself. It is a question of the Body. You will find that every movement has to take its shape on the ground of the Body. Individual things have to go; you have to wait for others; you have to move with others. You have to go on with God and with your brethren.

That settles the question of all other headships. The question of other headships in the Body of Christ is doing damage to the Body. It is upsetting the Lordship of Jesus. It is the Anointed One being put off the Throne and someone else put on it. It is Saul as over against David.

## SAUL VERSUS DAVID

What Saul stands for is simply this—an organized thing, a system of things, among the people of God, as set over against the Anointed One of God. You have two enemies of David. On the one hand, you have Goliath, and the Philistines under him—the enemy coming from outside. On the other hand, you have Saul—the one coming from within. It may be true that Saul has been engaged in fighting Goliath, but please remember that both are keeping David from the throne. The characteristic of Saul is that he stands head and shoulders above all the Israelites. He is a man of exceptional

(concluded)

standing; he represents the human brain, human notions, human ideas, as over against the Divine; what men think to be good, to be right, as over against God. That is Saul. That is keeping the Anointed One from the Throne.

But the day came when David, with a sling, sent a stone into the head of Goliath. He did not send a stone into Saul, but from the day when Goliath's head was hit the head of Saul was hit, to all intents and purposes. The power of Saul waned. The reign of Saul failed on the very day when Goliath was killed. The stone which hit Goliath dealt a death blow to the head of Saul. There is no need for us to make a direct hit against the present system of things. We are not dealing with flesh and blood; but if, by the mercy of God, a death blow could be dealt to our enemy, the unseen one, the spiritual one, the outside one, we should find that, when he has been dealt with, Saul's reign is already numbered. All other headships have to go, all other kings have to go. The Throne must be given to David. That is what God is doing to-day.

What I have in my heart is just this. If you really know the Cross, it will lead you into the Body. One thing puzzles me when I meet Christians. So many profess to know the Lord, so many profess to have given up everything for the Lord, so many profess to know what is the deeper meaning of the Cross, but nothing happens. They are still where they were—nothing happens. They profess to believe in the Body, they profess that all are one in Christ. They stress that the old man has to go, the man after nature has to go; nothing of that can be left, can be kept: but nothing happens. You never find the outworking of the thing.

It is not talking. May the Lord save us if we are only talking. The Lord has to give us something spiritually, so that we really see it. Then we shall see that all we have been going through, all the Lord's dealings with us, are with a view to the Body. He is taking pains to eliminate all that is of us, and make us functioning members of the Body. May He lead us to see clearly what He is after, and to see that nothing that is of us can have any part in His Body.

W. N.

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

## A STRANGE ANSWER TO PRAYER

**D**ETROIT, Michigan, is an important city in the U. S. A., near to the border with Canada. Years ago, it had a beautiful church, which was so finely built that it was known as one of the 'sights' of

the city. The church was not only famous—it was prosperous too, having as its Pastor Dr. A. T. Pierson, who was a clever and faithful preacher of the Word of God and greatly liked by all. Yet he

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was not happy. He was proud of the lovely building and he liked preaching in it, but still he was sad. He had come to feel that he and the church were failing the Lord, because of their lack of care for the needs of others.

At last he could bear it no longer. One stormy Friday evening in March he opened his heart to the 75 members who had gathered for the church Prayer Meeting. He told them how troubled he was, how ashamed before the Lord, and how full of longings for new power to preach Christ to the people round about. It seemed to him that their church building was so splendid and ornamental, their special choral singing so grand, their pews so high and their whole life so self-centred, that it kept people at a distance instead of welcoming them. Could they not ask the Lord all together that their church might become a place of blessing to many, and that He would take away every hindrance to this? Then Pastor and people knelt together and prayed that at all costs their church might be used to give the Bread of Life to the unsaved multitudes of the city.

When they had finished praying one of the elders thought he could smell smoke, but as it was a windy night he took little notice of it. As a matter of fact the Lord had begun to answer their prayer. It was a very quick answer to prayer, and a very strange one too: for, when they woke in the morning, they found their beautiful temple in ashes. There was a faulty flue in the chimney, and during the night the fire had crept along between the walls so that in the early dawn the flames took charge, and by the time the fire engines arrived the whole building was a roaring furnace.

When they had prayed 'at all costs', they never thought that the cost would be so great. And, when they had asked the Lord to take away 'every hindrance', they little expected Him to take away their lovely church. Poor people! They had lost their fine building, their magnificent organ, and the pews which brought in such good rents. And poor Pastor too! For he had lost not only his pulpit, but also his study, which was in the church tower. In it there were over 1,000 volumes which had all been burnt up. Worse than that, all his sermons were there. For 20 years he had carefully written out all his eloquent addresses, so that he

could read them from the pulpit, and then he had stored them away in the study. Now his 2,000 precious sermons had gone up in smoke. When Dr. Pierson heard the news he remembered his prayer . . . 'at all costs' . . . 'every hindrance'. Was this the strange answer from Heaven?

He was sure that it was. From that moment he made up his mind that in future, instead of reading sermons written on paper, he would preach messages straight from the heart. In the years to come many people in England as well as in America were to testify to what wonderful Christ-glorifying messages they were. Meanwhile, it was Saturday, and they had no building for the next day's services. At once Dr. Pierson called together the elders and suggested that they should hire the local Opera House for their Sunday meetings.

Next day the crowds began to gather long before the doors were opened. There were no special pews. All the seats were free. Soon the place was packed right up to the top gallery. It was a homely and hearty meeting, with Gospel hymns sung by all, though led by a volunteer choir. The building was not very ornamental, and it certainly was not 'sacred', but it became filled with the Presence and power of the Lord. Presently a great hush came on all, as they listened to a message which had been sought on the knees instead of being written in the study. Few, if any, in that city had ever heard God speak to them so solemnly about 'The Ordeal by Fire', from the text, "*The fire shall try every man's work . . .*" (1 Cor. 3. 13). As people began to seek the Saviour it was clear that Friday night's prayer was being answered. Among the first to be won were two theatrical men, who had looked in to collect their baggage, and became rooted to the spot as God spoke to them from the stage where they had been acting the night before.

This marked the beginning of a wonderful work of God in the city. As the weeks went on there was not even standing room, and large numbers had to be turned away. Hundreds came to know the Lord Jesus as their Saviour.

This story proves once more that God's answers to our prayers are sure. Sometimes they are strange. We need to mean business when we pray, and then we may prove that, after all, the strange answers are the most wonderful.

H. F.



## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

## I HAVE LEARNED . . . I KNOW . . . I CAN DO . . . THROUGH CHRIST

*"Not that I speak in respect of want : for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound : in everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want, I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me" (Philippians iv. 11 - 13).*

**I**F there is one statement in Scripture that finds us out, it is this one. It was Paul who said it ; but I wonder how many of us could say it, with the same positive affirmation? You will notice, however, that the Apostle is stating it as the result of a life-long schooling. 'This', he says, 'is the issue of my schooling with Christ. I have learned the secret. "I have learned . . . I know . . . I can do . . ."'!

The course of things is learning through experience, and thus coming to knowledge—knowledge which is not theory at all, but which works out in practice: "I can do". That is the meaning for us of life with Christ. If we, His children, want to know the meaning of our experiences in this very exacting school—for it is an exacting school; we don't get away with anything ; nothing escapes ; we are held to it, severely and strictly, though behind all is wisdom and love—the meaning of our experiences in the exacting school which the Christian life is, and is intended to be, it is that we may *learn*, that we may *know*, that we may *do*. God's end is always a practical end, and the end is *doing*. 'I have learned . . . I know . . . I can do !'

And, of course, the way to that end is learning that you *cannot* do, and that you do *not* know. I suppose that that is the truest thing that could be said of anyone in the School of the Spirit. The thing that they are learning is that they cannot do, and they do not know. That is the way. It does seem, on the one hand, a negative process ; it does seem to be an undoing experience ; but God's ends are always positive. And an absolute necessity to our arriving at the position, "I can do all things"—a tremendous statement!—which is His will for every one of us, is a deep, fundamental consciousness and realisation of how bankrupt we are of knowledge and of ability apart from Christ. For the all-governing clause or fragment is: 'in Him—who is, in Christ—who strengthens me'.

But, while this is a message of rebuke and cor-

rection, demanding adjustment, here is a word of tremendous hope, tremendous comfort.

## SELF-MISTRUST

I was reading recently Boreham's *Oliver Cromwell*. When Cromwell was a young fellow, farming in Huntingdonshire, he wrote a letter to his aunt, in which there occurred the following words:

'I am a poor creature ; I am sure that I shall never earn the least mite.'

There is the foundation of a man who hurled kings and thrones from their places ; turned a régime upside down ; became the terror of evil-doers ; and was, if not the greatest, one of the greatest champions of God in the history of this country. 'I am a poor creature ; I am sure I shall never earn the least mite'! You should hear what Thomas Carlyle says about him. Someone said that Cromwell was one of the four greatest men in history. Says Boreham: 'Carlyle would laugh: "Four! The other three are mere puppets compared with Cromwell—they are not in the same world with him!"'

But, Carlyle goes on to say, there was a turning point in Cromwell's life. From the Huntingdonshire farmer, with the consciousness of his weakness, his insufficiency, his worthlessness, there came a turn. Carlyle's way of expressing it, because he did not know in experience what he was talking about, was: 'It was what Cromwell would call his "conversion".' We know what that means. And then, away ploughing in his field, Cromwell heard of the great need: 'Everything in this country', says Boreham, 'rushing pell-mell toward turgid crisis, wild tumult, red revolution, and the cry for a man, a good man, a strong man, a great man.' As he heard that cry, whilst ploughing his field, something inside him said: 'You are that man! The world needs a man, a good man, a great man, a strong man—Thou art the man!'

Cromwell set to weighing up his assets and his liabilities: 'I cannot be that man ; I can never answer that call, meet that demand.' But then, as he was thinking about it after the day's work, in his country home, by the fire, with his wife at his side, and the little child in the cradle, he took down the big Bible, and opened it to read ; and turning the pages, he came to the letter to the Philippians, and began to read chapter iv. He stopped at verse 13 :

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“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”—and that was the beginning of the history that we know. It carried him through to the end. When he was at Hampton Court, passing from this life, he called for the Bible, and asked them to read; and they said: ‘What shall we read?’ And he said: ‘Read from Philippians iv. 13—“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”’

Now, you and I are not going to be Oliver Cromwells; we need not begin to get big ideas! But the principles are the same. ‘I am a poor creature’—is that how you feel to-day? Most of us feel like that! ‘I shall never earn the smallest mite.’ Our worth, our ‘worthfulness’, is *nil*. The Apostle Paul, with all his great endowments, was one man who was ever ready to tell us of his own worthlessness: ‘Chief of sinners, chief of sinners’; ‘I am what I am by the grace of God’; and much more like that.

### THE SCHOOL OF CHRIST

We have said that Paul arrived at this position through a long and difficult schooling. We have some catalogues given us by him as to what he encountered, in that School of Christ, of opposition and adversity, of trials and difficulties, of suffering and affliction. He is telling us that that was the nature of the school; they were the things that made up his schooling. But what he is saying is—not: ‘I have arrived to-day at this conclusion, after all that’—but: ‘It was in the schooling, when I was in persecution, that I discovered this. When I was in hunger and nakedness and peril, my reaction to my situation was such as to make that experience yield a secret; to wring a knowledge, a secret, out of the very situation itself.’

Now, when you and I are in trouble, going through a difficult time, having a difficult experience, perhaps our first thought is to pray that we might get out of it, be delivered from it. We groan in it, and long for a change of the situation, some way of escape. That is usually our reaction. ‘How long will this last? when will the Lord deliver me from this? when will He change this whole thing? when will it pass?’ But I gather, from what Paul says, that his was another reaction. He took in this situation, and he said to himself: ‘I have something to learn in this—something that is going to make me able for more later on. There is a secret buried in this, and I am going to extract that secret. I am going to make this yield something, for the Lord and for the future.’ With Paul it was

not, ‘How can I get out of it?’, but, ‘What can I get out of it?’ We usually say, in the presence of very real difficulties, sorrows and trials: ‘I cannot . . . I just cannot go on; I cannot bear this any more. I just *cannot!*’ Paul was saying to his situations: ‘I am going to make you teach me how I *can!*’

### A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

You see, it is a question of a positive attitude toward things, is it not? It makes such a difference, the attitude that we take. “*I have learned . . .*”: I have learned the secret; I have made everything yield something of a positive character. The result is: “*I know . . .*”: I know how to be abased, to be set at nought, to be walked over, trampled upon, ignored, regarded as worthless; I know how to take hold of that—how not to go down under it, but to make it serve spiritual ends. I know how to abound: when people are kind and good—when, as you Philippians, they send me gifts, so that I can say, “I have all things, and abound”—I do not get proud and uppish, and conceited and self-sufficient, and think myself something: I know that is ruination! I have learned the perils of prosperity just as much as the perils of adversity; I have found the secret. And so, come what may, for or against; be as I may be—and I am to-day in prison at the end of my life—I *can!* I do not say—After all this, I cannot bear any more; but—I can do all things, through Christ who strengtheneth me.’

I pass on this message, not as an elaborate address or discourse, but as a word from my heart. It is a challenge to us all as to our attitude. Our natural condition—which is not mere imagination, but undoubtedly something very real—would so often argue: ‘I cannot! The situation is utterly disconcerting, utterly devastating, both inside and outside. Naturally, it is the end; it is paralysis: I cannot; I just cannot.’ That is the situation, if we just look at ourselves; if we in ourselves represent the sum-total of everything. If we look at the situation, that argues finality; we may as well give it up and say: I cannot; I cannot! But what about Christ? Is there not another off-look from ourselves to ‘Christ who strengthens me’? This is not a question of a psychological effect upon ourselves, in trying to be more cheerful, and to make ourselves believe something that is not true. There are the facts—in ourselves, and perhaps in our circumstances: they *are* the *facts*—they are stark facts; and there is no getting away from them.

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

## A GREATER FACT

Nevertheless, there is a greater fact than ourselves, and than our circumstances: the fact of Christ. And so you and I will have to seek from the Lord this grace, morning by morning, and day by day, perhaps even hour by hour, as we face our own inability and disability, our own utter futility and helplessness—the grace to say: Nevertheless, I can through Christ. I say again, it is not just a psychological reaction, or fillip, which will make us ignore facts. No! this is the act of faith; this is the link of faith; this is the plank of faith, across which we pass right over from ourselves and our condition to Christ. And to-day, when we are as weak, as helpless, as overwhelmed, as perplexed, as distracted by things as ever—nevertheless, to-day, and to-morrow, and all the days, *I can—I can through Christ!* If it is real faith in Christ, you will find that the Spirit comes in, and enables you to do what you never would have done, or could have done, but for that positive attitude. May we be helped to find the way of deliverance from the ‘I cannot . . . I cannot . . . I cannot . . .’ into the ‘I can do all things through Christ.’

No doubt, with many this represents a very practical situation. As we look on ahead, we dread some things, for we know that those things are beyond us altogether; but we have got to take this position. We must look at our situation to-day, and say: ‘This situation holds something. The Lord is not answering my prayer and getting me out of it;

He is not changing it; He is just not doing all that I am longing for, and praying for, and craving for, and waiting for—changing my position and circumstances, and getting me right out of it, I pray, and there is nothing; there is no getting through; He is not doing it. Therefore, I must look at it in another way. There is a secret in this, and I have got to get hold of that secret. What does the Lord intend to teach me and to give me in this situation, that I can bring out of it as fruit, as stock-in-trade for the work in the days to come? What is it? I must get it!’

If we take that attitude toward things, I think we shall probably find that that is our way of deliverance, our way out, our way through. Let us ask for grace to do this, not only now, in our present situation, but as to everything that the Lord may require of us in the future—perhaps things that we never thought of. I am quite sure that that young fellow of twenty-three, in Huntingdonshire, pushing his plough, never, never thought of himself as becoming the Lord Protector of England, the ruler of this whole country, the changer of the whole constitution, the one who overthrew the mighty system of evil. Cromwell never saw himself as we see him, and know him to be, but his life was built upon this: ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.’ While we may never rise to such eminence, or become great historic figures, nevertheless, through Christ, things can be, which would go far beyond any dreams that we ever had, more than we ever thought.

T. A-S.

## THE NEXT

## SPECIAL GATHERINGS

at HONOR OAK

will be held, the Lord willing, on

GOOD FRIDAY, April 4, at 11 a.m., 3. 30 & 6. 30 p.m.

SATURDAY, April 5, at 3. 30 & 6. 30 p.m.

LORD'S DAY, April 6, at 11 a.m., 3. 30 & 6. 30 p.m.

MONDAY, April 7, at 11 a. m., 3. 30 & 6. 30 p.m.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Aberdare 7s. 6d.; Adelaide, Australia £2 10s.; Airdrie 5s., £2; Ardingly 7s.; Asmara, Eritrea £5; Auckland, New Zealand £1, £1; Babbacombe £1; Balallan Lochs £5; Banbury 4s. 10d.; Barnet 3s. 3d.; Bearsden 10s.; Bearsted £1 1s.; Bebington 15s. 5d.; Beckenham 7s. 9d.; Belfast £1; Bembridge 10s.; Birmingham 12s. 10d., 18s. 3d., 6s., 3s., £1; Bishop Auckland 18s. 2d.; Bognor Regis 5s., 5s.; Bournemouth £1 1s.; Brienz, Switzerland £2 0s. 5d.; Brighton 10s.; Bristol 10s.; Bromley 5s.; Buckingham £1 10s.; Burnley 2s. 6d.; Casablanca, Morocco £1; Chelmsford 10s.; Chorley Wood £1; Coolock £1; Coonoor, India £1; Copenhagen, Denmark 12s., £2; Corfe Mullen 10s.; Crawley 10s.; Croydon 10s.; Drinkstone 10s.; Dublin 10s., 11s. 3d., 8s. 5d., 10s., £2, £1, £1; Edinburgh 5s.; Elsworth £2; Felixstowe £1 10s.; Fetcham 10s.; Fulstow 14s. 10d.; Galashiels 10s.; Gateshead £1, 2s. 6d.; Gidea Park £1; Glasgow £1; Guildford £1; Hassocks £2; Hastings 5s., 7s. 6d., £1, £3; Hatch End £1; Heliopolis, Egypt £1; Hindley Green 10s.; Hornchurch £1; Hove 10s.; Indianapolis, Indiana £1 1s. 5d.; Ipswich 2s. 6d.; Jersey £1; Kirkcudbright £1; Küsnacht, Switzerland £2 8s. 6d.; Leigh-on-Sea £2; Lenham 8s. 9d.; Llandrindod Wells £1; London E.11—£1; N.14—10s., 13s.; N.17—10s.; N.W.10—10s.; S.E.3—£1; S.E.6—5s. 6d., 10s.; S.E.7—10s.; S.E.13—£1; S.E.15—6s.; S.E.18—2s. 6d.; S.E.21—5s.; S.E.23—£2 2s. 6d., £1 1s., £2, £6, £1, £1, £1, £3, £1; S.E.26—10s.; S.W.4—£2; S.W.11—10s.; S.W.18—12s. 6d.; Long Beach, California £17 17s. 2d.; Lostock 7s. 4d.; Luton 10s.; Maidstone 10s.; Marden £2; Montreal, Canada 7s.; Moulton £12 10s.; Musselburgh £1 10s.; Newcastle-on-Tyne 5s., £1; New Mills £2; Niagara-on-the-Lake, Canada £1 8s. 10d.; North Walsham £1;

Northwood £3; Norwich 11s. 4d., £2 2s., £1; Oldham 10s., £3 15s. 9d.; Old Hill £1; Orillia, Canada £1 9s. 4d., 14s. 3d.; Paisley 5s.; Penticton, Canada 14s. 6d.; Perth £5 1s. 10d.; Plymouth 10s.; Portsmouth 10s.; Prestonpans 10s.; Purley 16s. 2d.; Ranau, Borneo £1; Regina, Canada 18s. 3d.; Romford 10s.; Rufforth £2; Rutherglen £1; Ryde 6s. 10d.; St. Gallen, Switzerland 10s.; St. Mary's Platt 5s.; St. Ursanne, Switzerland £1 8s.; Sandown 6s.; San Francisco, California £15 19s. 2d., £15 19s. 2d.; Saxköbing, Denmark £5; Sheffield £10; Shirley £1; Singapore £2; Slough £1; Southampton 10s.; Southport £1; Southsea 5s., £1; South Shields 10s., 10s.; Southwick 10s.; Stoke Gifford £1; Stonebroom 12s.; Summer Hill, Australia 17s.; Sunbury-on-Thames 10s., 10s.; Sunderland 5s. 3d.; Timperley 10s.; Tonbridge £3; Toronto, Canada £1 6s.; Torpoint £2; Tunbridge Wells 13s. 9d., 9s., 5s.; Virginia Water £1; Waterhead 5s.; Wendover £1; Wirral 10s.; Worcester 10s.; Worthing 18s. 9d., 9s. 3d.

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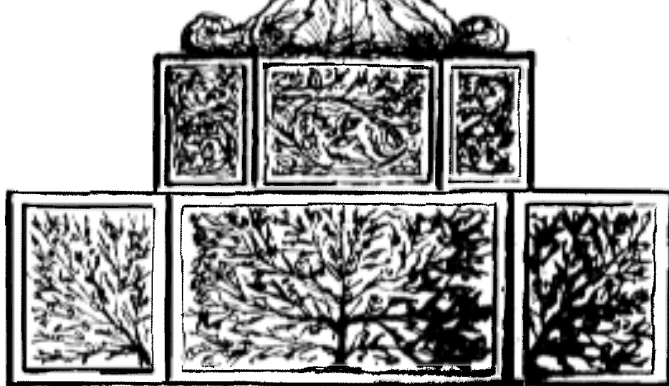
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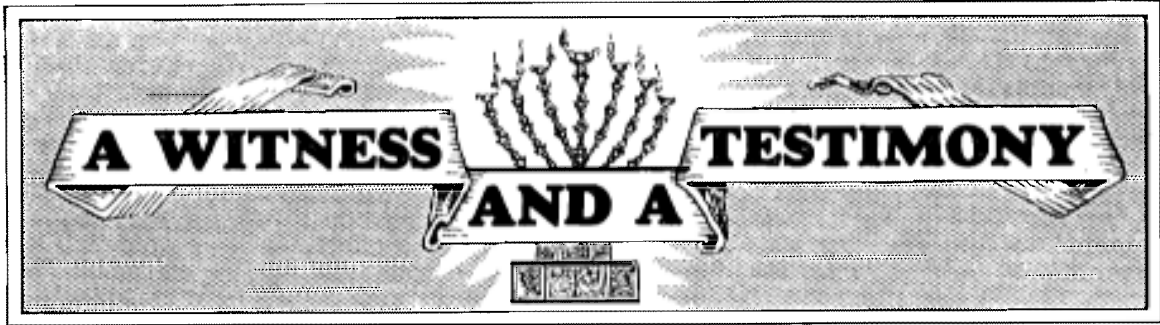
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THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE CHURCH, AND THE NATIONS

IV. THE HOLY SPIRIT

*"The Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name . . ." (John xiv. 26).  
"John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit . . ." (Acts i. 5).*

WE are now going to think about the Holy Spirit as the 'Spirit of Holiness' (Rom. i. 3)—the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament He is referred to by the latter title somewhere about eighty times, which is in itself a very impressive thing. He is the Holy Spirit.

MISTAKEN IDEAS OF 'HOLINESS'

The subject of 'holiness' or 'sanctification' can be a very oppressive and heavy-going matter. I confess that for a long time it was a subject that I never enjoyed looking into, or having anything to do with. The fact is that, as a subject, it has been resolved into various systems of teaching, has been made the ground of particular cults and movements, and has even provided a name for a 'church'—the 'Holiness' church. It has brought many Christians into bondage and confusion and frustration of life.

This is mainly due to holiness or sanctification

being focused down on certain particular aspects of human life. When you come to ask people what they mean, you usually find that they refer to certain common sins in human nature: if you desire to be delivered from these, then that is a 'longing for holiness'; and if you are actually delivered from them, that is an experience of 'holiness' itself. I am not saying that holiness does not involve that; but holiness in the Scriptures is a very much bigger, greater thing than any of our systems, or our movements, or our crystallized teaching, or our 'foci of application'. It is not intended to bring anybody either into bondage or into a life of struggle or strain. It is just in this connection that Satan has shown his cleverness. Having himself brought about our unholy condition, he then turns upon his own victims, bringing them under terrible condemnation and accusation, and involving them in a whole constellation of complexes, so that they have become completely tied up on this matter of sin and sanctification and holiness. That certainly ought not to be the effect of a healthy occupation with holiness as presented in the Word of God. It is just the opposite of what God has intended.

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

## SATAN AS THE SPIRIT OF UNHOLINESS

This is, of course, a matter that goes far beyond the limits of a few brief pages. But let us seek at least to get it into its right perspective. At the outset, holiness must be seen in its full setting. We will not stay to argue that this is the supreme characteristic of God. We have to see it in its full background. The *Holy Spirit* is set over against an un-holy spirit. Just as the *Holy Spirit* is a Person, so, just as truly, there is a personal un-holy spirit. This whole matter of 'holiness' has to be seen in that light. Satan it is who has brought in an un-holy State: not merely as an un-holy condition, but State with a capital 'S', as when we speak of the State in the sense of the Kingdom; the régime, the system or government. Satan has brought in an un-holy condition and an un-holy kingdom or State. He has defiled everything: he has defiled human nature; he has defiled the creation; and the proof is in the universality of death—God's verdict on all that is unclean, that it is defiled, that it has been touched by Satan.

It is therefore impressive and instructive to note that, as soon as Jesus had been anointed by the *Holy Spirit*, He entered upon a direct and immediate battle with Satan himself. From the Jordan he went straight to the wilderness, to meet and encounter this arch-foe of all righteousness. As Jesus went into His baptism, He said to John: "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all *righteousness*" (Matt. iii. 15). For, in figure and representation, His baptism, as a type of His Cross, in death, burial and resurrection, was truly the fulfilment of all righteousness. On that ground, then, He encounters the one who is the embodiment of all unrighteousness. And it is under the anointing that He does it. The *Spirit of Holiness*, the *Holy Spirit*, takes the Righteous One to encounter the universality of unrighteousness, as represented by Satan, there in the wilderness. I say, it is most impressive and instructive to note that that was the very first thing after the baptism and anointing.

Now the method of Satan is always to bring about a link with his State, a link with his kingdom, thereby achieving his object of effecting a link with his defilement. Remember that! Let me repeat it: the object of Satan is always to bring about, if possible, some complicity, some touch, some link with, or some foothold in, his own un-holy kingdom, or State, or condition. That is what was happening in that battle in which the Lord Jesus found Himself. All the time, Satan, from one angle and another, was moving round, trying to involve that Righteous One in his unright-

eous kingdom. We are not going to argue out these three temptations, but it is perfectly clear. At last it comes out: 'If Thou wilt worship me' (Matt. iv. 9; Luke iv. 7). 'If only You will recognise me, accept me, give me a place'—'If only Thou wilt worship me, all this will I give Thee!' In other words, 'If only I can get You on to my ground, I have spoiled Your kingdom, spoiled You: I have established myself, if I can but make that link.' Blessed be God, that Holy and Righteous One saw through it all, and said, in effect: 'No, not a hoof—not one iota. Nothing for Satan.' "The prince of the world cometh: and he hath nothing in me" (John xiv. 30). That is victory, absolute victory.

THE PRINCIPLE OF  
NON-CONTAMINATION

Remember, then—what was true in His case is always true. Satan is ever seeking to find some way in which he can link us in with his kingdom, which is his power, by getting us on to his ground. Hence all those Old Testament prescriptions made by God against contamination, against mixture: "Thou shalt not plough with an ox and an ass together" (Deut. xxii. 10). Nothing wrong with the ass, as such, for Jesus rode upon an ass, and we read in the Bible of the ass serving many a good purpose. But from God's standpoint they belong to two realms, two kingdoms, they represent two orders of life, and He says that you cannot mix them up. The work of God must not be done on the basis of a mixture of two things which belong to two different kingdoms and realms.

"Thou shalt not wear a mingled stuff, wool and linen *together*" (Deut. xxii. 11)—they belong to two different kingdoms. There is nothing wrong with wool in itself: God clothed the man and wife with the skins of animals—that is, in principle, with wool; and I suppose all the patriarchs wore woollen garments. But here it is forbidden that the animal and vegetable fibres be woven together to form a 'mingled stuff'. They belong to two realms, and God is simply saying this: You must not try to bring together things that do not belong to each other. It is a foreshadowing of this great principle of distinctness, separation, non-contamination.

When the remnant came back from captivity, for the rebuilding of the temple and wall, as we read in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the whole thing headed up to this—the mixed marriages (Ezra ix, x; Neh. xiii, 23–31). And when that was settled, the books close; that is the end, it is all right; now we have got to the point—

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the mixed marriages between the people of God and other, idolatrous, nations. These two things must not come together. "Be not unequally yoked . . ." (II Cor. vi. 14); God will not have it. It is providing Satan with that which he is always seeking, towards which he is always trying to work—a link with his own kingdom. This is the whole point of 'holiness' in its right setting.

### NEW TESTAMENT ILLUSTRATIONS

Now this is very thorough-going, and it is very comprehensive. For instance, let us allow this principle to take us right into the First Letter to the Corinthians. Everything in that book is explained by this.

First of all we read of "the wisdom of this world" (iii. 19; i. 19—ii. 13). The *wisdom* of this world: we remember what the Apostle says about it there. But listen to another Apostle earlier: "This wisdom is not a wisdom that cometh down from above, but is earthly, sensual, demoniacal" (Jas. iii. 15). 'The wisdom that is from beneath is demoniacal.' What, the wisdom of this world, demoniacal? Well, so the Word says; and if we want the proof of that, let us come back to Paul's argument, that it was in "the wisdom of this world" that Christ was crucified (I Cor. ii. 6—8). In the wisdom of this world, it was thought to be the 'wise thing' to put Him to death—what folly! what madness! what devilishness!

Anybody who really touches the wisdom of the world knows that it is a realm of death. Anyone who has dipped into philosophy knows that there is no more deadly thing in all the sciences than philosophy. If you touch it, you touch death. That was the wisdom in Corinth—the wisdom of this world. Yes, Satan had a good foothold in that church, along that line; he had got them on to his ground right enough.

Again, we read of—"divisions among you" (i. 10). "There are contentions among you" (vs. 11). Remember—and this may be anticipating—the Holy Spirit is essentially the Spirit of unity. Satan has got them on to his ground, for he is the great divider. Satan never stops until he has divided the last thing: if he comes to one, he will make two of it! "Divisions among you"—they are on his ground. Nothing need be said about the next thing mentioned—fornication. But then the Apostle speaks about the Lord's Table, and you hear him say: 'You cannot—you *cannot* partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons' (I Cor. x. 21). 'You cannot mix things up like this!' But it was actually there in Corinth.

### PRACTICAL DETAILS IN THIS LIGHT

At this point let me utter a very emphatic word. These chapters in the First Letter to the Corinthians must be read in *this* light. Do not extract subjects from those chapters, about women wearing hats or head-covering, and all those difficult things—do not just lift them out, as separate subjects: for, if you do, you will just get into confusion. What the apostle was dealing with then was the coming in, among the Lord's people, of the spirit of this world. He was saying to the Corinthians, in effect: 'That is how the world behaves—or misbehaves; that is how the world does it; and that world is Satan's world. If you let this sort of thing in, you are lining up with the world—with *his* world.'

Study it in this light, as to all these details, all these practical matters. It is not just that you are having to do with an apostle who you think had no great liking for women! No, no; you are up against tremendous things here. It is Satan seeking to get inside and get a foothold—a link between what is holy and what is his—in order that, by thus bringing the world in, and touching with his corruption and defilement, he may destroy that which is of God. Read it all in that light, for that is where the New Testament puts it—"that no advantage may be gained over us by Satan" (II Cor. ii. 11).

You see, the whole of the bulwark is raised against this one—this un-holy spirit that is in the universe; this corrupting influence and power; this defiling work. The Church is to be always on its guard against these spirits of uncleanness that are everywhere. Why? Because of the power of holiness. It is not just to have a clean condition, as something in itself. Never make 'holiness' an end in itself. No, it is because of the power, the mighty power, of holiness.

### HOLINESS IS MILITANT

Remember that, in the Bible—and it is so strongly illustrated in the Old Testament—'holiness' is always militant. It was the priests that led the nation into battle; it was the sacrifice that was the ground of the warfare. It is a most impressive thing that even the Levites are spoken of as set apart for the "warfare" (Num. iv. 3, 23, etc.; viii. 24, 25). Levites, priests, set apart for warfare? We thought they were set apart to offer sacrifices and deal with all that side of things! No, holiness is militant, and it is a mighty power against a militant foe. "Our wrestling is . . . against the principalities, against the powers . . ." (Eph. vi. 12).

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

They are making war, there is no doubt about it. They make war. What is the ground of our hope? It is not our language, our phraseology or our terminology, or our doctrine: it is our holiness of life. That is the point of attack. Unholiness puts God back, God is holy, even as the Holy Spirit is holy; and unholiness just keeps Him back; it binds His hands; He cannot do anything. When there is unholiness, it is as though the Lord is bound, helpless, paralysed, in the midst of His people (cf. Jer. xiv. 7-9).

The following extract provides a simple, fragmentary illustration of what I mean, and brings out some very practical points. It is the story of a Christian college that depended for all its support upon prayer and faith.

'The College was based on the simplicity of daring faith in God for the provision of need. As long as the spiritual life of the men was maintained, the necessary funds came in in answer to prayer. If supplies failed to come in, or were low, with no signs of replenishment, it was recognised that the finger of God was on some failing, or unconfessed sin, among them, and not until this was put right would supplies come in. Thus, the meeting of material needs became, as it were, the spiritual barometer. One instance of this may be recorded: Funds were so low that a meeting was held, and the students were urged to a more complete surrender to God. Still matters did not improve, and it was thought that possibly the men were not devoting sufficient time to prayer, so the curriculum was curtailed, and more time devoted to prayer, but still no supplies. And, finally, all funds came to an end, and there was only the garden produce left.

'Then, late one night, two students came to the tutor and confessed secret drinking. He gave urgent advice to repair to God, and confess their sin and plead forgiveness, and not for the sake of the loaves and fishes, but because of the leaven of hypocrisy. And they did that. Confession was made before the whole college, and united prayer was offered. The next day was set apart for fasting and humiliation and prayer, at the close of which they gathered together with a great heart-thankfulness, feeling the moral and spiritual atmosphere was cleansed, and that God would be able to give an exhibition of His faithfulness. God honoured their faith, and the very next morning came a cheque for fifty pounds.'

A very simple story, but it illustrates how the whole work of God can be held up; a whole assembly can have its spiritual life injured, limited; the warfare of the saints can be turned

into defeat, if for some reason the Lord has to stand back and say: I'm sorry, but I cannot go on with them—there is this, and that; there is an Achan, or an Ananias and Sapphira . . . Yes, He knows! It may be unholiness in something which is, after all, only a small part of a whole—two men in a whole college, or one man in all Israel, or a man and his wife in the Church at the beginning. Yes, the majority are all right; the mass are not doing this sort of thing. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit focuses right down on that, because He is bound and committed to the corporate principle. On the one hand, "whether one member suffereth, all the members suffer with it"; but, on the other, if "one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (I Cor. xii. 26). There is a relatedness which to the Holy Spirit is sacred. And while our blessing benefits the whole Church, our sin, our unholiness, may cripple the whole Church.

#### HOLINESS IS THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST

Holiness, then, is militant; it is the power of triumphant warfare. But holiness is also Christly character. Holiness is not formal make-up, something put on. The Lord Jesus saw right through that with the Scribes, Pharisees, Rulers. None of that, no 'make-up' spiritually, will pass with the Holy Spirit. Holiness is more than teaching; more than profession; more than pretence; more than formal outward procedure. It is the very Person, the very life, the very character of Christ in the believer and in the Church. It is a very big matter, far bigger than I have been able to indicate in these pages. But the Spirit is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Holiness; and because He is that, everything else follows.

Now, just a few words in closing, for our comfort. Those men who were gathered in that Upper Room for those ten days: I do not think they were, in themselves, any more holy than when one of them denied the Lord Jesus thrice. They had *all* forsaken Him and fled, and in that way denied Him—they were all guilty. And I do not think that, even on that particular Day of Pentecost, they were in themselves any more holy than they were before. But the Spirit came upon them—for what? In order to *make* them holy; to set up, establish, a holiness of life within them. We do not have to struggle in order to get to a place of holiness; we have not to try to make ourselves 'worthy' of the Holy Spirit. We have to be where they were—just before the Lord: set upon all that the Lord has spoken of; obedient to what the Lord has said.

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That is what they were doing. "After that he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit . . ." The first part of that 'commandment' was to wait until endued with the Spirit. The writer almost immediately continues: "He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem . . ." (Acts i. 2, 4).

"After he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit . . ." They are obeying His command: that is, they are there, as men with many, many imperfections, but open, diligent, committed, earnest, ready, waiting on Him. The Holy Spirit saw a way in them, and He came, and took the way He found.

T. A-S.

## THE FRAGRANCE OF CHRIST

*"And the Lord said unto Moses, Take unto thee sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum; sweet spices with pure frankincense: of each shall there be a like weight; and thou shalt make of it incense, a perfume after the art of the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy: and thou shalt beat some of it very small, and put of it before the testimony in the tent of meeting, where I will meet with thee: it shall be unto you most holy. And the incense which thou shalt make, according to the composition thereof ye shall not make for yourselves: it shall be unto thee holy for the Lord" (Exodus xxx. 34-37).*

*"But thanks be unto God, which always leadeth us in triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest through us the fragrance of his knowledge in every place. For we are a sweet fragrance of Christ unto God . . ." (II Corinthians ii. 14, 15).*

ALL that we do should be fragrant with what we are. And what we are should be 'a sweet fragrance of Christ'. There can be no question about the fragrance of the Lord Jesus. It was a part of His very nature. Wherever He went, whatever He did, whatever He said, the precious perfume of another world accompanied Him. It literally was that—the fragrant atmosphere of heaven. The secret was in His origin: He had come 'out of the ivory palaces'; but, even more than that, He had a heavenly nature, a nature redolent with the beautiful perfume of the eternal glory. Moreover, the human walk on earth was so essentially one of communion with the Father, that He never appeared before men without a lingering sweetness of the Sanctuary about Him. And, like the incense, He was 'beaten very small'; His fragrance was the result of His life of suffering. The Word tells us that "we are a sweet fragrance of Christ". We certainly ought to be. It will not be out of place for us to enquire if we really are.

### FRAGRANCE CANNOT BE DESCRIBED

Such an enquiry is made difficult by reason of the fact that perfume is indescribable. In the natural world this is so. We recognise and enjoy the

comforting, satisfying, pervasive sweetness of what is fragrant, but no human words can adequately convey the effect of a sweet scent. It can be recognised, but it cannot be described. The incense had an unmistakable scent. No doubt, if any of the priests had detected it anywhere outside of the Sanctuary, they would have immediately set to work to punish the offender. Even in the remotest corner of the camp, even in the darkest and most hidden secret place, any imitation of the sacred incense must have been discovered at once. There would be no mistaking it. For us, happily, there is no blame, but only praise, if the fragrance of the Sanctuary is discovered in our dwelling. But how can we explain it, except by comparing it with other perfumes? What is it like? we ask. The fragrance of Christ is like the Father. It conveys the sweetness of the Father's love, the glory of the Father's character, the desirable loveliness of the Father's goodness. All that we can say is that this fragrance was the quality which brought the Presence of God to men. And all that we can say to describe the fragrance of a truly spiritual life is that it reminds men of Christ, it brings the atmosphere of His Presence near to men.

### IT CANNOT BE MEASURED

We cannot measure fragrance. Nor do we need to do so. It is altogether a matter of quality, not of quantity. The world in which we live is a world which tends to value everything according to its magnitude. Even in the realm of spiritual things we are all too prone to enquire first about dimensions, and to prize that which is big and impressive. Fragrance cannot be treated in this way. A very little scent can fill a whole room. A very small quantity can exert a widespread influence. God shows little interest in the things which seem so impressive to men. He is not asking us to be what the world calls 'big' or 'successful'. What He does seek is that which brings back to Him something of the sweet and satisfying perfume of the character of His Son. It is "to God", in the first place, that we are to be a sweet fragrance of Christ, and if

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we so bring pleasure to God in our ministry, we shall undoubtedly bring blessing and life to men. We shall be a 'savour of life'.

### THE EFFECT OF THE FRAGRANCE

While this fragrance is peculiar to the Sanctuary, and in the Old Testament was confined to that place alone, the pervading effect of it should be known in every place where the Lord's servants go. It is more than a mere accompaniment of their ministry—it is an essential factor in it. The fragrance is attractive: it makes men yearn to possess the secret of this scent of heaven.

This is how it worked in the case of the Lord Jesus Himself. In His Presence, men were moved to desire and enquire after that walk with God which He so manifestly enjoyed. What really made the devout Nicodemus seek out Jesus? None of us can know. His question was clearly connected with the Kingdom, yet his very first words suggest that the perfume had reached him and aroused deep desires in his heart for this kind of knowledge of God. 'No man could do these signs *unless God were with him*' (John iii. 2). Perhaps, until Jesus came on the scene, he had been satisfied with his own attainments: if so, this life, fragrant with the atmosphere of heaven, had awakened in him a realisation of his own deep lack. Or it may be that already he was dissatisfied with all the best that keeping the Law could do for him, and had become convinced that there must be something which could bring him truly near to God. In either case, he was attracted and drawn by this atmosphere of the Presence of God which surrounded the Lord Jesus. God was 'with Him', and Nicodemus wanted to know more about it.

There seems to have been a similar wistfulness about the rich young ruler (Mark x. 17). There was an attraction which drew him—he ran to Jesus. There was a majesty which humbled him—he knelt before he spoke. And there was an awareness of His lovely fragrance, for the ruler addressed the Lord as 'Good Master'. He did not say, 'Wise Master', nor even 'Great Master', but '*Good Master*'. It seems that he 'scented', as it were, the loveliness of such a life, and yearned to possess it.

This was the effect of the presence of the Lord Jesus as He moved among men. He carried everywhere with Him such a fragrance of the Sanctuary that even the most devout and godly men who met Him became dissatisfied with their present experience and longed for a closer walk with God. If this was true of the godly, how much more true was it of the common people. Some, it is true, came per-

haps because of the experience or advice of others, but most seem to have been drawn irresistibly after Christ—drawn not merely by the words He spoke or acts He performed, but by the indefinable 'something' which we can only describe as the fragrance of the Sanctuary. It would be true to say that the ministry of Christ was often made possible by people being so drawn to Him, for they themselves sought Him out.

The lovely perfume of His life not only aroused longings and desires in men's hearts—it also seemed to inspire hope. Just as a sweet scent may inform us that there are beautiful flowers just beyond our sight, so this fragrant Son of Man suggested to the sons of men that God had something more for them if only they would press forward to receive it. Even in their defilement and bondage they were made to feel that there must be—there *is*—an answer from God. God is not afar off, distant and unmoved; He is very near, able and willing to impart His love and life to the needy. The fragrance did not heal them, but it made them draw near, it gave them new hope, it prepared the way for the ministry of healing. It made men feel that, if only they drew near enough, there would be a mighty provision from heaven to meet their deepest need.

We cannot heal men. Only the Lord can do that. But is it not true that we should carry with us, as did our Lord, something of that indefinable fragrance of the Sanctuary, that makes men believe that after all there is hope for them in Christ? Is it not this that Paul referred to? It is true that the Apostle had a very large spoken ministry, both in public preaching and private conversation; but, whether public or private, vocal or silent, there was something about him of an atmosphere of heaven, which made men long for a knowledge of God and at the same time filled them with an expectation that such a knowledge was available.

### THE SECRET OF THE FRAGRANCE

The Old Testament typology concerning the incense may help us to understand something of the secret of this fragrance. In the type, 'the shadow of the true', it had to be kept unique: any kind of imitation was expressly forbidden. In the reality, it is unique, for nobody can imitate this fragrance. It is essentially one of nature: it derives from the heavenly origin of Christ. It was not the result of His birth at Bethlehem, but of His heavenly origin which was veiled in the human frame. This was the explanation of that perfect balance, that Divine blending of all virtues, indi-

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cated in the instructions that the ingredients of the incense were to be mixed 'in like weight' as well as to be absolutely pure.

The Lord Jesus did not have to try to be fragrant: it was a characteristic of His very inner nature that it gave forth the atmosphere of heaven. He has given this heavenly life to us. In our case also there is a sense in which we do not have to 'try' to be fragrant. We have to live out the life of the Lord Jesus, which carries with it everywhere the sweet scent of the character of God. To imitate it brings death, not life. To make any use of it other than for the glory of God alone, to seek some gain for ourselves out of it, also means bringing in death. We have the unique life within us. If only we can live it out, the fragrance will be found wherever we go.

Then, of course, this was the special scent of the Sanctuary. As we have said, it was not only His heavenly origin, but His heavenly walk, that made the life of the Lord Jesus to be so fragrant. He belonged to the Sanctuary. He was a Man of the Sanctuary. Though His life was as busy and full as any of ours, indeed busier and fuller than any other, yet He never allowed the calls and distractions of life, not even of His work for the Father, to entice Him away from the hidden union and communion of life within the veil.

Probably the High Priest of old carried at least a hint of that Sanctuary perfume wherever he went. Even when he left the Holy Place and moved in common circles, something of the fragrance lingered. It cannot be otherwise in the case of the spiritual incense. There is a fragrance which is only obtained in the Sanctuary. It can be found nowhere else. In most cases the one concerned may have no consciousness of it. Probably the High Priest would be so familiar with the scent that he would not be aware that it clung to him. But others would know. It is the background life of fellowship with God which maintains this unique and lovely atmosphere of heaven.

We have already mentioned the injunction that before use the incense had to be beaten 'very small'. The constituents were all gathered, they were perfectly blended, the latent possibilities were provided, but still there lacked this further process to produce the fragrance—"Thou shalt beat some of it very small". He who was of heavenly nature, He who lived in constant heavenly communion, had to pass through experiences of bruising and crushing, and through the very fires, before the full fragrance of His love was released to God and to men. His sufferings were not extra to His ministry; they were not an unfortunate accompaniment of

His service for God; they represented the essential process by means of which the latent preciousness was released and became available to others. The pervasive power of the Spirit, which aroused men to a sense of need and a desire for God, and led them on to vital faith, was the result of Christ's being pounded in the crucible of suffering.

#### OUR MINISTRY OF HIS FRAGRANCE

This, then, is the background of the Apostle's claim that we, too, spread abroad the heavenly fragrance of Christ wherever He leads us. The verse is all part of a larger metaphor based on Roman triumphal processions. There is no need for us to consider that now. Nor is there need here to dwell on his reminder that such a fragrance can have a deadly message for the unbelieving as well as a vitalising one for those who turn to Christ in faith. Our present emphasis is concerning this essential background to all ministry—this fragrance of life from heaven, which is so satisfying to the Father and such a benediction to men.

The secret will be the same for us as for the Lord Jesus. In the first place it must be the expression of a nature. "We *are* a sweet fragrance of Christ unto God". There is a sense in which we are only the incense-bearers, for Christ alone can be the true incense; yet, since He is the very inner life of our life, it is impossible to describe our ministry as though we were merely utensils for carrying the fragrance around. By new birth we, too, have the heavenly deposit within us, and it is that heavenly life which provides the fragrance of Christ, for it is His life being lived out through us. Paul speaks of this cloud of sweet-smelling incense being diffused "in every place": it goes where we go, for it is a very part of our inner life. Perfumes are not affected by their surroundings; they do not take on their scent from what is round about: their fragrance is the liberation of their essential being, released freely without taking account of their surroundings. It is good to notice that, in this letter about ministry, Paul lays such stress on the unconscious and spontaneous background of all labours for the Lord. In chapter ii it is described as fragrance, and in chapter iii as radiance. Without this, the ministry will lack that most essential quality of all, which was so characteristic of Christ.

Both the fragrance and the radiance are the results of a life in the Sanctuary. As we have remarked concerning the Lord Jesus, He not only had an inner life of fragrance, but He appeared among men always as One whose first and chief sphere of ministry was not among men at all, but

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'unto God'. "We are . . . unto God". In the Old Testament days it was forbidden to imitate this scent of the Holy Place. In spiritual reality it is impossible to imitate it. Almost everything else in Christian service can be artificial, the product of our own skill or earnestness, but this fragrance of Christ can only be acquired by those who dwell much in the place of communion with the Lord. We may say the right things, do the right things, give the right impression, but if we have lost touch with the Lord there will be no fragrance of Christ about us. This scent is not pungent, it is very delicate. Only by constant renewal in the Secret Place can we possess it. It is easily lost; it cannot be produced or recovered by any effort of ours. It belongs to the Sanctuary and is only found there.

Lastly, it is best released by being beaten "very small". As with Christ, so with us, there is no substitute for suffering, if we would carry the consoling balm of Christ's fragrance to needy ones around us. Suffering is not an 'extra' to our ministry, any more than it was to His; it is the Divinely chosen means to its fulfilment. This letter of ministry is also the letter of suffering, but the one is the

direct result of the other. It is the bruising and the crushing which bring out the fragrance.

Some of us in this place live a rather 'cloistered' life; so that, when a brother or sister comes to a Prayer Meeting straight from town, with the smell of smoke clinging around them, we meet the shock of another world. The one concerned cannot help it: they have travelled in the rush hour, public transport has been crowded and they have been unable to avoid the smoke. But to us it is the aroma of another world. They may not be aware of it, but the smell clings around them. Is there not a reverse of this 'other-worldly atmosphere'? May we not go out with a different kind of scent clinging to us—the blessed sweet fragrance of the other world? Instead of it coming as an unpleasant reminder of the existence of this world about us, with its unsavoury scent, may there not be a blessed and inspiring reminder to many in the unhappy world around that there is 'another world'—the world of Christ? We need to be a people of the Sanctuary, able to move about in the power of the Lord's Presence, spreading abroad "the fragrance of His knowledge in every place."  
H. F.

## THE ARM OF THE LORD

### II. THE MEANING OF THE ARM

**H**AVING considered something of the meaning of the phrase 'the Arm of the Lord', and seen that it indicates the support, the upholding, the strength of the Lord, given to those who are wholly in line with His purpose, let us now ask the question: What does the Word of God show to be the real implication of this support or upholding of the Lord? What is in our minds when we think of having the Lord's support?

#### WHAT DOES THE ARM OF THE LORD IMPLY?

We all want to have His support, His upholding, His strength. To have the Lord with us, alongside of us, with all His gracious and infinite power exercised on our behalf, is, after all, the most important thing in life, not only for us as Christians individually, but for the Church, and for the whole work of the Lord. But have we really thought as to what we mean by this? What do we expect? Is it just the bare support of the Lord, to get us through, to carry us over, to see that we do not collapse on the way? When we see somebody standing fearfully by the side of the road, afraid to step out and cross, we sometimes proffer an arm: we say, 'Let me give you an arm and see you over'—an arm! Well,

the arm is a support; it helps to the other side. Is that all we want from the Lord? We do not always speak about the Arm of the Lord; we often express it in other ways. We ask for grace; we ask for sufficiency; we ask for many other things; but it is all included in the Arm of the Lord. What is it that we are really seeking?

Now, what does the Word of God show to be the meaning of this support, this Arm of the Lord? Before I answer that question, let me pause to say that this is a matter of the most far-reaching importance and application. I am not at this time at all concerned with merely giving Bible studies. There is a very great practical background to all that is presented here. There is coming daily into one's life an almost continuous, unbroken demand for help in the problems of Christian lives, the problems of churches, the problems of Christian relationships; sometimes it seems almost day and night, without cessation. And letters are continually coming—sometimes very long letters—from assemblies of God's people in different places, telling of the deplorable conditions in those assemblies, with all their frustration, limitation, disappointment, even deadlock and defeat, and asking for counsel and advice as to what is to be done. It is over



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against this background of real and urgent need that these messages are presented. I want to stress that there is something very practical in this.

For after all, it just amounts to one thing: Where is the Lord? Just that: Where is the Lord? where shall we find the Lord? How are we going to know the Lord unreservedly with us? And that contains this further serious question: How far is the Lord able to support this and that—to come in and undertake, to show His power, show Himself mighty? That really is the heart of the whole matter. Is there a limitation upon the Lord, that He cannot do these things, because of certain obstacles? It is of supreme importance, then, that we should know and understand the ground on which the Lord will show His mighty Arm in these days, on behalf of His people, on behalf of His Church, on behalf of His work.

When, therefore, we ask the question: What does it really mean for the Arm of the Lord to be revealed? we find in the Word of God two or three things, holding a very large place there, in many forms of expression, which answer that question.—But first may I pause again to say, in parenthesis, that the message of Isaiah liii is the answer to everything! Perhaps we think we know Isaiah liii; perhaps we could even recite it. I venture to suggest that we know very little about that chapter. It is the most comprehensive chapter in the whole Bible. If we were able to read it with real spiritual comprehension, we should find that, in that one chapter, all our questions are answered; all our needs are met; all our problems are solved! The Bible is comprehended by Isaiah liii, and in what follows I am keeping within the compass of that chapter.

#### (1) THE VINDICATION OF A COURSE TAKEN

Now, I find that the first thing that is meant by the Arm of the Lord on behalf of His people is this: it means the vindication of the course that they have taken. If you turn to your Bible with that in mind, you will find how much there is that gathers around it. You will agree that it is a very important matter, that the course that we have taken should be proved at the end to have been the right one. There could be nothing more terrible and tragic than that, having taken a course, and given ourselves and all that we have to it, poured out our lives in it and for it, we should find at the end that we have been wrong, and that the Lord is not able to vindicate the course that we have taken. It is plainly of the utmost importance that the course that we have taken should, in the end, receive the Divine approval—that over against every-

thing, in spite of everything, from men and from demons, God should be able to say: 'That man was right!' That, after all, was the vindication of Job, was it not? How much that man met of misconception and misrepresentation! But in the end God said, 'My servant Job is right'; and it is no small thing to have God say that. In Isaiah liii it is that: the vindication of a course taken, in spite of everything. And that 'in spite of everything' amounts to a good deal in that chapter, does it not?—an overwhelming weight of contradiction and misunderstanding; but, in the end, the Servant is vindicated; God says He was right. "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" To *that* One—to *that* One!

That thought runs everywhere through the Bible, in relation to all the great men of faith, as they walked with God. What a difficult way they went! But in the end, God said, not in word only, but in very, very practical vindication, 'He was right, he was right.' That is the meaning of the Arm of the Lord. That is what I want when I ask for the Arm of the Lord: 'O Lord, that I may take such a way with You that, in the end, You may be able to stand by that way and say: He was right.' Do you want that? There is no value in anything that does not work out like that.

#### (2) THE ABIDING FRUIT OF A LIFE

A second thing that I see to be the meaning, or evidence, of the Arm of the Lord, is in the abiding, spiritual fruit of a life. In Isaiah liii. 10 we read: "He shall see his seed"—that is, His abiding spiritual seed; the life that was in Him now perpetuated and established, indestructible, in new forms of expression. Of what value is it if, when we have lived our lives here, and done our work, and have gone, that is the end of everything?—a memory, growing more and more indistinct, fading into the past? It may be true to that very depressing verse that some people like to sing:

'Time, like an ever-rolling stream,  
Bears all its sons away;  
They fly, forgotten, as a dream  
Dies at the opening day'—

but that is pessimism to the last degree! That ought not to be our heritage. It ought not to be true of any servant of the Lord that he is 'forgotten', 'borne away', passed out, nothing left, a vapour. No, "he shall see his seed". The Arm of the Lord on behalf of any true servant of the Lord ought to mean that, when the form of service and expression, the vessel and the framework, which were only temporary, have gone, there is some-

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thing intrinsic, indestructible, that goes on and ever on, and will be found in Heaven, abiding for eternity. That is the Arm of the Lord! That is the vindication of life, and that is what you and I covet, is it not? Surely, that is the only thing to justify our having lived at all! Not that we did all kinds of things, and that there was much to show even while we were here, but that, when we are gone, the work goes on, there is a seed that lives on—an imperishable spiritual seed.

That is what the Bible means by 'the Arm of the Lord'. It is the Lord giving His seal, the Lord involved in things. The Arm of the Lord establishes what is of Him, as something which cannot be destroyed. Do you not want the Arm of the Lord in that way? We all desire that there should be spiritual fruitfulness, spiritual increase, no stagnation, no end, but a going on. We can see that, can we not, in the case of all the true servants of the Lord—that the Lord came in after they had gone, and stood by their ministry. He stood by Jeremiah when Jeremiah was gone: "that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation . . ." (II Chron. xxxvi. 22; Ezra i. 1; Dan. ix. 2). Paul has ministered to the seven churches in Asia, and now Paul is gone; but the Lord comes back to the seven churches to vindicate the ministry of His servant (Acts xix. 10, 26; Rev. i - iii). That is the Arm of the Lord—that He does not allow what has been of Himself in any servant's life to perish. It is established. (Compare also what is said of Samuel, in I Samuel iii. 19, 20 and xxviii. 17.)

### THE PRINCIPLES OF THE REVEALING OF HIS ARM

Now we come back to our initial question: What are the principles upon which the Arm of the Lord will be revealed? As I have said, we think we are very familiar with the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. But when we read it, we are usually so taken up with those vividly descriptive words concerning the sorrows and the sufferings and the sin-bearing of the One who is in view, with the Person and the experiences of this suffering Servant of Jehovah, that we almost entirely lose sight of the tremendous significance of that fundamental opening question: "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" And yet the whole chapter would have very little value and meaning but for that question. Think about it again: Supposing all that is described there—His sufferings, His sorrows, and His sin-bearing—had taken place, and then the Arm of the Lord had not been revealed on His behalf, what were the value

of it all? It has happened—but where is the vindication? What is the verdict of God upon it?

For, although the content of the chapter is so tremendous, and so overwhelmingly moving in its tragedy, it all relates to this one thing: "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" The answer is: To that very One who is described here in such vivid detail. The Arm of the Lord is revealed to the One who, with such fulness and such pathos, is here brought into view, as the object of all this tragedy, affliction, misunderstanding and misrepresentation. It is to that One that the Arm of the Lord is revealed.

The prophet is viewing the reaction of the whole world, Israel and Gentile alike, to the report, the proclamation. "Who has believed our report?" he asks. "Who has believed the message that we have proclaimed?" It is all looking on to the day of the Son of Man. The messengers have gone out; the proclamation has been made—and what a proclamation it was! It was made on the Day of Pentecost; it went out from Jerusalem into all the regions round about. But—who believed it? What was the reaction to it, from Israel and the Gentiles? The prophet, in his wonderfully vivid, inspired foreknowledge of, and insight into, the reactions of the world to the message of the Gospel, asks the question, and answers it in the whole chapter. But he asks also: "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" The world has so reacted; the vast majority have refused and rejected the message; they have put a totally false construction upon the afflictions of the Suffering One. Nevertheless, it is to this One that the Arm of the Lord is revealed; it is alongside of this One that Jehovah stands.

### THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

And that leads us to the whole comprehensive context of the question. The wider context takes us back to chapter xlii: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen, in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgement to the Gentiles," and so on. But that phrase, "Behold my servant," brings us also to the immediate context of our chapter liii, for we find it echoed, as it were, in verse 13 of chapter lii. There ought, in fact, never to have been a break between lii. 15 and liii. 1, for this whole section really begins at verse 13: "Behold, my servant shall deal wisely, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high." We are thus brought into the wider context of the servant of the Lord, and of what real service to the Lord is: that is, what is that service that the Lord vindicates, what is that servanthood that the Lord stands by. You and I

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are surely very much concerned with that, to be those to whom the Lord can say: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold"—and "whom I uphold" is only another way of saying: 'to whom I show My mighty Arm'.

Now this term, 'Servant of the Lord', is used by Isaiah in a three-fold way.

In the first place (e.g. in ch. xli. 8 ; xliv. 1, 2, 21), he uses it of Israel: Israel is called 'the servant of the Lord', raised up to serve Him in His great purposes in the midst of the nations. But Israel failed the Lord as a servant, tragically failed.

Then, out of the midst of Israel, God raised up One, His Messiah, His Anointed One, and transferred the title to Him: "My servant, whom I uphold . . . I have put my spirit upon him" . . . "Behold, my servant . . . he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high." That is the second way in which the title is used. It opens up a very profitable line of study, if you care to follow it, for you find that Isaiah lii - liii is quoted no fewer than eleven times in the New Testament, these very words being transferred to the Lord Jesus. For instance Matthew (viii. 17) says: "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah"; then he quotes from Isaiah liii in relation to the Lord Jesus. One might say that the whole New Testament can be bracketed into Isaiah liii, and into this title 'The Servant of the Lord', His Person and His work.

The third way in which Isaiah uses the title 'Servant of the Lord' is in a collective or plural way of faithful believers. In chapter liv. 17 (compare also lxxv. 13, 14) the faithful people of the Lord are given this very title, "the servants of the Lord". There is, therefore, a sense in which you and I come within the compass of this great Divine vindication.

But here we must pause to make a fundamental distinction: the distinction between the unique servanthood, the unique work of the Lord Jesus, and that which relates to others. This must ever be borne in mind. For Isaiah liii sets forth that unique servanthood of Christ, that unique work of Christ in which no one else shares at all. And, thank God, no such sharing is necessary! He has fulfilled it all Himself, alone. We shall follow that through in a moment more closely. But, while it is true that we do not in any way share in the atoning work of the Lord Jesus, or come into this vicarious service, nevertheless we do come into a service, and a service that is based upon the same spiritual principles as His. That is very important: for it is upon those principles that the Arm of the Lord is revealed.

## THE UNIQUE WORK AND SERVANTHOOD OF CHRIST

Let us, then, spend a few minutes in looking at His unique work and service. I think it is impressive to note that this section begins with the glorious end to which God is moving. "Behold, my servant . . . shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high" (lii. 13). It is always good to get the end right into view at the beginning, and see how it is all going to work out. All this tragedy of chapter liii, all this terrible story—how is it going to end? Well, here God begins with His end. He says: 'This is how it is going to end: before I tell you all about the course of things, which might terribly distress and depress you, I will tell you how it is all going to end. This Servant, whom I am going to describe in His Person and His work, in the end shall be exalted, shall be high, shall be lifted up!'

Of course, this word immediately carries us over to those great passages in the New Testament, such as Acts i and ii; Philippians ii: 'He became obedient unto death . . . 'God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . .'; and Hebrews i: "he . . . sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high . . ." That is not how it is *going* to end; that is how it *has ended*! And that is how the terrible story is introduced. It is all found in this repeated phrase of two words: "He shall . . ." "He *shall* be exalted . . . He *shall* be lifted up . . . He *shall* be very high . . . He *shall* see of the travail of his soul . . . He *shall* be satisfied'. It is established from the beginning. That is vindication; that is the Arm of the Lord! Let all this transpire—nevertheless, the Arm of the Lord will see to it that it leads to a glorious end. Before anything happens—before the Cross, before the rejection—it is established in the counsels of God: "He *shall* . . ."

And if you and I come into the true spiritual principles of Christ's service, that is exactly how it will be with us. God will see to it that that is how the end will be. "If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be glorified with him" (Rom. viii. 17). "If we endure, we shall also reign with him" (II Tim. ii. 12).

Having noted how this matter is introduced, let us now look at the story of His unique servanthood.

## HIS VICARIOUS SUFFERINGS

There are eleven expressions in chapter liii which describe the vicarious character of the sufferings of the Servant of the Lord.

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1. 'He bore our griefs' (v. 4).
2. 'He carried our sorrows' (v. 4).
3. 'He was wounded for our transgressions' (v. 5).
4. 'He was bruised for our iniquities' (v. 5).
5. 'The chastisement of our peace was upon Him' (v. 5).
6. 'By His stripes we are healed' (v. 5).
7. 'The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all' (v. 6).
8. 'For the transgression of my people was He stricken' (v. 8).
9. 'Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin' (v. 10).
10. 'He shall bear their iniquities' (v. 11).
11. 'He bare the sin of many' (v. 12).

It is very instructive to notice the three words, used here, descriptive of what He bore. The three terms are: 'iniquity', 'transgression' and 'sin'. If you turn to the book of Leviticus, chapter xvi, you will understand what Isaiah was talking about, and what the Holy Spirit, through Isaiah, was pointing to.

*"He shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleannesses of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, even all their sins: and so shall he do for the tent of meeting, that dwelleth with them in the midst of their uncleannesses . . ." (Lev. xvi. 16).*

*"And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, even all their sins" (v. 21). Here we have our three words of Isaiah liii.*

*"And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a solitary land: and he shall let go the goat into the wilderness" (v. 22).*

*"For on this day shall atonement be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins shall ye be clean before the Lord" (v. 30).*

*"And this shall be an everlasting statute unto you, to make atonement for the children of Israel because of all their sins once in the year" (v. 34).*

Here in Isaiah, then, we have the work which corresponds to the work of the scape-goat. That term fits into this chapter so perfectly. This suffering Servant is the 'scape-goat', bearing iniquities, transgressions, sins, and driven out into the wilderness, into desolation.

What are we to conclude from this as to the Arm of the Lord, in relation to His service?

THE ARM OF THE LORD:  
RELATED (1) TO THE CROSS

The Arm of the Lord, with all that that means, is inseparably related to the Cross of the Lord Jesus. There you have the heart and the sum of the whole matter. Do you want the Arm of the Lord? Do you want vindication? Do you want the Lord to stand by and support, to uphold, to carry through, to commit Himself, to be on your side, to be with you in your life, and with you in your company of believers, in the work of the Lord? The Arm of the Lord is inseparably related to the Cross, and none of us will ever find the Lord with us otherwise than on the ground of the Cross.

I spoke, at the beginning of this message, of the situations of spiritual tragedy obtaining in so many places amongst the Lord's people. The root cause of these situations comes to light again and again, both in personal conversation, and in the letters that one receives, in some such terms as these: 'It seems that the Cross hasn't done its work in us yet!' Yes, that is it! A deeper work of the Cross is the one answer, and the sure answer, to all this spiritual tragedy. The absence of such a work explains all the lack of support from the Lord. Isaiah liii covers everything. The support of the Lord, the presence of the Lord, the power of the Lord, the Lord's committing of Himself to us and to the work, will only be—*can* only be—on the ground of the Cross of the Lord Jesus, as being the ground upon which we stand and live, whether individually or collectively. The Arm of the Lord only operates by the Cross. You may say, indeed, that the Cross *is* the Arm of the Lord. It is there that Divine vindication is found. "Christ crucified . . . the power of God"—the Arm of the Lord!

RELATED (2) TO A SEED,  
THE FRUIT OF HIS TRAVAIL

The Arm of the Lord is inseparably related, also, to a seed which is the fruit of the travail of this Servant of the Lord. "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" To this One: "He shall see his seed"; "He shall see of the travail of his soul". The Church is essentially the fruit of His travail, not the making or the building of men. It is something that has come right out of His own anguish and passion; something born out of His Cross. The Arm of the Lord is inseparably bound up with that.

I am sure you recognise, then, how important it is that you and I should be a part of that. I say, 'a part of that', advisedly. There is always a danger that we may make things too personal—in this

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sense, that very often we are not so happy to be a part of something larger; we want attention to focus down upon ourselves: if it focuses down on us we are happy! To have to say: 'I'm just a bit of something more; I am only a bit of something'—well, that is not very interesting! Ah, but the Arm of the Lord is bound up with the larger thing, of which we are perhaps only small bits, and we come into the value of the Arm of the Lord as parts of that whole. For instance, if the Arm of the Lord is with a local company, we shall only find the Arm of the Lord for ourselves as we are really integrated into that local company. If we take an independent and personal line we may not find the Arm of the Lord; the Lord will not stand by us on that ground at all. It is a very important thing that we should let go our own independence and individualism (though not, of course, our individuality) into that in which the Lord is finding His fullest interest and concern. We should live for that, for it is there that we shall find the Arm of the Lord.

#### RELATED (3) TO THE VINDICATION OF GOD'S SON

And finally, for the moment, the Arm of the Lord, with all that it means, is inseparably bound up with the vindication of His Son. That is a test of our lives! Paul said: "For me to live is Christ",

and God has vindicated Paul. What enemies he had in his own life-time, and how many more he has had since, and still has! I think nothing has been left untried in efforts to discredit the Apostle Paul; but he has a greater place to-day than he has ever had in history. The Arm of the Lord is with that man! Why? Because for him to live was Christ. He had one all-absorbing concern—the vindication of God's Son. Read again Paul's sad, bitter words about his earlier life against the Lord Jesus. Again and again he tells us of what he did: how he persecuted the Church, how he haled men and women to prison; but now his whole being, to the last ounce of his strength, is set upon vindicating the One whom he persecuted, and God is with him.

Remember that! A life really poured out for the vindication of God's Son will have God with it. If we are serving ourselves, or some piece of work, trying to make something go and be successful, God may leave us to carry the whole responsibility, and all the troubles associated with it. But let us have a passion for the honour, the glory, the Name of His Son, and God will take care of the rest.

"To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" These are a few of the things which answer the question. We shall find that Arm revealed on the ground of the Cross, on the ground of the Name, and on the ground of the Glory of the Lord Jesus.

T. A-S.

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

### A LONG-DISTANCE CALL

**M**ANY years ago two young men worked together in Edinburgh as representatives of a London newspaper. They not only worked together, but lived together also, for they shared a flat at the top of the building where their office was situated.

Naturally a newspaper man expects to have to work at night if necessary, so one of them had always to be on duty, ready at any hour to answer calls on the private telephone which came direct from their London Office.

Now Thomas, the younger of them, was a very heavy sleeper, so much so that an ordinary telephone bell in the office would not have roused him. The only remedy was to have a specially loud bell for the private line, and to have it connected to his bedroom. So loud was this bell, and so near, that even he could not sleep through it, and could be relied on to wake up when London called.

One night when Thomas was on duty his friend,

James, went out to a party and stayed out very late. When at last he reached their flat and felt for his key, what was his dismay to find that he had forgotten to bring it. There he stood outside the building, searching in his pocket and in that, yet knowing all the time that the search was hopeless, for the key was up in the top flat. And up there too was his companion, sunk in such a deep sleep as to be as senseless as the metal key.

Bang! Bang!! Bang!!! James hammered away at the knocker, but all in vain. It seemed likely to wake up the rest of the city but to have no effect at all on Thomas. What could James do? He grew colder and more tired at every knock, and was almost in despair about getting into his home, when suddenly he had an idea. It would mean another walk, he told himself, and it would be expensive too, but it was the only way. So he left off knocking and plodded down the street again.

Upstairs in the flat a loud bell began to ring. As

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Thomas rose to answer the call, still more than half asleep, he began to wonder what the Head Office wanted this time. Was it a fire? Or a robbery? Or even a murder? What had the voice from London to say to him? He was a very surprised young man when the voice just said: "Go down and open the door!" "Why?" asked Thomas, "what is the matter?" "James is shut out", the answer came back, "and has sent a long-distance call all the way from Edinburgh, asking us to tell you to open the door for him!"

Not long after this James came back to the door and found Thomas waiting to open it. In he went, very thankful to be home at last, but they were no sooner upstairs than Thomas began to reason with him. "Fancy calling all the way to London to get me to open the door! All those hundreds of miles when I was so near! Why didn't you knock at the door?" Smilingly James replied, "I knocked as hard as I could, but it had no effect. Only London could wake you. I found that the only way to reach you was via Headquarters; the long distance was the quickest way, in fact it was

the only way. It was costly, but it worked!"

Have you ever tried to get someone to open their heart's door to let Jesus in? Do you not find that so often they seem to be sound asleep, like Thomas? Nothing that you can say seems to rouse them. Try putting in a long-distance call. It may seem a long way to Heaven and back, and prayer may be costly, but this is the quickest way to make them know that the Lord Jesus is waiting to enter. We need to learn to use the long-distance call of prayer, asking the Lord to speak right into their inner chamber through His private line. This may rouse them when nothing else will. Like Thomas, they will hear a voice telling them to go down and open the door, for it is the Lord Jesus who waits to make His home in their heart. He Himself promised, "If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him" (Revelation 3. 20). Our words may not have any effect on them. We must learn the secret of speaking to them by way of the Head Office, reaching them via the Throne of Grace.

H. F.

## THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH

(Translated from the Chinese)

*Reading: Matthew vi. 9, 10; Luke xvii. 20, 21; Matthew xxviii. 18-20; Acts ii. 33, 36; v. 31; Matthew vii. 21-23.*

THE Scriptures emphasize to us that the one problem in the universe is the problem of authority. While many people admit that God is the Mighty One, and that He is in authority in the universe, yet very few really let Him exercise His authority. We barely need to open our eyes before we see that, throughout the entire earth, men will not submit to His government. This violation of His authority on the earth is the result of Satan's revolt against His authority in Heaven.

It is made clear to us by the Holy Spirit that God must exercise His authority if His purpose is to be realised. If a person is to accomplish anything, he must have authority in relation to that thing; if he loses authority in any direction, then in that direction he is impotent. In like manner, if God is to execute His purpose, then He must have utter authority.

When the Lord Jesus taught us to pray, He set this matter clearly before us. He showed that, if God's will was to be done on earth as in Heaven, it was essential that His Kingdom come; and the coming of His Kingdom implies the exercise of

His authority. The extent to which God's purpose can be carried out will depend upon the extent to which His authority can operate.

Satan's rebellion has been directed with amazing precision. He has not dissipated his energy in a thousand different directions, but has concentrated all his activity at one point—the overthrow of God's throne. True, Satan has done a multitude of different things; but all his doings have been governed by one principle, one idea, one objective—the subversion of the Divine authority.

## A MATTER OF AUTHORITY

What is rebellion? It is resistance to authority. The entire universe should be under Divine government, for only under the Divine government can the Divine will be made effective. Satan aimed directly at the target when he violated God's authority. From Isaiah xiv we see that he sought to usurp God's place in the universe by setting aside God's throne and seeking to establish his own. From that time onward, the one problem in the universe has been the problem of authority. Do you remember what the Lord Jesus said when He was arrested? He said: "This is your hour, and the authority of darkness" (Luke xxii. 53b).

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What strategy Satan displayed, concentrating all his assaults on the Divine authority! But one day God created a man, and it looked as though that man was going to be God's answer. Genesis i shows us that when God created that man He committed to him the right to govern the whole earth. He wanted that man to exercise governmental authority, on His behalf, over everything on the earth. But that man was deceived by Satan, and followed Satan in his revolt; and from Genesis iii onward we see man in rebellion against God. We usually talk of man as having 'sinned', but from God's standpoint the story is one of continuous rebellion. Just as Satan had violated God's authority, so also man violated His authority. Man, like Satan, refused to yield God His place of dominion. If you are familiar with the Scriptures, you can see how, throughout the entire Old Testament, man resisted God's authority. All the nations repudiated His government, and even the Israelites—His own people—at a given point refused to recognise His rule, so that God's authority was violated throughout the whole earth.

It was under such conditions that "the Word became flesh". We need to realise the background to the story of the incarnation. Long before the incarnation God had committed the Kingdom to His Son, in order that the Son, by wielding the authority of the Kingdom, might set forth God's own authority. Meantime, Satan had wrought confusion in the universe, by violating the authority of God; and when God had sought to answer this rebellion through man, Satan carried man off with him. Man, in fact, entered into complicity with Satan, and joined the revolt against God.

#### THE KINGDOM OF GOD AMONG MEN

It was under those circumstances that the Son of God became incarnate and dwelt among men. We rightly acknowledge that He came among us to be our Saviour, but that is when we regard the matter from the viewpoint of our salvation. Seen from the viewpoint of God's authority, His Son came among men to bring the Kingdom among men. The Kingdom of God was in the very constitution of this Man. This Man bore in His Being the authority of God. This Man was utterly subject to the authority of God. This Man and the authority of God were so closely associated that, when He was in the midst of men, the authority of God was in the midst of men. The Pharisees asked this Man when the Kingdom of God would come, and He replied: "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, There!

for lo, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke xvii. 20, 21). From the context it is clear that the Lord was speaking of Himself. He was saying, in effect: If I am in your midst, God's Kingdom is in your midst: I have brought God's Kingdom here: I am God's Kingdom: the authority of God is in My Person.

The whole earthly story of our Lord is a story of the authority of God: a story, on the one hand, of subjection to authority, and on the other hand, of the exercise of authority. Authority, as we are aware, has these two aspects, and we can clearly see both aspects in the life of the Lord Jesus. Many passages in the Gospels show us that the Lord was a Man under authority. When His own brothers urged Him to go to the feast at Jerusalem. He said: "My time is not yet come; but your time is always ready . . . Go ye up unto the feast: I go not up yet . . . because my time is not yet fulfilled" (John vii. 6, 8). What did those words imply? They implied this: 'You are not under the government of God; I am. If you wish to go you can go, if you wish to come you can come. It is always convenient for you to go or to come. It is not always convenient for Me, because I am under authority. I love the government of God, so I submit to His government.' My beloved brothers and sisters, in the Gospels you can find very much evidence of the fact that this Man, Jesus of Nazareth, was a Man under the Divine government. He was a Man who walked step by step under the authority of God. You could see God's authority in His life. And because He submitted to God's authority, He was able to wield authority.

Just see how His life expressed authority! See with what authority He cast out demons! He said: "If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you" (Matt. xii. 28). This matter of casting out demons is not a matter of power, but of authority. It was with authority that the Lord cast out demons; and it was with authority that He healed diseases. Do you remember what the centurion said, when he wanted the Lord Jesus to heal his servant? He said: "Lord, . . . only say the word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having under myself soldiers: and I say to this one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh . . . And Jesus said . . . So be it done unto thee. And the servant was healed in that hour" (Matt. viii. 8, 9, 13). The Lord's healing of sicknesses was a question of authority. So was His stilling of the storm. He just "rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm" (Matt. viii. 26). His preaching likewise was

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a question of authority (Matt. vii. 29). And so also was His arrest. When men tried to take His life they were impotent (John xviii. 6). Not till He Himself permitted it could they arrest Him. He was a Man under Divine authority, so He was a Man who could wield authority.

To-day this principle still obtains. We shall exercise the authority of God only to the extent to which we are subject to His authority. Whether at home or in the Church, the measure in which we come under authority will determine the measure in which we exercise authority. If the authority of God is to rest on any man, that man must be subject to God's authority.

## 'A MAN UNDER AUTHORITY'

We know that the Lord Jesus accomplished God's will on the earth. But how did He accomplish it? He accomplished it by means of authority. The Lord was a Man *under* authority. He was also a Man *in* authority. His life was the Kingdom of God in expression, and so God's purpose could be accomplished through His life. And so it is to-day. Wherever a man comes *under* the authority of God, *through* that man the authority of God is exercised, and *in* that man the Kingdom of God is set forth. Thus God's will is accomplished. When the Lord Jesus came among men, the Kingdom of God and the authority of God came among men. He brought God's Kingdom and God's authority to the earth.

One day He died. When He rose again, He said to His disciples: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. xxviii. 18). All this was His before the creation of the world; but, because "the Word became flesh," it was not until after His resurrection from the dead that He as Man entered into all the reality of the authority given Him before the creation. What He was really saying to His disciples after the resurrection was this: "From now on I am going to be in dominion; from now on I am going to establish My Kingdom among men."

Do you realise that, from the time Satan rebelled, and then drew men after him in rebellion against God, God seemed to have no way out? Now God has found the way! His Son has become Man; this Man, who has subjected Himself to the authority of God, can wield the authority of God. This Man died, but this Man rose again; and into His hands was committed all authority in Heaven and on earth. God always had authority, but He had no man to wield it. Now God had got His Man—a Man risen from the dead. And to this Man He

has committed all authority, in order that this Man may wield it on His behalf. God has made this Man King, that this Man may establish God's Kingdom in the universe.

## DISCIPLES ARE DISCIPLINED ONES

How weighty were those words that the Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth." And now He is going to assert His authority in order to establish the Kingdom of God on earth among men. But how will men react? They will rebel and repudiate authority! What then? Then you must go and "make disciples of all the nations". We usually apply those words to the preaching of the gospel. But the Lord's words went further than the preaching of the gospel. He said: "Make *disciples*". We must understand the difference between disciples and believers. Anyone who is saved is a believer; a disciple is not just a believer, but one who is *disciplined*, one who has been brought under control. "Make disciples" means: 'Bring men under My discipline. Bring them into subjection to Me. Bring them under My government.' Matthew xxviii is not just a commission to preach the gospel. It is a commission to bring rebels into submission to Christ. It is a commission to go to men with the gospel of the Kingdom, that thereby they may be able to submit to the authority of Christ and be disciplined under His government.

But why did Christ require this? Because He wanted to establish a Kingdom on the earth among men. And this desire of His did not relate to the future. The Lord Jesus of Matthew's Gospel said: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age." The Lord Jesus of Matthew's Gospel never left the earth, but remained in the midst of His disciples to reign among them. And when He commissioned them to "make disciples of all the nations," He added, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you." That implied bringing them then and there under His government and establishing His Kingdom among them.

Of course we acknowledge that the Lord Jesus ascended to Heaven, and that He will return to set up His Kingdom on the earth. In Psalm ii it is written: "I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion." And in Acts we read that He has been exalted by the right hand of God, and that God has made Him both Lord and Christ. But how do we know that all this has taken place in Heaven? Peter gives us the answer: "Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the



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Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear" (Acts ii. 33, 36). The Holy Spirit has been poured forth, and when He comes into the lives of men, He makes men aware that Jesus is on the Throne. Anyone in whom the Holy Spirit has really begun His work will fall at the feet of the Lord and say: 'Lord, You are not only my Saviour, You are my King. I accept You not only as the crucified Saviour, but as the Christ on the Throne.'

### THE SPIRIT SENT NOT FROM THE CROSS BUT FROM THE THRONE

Let me halt again for a moment. I long that all we who are saved might see clearly that, when we received the Lord as Saviour, He was no longer on the Cross: He was already risen, He was already ascended, He was already on the Throne. The coming of the Holy Spirit shows that God has exalted Christ to the Throne: because the Spirit has been poured forth from the Throne—not from the Cross, but from the Throne! When the Holy Spirit entered your life, He brought into your life not only a crucified Christ, but a Christ upon His Throne.

At the breaking of bread I constantly hear brothers and sisters praising the Lord in words such as these: 'Oh, Lord, how we praise You! You have not only forgiven our sins, You have given us life. You have given Your own Self to be our life. Oh, the greatness of Your grace!' But I have never yet heard any brother or sister say: 'Oh, Lord, You have not only done all this: You—the King of kings—have come into my life as my Saviour; and You have brought Your Throne and Your Kingdom with You.'

Dear brothers and sisters, do not despise yourselves! You have the Lord within you! You have a Throne within you! You have the Kingdom of Heaven within you! The Holy Spirit, who has come to dwell within us, has not come as He came in Old Testament times. Then the Lord had not taken man's nature; He had not died and risen again; He had not brought man to God; and He had not been exalted. But when the Holy Spirit was poured forth at Pentecost, He came from the One who had taken human form, from the One who had died and risen again, from the One who had brought man to God, from the One to whom all authority in Heaven and on earth had been given, from the One who had been exalted to the Throne. And the Holy Spirit, coming from this One, brought into our lives all the values of His incarnation, all the values of His death and resur-

rection, all the values of His exaltation, and all the values of His authority and His Kingdom. When you believed on the Lord, the Holy Spirit entered into your life, and His entering into your life brought God into your being, brought death and resurrection into your being, brought life into your being, brought joy and peace into your being, brought the Throne into your being, and brought the Kingdom into your being!

I don't know how you feel about it, but as I preach about it I feel I want to leap! I hope that as you listen you are saying: 'Lord, it's all too great! It's far beyond my capacity!' Well, that's what it means to be a Christian! That's what it means to be a disciple! That's what it means to be a son of the Kingdom of Heaven! The Lord Jesus "washed us from our sins by his blood; and he made us to be a kingdom" (Rev. i. 5, 6). The Kingdom life is within us! The life of the King is within us! The throne of the King is within us! Oh! God's salvation is an immense thing! It is no mere matter of joy and peace; it is no mere matter of pardon and life. It is a matter of the Triune God coming into human life with all the authority of His Kingdom.

Do not think I am overrating things. There is no such possibility. Perhaps you smile rather incredulously; but I invite you to recall your own history as a Christian. You have met the Throne of Heaven in your own life! You have met a heavenly government that operates within your being! This is a glorious thing. This is a mighty thing. We might have thought it was an impossibility, but the impossible has happened. The fact of the Kingdom of Heaven has become a fact within our lives. Praise God for this fact in the life of every saved person! The saving grace of the Lord has saved us into His Kingdom; and now to live the Christian life is a matter, not of doing good deeds, but of submitting to the government of Heaven.

### INWARD PERMISSION

Very many brothers and sisters have asked me: 'Can we Christians not do such-and-such? What's the harm?' I invariably answer: 'The question is not: Is this thing good or evil? The question is not: Ought I, or ought I not, to do this thing? The one question is this: Have you permission from within?'

Wherever I go, young people keep questioning me about the cinema. If they were not saved they would never be worrying me with their questions. They ask: 'What harm is there in the cinema? Why shouldn't we go?' And I answer: 'The Bible

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doesn't say you shouldn't attend the cinema ; and I have never in all my 30 years of preaching said you shouldn't ; so why do you come troubling me with your question?" Then they say: 'Well, we have a question inside'. Yes, that's what it means to be a Christian! In the Christian life the questions that arise are not questions of good or evil, but questions of an authority within. I cannot do anything which that authority forbids.

In the Christian life the criterion is not just good or evil. The Lord has not just saved us from the evil to the good, He has saved us from rebellion to submission ; and we must learn to yield to His authority and to accept His control, not in matters

of evil only, but in matters of good also. We need to accept His restraints, not only in relation to worldly things, but also in relation to spiritual things. Even in the matters of His service we must come under His government. The question to-day is not: What are you doing? but, Who is in authority? For the Christian there is one question: Who is in authority here, you or God?

To-day God wants to set up His Kingdom in our lives. He wants to take the Throne and wield its authority. May He in His mercy cause us to realise what He is wanting to save us from and what He is wanting to save us to!

W. L.

## THE POTTER'S HOUSE

*"The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and behold, he wrought his work on the wheels. And when the vessel that he made of the clay was marred in the hand of the potter, he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it" (Jeremiah xviii. 1-4).*

*"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them" (Ephesians ii. 10).*

AS we read this so well-known illustration of God's workmanship, seen in the house of the potter, to which the prophet was told to go, there are three possible effects that it can have upon us, depending upon which word we underline, where we stop, where we put the emphasis. There are three words which sum up this paragraph, and which of those words we choose and resolve into the message will decide a very great thing for us. It may affect our whole life.

### THREE POSSIBILITIES

There is the word 'marred'. "The vessel that he made . . . was *marred* in the hand of the potter". If we make that the word, then something of a spirit of hopelessness will come over us. We shall begin to find an inward sinking ; we shall begin to say, 'Yes, I made a mess of things, I spoiled it all. There is not much hope for me—my life is marred, spoiled.' If you take that word and make it the message, it will have one effect upon your life. Thank God, that is not the message ; but there may be someone reading who has got there. Looking back on your life, you do so with very little

gratification or pleasure ; rather with regret, perhaps remorse. Maybe you fall into this mood, if you think of yourself as the clay. You feel there has been a breakdown ; you have perhaps made a mess of things, or you have not fulfilled all the promise, all the possibilities. And that sense of failure, of lost opportunity, and much more in that direction, creates a shadow over your life. It makes you feel, 'Well, that is that. Now it is up to me to try and get through in some way and finish up as decently as I can.' That is a despairing outlook on life, and that will most surely be the result of putting your circle round this word, variously translated 'marred' or 'spoiled'.

There is another word here: "he made it again *another* vessel". If we put our line under that word and make it the message, that, too, will open the door to gloomy thoughts and considerations. We shall at once begin to say, 'Well, God has not been able to fulfil His original intentions where I am concerned. I have to be content with being His second-best ; something other, something different, something that He really did not mean me to be. He is making the most and the best of a bad job. He is just working with me on an alternative line. So—well, that reduces me to being something of a misfit, not what I was intended to be.' You see the possibilities of putting your circle round that word 'another' vessel.

But then there is another phrase here: "as seemed *good* to the potter to make it." That introduces an altogether new possibility. If, after all, it is possible for Him to say, 'It is good, My work is good'; to find His own pleasure and His own satisfaction in it, that will certainly be far better and greater and higher than my greatest satisfaction could possibly be. His standard is so much higher than my best. If He can say, 'It is good',

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that surely opens up a new outlook and prospect, does it not? That introduces the triumph of His grace, in spite of everything. In spite of what we are and of all our failure and of all His difficulty with us, His grace triumphs. His wisdom triumphs over all the problems in us—yes, over all the setback that He may have encountered in us; His love overcomes all the difficulties that He has with us. If the end is that it is good in His sight—"as seemed good"—I say, that brings into view an altogether new situation.

These are the three possibilities that arise out of these words. We choose the third. That is the message that I want to bring to you.

## A STORY OF VESSELS RE-MADE

### (1) THE EARTH

Our method will be to take the principle that lies at the heart of this, lift it for a moment out of its immediate context and setting, and see it in its larger relationship and application. The Bible opens with a 'potter's house'. It is a very big Potter's house, very much bigger than Jeremiah's. In it we find at first a shapeless, distorted, chaotic mass. It must present to view the aspect of utter hopelessness and impossibility: What can you do with that? It is simply said: "The earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep" (Gen. i. 2). It is chaos. But the very next thing we see is the great Potter getting to work on the shapeless, distorted mass of clay. "He made it again", and when He stood back from the wheel of creation, of making again, He was able to look upon all things and say that "it was very good" (v. 31). That was God's verdict: 'It is very good.' The principle is of very large application, is it not?

### (2) ADAM AND ABEL

But then it is not long before we come to another breakdown, and once more the vessel is marred. We know the story of Adam's sin, by which he drew the whole creation into judgment, again under a curse. He himself came there: he was marred, spoiled; the creation came there. To the man God said: 'Because you have done this, the earth is cursed for your sake. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth, and you shall eat bread by the sweat of your brow' (iii. 17, 18). Well, we know something about that! To the woman He said other things; there would be suffering associated with her life and her function (v. 16). The clay is marred in the hands of the Potter, spoiled.

But does He throw it aside? does He give it up? Does He say, 'It is hopeless, it is impossible—I

can do nothing with this', and so discard the whole thing? That is not the God of the Bible. He has got poor stuff, poor clay, it is true; it is proved to be very poor stuff; but with that stuff He sets to work again, and He 'makes again another'. And out of that poor stuff we see a man emerging, named Abel: a man who stands in the Bible with much honour, whose name has come right down through the ages as of one who found the approval of God. The New Testament puts the clear approval of God upon Abel. No greater approval could be given than that the Lord Jesus should call him 'righteous': "Abel the righteous" (Matt. xxiii. 35).

### (3) ABRAHAM

And then Abraham. I am always so glad that with these great men God never, never hides what poor stuff they were in themselves. He lets us see their flaws—the flaws in the clay. He lets us see their weaknesses; He lets us see them break down; He lets us see that, but for that mighty hand of His, they would make shipwreck like all the rest. They in themselves are no better stuff than others. But they are in His hands—these are men in His hands. And out of that clay, that same clay, the same clay that we are made of, there emerges this man Abraham. How much there is in the Bible that is of this character—'It is very good, very good'; 'as seemed good unto the potter'.

### (4) JACOB

And what shall we say about Jacob? No one needs to be told that Jacob was poor clay. We know. That name has become the synonym for human frailty, weakness, and worse. Yes, he belongs to that clay. But he is in the hands of the Potter; and when the Potter has done His work, He for ever afterwards is proud to say: "I am the God of Jacob"—the God of *Jacob*!

### (5) ELIJAH

Think of Elijah, and then hear what the apostle James has to say: "Elijah was a man of like passions with us" (Jas. v. 17). Yes, the same stuff, the same clay; we know that even in his life there was breakdown. He showed his weakness under the strain, under the tension. But he stands in great honour with God. "He made it again". Out of that breakdown in Adam, out of that poor stuff that Adam's broken-down race represents, He has taken this one and that, and 'made it as it seemed good to the potter to make it'.

And so we might go through the whole of the Old Testament. The principle, you see, is at work everywhere. We might go on to look at the men

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who failed and who—to use the translation of the Revised Standard Version, which I rather like—were ‘re-worked’. In that version it says: ‘He re-worked it’. “We are his workmanship”, we have read in Ephesians. It would be difficult to know where to begin and where to finish with the men who broke down and whom He re-worked.

## (6) DAVID

But let us take one more from the Old Testament, who is quite an outstanding illustration and example—none other than David himself. We know the fifty-first Psalm. That Psalm is a Psalm of David—the cry of a heart overwhelmed with the consciousness of its failure, its breakdown, its sin. A great sob is rising out of that Psalm; and we know, from the history that lay behind it, that there was good cause for David to weep before God, confessing his sins, crying: “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (v. 10). We know the tragedy of David’s life, the breakdown. Oh, this clay was indeed marred in the hands of the Potter. He failed, he broke down; from one standpoint he became a tragedy. You are amazed that the man was capable of such actions—until you know your own heart.

But look again. Did God discard, did God cast away? God did not give him up. He made the vessel again, so that the David that comes down to us to-day is not the David of the failure, but another one. He is the David of honour, the greatest of Israel’s kings, “the sweet psalmist of Israel” (II Sam. xxiii. 1), the David of our beloved Psalms—what should we do without the Psalms of David? And listen: “I have found David . . . a man after my own heart” (Acts xiii. 22)! Is it possible to say anything more, anything greater than that?

## (7) PETER

If we pass out of the Old Testament into the New, at once there leap on to the stage men who embody this great principle. What about Peter? Did Peter break down? Was Peter poor stuff? In one breath—“If I must die with thee, I will not deny thee” (Mark xiv. 31), and in the next breath—“I tell you I know not the man” (v. 71)—denying his Lord with oaths. We do not like talking about men in this way, bringing up their faults, but we have to see that dark side in order to see the marvel of Divine grace. Here is Peter: did that clay disclose flaws, seeming unworkableness, resistance? Hear him speaking to his Lord, to his Master: “This shall never be unto thee” (Matt. xvi. 22)! “Not so, Lord . . .” (Acts x. 14). There is something there in the clay.

But what a Peter we have to-day, have we not? That is not the Peter we have—the old story of the clay that broke down. Remember that! The Peter we have now is a very different Peter. Wonderful help and inspiration come from his two letters in the New Testament; we love to read them. We love to see him standing up on the day of Pentecost; we love to see him later, dragged before the rulers, standing on both his feet and challenging them with all courage and boldness. What a changed picture from that fireside denial in the courtyard, when his Lord was standing trial for His life! What a change! Yes: ‘He re-worked it’; ‘He made it again, as it seemed good to the Potter.’ And we can only say, ‘It was good, and it is good.’

## (8) JOHN MARK

Take one other example from the New Testament—a young man by the name of John Mark. He lived in Jerusalem, evidently in a godly home, in the very place where the Lord Himself and His disciples were wont to gather and to have their fellowship. They had no doubt wonderful times in that home; and John Mark lived there. The day came when Barnabas and Paul took this young man with them on their great missionary journey (Acts xiii. 5b). From town to town and city to city John Mark saw the wonderful things that God was doing, beheld the wondrous works of the Lord. But it was strenuous going, it was costly; and, when he reached a certain point on the journey, he said, ‘I am not going any further. I can stand no more of this, I am going home.’ The narrative tells us that he left them and went back to Jerusalem (v. 13b). The clay has given out, it has broken down; the stamina been found wanting.

And that is not all. When he reflected upon it, I wonder what his thoughts were. I am quite sure that they were very gloomy reflections. ‘Oh, I have made a mess of things!’ And then, on a later occasion: ‘To think that I have been the cause of separation between these two great men—Barnabas and Saul, I have been the occasion of their parting asunder and the end of their united missionary activity’ (Acts xv. 37–40). For that is indeed what happened over him.

Those are things which might well lead to gloomy reflections and a hopeless outlook. The clay seems to have been marred and spoiled. But that is not the end of the story. You know how the story finishes. Even Paul says: ‘Bring Mark; for he is profitable to me’ (II Tim. iv. 11b). There are some lovely things said about this young man in the end. He is recovered, restored, recommissioned, in full-time service; and it is he who has given us

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the beautiful book which goes by the name of the Gospel by Mark. And many scholars to-day believe that Matthew and Luke very largely built their Gospels upon Mark's, that Mark was the source of the others. So, there is a story! 'He made it again.'

### THE TRIUMPHS OF GRACE

These are men who broke down in the process of being worked, but grace triumphed. The Potter did not discard the poor clay. So much depends upon how we interpret this Potter, does it not? Let us look at Him: who is He? This Potter is not a man. How differently men would deal with these people! This is God. He has the clay—yes, the poor stuff: and, as He is seeking to work it, He comes suddenly upon something in it that resists, that does not yield. For a moment He pauses, and says, Oh, what is this? What does He do? It is not the way of this Potter to say: We can go no further, we must give it up; all our intentions are impossible of realisation; we will just throw it aside and look for something better. Not this Potter! That is not the God of the Bible! Watch Him. He may be sorry that He has met that something, whatever it may be; He may for a moment have to pause; but then you see light come into His face, you see the smile of the triumph of His grace and of His wisdom, as He says: We will not be defeated; we will have something for our pleasure and satisfaction, whatever we find. That is the God of the Bible.

Behind all this there is one thought, to which I want to come as quickly as I can. *God is a God of purpose.* And God does not undertake anything that He knows He can never achieve. When He starts something, He can perfect that thing: He has the resource, He has the wisdom, He has the patience, He has the grace, He has the love, He has the power. He can do it. He is the *God of hope*: that means the God who never despairs. It is something for our comfort.

### VESSELS UNRETRIEVED

But we must always be perfectly honest and perfectly faithful. While all this is true in the Bible along the line that we have pursued, there is in it another line—the line of those who were spoiled and never re-made. It is a dark side—one hardly likes to look at it; but we must do so, in order to reach the point we have in mind. There were some spoiled and never re-worked. You can call them to mind at once. There is Abel's brother, Cain; there is Jacob's brother, Esau; there is Saul, the first

king of Israel. In the New Testament there is Judas. Yes, these are people who have gone out into the dark; there is nothing about them that is to God's pleasure.

But one mentions that for a purpose. To see the reason for this means two things. Firstly, it will explain their opposites; that is, it will tell us why these others did come out to the glory and praise of God. And, secondly, it will bring us to the door of hope and promise.

#### (1) CAIN

Let us look at these men quite quickly. Cain. Why was he unretrieved? Why was he not re-worked, made again? In him, it seems, a sense of *sin* was completely lacking. Cain was a self-righteous man, a self-sufficient man. Yet, withal, he was a man who had some religion. He brought an offering to God. If he had lived to-day, he would have gone to church. But his religion was either mere superstition, or else patronage. It was the religion of one who acknowledges God for fear that, if he does not, it will go ill with him—a sort of 'safeguard' religion. Oh, yes, you recognise God; you acknowledge that God is: but you have no sense of sin. It is, indeed, only too possible to be religious without having that essential consciousness of sin and of the need of a substitute who is your Saviour.

That is Cain. Cain was the man who did not know his own heart. If you had said to Cain, earlier on: 'Cain, it will not be very long before you commit the foulest murder: you will take the life of your own brother. By your act, your own brother will lie dead at your feet, his blood trickling into the sand.' What would Cain have said to that? He would never have believed it! But that was what was in him. He had no sense of sin. He did not know his own heart. And God cannot do anything with a condition like that.

You notice that all the men of whom I have spoken on the *other* side were men who had this deep consciousness of sin, men who believed in the law of sacrifice for sin. Men like David: "I acknowledge my transgressions . . . Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight" (Ps. li. 3, 4); men with a consciousness of sin and of the need of a Saviour, every one of them. But Cain was not like that, and that puts him out of the hands of God. He can do nothing with that; He cannot re-work that.

Which brings us to this: The way of the purpose, the way of the glory, the way of the realisation, the way of the Divine satisfaction, is the way of the consciousness of sin. If you have that, it is a way

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of promise. That leads to the door of hope. The most hopeless person before God is the one who does not, in their heart of hearts, realise that they need what He has provided in His Son—a Saviour.

## (2) ESAU

Consider now Esau, Jacob's brother. We know about him. Here, again, there was a fatal lack. He lacked a sense of the supreme importance of things spiritual. The birthright brought him, or would have brought him, into the place of *standing for God*. The firstborn was supposed to stand for God, that is, to be God's representative. He was the priest in the family; he had to do with holy things. He it was that led the family into the presence of God. And much more was bound up with the firstborn and his birthright. But Esau, the Bible says—and this is the final condemnation of the man—"despised his birthright" (Gen. xxv. 34). That is, he lacked this essential consciousness of the supreme importance of things spiritual. And whatever else you may say of Jacob, that, at least, was not true of him. He maybe stole the birthright, but he did at least recognise the superlative value of spiritual things.

And how much there was hidden in the veins of Esau!—a long, long history—the history of Edom. How that breaks out in the Bible story again and again! Think of Doeg, the Edomite, whose vile treachery resulted in the slaying of all the priests of God (I Sam. xxii). Yes, Edom and the Edomites are the descendants of Esau, and wherever you find them in the Bible you find an utter lack of the sense of the importance of spiritual things: holding spiritual things lightly and cheaply: thinking that a mess of pottage, to gratify some passing whim and pleasure, is more important than the things of God. God can do nothing with that. He never works that over again.

## (3) SAUL

We pass to Saul. Saul's fatal lack was of that spirit of meekness which trusts and obeys the Lord. That is how it came out in the end. The final downfall of Saul came about because, first of all, he did not trust the Lord. He was put to the test; he was given a magnificent opportunity of showing that he implicitly trusted the Lord; and he showed that he did not. His trust in the Lord would have led him to do a certain thing that Samuel the prophet, in the name of the Lord, had told him to do; and he disobeyed, because he did not trust. That is fatal. God cannot do anything with that. The kingdom was rent from Saul; he went out a marred and never re-made vessel. If God is going to do

this thing, He must have in us that simple faith which trusts Him and obeys Him. It is the very least that He asks of us.

## (4) JUDAS

And, finally, Judas. Many things can be said about Judas, but let us try and sum it up. Judas fatally lacked an adequate sense of the greatness of his opportunity. Just what would you give to have been called by Jesus Christ into the circle of immediate discipleship; to be with Him wherever He went, and to share His ministry; to be His companion, to be His helper? Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was here in the flesh, and here was a man called into fellowship with Him in His life and in the great purpose of God for which He came into the world: and then to throw it away for thirty pieces of silver! Yes, he was utterly lacking in a sense of the greatness of his opportunity.

We, every one of us, are called into the most honourable company and circle that this universe has—into living fellowship with God's Son, in life, in service, in companionship, in suffering for Him. That, all that, is the call for every one of us. Oh, what an opportunity! What an honour, what a privilege, what an unspeakable blessing! "Called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ" (I Cor. i. 9)—that is Paul's phrase. If God is going to realise all His great designs, fulfil all His purpose, make out of this poor clay something that is pleasing to Him, that is good in His sight, you and I need to have this: a sense of the great, the immense honour that is conferred upon us, in being thus "called into the fellowship of his Son".

So there must be in us—not as in these men, Cain and Esau and Saul and Judas—an overmastering sense of the transcendent importance of eternal things. Eternal things must outweigh for us all other considerations in this life. To use a phrase of the Lord Jesus: 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God' (Matt. vi. 33). The things of the Kingdom of God shall be to us of such paramount importance that nothing is to be compared with them, or to come in their way. All else, however great, is worthless. The kingdoms of this world—'What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' (Matt. xvi. 26; Luke ix. 25)—which means lose the purpose for which Christ redeemed you.

No: we may be poor stuff, we may be very poor stuff; but, if there is in us and with us an overmastering sense of the transcendent importance of things eternal, He will 'make it again' a vessel that is good to the Potter—good. To think that, at long last, He might look upon His work in you and

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in me, and say, 'Through grace, it is very good' !  
That is the possibility, that is the prospect. May the

Lord find in us the things that will make it not  
only a possibility, but an actuality.

T. A-S.

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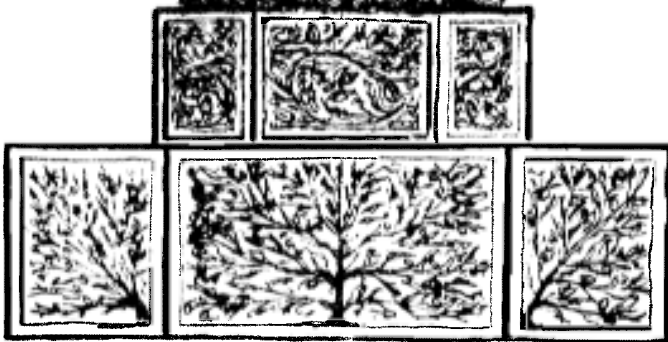
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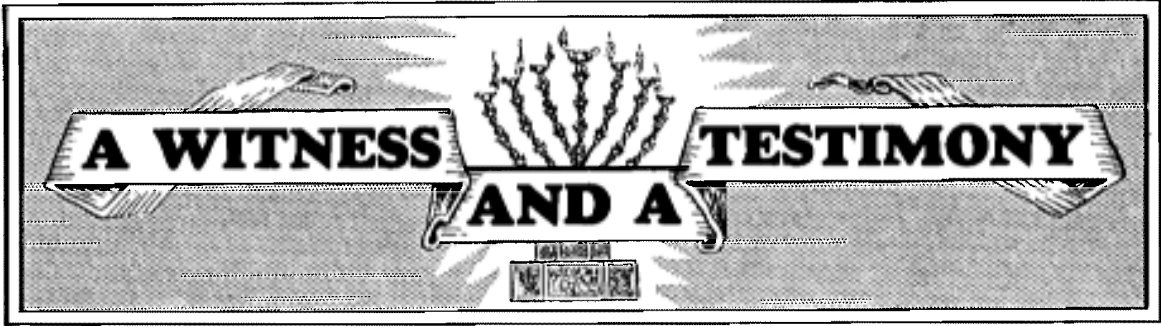
## THIS MINISTRY

**T**HE OBJECT OF THE MINISTRY of this little paper, issued bi-monthly, is to contribute to the Divine end which is presented in the words of Ephesians iv. 13—" . . . till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge (literally—*full knowledge*) of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we be no longer children . . . "

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ONE UNIVERSAL ANSWER

PERHAPS one of the greatest, if not *the* greatest, of the difficulties of the Christian is to accept in a practical way, and establish as a governing rule of life, the things "most surely believed" as truth. We are all greatly oppressed with some of the big problems and questions which are related to Christian life and experience, either subjectively or objectively; and yet, the most difficult thing is to accept the true answer or solution when it is offered.

This difficulty is largely due to the fact that, before a change in the situation in question can be effected, there has to be a change in our attitude toward it. We want *things* changed. God wants *us* changed. But even here, it is not just a psychological change. That might be very artificial and self-deceptive. The question is: Is there one answer to most, if not all, of our problems? Is there just one thing which, if we embraced it, would be God's answer to, and explanation of, our difficulties? Has God one answer to most of our cries of 'Why?'

THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING

Take the problem of suffering. That may include many things; physical, circumstantial, spiritual. It

may relate to ourselves or to others. Almost countless are the ways of God's dealings with us, which are most trying and hard to bear. The most acute form of suffering is that which relates to God Himself: His silence; hiding Himself; seeming to have neither knowledge nor care. Prayers seem to be unheard, and are, apparently (we would say positively), unanswered.

What is the explanation? Well, the Word of God has made very clear that such an explanation exists.

There is one all-comprehending, all-embracing, all-governing purpose to which God has committed Himself, by creation, by redemption, and by union. That purpose is the conformity of a race to the image of His Son. This is man's chief end and chief good. What more satisfied and 'happy' person is there—even amidst suffering and sorrow—than he or she who is most perfect in patience, love, faith, and the other 'fruits of the Spirit'? If our requests regarding *things* were granted, while we were left the same people, unchanged in disposition and nature, it would not be long before we should be in the same unhappy condition over other things. There is possible for us some inherent quality that wears out circumstances and

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

reigns above them. Some of the most radiant people have been the greatest sufferers, in infirmity, poverty, or other forms of adversity; whilst the most 'privileged' are often the most discontented.

The solution to the problem of suffering does not lie in being philosophical; it is not in fatalistic resignation—'This is my lot; I suppose I must accept it'. It is not in passive or active suppression of desire. It is far removed from self-pity, bitterness, cynicism, or envy, and the rest of their wretched family of wilderness-makers and wanderers.

We may have to let go the particular occasion of our trouble, and first recognise, and then embrace with our heart, the fact that in the affliction there resides the immense eternal potentiality of an increase of the image of God's Son, which is to be the one and the only character and nature of the eternal kingdom. We have too much visualised the 'Heaven' that is to be, as geographical and pleasurable, without giving sufficient weight to the fact of a *nature* to be inculcated and perfected.

## THE WORK OF GOD

Why is it that—God willing and purposing a certain object to be accomplished, e.g. the salvation of souls, the building of the Church, the increase of spiritual measure; and God being Who and What He is, All-mighty, All-wise, All-gracious—the work is fraught with so many problems? The workers are often at the end of themselves; everything is so hard and heartbreaking; and in deepest suffering many die with so little accomplished. Why is the vindication of those who have honestly sought to do the will of God and have suffered deeply at the hands of men, even Christian men, so long delayed?

How much we could enlarge upon the perplexities of the work of the Lord! But if we could say all, does not the same solution apply as above?

It has become almost a platitude now to say that 'God is more concerned for the worker than for the work'. Yes, and, as a proposition, we may quite honestly believe it; but as applied and experienced it is the root of unspeakably much perplexity and disappointment. Yet there it is: the whole fact that, second causes being admitted or rejected, the work of God has never been something easy or straightforward, with the continuous *manifestation* of His absolute All-mightiness making difficulties as though they were nothing.

God will never put work or service in the place

of character; and, if we do that, eternity will reveal that, however *much* we may have done, we are very small amongst the inhabitants of the Land, whose stature will be measured by 'the measure of Christ'. It would be well if all who contemplate or are engaged in the work of God were governed by this one absolutely final law: that, both as to themselves and as to those amongst whom they minister, the ultimate test is—not how much work is done, but how much of Christ is present, or results from the ministry. This might solve many problems, explain many 'strange' ways of God, and seal life with the kind of 'success' that is worthy of the name in the eyes of Heaven.

## THE CHURCH'S UNITY

We touch on one other problem, though it is too big for any adequate handling here: the problem of the Church's unity or disunity.

What a problem and heartbreak this is! What efforts are being made to solve it! Never was it engaging so much attention as now. We are not unfamiliar with this matter, from the standpoint of Church History, the Ecumenical movement, World Councils, Conferences, and so on; and we sincerely trust that we shall not be thought to consider ourselves superior when we say with emphasis that we believe that there is one answer and only one.

It is God's answer, anticipating all divisions and established before them. That answer is a right apprehension of Christ, and conformity to Him. Every Christian believes in 'the oneness of the Body of Christ'. Books, almost without number, have been written on the Church. But we are really no nearer a manifest expression of the Church, as set forth in the letters of Paul to the Ephesians and Colossians, because the real secret is in the measure of Christ in all concerned. No *two* members of Christ can keep apart, if Christ is really dominantly Lord in their hearts by the Holy Spirit! We may have put systems, institutions, denominations, traditions, interpretations of doctrine, etc., before Christ Himself. It may be necessary to dethrone and displace these, and make everything of Christ, before there will be any solution of the problem.

There are other questions and difficulties, but the same answer applies to all. God's end—to which, in a thousand ways, He works—is that "Christ may be all and in all", and light is thrown upon all the dark things by this.

T. A-S.

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## THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE CHURCH, AND THE NATIONS

### V. THE SPIRIT AS LIGHT

*"I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, that he may be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth : whom the world cannot receive ; for it beholdeth him not, neither knoweth him : ye know him ; for he abideth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you desolate : I come unto you . . ."*

*"These things have I spoken unto you, while yet abiding with you. But the Advocate, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you" (John xiv. 16, 17 ; 25, 26).*

*" . . . That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him" (Ephesians i. 17).*

**I**N our consideration of the Holy Spirit as Divine character for Divine testimony, we now move round to another angle, to view Him as Light. We have seen Him as Truth and Holiness ; we have now to consider Him as Light.

"God is light" (I John i. 5). Jesus is the Light of men and of the world, it is stated (John i. 4, viii. 12, etc.). The Holy Spirit is called the 'Spirit of Revelation'. God dwells in the light (I Tim. vi. 16). The City, which is the last presentation in the Bible, has the light of God (Rev. xxi. 11). The Word of God is a light, a lamp (Ps. cxix. 105). Christians are said to be 'children of the light' (Eph. v. 8).

So, everything related to God is light: 'in Him there is no darkness at all' (I John i. 5). It is Satan who is the prince of darkness ; his works are the works of darkness ; his children are the 'children of darkness'. These are the two contrasted and conflicting kingdoms: the Kingdom of Light ; the kingdom of darkness. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Light. We recall those further words of the Lord Jesus: "When he . . . is come, he shall guide you into all the truth . . . He shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you" (John xvi. 13, 14).

#### LIGHT PRECEDES BUILDING

Let us look, then, at the Holy Spirit, first as character and then as function, in terms of light. God never begins to build until there is light. In

the creation, before He proceeded to build, He divided the light from the darkness—He said: "Let there be light". That is an intimation of an abiding law, that God does all His work on the basis of light. Those two great symbolic representations of God, the Tabernacle and the Temple, were the result of spiritual illumination, to Moses and to David respectively. Before they could be, light had to be given. Someone had to be the receptacle, the vessel, of the revelation. When we come into the New Testament, we find that the first definite intimation of the Church—"I will build my church" (Matt. xvi. 18)—was made immediately after the illumination had come to Peter as to the Person of the Lord Jesus. "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee"—*revealed* it—"but my Father . . ." "I will build my church . . ." Note this consistency in the principle of God.

We pass from the first intimation of the Church in the New Testament, from that first mention of the word, to the full disclosure of its eternal calling, vocation, destiny, in this Letter to the Ephesians, and we find that, as in the beginning, so in the full-orbed presentation, it is along the line of illumination, or revelation, by the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus said: "I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Advocate . . ." "He shall guide you into all the truth". In the mind of the Lord Jesus, there may well have been the thought of the pillar of cloud in the wilderness, guiding to the land. But He said: "I will pray the Father, and he will give you One who shall guide you into all the truth."

Paul is in prayer: he is praying in the same way as his Master ; his prayer is on the same line: "I bow my knees unto the Father" (the same Father), that He "may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him". Here it is not the beginning of revelation: that was with Peter—that was in Matthew xvi. Here, it is another word, which it is difficult to translate adequately ; it is really 'in the full knowledge of Him'. "A spirit of revelation in the full knowledge of him".

#### THE NATURE OF LIGHT (A) AS TO CHARACTER

So we have to see, first of all, what light is. If so much depends upon it, so much rests upon it ; if it is, as it were, one of the pillars upon which

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the whole structure of the church rests, then it is very important that we know what it is. And firstly, as to character.

## (1) TRANSPARENCY

Light is transparency ; light is clearness ; light is absolute purity ; light is honesty ; light is openness of character. Light hides nothing ; its whole action and nature is contrary to hiding anything. It has nothing to hide ; it shows everything ; it shows all : in other words, it is not deceitful. It does not want to cover anything, or to pretend or make believe that something is other than what it is. Light is single ; it is not double ; there is no duplicity about light. And light is just—light ! There is 'no darkness at all' where there is light.

Now, we have pointed out that the City—which, as we so well know, is one of the titles of Christ corporate, Christ and His members, the Church—is characterized by everything that speaks of the nature of light. It is characterized, as a whole, by crystal clearness ; it is like "a jasper stone, clear as crystal" (Rev. xxi. 11). Its street is of pure, transparent gold (v. 21b). The water of its river is bright as crystal (xxii. 1). Everything about it is of the nature of light. It has so much light in its character, that it has no need of the sun. The light is in its own constitution. It takes its character from the Lamb, who is "the lamp thereof" (xxi. 23b). You can see through this City, and everything in it. Perhaps we should not like to live in transparent houses on this earth ! But when you live in this City, to adopt the figure, you will not be ashamed for anybody to see what is going on : you will not need to hide anything. You can just 'see through it'. All the sin which produces cloudiness and murkiness, indefiniteness, mists and fogs, and all that sort of thing, will have been finally abolished—"there will be no night there" (v. 25).

These things, as you will recognise, are symbolic terms. They show symbolically what the Holy Spirit has come to do, in men and women, and in the creation. He has come to bring about in human nature a condition like that. He has undertaken a tremendous task ! He is the Spirit of Light—that is His character—and the purpose of His presence is to bring to an end everything that is of the nature of darkness. How many shades and aspects of darkness there are !—a whole vocabulary of words. The Spirit has come to bring all that to an end by applying the Cross, in which it was all brought to an end in the Person of the Lord Jesus ; to work out the meaning of the Cross in our lives, so that everything that belongs to that kingdom of

darkness is removed : so that in the end, with us too, there is no darkness at all.

Is that really what we think of, when we think of having, receiving, being filled with the Holy Spirit ? Here again, perhaps, a little re-shaping of our ideas is called for. It is true that He is many other things, as well as light : He is the Spirit of Power, He is the Spirit of Wisdom ; yes, He is many other things ; but, with them all, He is this. And we must not make more of those 'demonstration' aspects of the Spirit, in power, in gifts and capacities, in works, than we do of His character side. If He really does His work in you and in me, He will make us to be people who can bear to be 'looked into' without any fear, without any drawing of the blinds. Our lives and our motives will bear looking into.

The Holy Spirit knows us, He knows us. We cannot deceive Him ; we cannot, as we say, 'hood-wink' Him ; He knows us through and through. We must therefore give the Holy Spirit credit for dealing with us according to a knowledge of us beyond our own. Looking inside us, He has seen something that is contrary to His own nature ; He has found something that does not answer to His character of absolute transparency, and He is dealing with that.

We often think that sincerity on our part is all that is called for : we have only got to be 'sincere' in order to satisfy God. (I would remind you that there is, in any case, a difference between sincerity and reality.) But Saul of Tarsus was the most 'sincere' man alive in his day, and yet he was the most mistaken. Sincerity may be required, may be very important, and it is ; but do not let us deceive ourselves with our sincerity, and say that because we are downright sincere, then we must be right ; that is not the case. The Spirit may require sincerity to open the door, for anything that is insincere means a closed door to the Holy Spirit. But, after all, it is *only* an opening of the door, so that He may come in and then begin to show us that, 'sincere' as we were, we were wrong after all.

It is exactly what happened with Paul, is it not ? "I verily thought . . . that I *ought* to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts xxvi. 9). 'I verily thought that I *ought* to do . . .': absolutely sincere, absolutely conscientious, and yet so ignominiously mistaken and wrong—until the Light came. Then he saw it. You see the point. The Holy Spirit does not just accept our sincerity as the everything. He comes perhaps through that door ; then He begins His work of showing that even our purest motives were probably mixed ; our most sincere intentions were

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tainted. He works according to His knowledge, and we must give Him credit always for doing that.

If you and I are really meaning business with God, and the Holy Spirit has taken us through an experience, through a depth, which has been very self-revealing, a real shock to us: we have discovered that there was that there that we would never have believed, had we been told: the end is that we are on our faces, worshipping Him as the Faithful and the True. No rebellion, no bitterness, but thanking God that He has been so faithful with us, and so true. We do not want to be let off anything that is of the darkness, do we?

This, then, is the first thing about the Holy Spirit as light. He is, and He works for, complete transparency and honesty and purity, without a shadow. He seeks to bring us to that end of glory—"having the glory of God" (Rev. xxi. 11)—because there can be no glory in anything that is of the kingdom of darkness.

#### (2) FEARLESSNESS

Another thing about light is that it is absolutely fearless. If the Holy Spirit is really there in this character, we are never afraid of something being discovered. A good conscience, a clear conscience, is a wonderfully courageous thing. It is a very strong thing; it puts you in a very strong position. Where there is light, and no darkness, nothing to be hidden and nothing that we do not want to be discovered or uncovered, there is no fear. There is a great strength of confidence and assurance.

Light is a fearless thing. If there is anything doubtful or questionable, anything about which we are not sure; if we have some question, if we are not sure whether our position is right or wrong: then we are always afraid, we are in the weakness of fear. Darkness and fear always go together—it is like that naturally, is it not?—fear belongs to darkness. There can be no confidence, no strength, where there is darkness. This City, this people, at the end, is a strong city, "having a wall great and high" (Rev. xxi. 12); it is the very embodiment of the idea of strength: but its strength lies in its character—in its purity, its light.

#### (3) DISINFECTIO

Another thing about light is that it combats disease. We know that physically, do we not? We send people with certain diseases to the country, where all is sunny and light. We have learned to expose our wounds to the sun for their healing. The light is healing; light is purifying; disease cannot abide the light. Now, come back again to the City. It is said: "the leaves of the tree were

for the healing of the nations" (Rev. xxii. 2c). Disease cannot abide this light that is in the City. The light deals with everything that is working corruption: it destroys it, and repairs the damage.

I am thinking especially now of the more recent discoveries and uses of light in healing. I remember how it began. In the first world war, I had a great deal to do with wounded soldiers—thousands of terribly mangled bodies, torn by shell; and it was in that war, when it was so difficult to cope with this terrible situation, that the method of healing, and even of making good the loss of flesh, repairing the destroyed tissues—the method was adopted of just putting the wounded out in the sun, exposing them to the sun. It was marvellous what the sun did. It built up the bodies; it made good the destroyed tissues; it healed in a wonderful way. That was the introduction of a new technique which has now, of course, been resolved into the various kinds of ray for healing. Light does it: it heals; it repairs; it destroys disease.

#### (4) JOY

Another thing about light—and we are building up for an application—is that it is something joyful. It is a joyful, an uplifting, an inspiring thing. Darkness is nearly always depressing. You can see something of this in the people of this world. Those people who live in extreme northern realms, where they do not see the sun for months on end, often tend to be heavy, serious, grim, taciturn, even joyless people, whereas, when you go to more southern climes, what a difference you find—laughter, merriment, light-heartedness. Light has that effect. People of the sun are sunny people; people of the shadows are marked by shadows.

So we can see that light is a very important thing in character. And you have got to have the character before ever the function can begin—that is the point. You see, it was when the Holy Spirit Himself had come into the Church, and given His own character to it, that the Church broke out on its great world mission, and challenged darkness everywhere. You can see the contrasts in those early chapters of the Church's history. There were tremendous contrasts in the apostles themselves. Oh, what a change has taken place in them—what different men they are! They were men in the shadows, in the dark, but now they are in the light—or rather, they are men with the Light in themselves. Something has transformed those men; they are changed. The Spirit has come—the Light is in them.

Take those two representatives on the Emmaus road. What a veil was over their eyes as to the



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Scriptures! When the Lord Jesus opened up the Scriptures of the Old Testament, from Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms, that was not their first introduction to the Bible. They knew their Bible; they knew the Scriptures; they were not just being introduced to the Book—but how dark their minds were! Now, listen to others like them on the Day of Pentecost! What light they have! They now are seeing, and are proclaiming wonderful illumination out of the Scriptures. Light has come into them, changed *them*, made them into a different kind of people. In many respects you can hardly recognise them as the same persons. You cannot recognise the old Simon Peter, can you, in this man who is now standing up and speaking, and challenging everybody. Only a short while before, he could not stand up to the challenge of a serving maid, but now he can challenge the rulers. Something has happened to this man: the light has come in—in other words, the Spirit has come into him—and he is now seeing in a new way.

THE NATURE OF LIGHT  
(B) AS TO FUNCTION

That is how the testimony begins; that is how the functioning begins. You see, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the *work*—of the world testimony, of the testimony in the nations. The Holy Spirit is not out just to make us ‘retailers of the Truth’, in a second-hand way. That is one of the weaknesses of the whole order, that certain things are taught in schools, and then people are sent out with what they have learnt—all this school-learning. And they go out, and they give it out—in a second-hand, ‘phonographic’ way! You are not surprised that there is not the impact upon the darkness that there was at the beginning; that the healing of spiritual and moral diseases does not take place; that the whole scene is not transformed.

## TEACHING IS NOT SUFFICIENT

No, it is not that way. The disciples had had all the information that ever they needed: they had had all the Lord’s teaching; they had seen all His work; they had seen Him die; they had seen Him after the resurrection; and they had heard angels declaring from Heaven that He would come again in like manner as they had seen Him go up (Acts i. 11): and yet, with all that, they are not allowed to go out into the nations and preach it! This has got to become more than something said to them—something that they have been told—something that they have heard with their ears. This has got

to come *into* them by the Holy Spirit, as a mighty power within their own being. Hence, He gave them commandment that they should not depart from Jerusalem, until they received the promise of the Father (Acts i. 4).

No, it is not the truth that we have been taught—it is the truth that has come into our hearts, by illumination of the Holy Spirit, that is powerful; not any other. That is most important! I venture to say that, if only a small percentage of the teaching that some of us have received were to come up in the power of the Holy Spirit, some tremendous thing would happen: there would be an impact and registration that would be comparable to what was at the beginning—just wonderful. Let us not be content with our ‘truth’ and our ‘teaching’. The Lord made it perfectly clear that, much as He had given, and much as He had shown, and much as they had come by through their association with Him, that was not all that they required. You must not go out into the world with nothing more than that; that must not be the sole basis upon which you go. That will have its place; it is necessary, and it will come to life; but—you cannot just go on with that only. ‘Tarry ye, until ye be endued with power’: and when the enduement came, what happened? It was what He had said to them that sprang into life; it was what He had done that came to them with a new revelation as to its meaning. The Holy Spirit is absolutely indispensable, even when you have a very, very large wealth of instruction, of teaching, of information.

## THE CHURCH SHOULD MAKE AN IMPACT

This is true as to the individual, but remember that the Holy Spirit is the Light of the Sanctuary. When Paul prays about this ‘spirit of wisdom and revelation’, he has the Church before him. He is thinking of the Church as the dwelling-place, the ‘habitation of God’ (as he calls it) “in the Spirit” (Eph. ii. 22). The Church is to be here in this world, universally and locally, as a challenge to, and with a powerful impact upon, the darkness in each locality, wherever it may be, by the Holy Spirit. The darkness cannot go unchallenged and it cannot eventually triumph. It was said of the Lord Jesus that life was in Him, and the life was the light of men, and the darkness overcame it not (John i. 4, 5). It looked as though it did, but it did not.

The presence of the Church, with the Holy Spirit within, ought to be like that, registering a tremendous challenge; and it should be that, whatever men do, or Satan does, that light is not quenched;

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the light survives. You and I, individually, when we have passed from this earth, should be remembered for having been vehicles or vessels of light—this kind of light. It was a challenge ; it was healing ; it was effective. It should not be merely that we had teaching, or that we had truth, but that there was that which had the Holy Spirit in it, which left a mark. We all ought to be like that. Do you think it would be possible for anybody really to have the Holy Spirit in any measure, and for it to make no difference where they are? Surely that could not be. It was said of the Lord Jesus: "He could not be hid" (Mark vii. 24) ; and so it should be with us.

#### LIGHT CAN BE SHUT OUT BY PREJUDICE

Now this is the 'truth' about the Holy Spirit as light ; and I am sure that you agree with the truth, and that your heart goes out that it might be so in your case. Perhaps there is a need for us to give the Holy Spirit a better and a larger chance than He has hitherto had. We can, you know, deprive ourselves of this light of the Spirit ; we can shut out the light ; we can have bandages over our eyes. What might such bandages be? Well, take prejudice. Prejudice is a terribly blinding thing. It means, as the word clearly indicates, that you have pre-judged something, some situation, before you really looked into it. You pre-judged it—perhaps on the basis of report, or on any one of many pretexts. And, in pre-judging, without a first-hand, honest, sincere, true investigation and enquiry, pursuing this matter till you really knew, you closed down—you foreclosed on it. Very well: you have put the bandage of prejudice on your eyes, and there is no hope—no hope—until that is removed.

Some of us know that quite well. Some of my brethren know that it was just on that very point that, many years ago, everything turned in my life from what I have called a 'closed heaven' to an 'open heaven'. I was preaching one Sunday morning on the subject of 'prejudice'. Some people think that I can be emphatic, but on that day, I had—metaphorically—my coat off, and my sleeves up! I was lunging at 'prejudice' with all the strength that I had, calling it by all the names that my vocabulary could provide, saying it was a cruel thing, a thing that gave neither God nor man a chance . . . and so I went on. That was the Lord's Day morning.

Tuesday morning, I was in my study. A letter was handed to me, in which I was invited to attend a certain conference, with all expenses paid, includ-

ing travelling. And I looked, and I said: No, not on your life ; you will never find me there ; I would not touch that with a twenty-foot barge-pole! And I took out my diary, quite sure that, in those very busy days, of course I should have my answer—I should have other engagements. When I looked in my diary, the only dates that were free were those very dates! And I left it on my desk, wondering—How am I going to get round this? what am I going to do about it? Very kind of this person, to offer me all my expenses ; but what am I to say?

While I was trying to find my way out, my backdoor of escape, my wife came in with my morning cup of something, and she saw that I was a bit disturbed, looked a bit worried ; and she asked me about it, and I told her what it was. She said: Well, have you any engagements at that time? I said: No, just at that time I have none. Well, she said, it looks to me as though you have one of two alternatives: either tell them that you will *not* go, or *go!* (I suppose that is the value of having a practical wife!) I was left with that, and she went out.

And as I began to think about this again, it was as though somebody stood at the side of me—I did not see anybody, and I did not hear any voice—but it was as though someone stood at the side of me and said: *What about your sermon on prejudice?*

Well, I had to face that whole thing before God. It was just that that brought a great turning-point in my life, opened the way for the Lord, for something very much more. By dealing with that whole spirit of prejudice I came into an altogether new way with the Lord. You can perhaps understand how afraid I am of prejudice—what it can do, how it can close the door, how it can figuratively put a bandage over the eyes, so that we are deprived of what the Lord wants to give.

#### LIGHT CAN BE SHUT OUT BY PRIDE AND POLICY

And then there is pride: unwillingness to humble ourselves ; unwillingness to say that we have been wrong, to take something back. Pride can blind. Perhaps there are few things more blinding than pride. And policy: you can just shut the Holy Spirit right out if you are going to be governed by policy. Policy means taking into account how things will affect you and your interests, your future ; how it will close doors to you ; what other people will think—that if you do this or that you will be regarded as a 'speckled bird', and so on ; you see, secondary considerations. Oh, that is a hobgoblin of the Devil to rob you of some-

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

thing! Yes, it will blind; you will not go on if there is any policy about it—make no mistake.

There is a passage in John's Gospel, by which I have often been greatly impressed (and which I have tried to make a guiding principle in my own spiritual life)—those words in John v. 44: "How can ye believe, who receive glory one of another, and the glory that cometh from the only God ye seek not?" "How can ye believe?" You see, that whole nation, and those Jewish rulers and teachers and leaders, were shut out of all that Christ came to give on this one thing—policy: thinking more of the glory of men than of the glory of God; walking more as before men than as before the Lord. If Abraham has a great inheritance—and there is no doubt that he has, for the covenant of promise concerned his seed, 'which seed is Jesus Christ' (Gal. iii. 16)—what an inheritance!—remember that the covenant with Abraham was made at the point where God appeared to him and said: "I am God All-sufficient; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. xv. 1).

'Walk before Me! and be thou perfect.' That is the way of the enlarging inheritance. 'Before Me!' Not before men; not before systems; not before public opinion; and not before your own interests, with an eye to how they are going to be served, and what is going to happen to you. 'Walk before Me, and be thou perfect. I am the Lord All-sufficient'. 'How can ye believe, who receive glory one from another, and do not seek the glory which comes from God only?' This is the way of light; this is the way of power; this is the way of the Spirit. It is the way of 'walking in the light, as He is in the light', and walking with the light in ourselves.

We can, of course, see how all this relates to the Church's witness in the world. We can understand much in the light of that. When the Church was filled with the light of the Spirit, what an effect it had upon the kingdom of darkness, everywhere! But when the Church began to lose that basis of life, it began to lose its influence in the world. The Lord save us!

T. A-S.

## FAITH'S DISCOVERY OF THE "I AM"

*"Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life" (John vi. 35).*

*"When I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John ix. 5).*

*"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life" (John xi. 25).*

*"From henceforth I tell you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am" (John xiii. 19).*

IN order to be a true disciple, it is essential to know the Lord Jesus as the Divine 'I AM'. Such knowledge can only be acquired by experience. It was for this reason that the Lord warned His disciples that things had to happen to them before this priceless knowledge could become theirs. Only when it had all 'come to pass' would they possess the vital inward awareness of His eternal fulness. 'I am the resurrection and the life', He had said to Martha, and she honestly thought that she believed this; but it was not until her brother Lazarus had emerged from the tomb that she and her sister really did enjoy this confidence in Him.

Much of our imagined knowledge, like Martha's, is largely theoretical, and so it is found wanting when the really big crises come. No doubt the disciples, also, thought that their faith in Christ was very strong: yet even as He spoke these words to

them He knew very well that, before they truly entered into such faith in Himself, they would go all to pieces. He knew this, and He had no intention of trying to prevent it. The important thing was—not to feed their self-respect or safeguard their reputation, but to bring them to the place of discovery that after all He, and only He, is the great 'I AM'.

## OUR INADEQUACY

How does this "come to pass"? How do we obtain this knowledge? Firstly by discovering our own inadequacy. We find that we 'are not'. So long as we think that we 'are'—that we have capacity or ability in ourselves—there is no chance of our making this great discovery. Consider the blind man. Was there ever such a case of a man without light? He was absolutely in the dark; he always had been; and, apart from Christ, he always would be. It was his nature. It was not comparative, more or less; it was absolute. Until he met the Lord he had no light at all.

The miracle was a sign. Its message is surely to remind us that this is the true state of every man by nature, so far as Divine things are concerned. It is not that he does not wish to see or does not try to do so, but that he is quite unable, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see . . ." All through

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our earthly life this same principle works, in connection with every fresh finding of Christ as Light. It comes to those who confessedly have none of their own.

Inevitably such a confession is accompanied by a sense of failure and humiliation. We are confronted with our own inadequacy. Some by their questions may add to our shame, as the disciples did in the case of the man born blind. They seemed to feel a certain superiority and satisfaction in emphasizing it. Here, they seemed to say, is the pitiable tragedy of a man in the dark. Clearly there is something wrong here. So far as light is concerned it is plain that he 'is not'. Their wholly negative contribution was swept aside by the Lord Jesus, whose approach was so different and so hearteningly positive. No, He replied. This need be no tragedy. It is true that he is in the dark, but for that very reason he can make the happy discovery that I am the Light of the world. He 'is not'—but I AM!

The disciples' curiosity and conversation betrayed how unaware they were of their own deep needs. When the great test came, for how much would their imagined knowledge count? They had yet to discover their own inadequacy. When the great darkness of the Crucifixion came down upon them, then, and only then, were they in a condition to be taught the utterness of Christ's claim to be the 'I AM'.

Unhappily, some of the onlookers at this miracle never did discover the eternal light which is in Christ, and the reason is not far to seek. They thought that they had the light. They were not prepared to own how complete was their natural darkness. When they argued with the cured man, they insisted: "We know that God hath spoken unto Moses" (John ix. 29). "We know"! All right: but if you think you know you will never discover the Lord Jesus as the Light. Later on, to the same man, they retorted: "Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?" (v. 34). All right: if you are not prepared to be taught, you will never know Him who is the true Light. How much happier, like the blind man, to discover the 'one thing' which really matters (v. 25)—that all the supply for all needs is in the great 'I AM'.

#### THE INADEQUACY OF OTHERS

Then there is a further, and perhaps a more surprising discovery, and that is the total inadequacy of even our most trusted helpers. Most of us have someone to whom we look up. We are inclined to think that 'they are'. How essential it is for us to

know that they are not, if we are to learn that the Lord Jesus IS!

When the hungry multitudes were in the wilderness, some of them, perhaps many, might well have assumed that the twelve disciples could be relied on to save the situation. After all, they were now becoming men of some importance. In the midst of their distress, with the reminder of their own emptiness, the people might have comforted themselves with the thought that there was always Peter, there were John and James; these and the others would not fail them in their hour of need. It is interesting that John's Gospel is the only one to disclose how utterly groundless any such hopes might have been. Even the five loaves and the two fishes did not belong to them. The twelve were as needy, as bewildered and as bankrupt as the rest. Only One in that great multitude could make the claim, 'I AM'.

It is a part of our education to discover the fallibility of those in whom we most trust. The experience can be a very painful and bitter one, but it is most necessary for us to find out that everyone else but the Lord Jesus is a failure. The Lord will not hide the faults of others. Sometimes He seems to take pains to bring them to our notice. He never hid the failures of His disciples from the people, for He wants it clearly understood that we must place our full trust in Him alone. Some Christians get offended with the Lord when they find that others on whom they relied are not, after all, perfect. Let none of us who are leaders cloak ourselves with this as an excuse: but the fact remains that some realisation of all human inadequacy is essential for a full discovery of the perfection of Christ. There is only one 'I AM'. Let us cling to Him all the more closely!

#### THE INADEQUACY OF THE PAST

In the light of their hunger in the wilderness, some of the Jews felt that Moses was the man to be relied on. "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness", they reminded the Lord Jesus. The answer of Christ was swift and emphatic. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, It was not Moses that gave you the bread out of heaven" (John vi. 31, 32). You must not confuse even the greatest servant with the Divine 'I AM'. Moses was not the 'I AM'. And no servant of God, then or now, must be treated or trusted as though he were. To follow that course is to meet with bitter disillusionment sooner or later.

But notice how the Lord Jesus developed this answer. He avoided saying that it was His Father who gave the manna (although of course it was),

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for that would be to transfer matters back to the past. God is not the 'I WAS'; He is the 'I AM'. So, even though the sentence may not seem very logical from the viewpoint of human language, the Lord Jesus continued: "but my Father giveth you the true bread out of heaven" (v. 32). The important thing is not only what God gave but what God now gives. From this point the Lord began to lay great stress on the up-to-date-ness of spiritual knowledge, by His use of the Present Continuous Tense. "He that *cometh* . . ." (v. 35, 37); "He that *believeth* . . ." (v. 35, 47); "He that *eateth* . . ." (v. 54, 56 - 58); "He that *drinketh* . . ." (v. 54, 56). When spiritual experience can be embalmed in the past it is dead. "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matt. xxii, 32). He is the ever-present answer to need: the 'I AM'.

## EVEN OF PAST KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD HIMSELF

The story of the raising of Lazarus (John xi) shows so clearly that even our past knowledge of the Lord is not sufficient to carry us through new tests. It would almost be a contradiction in terms to say that we used to know the 'I AM'. No, this very title suggests that we must be constantly making new discoveries of Him: which means that by God's own intention our previous knowledge will not be adequate for the new challenge. Is not this implicit in the Lord's claim to be 'The Resurrection'? Resurrection always means coming up into a new realm. Martha and Mary, Mary in particular, had a very real knowledge of the Lord; but they had to come up into a new realm—to them a strange realm—and the transition was a painful experience. All concerned with this great display of the glory of Christ at Bethany seem to have been people completely out of their depth.

Firstly the disciples. When the Lord announced that He was going to Bethany they were frightened; they tried to keep Him from going; they feared it would lead to His death (v. 8). Thomas gave a noble lead to the others when he encouraged them to go into danger with Jesus and to die with Him (v. 16), but none of them seems to have realised that He for whom they feared was the great 'I AM'. Yet this was at the close of Christ's earthly ministry. They had not only witnessed the Lord's ability to avoid the Jews' murderous attempts on His life, and His utter indifference to them, but they had also seen Him raise the dead. They had seen Jairus's daughter raised from the dead; they had seen the widow of Nain's son brought back, metaphorically if not literally, from

the grave. He had emerged victorious from every clash with the great enemy, yet it was as though they had learned nothing. Their knowledge did not affect them or influence them; it did not deliver them from fear and unbelief. It was inadequate for this new challenge.

Then the two sisters. As soon as Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she ran out to meet Him. This implies some trust and some expectancy. Moreover, although she regretted that He had not come before, she made the remarkable confession: "Even now I know that whatsoever thou shalt ask of God, God will give thee" (v. 22). Her appreciation of Christ was not a small one. Jesus challenged her reference to the last day by asserting that even *now* He is the Resurrection and the life, following it up with the question: "Believest thou this?" Her answer seemed on the surface to be highly satisfactory; she appeared to have an adequate knowledge of the Lord, for she replied: "Yea, Lord: I have believed that thou art the Christ, the Son of God". All this—and yet, as we well know, she was the one who tried to prevent the stone from being taken away. She really had no actual expectation of proving Christ sufficient for such need. This only goes to show that, however great her previous knowledge of the Lord had been, it was quite inadequate now, and she needed an altogether new discovery of Him. In that she is typical of most of us. We are confident that we have vital faith in Him; we can sincerely say, 'I know . . .', 'I have believed . . .'; and yet, when we are confronted with actual tests, we find they are of such magnitude that nothing less than a new discovery of the 'I AM' will be sufficient.

Martha's sister, Mary, though deeply taught of the Lord, when she chose 'the better part' and sat at His feet, was no better. She would not even go out to meet the Lord. Martha had to persuade her to do so by bringing a message from Him. Was she offended with the Lord? She who had been so loved and had herself made His love the greatest concern of her life, did she now feel that that love had failed? Probably hers was a less superficial temperament than Martha's; she took the disappointment more to heart, so that when at last she did come to Jesus she voiced no trust and no hope; all she could say was: "Lord, if thou hadst been here . . ." (v. 32). The Lord had no answer for her except to join in her weeping, and shed His tears with hers. She appears to have had no sense at all that He could help now. For her it was all too late.

Where were the precious lessons learned as she sat at His feet? Were they not truly learned? Yes,

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we have no reason to doubt that her knowledge of Him was real—but *it was not enough*. Nobody knows the suffering which she and her sister endured, except those who have been brought the same way. It is painful, but it is absolutely essential—this new realisation that all our past knowledge of Him is not enough for now. It is thus that we come to know the eternal fulness of the great 'I AM'.

### FACED WITH THE IMPOSSIBLE

What it amounts to is this: that, in order to learn the meaning of the Divine 'I AM', we have to go into circumstances which are the very opposite of what He is; we have to come face to face with the impossible. There is no other way of learning that Jesus IS the Bread of life than to find ourselves starving in the wilderness. After all, it was Jesus who precipitated that condition among the multitude. It might be argued, and correctly so, that He could have foreseen their need and sent them away earlier. From one point of view it need not have been. Yet, from the spiritual point of view, if they were to prove Him, it had to be. How often our circumstances are like that! A trial arises which need not have been. A need appears which the Lord could easily have averted. Had we been in charge of our own affairs, or if we were allowed to order the affairs of those whom we love, how often would we take steps to ensure that these desperate crises should never arise. In one sense it need not have been. But in another it had to be.

That was the only way in which the Lord could lead us to a new discovery of His being in reality the 'I AM'.

Surely the blind man, when he received his sight, received at long last the answer to a question which must have been nagging him for years. 'Why did this happen? Why did it have to be me?' In the end the answer was both simple and satisfying. It was that he might prove the words: 'I AM the Light of the world'. For the rest of his life he must have gone round declaring that it was worth it—well worth it! Those who had been afflicted with hunger in the wilderness knew afterwards how worthwhile it had all been. The blind man, worshipping Jesus in the light, would be crying, Hallelujah! It was worth it! And Lazarus, Martha—yes, and even Mary, would doubtless say the same, though they would say it in a deeper way, for theirs had been a deeper experience. For them, too, it was an experience which need not have been. Their biggest problem with the Lord had been about His strange delay. They felt that He could have come sooner; He could have spared them—He *could* have, but He did not. Afterwards they understood it all. If they were really to discover something of the fulness in their great 'I AM', then this was the only way.

The Lord tells us beforehand. But it is only when it 'comes to pass' that we can believe in this deep and inward way that He is indeed the 'I AM'. Such knowledge may be costly, but it is most precious. It is this which will make us real disciples.

H. F.

## THE ARM OF THE LORD

### III. THE GROUND OF THE REVEALING OF THE ARM

IN this fifty-third chapter of Isaiah (with which we include the last three verses of chapter lii), we believe there are to be found certain Divine thoughts, Divine laws, Divine principles, of abiding and universal application, upon which the Arm of the Lord can be revealed. We continue our investigation to discover what these Divine thoughts are. There are certain things which lie clearly upon the surface, as we have the record before us.

#### MAN'S ATTITUDE TO THE SERVANT

First of all, one thing which is very apparent is the difference between the attitude of man and the attitude of God to this suffering Servant of the

Lord. These two attitudes are very clearly defined, and represent two entirely different realms. What is said as to the attitude or judgment of man concerning this One—'My Servant'—falls into two parts: firstly, that of the Gentiles; secondly, that of Israel.

#### (1) THE GENTILES

The reaction of the Gentiles, on hearing the report and receiving the description, is found in those last verses of chapter lii: "*Like as many were astonished at thee, (his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men,) so shall he startle*" (for that is the word, not 'sprinkle') "*many nations; kings shall*

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*shut their mouths at him : for that which had not been told them shall they see ; and that which they had not heard shall they consider."*

The 'report' of Him (mentioned in the next verse, ch. liii. 1) which has gone forth, has caused the nations and the kings to be startled. They shut their mouths in horrified consternation. The description produces an attitude of dumb amazement and incredulity. 'Who has received the report?' Not these! They are incredulous—*this* could never be the Servant of the Lord! Such an one! 'Do you tell us that this is the servant of Jehovah?—that such a weakling stands within the pale of Divine approval? Never!' They shut their mouths; their jaws are fixed. That is the Gentile reaction.

## (2) ISRAEL

## (a) AS TO HIS LIFE

What is the attitude of Israel? His whole career is here brought before us. First of all, as to His birth and youth, He is described as "a root out of a dry ground". There was a sense in which this was a true description, for the seed of David had seemed to have become very dry; and yet the nation is discrediting Him in this way. "When we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him". There is no shining glory or splendour perceptible in His coming into this world. Who is He, after all? Where did He come from? Of course we know more, but you must remember that Matthew and Luke wrote their records of His birth long years after He had gone to glory. They had set themselves with pains to trace His ancestry, and to find out all the circumstances of His birth, and we have them in their Gospel narratives. But these were not common knowledge in Israel. "Search", they said, "and see that out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" (John vii. 52). "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John i. 46). No, there was no carry-over of human glories and grandeurs into this life naturally; He was born with no human prestige.

As to His life—well, in the description here, there are more negative things than positive; there are more handicaps than advantages. He had "no form"; He had no "comeliness"; He had "no beauty that we should desire him". We must not attempt mental pictures of the appearance of the Lord Jesus, but this is how *they* looked upon Him. He had a heritage of woes—"a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief". In His life, linked as it was with the tragedies of human inheritance and experience, there were only sorrows, griefs and woes—that is how they viewed it; that was man's

judgment. In their view there was not one positive factor about Him that would attest Him as the chosen and anointed Servant of the Lord, the Redeemer and Messiah.

## (b) AS TO HIS DEATH

What is Israel's judgment on receiving the 'report' of His death? How does Israel look upon Him? "A root out of a dry ground". There is nothing beautiful or attractive about that: it is the sort of thing that you might find in the way and kick out of your path. That is their estimate of it. "Despised and rejected"—that is Israel's judgment. "A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief". "Tell us that is the Messiah! Tell us that is the Anointed of the Lord! Tell us that is the Servant of Jehovah! Tell us that is the Redeemer of Israel! No, never, a thousand times never!" "As one from whom men hide their face he was despised, and we esteemed him not." It is not difficult to visualise the gestures, the attitudes, the looks on these faces. "We did esteem him smitten of God . . ." ("Smitten of God! *That* is the meaning of His Cross—He deserved it! God has smitten Him!") ". . . smitten of God, and afflicted." "God has put upon Him the judgment which He deserved and earned." "They made his grave with the wicked"—that is, no doubt, what would have happened, had Joseph of Arimathaea not intervened and begged His body from Pilate. He would have been flung into the common grave with the malefactors.

What a full description there is of His death! "He was oppressed, yet he humbled himself and opened not his mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb; yea, he opened not his mouth." He was like something for the slaughter—terrible, horrible word! Slaughter! "Smitten of God"—that was the interpretation of the Cross. "From . . . judgment he was taken away". The fact was that at that time the judgment was being exercised by Him over His oppressors: but their view was, 'He is rightly deprived of judgment; all his franchise is removed, all His rights are eliminated, and deservedly so.' "He was cut off out of the land of the living": "God has just cut Him off—*God* has done it!" This is the judgment of Israel, the judgment of man. Man's judgment of Divine things, Divine Persons and Divine works, is based entirely upon objective consideration, without any knowledge of inward reality.

## WHY THESE STRANGE WAYS OF GOD?

Now, when we take all these reactions together, we find ourselves in the presence of the deep ways

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of God as He moves toward revealing His Arm. How deep are His ways! how mysterious! how past finding out! And oh, how startling, when you begin to recognise them! As we consider this interpretation and judgment of the human mind, the mind of this world about this One whom we know to be the Divine Son of God, the Redeemer of men, we have to recognise that these are the profound ways of God, as He is moving—moving steadily, moving with determination, moving resolutely—toward the point of revealing His Arm. Is it not tremendous, that this should be His way?

Now, two questions arise here. First, why this universal reaction of the world of men to this Servant of Jehovah? From our standpoint, as Christians, it is an astonishing thing that such judgments and reactions should be possible on the part of men universally, but we know they were there, for a fact. What is more, we know that they are still a fact. The mind of this world sees nothing desirable in this Crucified One.

Second—and this question perhaps goes even nearer to the heart and root of the whole matter: Why this deliberate method of God, making this reaction on the part of man inevitable? It is such a strange thing. It seems as though God has gone out of His way to produce such a reaction from man. Why did not God give One “altogether lovely”, whom all would appreciate; One who would stand in a position of acceptance with all men at first sight? Why did He not bring Him into the world in state, in grandeur, in glory? Why was He not at the beginning embellished with all the signs of Heaven, for all men to see? Why did God deliberately, it would seem, take a line that would produce reactions of this kind? They would be inevitable. Draw this picture, as it is drawn by Isaiah: “his visage . . . marred more than any man”—distorted “more than the sons of men”, and all the other details—and then hold it up and say, “That is your Redeemer!” It would seem that God has deliberately taken a course to upset and to scandalize.

*And so He did! But why?*

#### BECAUSE OF MAN'S FALSE STANDARD OF VALUES

We are getting very near now to the real point. *Man's standard of values is an entirely false one*, and God knows it. It is utterly, utterly false—because it is the result of man's pride. It is offended pride, is it not, that speaks like this: ‘Tell us that we have got to come down to that! That we have got to accept *that* for our salvation! That we have

got to condescend to that level! No, never! It is contrary to human nature!’ Yes, it is, because human nature has an utterly false standard of values, produced by man's pride. So the idea of the Suffering Servant is an affront to human pride, an offence and a scandal to man's standard of things. For this very reason, neither Jew nor Gentile would receive the report—pride would not allow it. We sing:

‘When I survey the wondrous Cross . . .  
I . . . pour contempt on all my pride.’

That ought to be the effect of the Cross. But no. Man being what he is, his pride will not accept that; and therefore ‘He is despised, rejected’; ‘He has no beauty that we should desire Him.’

The Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ represents the deep undercutting of all false glory. It goes right to the very root of man's self-esteem and self-importance. It goes to the very root of life that is based upon man's own prestige and value. Even though, from this world's standpoint and by this world's standards, a man may be something and have something; even if, by birth, or by acquisition, by his brains or his cleverness, by his hard work or study, he may have acquired some position, some glory, some success, some prestige: if you or I base our life, before God, upon anything like that, we are numbered with those here who are in absolute contradiction to the Divine standard of values.

#### MAN'S PRIDE EMPTIED BY THE CROSS

The fact is that, when we come to the Cross, even our rightful glories, as this world regards them, are going to be emptied out—just poured down the drain. Look at Saul of Tarsus—had he something to glory in? He tells us of all his advantages by ancestry, by birth, by upbringing and by training, by acquisition and by success. He had climbed to the top of the ladder. What did he think of it when he came into the presence of the Cross of the Lord Jesus? He called it just ‘refuse’! For him, life was not based upon that at all. He knew quite well that that was out of the Divine court as the basis of any standing with God. And if you or I are coming into the ‘fellowship of God's Son’—God's Servant—in heart, in spirit, in truth, that is the way all our natural values will go. We are destined to come to the place where everything that we have, whether from before birth, or at birth, or since birth, as something that we might glory in, will become nothing to us. We shall see that that thing always contains a threat to our spiritual life, if we are not very careful.



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I am speaking, of course, about *basing our life before God* upon that sort of thing. I am not saying that there are no values in those things; but if we should begin to bring them into the presence of God, and to calculate with them, and make something of them, it is clear, is it not, in whose company we find ourselves? We do not come into account with God; God has discredited all human pride. In the Cross of the Lord Jesus, He has utterly undercut all man's glory. The picture that is painted here of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah, with all the agony, all the distortion, all that is so terrible, is a portrait of what sin does—what pride does—in the eyes of God. That is how God views man. These people who would not receive the report, because of pride, are here depicted as they are in the sight of God, in the person of that Man hanging on the Cross. He bore *our* sins, *our* iniquities, *our* transgressions; all that we are was put upon Him. That is how we are in God's sight. He was not brought into that position because it was true of Him, but because it was true of *us*; that is the whole argument of the chapter.

But it is not only life based upon things that in their own realm are legitimate and true, upon merits and values either inherited or acquired, that has no standing with God, but life based upon *assumed* importance. This may be more subtle, and it is certainly more terrible: when a person, who has no natural rights to be anything, begins to assume that he is something, to display self-importance, to take position and strut about in the very house of God. How contrary to the spirit of this Servant of the Lord! "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard" (Is. xlii. 2). There is nothing about Him that is assertive, loud, noisy. Yet people can assume positions, even in the very house of God, making themselves noisy and assertive, drawing attention to themselves. This is something that is very horrible to God.

The Psalmist says: "Thou desirest *truth* in the inward parts" (Ps. li. 6). What is *true* of us, after all? What is true of you, what is true of me, before God? For it is before God that things are weighed rightly (I Sam. ii. 3). The Apostle said: "Love . . . is not puffed up" (I Cor. xiii. 4). What a phrase, 'puffed up'—full of air and nothing else! Love is not 'puffed up'; there can be no inflation of man in the presence of God. When we come into the presence of God, we become completely deflated. It always was so—"When I saw Him, I fell on my face" (Ezek. i. 28; Dan. viii. 17; Rev. i. 17).

So we see man's standard of values, and God's in contrast. What a difference! This disfigured, marred Servant is God's way of showing us what

we are in His sight. There is something very deep in the ways of God. Man has ever, since the day of the Fall, sought to draw attention to himself, to be something in himself, to have glory for himself; and at the heart of the whole thing was pride. It brought Satan from his high estate, and it brought man from his. And God has repudiated the whole thing in the Cross of the Lord Jesus. "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Not to anybody who has anything of that about him. Here are your principles of Divine committal. "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit" (Is. lvi. 2). "The haughty he knoweth from afar" (Ps. cxxxviii. 6). "Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination unto the Lord" (Prov. xvi. 5).

On the one side, therefore, the Cross of the Lord Jesus is the undercutting of all our pride, all our self-importance; of life based upon a false standard of values. But on the other side, the Cross is the uncovering of that which is God's standard of values. What is His standard?

## GOD'S STANDARD OF VALUES

Paul's Letter to the Philippians is the great letter of the Cross, is it not? The second chapter of that letter is the most perfect complement to Isaiah liii. Listen to how this part of the letter begins:

*"If there is therefore any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassions, make full my joy, that ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind; doing nothing through faction or through vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself"*.

What a challenge! Would that not undercut all our criticism, even of those in whom we feel we have something to criticize? That brother, that sister, may have some very glaring faults—but, God only knows, I may have very much worse!

*"Each counting other better than himself; not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others. Have this mind in you"*—notice how frequently this word 'mind' occurs—"Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be held on to, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bondservant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross".

This is the complement, I said, of Isaiah liii.

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What immediately follows is the complement of the end of Isaiah lii ("My servant . . . shall be very high"):

*"Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name . . ."*

What is the basis of the Arm of the Lord being revealed? To whom . . .? To these, to these, described or addressed in this second chapter of the letter to the Philippians. When you pass into the third chapter, you find a list of those things in which man glories, of which man takes account, on which man builds, as exemplified in the past life of Paul. But God did not at that time look toward him in this way of approval and blessing; He did not say, 'I will stand by that man.' He first met him and laid him low in the dust, broke him and shattered him; and then, afterward, He lifted him up. The principle is so clear. *The chief evil with God is pride! The chief virtue with God is meekness!* So this is but a confirmation of what we have in this great chapter in Isaiah. To whom will the Arm of the Lord be revealed? To this One, and to those like Him—to those who are of 'this mind that was in Christ Jesus.'

But are we not ever more and more amazed, when we think of this Servant of the Lord—knowing beforehand, as He did, what He was going to

experience and suffer, and all that it was going to mean—being willing to take that course, in order to redeem us from our pride—the *iniquity* of our pride? The root of that word 'iniquity' in the Hebrew means 'perversity'. It was in order to deliver us from that perversity—really an inward alliance with Satan, in his pride of heart—that the Servant of the Lord went down to the depths of degradation! This gives us a true estimate of pride: we see what pride is in the eyes of God, as well as man's utterly false standard of values. And surely there opens up to our eyes the infinite value of self-emptiness, of 'having no confidence in the flesh' (Phil. iii. 3), of the "meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (I Pet. iii. 4).

So then, if we want the Arm of the Lord for us, and not against us; if we want its girding, its support, its strength, in our lives, in our fellowships, our assemblies, and in our service—this is the ground. Nothing that is a contradiction to this will find that Arm lifted up on our behalf. He will leave us to wallow in the mire of our own creating, until, at the Cross, we are prepared to 'pour contempt on all our pride', and to find what it means to be 'dead to all the world'—most particularly the world of our own hearts.

T. A-S.

## THE CHURCH AND THE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST

(Translated from the Chinese)

*Reading: Matthew xvi, 18, 19; Ephesians ii, 22; I Peter ii, 5; Ephesians iv, 11, 12, 15, 16; Colossians ii, 19.*

THE New Testament clearly reveals that in this universe God has focused all His activities on a building project. He has undertaken many other tasks, but the work that is central to all His other work, and the work that is the ultimate, to which all His other work is directed, is the structure of which the Lord speaks in Matthew xvi—'I will build My Church.' All the Divine activity in the universe is directed toward this—the building of the Church.

The Church is a mystery, a great mystery. If we know our Bibles, and if we know something of fellowship with God, then we will know that this thing called 'The Church' was a secret long hidden in the heart of God. To state it briefly, this mystery is God Himself wrought into humanity: God Himself wrought into the lives of His creatures—and fallen creatures at that. But

through redemption these creatures have become partakers of Divine life, and have thereby experienced two creations—creation "in Adam" and creation "in Christ". By the first creation they have received created life; by the second creation they have received uncreated life. By the first creation they have become possessors of a human nature; by the second creation they have become possessors of a Divine nature. Not only has man become possessed of two dispositions—the human and the Divine—but God Himself has taken up His abode in man. Man in his outer being remains unchanged: he is still man, truly man; but into His inner being has come the heavenly nature, for the God of Heaven has come to dwell within him.

And God has set to work in this humanity that men should not be separate units, but be coordinated into one. He wants many men to become one organic whole, one Body. He wants the many to be built up into one structure, one House. He wants them to be brought into such harmony with Himself that they may become His dwelling-place.

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He wants them to be brought into such correspondence with Christ, that they shall become His Body. When the work of God is perfected, what we now see as Christ's Body, and what we now see as God's dwelling, we shall then see as the Bride of Christ and the City of God, which is His governmental centre. Call this as you will—the Body of Christ, or the House of God, or the Family of God, or the Kingdom of God—it is here that all God's fulness dwells, and it is this thing that God was planning in eternity past, before the creation. And when, in time, God began His creative work, in all the work of creation He had this goal in view. Though there was satanic interference, God did not suspend His activity, but brought in redemption that the work might be continued; and when His Son came to earth He plainly stated that what He was bent on was the building of the Church.

I trust you have caught a vision of the Church. I trust you see how sacred a thing the Church is, how mysterious, how immense. God has laid hold of men and has imparted Himself to them; He has put Heaven within them and is working to make them one corporate whole, so that in and through them He may manifest Himself in all His glory. This is the task to which God has been bending all His energies, and it is in the light of this that we must read again the words of the Lord Jesus: "I will build my church".

When I visited Hong Kong recently, as I alighted from the 'plane, a fellow-worker drew my attention to the high blocks of buildings everywhere. But what are these buildings in comparison with the Church? Mere worthless structures! God is putting up a great building in the universe, and He is using Himself and man as building material. He is putting Himself into the building; He is putting Heaven into the building; and into it He is also putting numbers and numbers of men who have been saved through the generations. And He is building all that material together. That was what the Lord was referring to when He said: "I will build my church".

But how did He set about this task of building the Church? By sending the Holy Spirit, and by giving gifts to the Church, "He gave some . . . apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers . . . unto the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. iv. 11, 12). Alas! while much evangelistic work goes on, and much work for the edification of believers, there is little evidence of Church building; yet God has given evangelists, prophets and teachers for the specific purpose of building up the Church. Oh, that we might realise that this is the one thing

in the universe that God is after! This is the goal that all who are seeking to work for Him should have before them.

## BUILDING THE CHURCH

But let us now bring our consideration of this so lofty theme right down to everyday life, and consider it in its practical aspect. What is the usual conception of building a church? You open a place of worship, you introduce people to Christianity, you get them baptized, you arrange a variety of meetings, you get things organized a bit—and you have a 'church'! I do not wish to enlarge on this line of things, but I long that the Lord's children might realise that what we have just described is by no means what is meant by building a Church. The building of a Church means, in the first place, the bringing of men under the authority of the Church's Head. Before men are saved they are under the authority of Satan, and after they are saved they are "delivered . . . out of the authority of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of the Son of his love" (Col. i. 13). To be saved is to be delivered out of Satan's authority and to be placed under the authority of Christ. It is a great grief to me to hear people explaining salvation as a matter of being saved from hell to heaven. Of course salvation brings us to heaven, but heaven is not the goal of our salvation. Salvation is not a matter of God, in His compassion for men, translating them from hell to heaven, but of delivering them "out of the authority of darkness" and transferring them "into the kingdom of the Son of his love." The objective here is not "heaven", but "the kingdom". God saves us that we may come into subjection to the Son of His love. And the building up of the Church has its beginning here—the bringing under the sway of Christ of people who had been under Satan's sway.

Oh! that we might realise that as soon as ever the question of Church building arises, the question of the Headship of Christ arises! When you meet that challenge—praise God!—the building of the Church begins in your life. If in any life, or in any company, Christ is able to assert His authority, then He starts to build His Church. That is why we stress the fact that there must be the sovereign rule of the Kingdom if there is to be any building up of the Church. Unless the Kingdom is here, no Church will be built up here.

May I appeal to you to stop for a moment and quietly think? Consider the numbers of saved people there are in your locality. Of how much use to God are these very many saved souls? Do

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## THE NEED FOR THE THRONE

you have to admit—not very much? Is there no strong testimony there? Does the gospel not go forth with power? And why? Because these many saved people have not been built together. If all those brothers and sisters came under the Head of the Church, then the building would naturally go ahead; and if all were knit together as one, think how strong the testimony would be and what an impact the gospel would make!

Consider your own hall or church building. If the mass of material that has gone into its structure were torn down, till it all lay in a heap, what would be the good of it? It would be utterly useless. That the much material serves a purpose to-day, is because it has all been built up into an ordered structure. There is a clamant need for the building up of believers! The need is not for the establishing of Christian groups, but for the building up of the Church under the government of the Church's Head. If you are to have a part in that, then you yourself will need to submit to the Headship of Christ. When His authority becomes a settled issue in your life, an amazing thing will begin to take place—you will find yourself most naturally being built together with others who are also in subjection to His authority. Such a company of believers will be a strong Church, able to do battle for the Kingdom of God. In the face of such a Church, Satan will be impotent. But if such a Church is to come into being—a Church against which the gates of Hades cannot prevail—then a building up must take place; and that cannot take place apart from a recognition of the Church's Head and subjection to His authority.

You ask: But what does that mean in practical terms? Let me illustrate. Suppose two strangers meet, both believers. With delight each recognises the other as a brother. They praise the Lord and thrill that they have found one another. They decide to preach the gospel together, and soon a score of people are saved—twelve from the North and eight from the South. Those two brothers rejoice more heartily than ever. How they praise the Lord that they met! How they praise the Lord that they were able together to lead all those souls to Him! But this happy state of affairs does not last, for the Northerners are rather queer characters, and the Southerners too have their peculiar temperaments. At first praise is so easy, but soon it becomes hard work to produce a 'Praise the Lord!'; and before long criticisms begin to take the place of 'Hallelujahs', and discord increases, till one day the Northerners and the Southerners decide to part company, and each group rents a separate meeting-place.

Is the Church built that way? Far from it! That is the way the Church is destroyed. And what is the source of the trouble? The absence of the Throne! In the book of Judges we read: "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (xxi. 25). When there was no kingdom in Israel, there was no authority, and the people just did as they pleased. At that time a certain family set up a place of worship in their own home, and hired a Levite to be their household priest; and there they instituted a form of 'divine worship' (ch. xvii.). Alas, that is exactly the state of things in the present day! We think if we are just keen enough, we can gather some people together: you can set up a church in this street, and I can set up a church in that street, and we can hire a preacher to preach for us. Brothers and Sisters, what is the cause of all this confusion? The ultimate cause is that we have not subjected ourselves to the Head of the Church.

But let us return to our illustration of the two brothers. If those two had both come into subjection to the Church's Head, their problems would have been solved, for authority quells all rebellion. Oh, what rebel stuff there is in our make-up! I confess that, if it were not for the authority of the Lord, I should always be falling out with one or other of my brethren, for my own nature is utterly antagonistic to the Lord's authority; but His authority over me has brought me to love my brethren, so that I can truly serve the Lord together with them. We often talk about 'mutual love', but this love of ours one for the other is very transient. There is only one place where love is permanent, and that is under the Head of the Church. Nowhere else is there true harmony or permanent relatedness.

Let me illustrate again. One day I meet one of the elders of the company, and he doesn't look too happy. I begin to think there must be something wrong with that elder; and I think and think about that thing. The more I think, the more wrong that thing appears. The upshot is that I cease to attend the gatherings. But why do I stop coming to the meetings? The real reason is—not because that elder is wrong, but because I myself am not in subjection to the authority of the Lord. Even should that elder be wrong—and very seriously wrong—provided I maintain my place under the Headship of Christ and accept His discipline, not flinching however deep His dealings with me may be, I shall make positive spiritual advance. This is a trivial example, but it illustrates a mighty matter. Every

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Christian who has attained any degree of Christ-likeness has attained it in this one way—a recognition of Christ as Head and a constant acceptance of the discipline of His government. All true progress comes this way, and all true functioning comes this way too.

To illustrate again: Suppose a responsible brother has wronged me, and I feel badly about it and cease coming to the meetings. That will be the end of my spiritual progress. And as for fulfilling my function as a member of the Body of Christ, all possibility of that will be completely ruled out. But suppose, when that responsible brother wrongs me, I recognise that Christ is really Head of His Body, and that His authority is really here, then something within me instantly breaks and I know a great increase of life. Quite spontaneously something happens—I find myself functioning as a vital member in the Church. I open my mouth to pray, or I speak a word of testimony, and others are ministered to. How does it come about that a brother who could not open his mouth, and had nothing to minister to others, now functions so effectively? It has come through submission to the Lord. When we are willing to be broken under

His authority, something tremendous happens—a building process begins to take place. If, whenever we meet a difficulty, we let it break us, then that inner breaking makes way for an increase of life, and the building work goes on apace. Brothers and sisters who have been our problems become our blessings, and it is not long before a company is built up in the life of Christ; and that brings in the presence of God in a very full way.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters, this is what God is after to-day. It is not enough that we preach the Gospel and bring people to a knowledge of salvation and to a measure of spirituality; we must bring them under the Headship of Christ so that they may be built up. Under His Headship we shall cease to reckon with difficulties, for we shall touch fulness of life. Then the specific spiritual function which belongs to each member of the Body will become apparent, and this local Church will become a strong Church in which all the diverse gifts will be in evidence; and under the direction of the Head every member, from the smallest to the greatest, will have a contribution to make to the whole.

W. L.

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

## HIS OWNER'S NAME

IT was a half-holiday. Forbes had been given permission to go into the local town to get some studs put in his cricket boots, and as the town was 3 miles away he had borrowed his friend Jackson Minor's bicycle. The first boot-shop he tried did not have just the kind of studs he wanted, but they told him of another shop a little distance away. He found it, and found the special studs too, so he left his boots to be called for later in the afternoon. This left him with nothing special to do, so what more natural than that he should find himself making his way to his favourite ice-cream shop? And what more natural, too, than that he should find other fellows from his school there as well? A discussion arose, and a rather noisy one, about some knotty point connected with cricket, which went on and on, until Forbes suddenly realised that he must hurry away. For, all this while, Jackson Minor's bicycle had been standing at the kerb by the first boot-shop—or at least Forbes took it for granted that it had. But when he had collected his boots, duly studded, and went to fetch the bicycle, there was no bicycle to be seen. Where was it? Had it been stolen? After a few hectic rushes here and there, he sadly came to the

conclusion that it had. Jackson Minor's bicycle was lost.

Forbes did what he could to find it, but there was not much that he could do. He went to the police-station and told the sergeant about it, and when he got back to school, after a long and weary tramp, he reported the loss to his Housemaster. Finally, and worst of all, he had to tell his friend. Nobody could expect that Jackson Minor would be pleased at the loss. Or even that he would not mind. Still, he said very little. Forbes rather wished that he had said more, for he felt that he had let his friend down rather badly and was due to be called some really hard names. He was sorry to have been so careless, and when he prayed that night he told the Lord so. He also asked that though it seemed quite impossible the bicycle might be found again.

Next Sunday, in the afternoon, the boys were free to go out into the neighbouring countryside, and as Jackson Minor wanted very much to show that he bore no ill will he asked Forbes to go with him. He knew where there were some sweet-chestnut trees, and proposed that they should go to see if there were any ripe nuts yet. It was a long walk,

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so they set off soon after lunch, going on steadily for a mile or two. Then the miracle happened! They were walking up a village street, past a group of youths with bicycles, when Jackson Minor stopped, and drew Forbes aside. One of those machines was his. At least he said that it was. Forbes doubted it. There was no saddle-bag, and the handle-bars looked higher, so that he thought it was not the same. Jackson, however, was certain that it was. There were no special proofs, but he just knew. It was his.

The question was what to do now. Forbes was for fighting it out, but his friend pointed out that it would be two against six, and that two of them looked pretty tough. So they decided that the best thing to do was to enquire if there was a village policeman, and if so call him. There was, and though he did not very much like being woken up from his Sunday nap, he came along with them to the group and spoke to the youth who was holding the stolen bicycle. It was quite clear that either Jackson Minor was very much mistaken, or else the thief was a ready liar, for he told the constable a long story, with many details, of how that the bike was his, that he had had it for a long time, that it had been given him by his uncle, and much more. The policeman looked from one to the other. Who was he to believe? By this time some of the villagers had collected, and soon made it plain that they did not believe Jackson Minor. There was a lot of talking and arguing, but it got them nowhere.

It was then that they got a surprise. All of a sudden Jackson Minor told the policeman that the matter could be settled if he would take off the saddle. The youth made some feeble protest, and the policeman felt a bit foolish, but in the end he took a spanner, loosened the nuts and lifted off the saddle. There was nothing! Everybody began to talk at once, but when Jackson Minor could make himself heard he asked the man to put his finger down into the hollow part of the frame which had been exposed and see if he could find anything. All were quiet while he did so, and pulled up a rough piece of paper with some words scrawled on

it. The policeman slowly read out the words. They were Jackson Minor's name, together with his House and School.

Now the seedy youth might have tried to pretend that his name was Jackson, but it would have been quite useless to pretend that he belonged to that school, so in the midst of the hubbub he quietly hurried off. When the officer looked round he was nowhere to be seen, so it seemed that without any more questions he could hand over the bicycle to its rightful owner and go back to finish his sleep. As the two boys went on their way it would be hard to know who was the happier, Jackson Minor or his friend Forbes.

Later on, as they walked along, Forbes asked him why he had allowed all that argument in the village street before he settled the matter. Jackson Minor told him that until that moment he had forgotten all about it. When he first went to school he had a vague fear that some bully would say that the bicycle was not his, so he had hidden the piece of paper in the hollow frame of the machine. When he got to school he found that his fears had been foolish, so he had never thought again of it. Then, in the nick of time, he had remembered that it was there. What a good thing he had put it in after all! Rather shyly, Forbes told him of the prayer he had prayed on the night of the loss, and they agreed that it had been wonderfully answered.

When they told their Housemaster, he, too, agreed that it was a real answer to prayer. And, would you believe it, he used the story in his next sermon? The text was: "From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Galatians 6. 17). He told the boys that Paul knew the Lord Jesus not only as his Saviour, but as his Master, his Owner. It saved him from many worries and fears to have his Owner's Name clearly marked in him. The Housemaster also told the boys to be sure that they really belonged to the Lord, and had their Owner's Name written in their hearts. If this were true they could never be lost. It is a lesson which every boy and girl should learn.

H. F.

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

## THE SPIRIT OF SERVICE

"Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written" (*Exodus xxxii. 32*).

"For I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (*Romans ix. 3*).

IN these two utterances of Moses and Paul—perhaps the two most outstanding servants of God in the two dispensations, the old and the new—we have represented the very highest point of service to the Lord. We are all concerned with this matter of being of service to the Lord, and we are ever seeking to know how that service can be best fulfilled, and how we may rise to the highest possible level of service to Him. Surely this prayer of Moses, and this prayer of Paul—for if you look at the margin of Paul's words, you will see that the word 'wish' is really 'pray': "I could pray . . ."—these two prayers of these two outstanding servants of God do represent the highest degree of service to the Lord.

It would be impossible to go beyond these statements in the matter of selflessness. You cannot go beyond this: 'Blot me out of the book that Thou hast written'; 'accursed from Christ'. There is no degree beyond that; the extreme utterness of selflessness is in those prayers. They represent a greater concern for the people of God, not only than for personal blessing, or personal vindication, or position, or reputation, but than for life itself! These men were only saying, in other words: 'My life begins and ends with the people of God; I have nothing beyond that. If they should lose or suffer, and I, in any way, could have prevented it, then I have missed the whole purpose of life, the very purpose of my own salvation. That is the sum and the end of everything.' What a devotion! That is service.

THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST  
IN MOSES AND PAUL

There were certain things that Moses and Paul had in common which headed up in these prayers. In the context of those passages, we see the sin of the Lord's people. This thirty-second chapter of Exodus is the story of that terrible breakdown under Aaron's leadership: the setting up and worshipping of the idol; the turning away from God, and saying: 'These be thy gods, O Israel!'—the

awful sin of the Lord's people. In the ninth chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans, the context is that of what Israel had done to his Lord, in the killing of Christ.

The point is that this devotion was not to a people who drew it out by reason of their goodness, the fineness of their substance, the loveableness of their nature. The quality of this devotion is tremendously enhanced when we recognise the *kind* of people to whom these hearts so utterly went out. It is a rebuke to us in our service. It is so easy for us to give ourselves to, devote ourselves to, labour for, those who give a return, who show kindness, who are 'nice' people—people we think are 'worth-while' people. Here was a love to the uttermost for people who were so utterly unworthy of it at all. That Paul and Moses had in common.

But further, they had this in common, that they themselves were objects of those people's reproach and persecution. There had been times, as Moses was seeking to bring the people out of Egypt, when they turned on him and blamed him for the difficulties of their situation. And we know that, even after this incident of the calf, they many times railed on Moses and laid all their troubles at his door. And as for Paul, what a time he had at the hands of Israel—the Judaizers and all the rest—what a time he had! They denounced him as a traitor. And yet, although these two servants of God were themselves, personally, the objects of the opposition coming from those for whom they had given their lives, this was their spirit and their attitude: 'Forgive . . . If Thou wilt forgive . . .' Moses breaks off; he does not finish that 'If Thou wilt . . .' He continues: 'But if not, blot me out of the book which Thou hast written.' 'I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren's sake.' What a spirit of service! I say again, it is a terrible rebuke to us.

These men are exemplifying the spirit of *Christ*. We have only to remember from Galatians: 'He was made a curse for us' (iii. 13). 'I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren's sake . . .'—'He was made a curse'! He carried the spirit of service all that way, to the extent of being cut off from God for that eternal moment when the Father hid His face, for the sake of 'His brethren'. When we turn to Hebrews, we know it was for His brethren. "He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (ii. 11, 12, 17). Yes, so utter was His committal, that He—Christ—for that moment

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actually suffered the loss of God—the loss of everything. That is the Spirit of Christ in service. How far it must take us!

### THE BATTLE FOR THE PURPOSE OF GOD

Now, when we look at these two passages in their context, we find very much instruction. You notice that, in each case, the previous chapter is a most wonderful and blessed chapter. The thirty-first chapter of Exodus shows us Moses in the mountain, in communion with God, receiving the pattern for the Tabernacle. What a wonderful thing that was! It was the Mount of Revelation—of the revelation of Jesus Christ, we can say, in meaning—in all the fulness of His mediatorial work; for that is what the Tabernacle stands for. This pattern was shown in the Mount, and Moses was there with God. It is a wonderful chapter. Presently that will all be taken up again and put into effect; but there is a dark chapter between.

Look at Romans viii: everybody knows what Romans viii is about. And there are few more beautiful, glorious things than the closing words of that chapter: "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creation, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (v. 37-39). A wonderful chapter is chapter viii; we are lifted into the heights of the marvel of Divine love. Presently that will all be taken up, and when we get to chapter xii—everybody knows chapter xii and onward—we shall find it coming into effect. But again, in between, the dark chapter!

Here is that to which we are called—the service of the House of God; the service of the revelation of Jesus Christ; the service of the love of God—all to be brought into concrete form in the Lord's people: but between the revelation and the realisation, there is a terrible battle! In these cases, and in every case, there is a terrible battle between. There is always this that we have in chapter xxxii of Exodus: the breaking in of the enemy to spoil everything; the outbreaking of the flesh in men; the spirit of idolatry—which is a far wider and bigger thing than just the worship of some idol; it is this comprehensive movement to draw away from God—and it is found by the play of evil forces upon men's nature. That is the realm of the battle. There is something that needs to be dealt

with and be got out of the way. As we know, Moses and the Levites dealt with it, drastically and terribly; and then they could get on with the Tabernacle.

Paul dealt with this thing in Israel; he, too, dealt with it drastically. I think that is *the* point of the Letter to the Galatians. The Letter to the Galatians saw a battle fought through, which never had to be fought through again in that time. Once and for all, Paul settled the matter of the Judaizers in his time—that battle was finished. They were doing just what these people were doing at the foot of the mount. It was a battle, a desperate battle, to make the way clear for the purpose of God.

### THE NEED FOR UTTER DEVOTION

Now that, of course, provides the very focal point for this message. Devotion, utter devotion, to God's purpose concerning His people, is going to make the uttermost demand upon any servant of God. It is going to test and find out our spirit of service. And if we are going to serve God in this utter way, it is going to bring us to the point where we have nothing left to fall back upon, either of personal interest, position, or blessing; it is simply a matter of God, and God only! If God does not do it, we are finished; we have nothing to live for! We have no alternative; we have no second line; we are *in* this matter of the Lord's purpose and interests to the very last drop of our blood. "And if not . . ."—then there is nothing more for us. The, *the* purpose of God in His people, will demand that; we shall find that, sooner or later. It is no use—we cannot have any alternatives; we cannot have a second course: it is everything or nothing!

And we must be prepared to be brought to the place where we are ready to get right out of the way ourselves—altogether out of the way, in every sense—if only the Lord can reach His end. We don't matter. That is what Moses said: 'I don't matter; my salvation does not matter; my life does not matter.' Paul's thought was the same: 'What matters is that the Lord has His end in His people, and if that is not reached, then I don't know what I am alive for; I don't know what I have been saved for.'

How far removed this is, is it not, from being saved to *get* things for ourselves in time and in eternity—to get Heaven, to get blessings, and all manner of 'things'—these things that are offered if only we will be saved! But we find that we are saved to be brought into the great purpose of God



## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

as His servants. And it is no use complaining ; it is no use saying, This is too costly, or, This is hard work ! No, it is no use ; we are committed—unto death—for this thing. We are just committed to death.

Now the Lord, right at the beginning, said this : ‘ He that saveth his life shall lose it ; he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it ’ (Matt. xvi. 25, etc.). It is a *life* matter. Saving or losing—what? Blessing? No—your *life* !—no less an issue than that. Are our hearts so bound up with the Lord’s concern for His people, for His Church, that we have nothing else for which to live?—so that that is our horizon ; that is our beginning and our end ; that is all that we are on this earth for—that the Lord shall have what He has set His heart upon in His people?

That is the implication of those words of Moses and Paul. ‘ I am not seeking something for myself in the work of God, or in salvation ; I am not seeking place, I am not seeking name or reputation ; I am not seeking any gain whatever. I am committed so utterly to the Lord’s concern and purpose in a people, that, far from hurting the Lord’s people, or doing them an injury ’—and alas, there are many who are doing hurt to the Lord’s people, and to the Lord’s interests in His people—‘ I would rather die, than that the Lord should lose anything in His people.’ That is the spirit of these words, and of these servants. And so the message is just that : a call to service, and to recognise what that service is. It is the service of Christ, and the service of Christ was—“ obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross ” (Phil. ii. 8).

### TRUE SERVICE NECESSITATES FIERY ORDEALS

This brings us to a final brief word concerning the peculiar sufferings and trials of the ‘ servants ’ of the Lord. We do not suffer for our salvation ; we pay no price whatever for our redemption : that is all free ; we have it ‘ without money and without price.’ Never attach your sufferings to

your salvation—keep those two things always apart. But you need not be told that, when you are saved, you enter upon a life of difficulties, adversities, trials, afflictions and sufferings. Why? Because you have been called, not just to salvation, but to *service*. And the *service* of the Lord necessitates for the servant these fiery ordeals in which the dross of self-interest is removed. That is the effect of our adversities and our sufferings, if they have their right effect: just completely to deal with this whole matter of personal motives, and selfish interests, and ourselves as featuring in the work of God. The fire deals with the dross of selfhood, which is always the menace to service.

Look at the Lord Jesus, the great Servant, the supreme Servant. One thing that is clearer than anything else, and the more outstanding in Him, being what He was—the Eternal Son of God incarnate : He could lay aside His robe, gird Himself with a towel, take a basin of water, and wash the disciples’ feet. There is the picture of the Servant, utterly emptied of all selfhood, reputation, self-importance, prestige, standing, dignity, and everything else. It is the spirit of service. “ The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life . . . ” (Matt. xx. 28). That is the spirit of it, and it carries us all the way : we have nothing left of ourselves in this service.

The explanation of our trials and sufferings and discipline is just this : to make us better servants, to make us *true* servants. Just think what Moses had in that way—until it was possible for it to be said : “ Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth ” (Num. xii. 3). And therefore Moses stands as a giant over the whole of the Old Testament, with one word, one title : “ Moses the servant of God ” (1 Chron. vi. 49, etc.).

And we need not indicate Paul, “ a servant of Jesus Christ ”. If ever there was a servant in this dispensation, it was he. But look at this man : ‘ I could pray myself to be accursed from Christ for my brethren’s sake.’ That is the spirit of service. May the Lord inculcate that in us!

T.A.S.

## CONFERENCE IN SWITZERLAND

We have taken an hotel in AESCHI, near the Lake of Thun, for a conference in September (17th to 29th).

Friends desiring to be with us are advised to let us know as soon as possible.

Write: *The Conference Secretary, 13, Honor Oak Road, London, S.E. 23*

JULY — AUGUST, 1958

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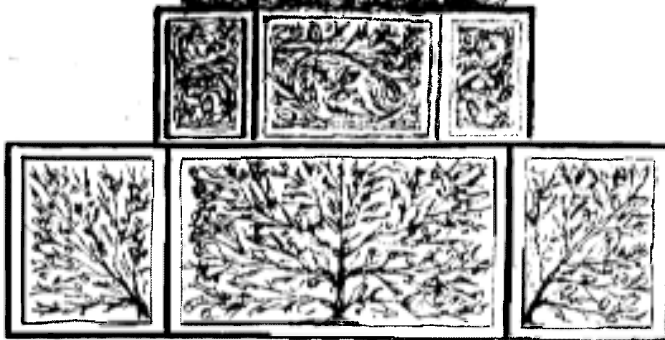
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EDITORIAL

THE FINAL CALL OF GOD

History is marked by a recurrent crisis which has three aspects. Whenever God has considered that the time has come for judgment, that ordeal by fire has involved these three issues. Judgment is not only penalty or punishment ; it is firstly discovery and uncovering. Then it is discrimination and putting things in the category to which they belong because of what they are. Finally, it is passing sentence accordingly, and fixing destiny. This is clearly observable in all the Divine visitations in the history of nations and of the people of God. It will be fully and ultimately true of the last phase of this present world-history—disclosure, discrimination, destiny.

We have a very clear and definite instance of this represented in the fiftieth Psalm.

It has not yet been finally settled as to what part of history this Psalm belongs. Who this Asaph was is not certain. The conditions referred to in the Psalm do not very well fit into the national situation in the time of David and Solomon, when Asaph was the leader of the music. They are more like those of a later time when that glorious epoch had passed and the glory faded.

But it does not really matter ; the Psalm embodies God’s work of judgment at any time of visitation, and the aspects are clear.

Firstly there is the delineation of His fullest and highest thought ; that which is His standard, His desire, His joy ; that which is His satisfaction.

“ God . . . hath spoken . . . Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty . . . ”

God has an object and a pattern to which He is committed, and this is the background against which His judgment is placed. God cannot judge until He has clearly shown and revealed that which He desires and that for which He has made every provision. Judgment will ever be according to the will of God, as revealed and known ; or, at least, as made available to knowledge.

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

In this Psalm, as in so many others, and in the Prophets, Zion is the synonym for that which embodies the full pleasure and satisfaction of God's heart and mind. In the New Testament, Zion is no longer any earthly point, but is synonymous with the Church ideally; which, again, is Christ in corporate expression (Hebrews xii. 22, 23).

This Divine conception and intention has been fully and gloriously revealed to a whole dispensation through the last 'Letters' of the Apostle Paul. We *have* this revelation, and it will be over against this revealed mind of God that judgment is to take place. In the sovereignty of God there is a great renewal of attention being drawn to these 'Church' Letters in our time. Perhaps never was there such a large place being given to these writings as at this present time. Upon this basis the judgment will rest, as in the case of the churches in Asia (Revelation i. - iii.), for it is here that the fullest and ultimate thought of God is revealed and presented. "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty . . ." Then immediately follows—"Our God shall come . . . a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him".

Three things characterize this 'coming to judgment'. We take them in reverse order.

(1) "But unto the wicked God saith . . ." (verse 16). "Now consider this, ye that forget God" (verse 22).

Fearful things are said as pending for the 'wicked' who are described as those who 'forget God': those who have not God in their thought when so many evidences of Him abound.

(2) The middle section has to do with the judgment of formalism: the judgment to uncover and reveal what is merely outward and formal. Here is a whole system of ritual; sacrifices, altars, priests, and ceremonies. The fiery ordeal will show how much there is in the religious world, that is, of "truth in the inward parts"; whether it is a matter of the very life and character, or merely a system of rites and practices. Here is a massive structure of profession which will collapse and become ashes in the day when "Our God shall come".

(3) The gold secured and preserved.

"Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice" (verse 5).

The last call of God, as judgment is pending, is a call to Himself. Here then is the call of God in our time.

The last movement of the people of God is to Himself: not to a movement as such; not to a teaching or interpretation of truth; not to a sect or party; not to an enterprise or mission—but *to Christ*. The final true and Divine movement is to the Lord Himself. The sheer pressure of the conditions in the gathering storm and tempest will demand a leaving of all lesser interests and objects, however good a purpose they may have served hitherto, and a moving toward the Lord Himself. 'Things' divide; the Lord unites. 'Things' must pass; the Lord abides. The time comes when all the means and accessories which the Lord has sovereignly used will cease to avail. This includes all the organized side of Christianity, and the Lord will force the issue as to how much there really is of Himself.

The basis of this phase or aspect is the 'covenant by sacrifice'. It rests upon the Cross as rooted in the very life of His people.

"GATHER . . . UNTO ME . . . BY SACRIFICE"

If this little paper could have any influence with the several thousands who receive it, this would be what we would desire, for our whole position from the beginning of our ministry has been that of the Lord above all else. It is not merely negative, as against this and that; or wrongly exclusive, as for some particular form or fellowship; but Christ in all His fulness. We may feel that devotion—more or less—to the forms or sections of Christianity is often a limitation to the Lord; but we would say: 'Make the Lord Himself your supreme object; to know Him, and to increase in His fulness; and all else will take its measure of value from that.'

So, not other than as *spiritual* movement, we would take up this Divine call.

"Gather my saints together unto me"—with the emphasis upon "*together*" and "*me*".

EDITOR



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## THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE CHURCH, AND THE NATIONS

### VI. THE PEOPLE OF GOD AND THEIR INHERITANCE

*Reading: Joshua i.*

*"It came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as prince of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant? And the prince of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Put off thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so" (Joshua v. 13 - 15).*

THE counterpart of the book of Joshua is found in the New Testament, especially from and with the Gospel of John onward. When you come to the end of the four Gospels, you find yourself at the self-same place as that which you find just before the book of Joshua opens. That is, a nation has come to the border of the Land of Promise—which border is, in this case, symbolically, the Jordan—and that nation has turned back and lost everything through unbelief. That is how it was before this book of Joshua opens. That is exactly how it was at the end of the Gospels. The nation to whom all the promises were offered for fulfillment came to that border land: through unbelief they were turned back and lost everything: and for the last two thousand years they have been experiencing a living death in the wilderness.

But a new nation springs into being. It is with that that we have to do as we open this book of Joshua, and it is that with which we have to do when we pass from John into Acts. A new nation has arisen out of the death of the old, and is now going in and on to possess.

The Ark of the Covenant went its lonely way through the Jordan. You remember that the Lord commanded that the Ark was to move ahead into the river, then in flood, and that a space of two thousand cubits was to be observed between it and the people. It was taking a lonely way, a way which it alone could take. We all know that that Ark represents the Lord Jesus Himself, and its passage through the Jordan typifies His passage through the Cross. "Ye . . . shall leave me alone", He said; "and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (John xvi. 32). There is a space; He

took a lonely way through the Cross. No one else can go that way as fully as He went; thank God, it is not necessary. He first met all the overflowing of Jordan—God's judgment, God's wrath, God's separation; it was a terribly lonely way. "Why hast thou forsaken me?" He cried to Heaven (Matt. xvii. 46). The 'Ark' went that way, to lead the way through for us, that we might have a dry passage, and might not be overwhelmed of Jordan.

I do not think that we really make enough of what He has borne for us, and of how little we have to bear because of that. If we know something of the Cross, if we know something of the fellowship of His sufferings, we know nothing of the judgment of God that rested upon Him. Nothing that we know has to do with judgment—not one whit. As the Ark went its lonely way to lead that people through, so He, by the Cross, has opened a way—a way into the inheritance.

#### JOSHUA AND AMELEK

At that point, Joshua comes into view in full stature, as representing, or indicating, the instrument of God for spiritual fulness. It would be instructive to spend a few minutes on Joshua in that light. Joshua stands for the mighty life and energy of the Holy Spirit. When the Captain of Jehovah's hosts, the Holy Spirit in figure there, joined Himself with Joshua, and joined Joshua with Himself, all that issued and proceeded was by the energy of the Holy Spirit. Everything thenceforth showed the Holy Spirit in charge and in action. Joshua, then, speaks of the Holy Spirit uniting Himself with a vessel for the purposes of the inheritance.

You remember that Joshua first comes into view in relation to Amalek (Exodus xvii). Amalek is the type of the flesh, coming out to thwart, to prevent, to straddle the path of Israel, that they should not come into the inheritance. The flesh always does that. Satan has a ready ally in the flesh, and by the energy of the flesh he would always keep the Lord's people out of the inheritance. Joshua first comes in then against Amalek. You see already, well in advance, when he first comes into view, that he signifies that which is of the Spirit warring against the flesh. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh", says the Apostle (Gal. v. 17). Joshua is there, as the energy of the Spirit, to deal with this obstructing and

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hindering and thwarting flesh, with the inheritance always in view. It is important always to remember that, and to keep it in its place. Why must we walk in the Spirit? Why must the flesh be dealt with? Not just for its own sake, but because the great inheritance in Christ is in view.

## JOSHUA AND THE TENT OF MEETING

The next occasion on which he is referred to is in Exodus xxxiii. He is spoken of here as "a young man" who "departed not out of the Tent" (v. 11). I think that is a very beautiful touch, not only in the case of Joshua himself, but in the whole spiritual background of this story. What was this Tent? It was, of course, not the Tabernacle, because the Tabernacle was not in existence at that time. You have to go back to the occasion when Moses went up into the mount to receive the Law, and the pattern of the Tabernacle. He came down, and Israel had 'broken loose' and had made a calf, and were saying: 'These be thy gods which brought thee out of Egypt!' (Ex. xxxii, 4). Joshua was there. But, when Moses came down, and heard and saw, he stood in the gate of the camp, and cried: 'Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come over unto me!' Now, from that time onwards, what Moses did was to take a tent, a 'tent of meeting', right outside of the camp, and "everyone which sought the Lord went out unto the tent of meeting" (Ex. xxxiii, 7). That was the Tent in which Joshua, the young man, abode, and from which he did not depart.

It is full of significance, is it not? First of all, that Tent out there implied absolute separation from every taint of Satan's touch. Satan had captured the gold of the Sanctuary, and had it made into a calf for his own worship: Satan had turned the heart of the people from the Lord to himself, and corrupted everything. If the inheritance is going to be entered upon and appropriated, that touch and that taint of the corrupting influence of the evil one amongst the people of God has got to be removed, and everything of God has got to be taken out of its precincts. Joshua, therefore, abiding and not departing from the Tent; this man of the Spirit, this man who is to bring into the inheritance by the energy of the Spirit; the man who abides beyond the taint and the touch of the powers of evil, says so clearly that he is not in that world, he is out of that realm altogether. He abides in the Tent of meeting. I like to think that there was one man, besides Moses, who was not a priest, but a man of the people, who was allowed to dwell in the House of the Lord.

## JOSHUA AS A "YOUNG MAN"

But then it says that Joshua was a 'young man'. Surely this speaks of freshness—the freshness of youth, with everything before; vision, purpose, a future; a life of energy in the Spirit; no touch of time, or old age, here. It is a very blessed thing. Oh, that we were all characterized by this youth! Here is where a part of our watchfulness and prayerfulness must be observed. It is always such a joy to meet with young Christians, who are reaching out for everything of the Lord; not satisfied with being just saved, but really after all that the Lord means for them. Because there are some of the Lord's people who 'know it all', and have heard it all for years, so that you can hardly say a thing, even about the book of Joshua, but they know all about it—'Oh, you have gone over that ground again and again!' They are so stale, and everything to them is so stale: it is like bread which has been locked up for years—it has got absolutely dry; and so you cannot say anything to them; there is no freshness. But then you find a group of young Christians, and there is life, there is freshness, and you can give and give.

That is not a matter of years: it is a matter of spirit. And it ought to be like that. If we are going to come into the inheritance, we must always have an appetite for it. If we are going to come into the inheritance, there needs always to be this vigorous spirit, this energy, this reach-out; this consciousness that, however much we know, we know nothing. We see so much before us—that 'land of far distances' that our eyes have seen; and yet, with all that we know, we know that we are only touching the fringes. It ought to be like that to the end: the spirit of youth, and youth's energy, ought to mark us. Sometimes it is very difficult to give a message amongst people who 'know it all', and have heard it all before: there is a sense of heaviness and hard going—simply because there is not this drawing out of a spiritual energy to know, to apprehend. Joshua, then, was a 'young man, who departed not from the tent of meeting.'

## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CONFLICT OF POSSESSION

Now, when we come to this fifth chapter of the book of Joshua, to those three verses that we read, we come to what is the very heart and essence of the book of the Acts. With John, the Land comes into view. With Acts, the Spirit takes over. He takes over this whole matter of the inheritance, and of leading the people of God into possession. But

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it is along the line of conflict. Yes, He takes over in relation to the inheritance, but note how immediately it becomes a matter of conflict. If that Man standing over against Joshua, declaring Himself to be the Captain of the Hosts of the Lord, is (in figure, if not in reality) the Holy Spirit, as we believe He is, note that He has a sword drawn in His hand—He has not come with an olive leaf! He has come with a sword, and it is drawn.

There is going to be not one whit of this inheritance possessed without conflict. We need to make up our minds to that, for that is how it is going to be. There is going to be a withstanding from all quarters. As soon as the matter of any spiritual increase comes into view, then, strangely, sometimes mysteriously, a state of conflict arises. It gets into the very atmosphere, and it comes even from Christian people. Be satisfied with what is called 'the simple gospel', and 'simple evangelism', and you meet no conflict; everybody applauds and accepts, and is on your side. *But*—set your heart on the whole purpose of God, and you find yourself at once in a realm of terrible conflict. Satan is not going to allow this Church to reach its determined destiny, if he can prevent it.

Every step is going to be challenged. Notice: "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon"—yes, "to you have I given it" (i. 3)—'but, there will be a battle over it; there will be battle over your possessing what I have given.' Yes, even though God has predestined and pre-determined it, and it is settled in the foreknowledge and fore-counsels of God, that does not mean that we are going to come into it willy-nilly! With all the Divine sovereignty, with all the Divine power, and with all the Divine wisdom, associated with the purpose, strangely enough there is a battle over every inch of it. It is like that.

#### THE SPIRIT AND THE INHERITANCE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the Gospel of John, we read that Jesus said: "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth" (xvi. 13). That is Joshua v. 13-15! The Spirit has come to guide them into all the Truth that is in Jesus (Eph. iv. 21)—that is the book of Joshua. When He came on the Day of Pentecost, fulfilling the promise and explanation of the Lord Jesus, He came to guide the Church right into its inheritance. I cannot be too emphatic about this, because there are such inadequate, if not wrong, ideas about the Holy Spirit and Pentecost, and so on. Let us understand that the Holy Spirit came for no lesser purpose

than to take the Church right on into *all* its inheritance in Christ. And if our ideas of the Holy Spirit are not poised and directed along this line, we are—if not arresting—at least in measure subverting the work of the Holy Spirit, and the purpose of His coming. The Church has to be brought into that inheritance for which it has been eternally predestined by God; and the Spirit came—in type in Joshua, in reality in Acts—for that one purpose. And this is going to be a conflict which will not end, until the Lamb has overcome in finality.

In the book of the Acts, then, the Holy Spirit does take over in the matter of the inheritance; and He takes over for the conflict of the inheritance. We do not move far into that book before we find the conflict is on. In Jerusalem—whether from Jewish leaders, who kill Stephen; or from the rulers of the pagan world, who kill James and imprison Peter—there it is; the conflict is on. But the mighty Spirit is with the Church in the conflict. He has linked Himself up with that instrument for the great purpose of God. And, when you consider the incidents, and what seem like the tragedies, and look through them, there is a sense in which it can be said, concerning this union of the Holy Spirit with a vessel here on this earth, that 'no man hath been able to stand before it all the days of its life' (Josh. i. 5). There is a sense in which that is true. There has been a withstanding from men and from demons, awful withstanding; but the Church has gone on; the testimony has never ceased in the earth. Even when sometimes it seems to have been driven underground, it comes up and goes on again. Acts, then, sees the Holy Spirit coming, uniting Himself with the instrument, the vessel, and the conflict arising.

When you pass over to the Letter to the Hebrews, you find yourself once more in this battle. For here it is all about the inheritance, spiritually. The Spirit is here, urging the Church, urging the believers to go on, to go on; not to go back, not to stand still, but to go on. The writer points out that Joshua did not bring the people into God's rest (Heb. iv. 8). It was type, it was figure, but that final fulness of Christ was never entered into under Joshua. But Jesus, and the Holy Spirit—they are going to bring the Church into the final fulness.

When we come to the book of the Revelation, we find that the whole issue of the inheritance has now resolved itself into a matter of 'overcomers'. However we interpret the book of the Revelation—whether as applying to the whole dispensation or to the end of the dispensation—the situation that we find is that the Church as a whole has not gone on. A very large proportion of the Church has

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either declined, fallen back or away, or has stood still in this matter. Perhaps the conflict has been too fierce, the cost too great, the world too attractive, sin too subtle; but there it is. As we find at the end of the book of Joshua, that the enemy was not finally cast out (for we have the tragedy of the book of Judges): so, in the last book of the Bible, in the Revelation, we find that the enemy has not been fully and finally worsted. He still has territory amidst the people of God. And so there arises the whole question of the 'overcomers'. The 'overcomer' company, or body, is that which will go on and will satisfy the Lord in the whole matter of His full thought.

All this, surely, indicates our own position. For we are in the dispensation of the counterpart of the book of Joshua: in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, whose one inclusive purpose is to bring God's people into fulness—all, that is, who will be led into that fulness; all who will go on. Not a 'select', an arbitrarily selected company, but all who *will*. Paul's great word as to his own praying and striving was: "that we may present every man complete in Christ" (Col. i. 28)—*every* man. It is God's thought for us all. Do not say: 'That applies to some good, large people, who have spiritual capacity and are of a different make-up from what I am.' No, 'every man complete in Christ'—that is God's purpose. If the Holy Spirit gets His way, if He gets His ground—we have to see perhaps later what that is—He can do it with every man.

## "BE STRONG"

Now, it is because of such a tremendous withstanding, all round, of any kind of real progress towards God's end, that you have this threefold reiteration to Joshua: "Be strong, and of a good courage . . . be strong . . . be strong . . ." (vv. 6, 7, 9). That is our side. And it is just in that connection, as he is bringing into view the cosmic forces, 'the principalities and powers', that are set against the Church and its inheritance, that Paul uses those words. "Be strong in the Lord", he says (Eph. vi. 10); 'be strong . . . be strong!'

There must be no weakening; there must be no letting go. The discouragements will be many; the heartbreaks will be many; perhaps the disappointments will be many. The situation will sometimes seem to be impossible, the prospect a hopeless one. But you and I have got to heed this word, for so much hangs upon it. For ourselves, the inheritance in fulness hangs upon this "Be strong"; no weakening, no letting go, no letting down. But it

may be that those who will be strong can be a strength to others, and therefore for the sake of others a responsibility is laid upon us to be strong. It is not only for ourselves—it is *vocational* to be strong.

## 'I AM WITH THEE'

And then: "The Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (v. 9). Do not take that out of its context. The context is, that the "whithersoever thou goest" must be in relation to God's full purpose. He cannot be 'with' you on any other ground—you cannot count on that promise otherwise. It will not prove true, unless you are right on the line of His full purpose. But when it is so, then He commits Himself; He is with us whithersoever we go. 'I will be with thee; I am with thee.'

## (1) IN SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

Do you notice that that is said in this first chapter twice over, in a twofold connection? Firstly, it is in connection with leading this people over—the responsibility of spiritual leadership. I emphasize and underline that word '*spiritual*'. Do not think of leadership as official. Leadership is not official: you are not made a leader; you are not appointed a leader; you are not given a uniform, or a dress, or a badge with 'Leader' on it! Either you *are* a leader, or you are not; it is a matter of spiritual quality and strength. And spiritual leadership means that you are exercising an influence on others, to bring them on, to lead them on, into God's full intention for His people. The effect of your life is that others, because of you, are being helped on, drawn on, led on. If you have accepted that responsibility, and are seeking to fulfil it for other lives, then this word: 'I am with thee', is yours.

## (2) IN OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD OF GOD

Then, notice the second connection in which this word occurs: "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth" (v. 8). 'Give heed unto it—give heed unto it.' And then: 'I am with thee'. Your whole life must be based upon and governed by the Word of God. You must not be above the Word of God, superior to it; you must not be apart from it. You must be able to substantiate your position by the Word of God: 'Now, does the Word of God say this or that?' Dear friend, the whole question of *your* inheritance, and of your

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influence, depends upon whether you adhere to that Word. And sometimes it will not be understanding the Word. But the word is there—it is said ; it is said, Don't argue ; don't be superior in judgment—it is said . . .

Oh, that there were more, a good deal more, of this government by the Word of God. That is why we have got to read it, to consider it, to give heed to it. "Observe to do according to all that is written therein", is what it says here. 'Observe to do it.' Are you reading your Bible in order to find out exactly what the Word does say? If the Word of God says: "Children, obey your parents", it says that ; don't argue. If the Word of God says: "Husbands, love your wives"—it just says that! Don't say: 'Oh, but . . . oh, but . . . oh . . .' It says that. If the Word of God says: "Wives, be in subjection unto your own husbands"—it says that, and no one can take superior ground to that (Eph. v. 22, 25 ; vi. 1). You see what I mean ; I am taking things out in order to emphasize this point—'observe to do'. You will be blessed if you do ; if you don't, you will not come into the inheritance, and you will have no sphere of real spiritual ministry. Very big questions are bound up with this.

But the main thing is that, when it is like that, the Lord says: 'I am with thee'. We cannot take that promise—'I am with thee'—with any assurance, unless we are seeing to it that this Word does *not* depart from us, that we *observe* it, to do it. The presence of the Lord, and our entering into our possessions in Christ, are both governed by this thing. Do read your Bible to see what it really does say—not what your interpretation is, but what it says. Of course there is a great deal fuller meaning in all the Scripture than we have seen, and we shall get more and more light upon it. But, first of all—What does it *say*, what does it *say*? Am I in line with that? Big things hang upon that.

*"As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee : I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage . . . This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth . . . observe to do . . ."*

This is why the Holy Spirit came. This is the ground upon which the Spirit is with us. And this is the purpose that the Holy Spirit has taken up in His coming. He has taken over ; and, in all the conflict, in all the suffering, He is sufficient to see us through.

T. A-S.

## “ SHEW THE HOUSE TO THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL ”

*Reading: Ezekiel xl. 1 - 4 ; xliii. 1 - 12.*

*"Thou, son of man, shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities ; and let them measure the pattern" (Ezekiel xliii, 10)*

IT seems that we must read thirty-nine chapters of Ezekiel's prophecies before we come to the essential theme of his ministry. Until this point the emphasis of his message has been mainly on warning or condemnation—perhaps a necessary preliminary to the end in view, but not the vision itself. With chapter forty we are introduced to the main revelation which he had to unfold: the Temple of God filled with His glory. Ezekiel saw a vision of the House, and was then commanded to make it known to God's people, "Shew the house to the house of Israel . . ." What did it mean, to 'show the house'? Quite clearly the intention was that the people of God should see things as they ought to have been, as God meant them to be. In Ezekiel's day the testimony of the Lord was in a chaotic condition. Things were certainly not as God desired them to be. It was therefore the prophet's task to bring to their notice what had been lost,

what must be recovered ; what the Divine plans involved and how they could be realised.

Ezekiel was a priest, and spoke in 'typical' language. If we can perceive the spiritual meaning of his vision, it may help us to know what God wants of us in our day, for we are now 'His house' (Hebrews iii. 6). We need to be shown the House. For this New Testament "house" we have the Word of God, given as a prophetic revelation of how the Church is constituted, how it should function, and what its end is meant to be. We need no new Ezekiel with his types, and no fresh Paul with his teaching, for the revelation has been given and written down. What we do need, though, and need very urgently, is to appreciate what the Spirit has revealed. We need to turn away from things as they are, things as men have made them, from the chaos and disorder into which the people of God have drifted, and to open our hearts and minds to Divine truth.

### THE OBJECT OF THE VISION

The first vision of God's glory given to Ezekiel was associated with the destruction of the city.

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Since then, years had passed, both in his own history and in the history of God's people, and now he was to see the same glory in connection with the recovery of the city. He was to show the people the positive objective of God, that for which He had been clearing the way, and towards which He had been working. The judgment had to come in order that the glory might follow.

In that first vision of chapter i, everything was focused on One Man, the Man of the Throne. Thank God that, whatever ruin and devastation there may be here on earth, the throne of Heaven still has God's Man "upon it above" (i. 26). But the theme of the later vision is not one Man but a city, seeming to point to the Lord's desire for a Throne-people—a community of men here on earth who can provide for Him an adequate place for the soles of His feet.

The first vision seemed to depict heavenly power. It may be difficult, or even impossible, for us to realise the full content and tremendous implications of its symbolic language, but at least we can get the impression of the limitless energy and ability of God to get His will done. This is of primary importance—to know that the mighty Spirit of life has all the resources for the will of God to be fulfilled. Under the supreme government of God's Man on the Throne, the Spirit moves swiftly and irresistibly to bring glory to God. But all this was in the heavenlies, even though it touched the earth. Our present vision of the House seems to imply that we need to see how the Throne can be expressed in men, how the living power of the Spirit can produce a practical outworking on earth of the will of God. For God is very practical. And He expects us so to be. It may be inspiring to see how the mind of God has been perfectly expressed in Christ, and all the power of Heaven's Throne mediated through Him; but the Divine intention is that this should be worked out in His people here and now. The Church is meant to provide a Throne-people, concerning whom the Lord can say: "Son of man, this is the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst . . ." (xlili. 7).

### FIRST EFFECT OF THE VISION

The first thing to notice is the immediate effect which the vision should produce. "Shew the house . . . that they may be ashamed . . ." Unless this happens, we may reasonably wonder whether the vision has been truly seen. Those who think of the purpose of God in terms of things, of ideas, of ways and means, will probably be inflated by their

vision. That is the kind of knowledge which puffs up. If our perception of what the Church should be makes us critical of others, or if it produces an impatient, carnal attempt to bring the thing into being, then the purpose of the revelation has been missed. So far as God is concerned, His first intention is to make us thoroughly ashamed of ourselves, God's purpose is not found in things and arrangements, but in a Person. The Church is only as it should be when Christ is everything. And when we see the glory of God in Christ, we do not blame others or make rash attempts to imitate Him; we fall broken and humbled at His feet. That is how it happened with Ezekiel. "I fell upon my face . . ." (Ezek. i. 28); "I fell at his feet as one dead . . ." (Rev. i. 17). It is always like that if we really meet the Lord.

The Gospels contain many stories of those who thus met Christ. Their first reaction was amazement, 'What a wonderful Person He is!' Alongside of this was deep humbling. They were utterly abased before His holy presence. Almost at the same time there was a dawning hope, 'If He is like that, then there is hope, even for me!' This is the shame which the Lord sought to produce in His faulty people; not the shame of despair but of hopeful contrition. And this is how the house of Israel was to receive the revelation of God's spiritual House: with a mixture of shame and hope.

The sight of the House would be sure to make them ashamed, for this was themselves as they were supposed to be and could have been. The glory of God ought to have been manifested in them, the power of God ministered through them. The vision of the ideal could not but make them ashamed of the way in which they had failed the Lord, come short of His glory, and deprived Him of His rightful place in the earth. There is at least a hint as to the cause of this shortcoming in the constantly repeated phrase: "Then shall they know that I am the Lord". Some sixty-two times in the chapters preceding this vision the phrase is used, suggesting by implication that things would never have been as they were if God's people had really known Him. This was the root cause of their failure—a lack of knowledge of the Lord. And it is the same lack which gives us cause for great shame in our day that the House of God occasions Him so much disappointment.

It was not only their shortcomings which brought shame, but even worse, the positive contradictions found among them. So much of Ezekiel's earlier chapters, together with the whole of Jeremiah's prophecies, must be set off in contrast to the vision

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## IMPLICATIONS OF THE VISION

So much for the effect of the vision. Let us now consider some of its implications.

## (1) ITS ONLY MEANING IS CHRIST

Firstly, we must realise that the House of God means nothing if it is not an expression of Christ. Those who study the types set forth in the Tabernacle and in Solomon's Temple know that everything portrays some feature of Christ. This metal, this colour, this material, this measurement—all speak of Him. Christ is seen everywhere, neither time nor place being given to anything which does not speak of Him. In the same way, the Church has no meaning apart from Christ. It is not something instead of Christ, nor even something in addition to Christ, which we are to be shown, but Christ everywhere, Christ in all, Christ and only Christ filling all things. The Church is nothing in itself. Our vision is not Christ *plus* something; it is the full meaning and implication of Christ, and that is something infinite.

It is striking that, in order that he might see this vision, Ezekiel was set down "upon a very high mountain" (xl. 2). It reminds us of that other 'high mountain' where the three apostles had their vision of the Transfiguration, the vision of the glory of God in a Human Being. The spiritual truth behind Ezekiel's vision is the same glory, and it is in the same Human Being, but expressed in a vast number of members, as a house or a city. The House must be composed of members of Christ; it has no meaning apart from Christ. Every part of it must be judged by the question: Does this express something of Christ? Has this a meaning in relation to Christ? If not, it is rejected. There can be no pleasure for God and no Divine glory in it. Moreover, it must be maintained in the true Spirit of Christ. It is not enough for things to be correct, to be Scriptural or orthodox. They must be held and maintained in the true Spirit of Christ. The Church was meant to be radiant and filled with heavenly glory, because filled with Christ—displaying Christ at every turn. There is no meaning in this House except it be the meaning of Christ.

## (2) IT IS MEASURED IN HUMAN TERMS

It also means nothing if it is not measured in human terms; that is, if the truths are not really expressed in practical ways in the lives of those who compose it. In these chapters we find a great

of the ideal, of the House as it ought to have been. It was shameful indeed that a people so privileged, so carefully taught and so richly blessed, should live in such flagrant contradiction to what they professed. This, alas, is our shame too. Every bit of understanding of the will of God brings its own measure of responsibility for conformity of life. Our gravest shame is when we fail to live in accordance with what we know and profess. It is striking to see how manifestly the blessing of God can rest upon any of His children, even those with a very limited understanding of Divine things, provided that they are obeying to the full all the light they have. They may be new converts, or believers little taught as to the purposes of God; but, if they are fully obedient to what light they have, the Lord will be with them, and everybody will know that He is with them. When we pride ourselves on the things we know, but do not live up to them, then indeed we should be ashamed.

Ezekiel's method was the best way of producing such conviction: he was to do it by showing them the real thing. Better than condemnation, better than argument, better even than exhortation, let them see the spiritual reality. Show them the real thing, and that should make them ashamed of the faulty and the false.

Those who perceive what God meant the Church to be, have to demonstrate that reality in life: to proclaim, by what they are, the glory of a people who give the enthroned Lord a place to dwell among them. We are not to theorize about such places. We cannot, even if we try, go around trying to set them up. We can only be a testimony, and thus by our very constitution and behaviour 'show the house'. This is the essence of our united ministry. This is what we are here for. Such a corporate expression of Christ, maintained in the fulness of the Spirit, should bring both conviction and hope. Instead of regarding Scriptural truths as unpractical and incapable of realisation in our day, believers should be made to know and believe that God intends the vision to be fulfilled.

So Ezekiel announced to the house of Israel that there was now hope. The full thought of God could, even at that late date, be expressed in them, provided that they were really contrite and in earnest. "If they be ashamed . . .", then 'make them know the form and the fashion, and the goings out and the comings in . . .' (xliii. 11). There is hope if there is hunger. The glory which departed can come back by the way it went, and fill again the House which it once filled, if only they are ashamed.

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deal about measurements. It may seem to some that there is too much. Whatever this means, our only purpose now is to consider the unit of measurement, the stick which was used for the purpose. "Behold . . . in the man's hand a measuring reed of six cubits long, of a cubit and a handbreadth each" (xl. 5). The "cubit" was essentially a measurement associated with human life. Normally it denoted the distance from a man's elbow to his wrist, or to the tips of his fingers. In this case it was the longer cubit, the special kind of cubit, for it is associated with the unique 'Man', God's New Man. Everything tends to remind us that these figures, though symbolic, are dealing not with mere ideas or theories, but with that which is closely identified with everyday human life. The "six cubits long" confirms this thought, for six is man's number. So we see that the vision only has value in the degree in which it is wrought out, lived out, in men's daily experience.

## (3) THE RIVER FLOWING OUT

Thirdly, the vision means nothing unless the river of life flows out from its heart, as we find described in chapter xlvii. This is the function of the City, of the House, so far as its manward side is concerned—to send out streams of living water to the dead and thirsty world around. The vision means nothing if it is shut up to itself. God will disown such a house. It cannot be His, for His House is the place from which the river flows. This is not a society for mutual self-admiration or preservation: it is a great world-centre, which is constantly sending out streams of blessing to those who so desperately need it. The Church must have an outflow. It may be more correct to say that it must have an overflow. But what an overflow! Ezekiel was amazed as he saw a trickle become a stream, the stream a river, and the river a mighty torrent. "Shew the house . . .", the Lord had said, "that they may be ashamed . . ."

## (4) ALL THE PEOPLE IN THEIR INHERITANCE

Fourthly, this vision resulted in a dividing up of the whole land into the true inheritance of all the tribes. For this we must read chapter xlviii. As the narrative proceeds, this point may seem secondary, almost a by-product of the main vision; nevertheless, it is surely a most important matter that the whole people of God should be found in full possession of their inheritance in Him. It has always been thus: when the House is in its right place, and really fulfilling the purpose of God

for it, then this becomes the key to all the rest.

If the Lord's Throne is established among His people, then the people will be led into their own appointed inheritances. All the tribes are provided for, but the divisions are quite different from anything previously stated about them, and seem to take no notice of history or geography. Each is described as being "from the east side to the west side", which elsewhere is the Scriptural way of indicating the immeasurable, the infinite. If, therefore, we consider the spiritual lesson of this vision, we are confronted with the reminder that it is the privilege of some to provide God with a central place among a Throne-people, that the outcome may be untold blessing and fulness for all the rest. The whole Biblical conception of the 'remnant' or the 'overcomers', is that such are to be a key to the ultimate realisation of the will of God in the sum total of His people.

It was in this spirit that Paul determined to concentrate on the "one thing" of striving for "the prize" (Phil. iii, 13, 14). As Saul of Tarsus, his only idea in spiritual attainment was to outstrip his fellows, to go one better than them, and then to look down on them. That was carnal ground. When, however, as Paul, he moved on to spiritual ground, to resurrection ground in Christ, then his one idea was to be so true to the Lord as to benefit the rest, to be so utter for Christ that all Christ's people should be helped by his utterness. We do not help our fellow believers by compromise, by coming down on to a lower level with them. We help them by utterness, though of course it must be an utterness full of the love of Christ. Our wholehearted separation to the will of God may in some senses seem to condemn them. We regret this but cannot avoid it. Yet our ultimate hope is that we may inspire them to go on with us into the full inheritance in Christ.

## (5) THE RETURN OF HOPE

The supreme implication of the whole vision is that our God is the God of hope. He has not abandoned His original purpose of a Throne-people; He is able to bring back His glory into the House "by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east" (xliii. 4). We may sometimes almost despair as to whether it is possible for the Lord to fulfil in us the vision of the glory of His House, but we shall probably never feel quite so helpless as Ezekiel must have felt on the day when he saw the glory departing. He lived to see the glory return.

There is, indeed, a hint here of that "exceeding



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abundantly above . . ." which Paul spoke of in this very connection of God's spiritual House. In the new vision, not only are the dimensions much larger than before, but an altogether new quality is foretold: "This is the law of the house: upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house" (xliii. 12). Previously only a small section had been "the most holy", but now the whole edifice was to be filled with the glory of the sanctuary. So this call from God to "shew the house" was not to mock His people, but to fill them—on the one hand, with shame at their own failure, and, on the other, with the hope of His mighty recovery.

### THE BASIS OF THE VISION

We should notice that nowhere was it suggested that Ezekiel or anyone else should make this House. In Exodus, God had said: "Let them make me . . .", giving to Moses a vision which was really instruction for the builders. When the pattern of the Temple was communicated to David, it was in order that his son, Solomon, should set to work to construct the edifice. Nothing of similar nature is stated here. The Divine call was that Israel should *take note* of the temple, and behave accordingly.

We are not called on to set up or to construct

## A TALK TO YOUNG CHRISTIANS ON THE NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

(as spoken)

I am going to talk to you very simply. I trust that the people who 'know all about it' will not think it is too simple! But I feel we want to be quite clear about our foundations, our beginnings, and so in what I have to say I shall risk being as simple as I possibly can.

I am going to take as the foundation the eighth chapter of the letter to the Romans. Perhaps you immediately say: Well, we know that one! And yet, you know, we may know a lot *about* it, and still we may not *know* as it has to be known. You will know this, to begin with, that the last section of this chapter is something immensely comprehensive. It reaches right back, takes us back into the 'before times eternal', and gives us just a glimpse into what was happening with God before this world was. And then in the same section we are taken right on beyond these ages, to the 'ages of the ages', and told what things will be like then so

the Church, but to conform to it. This is the pattern. If we are ashamed of all our own failure, then let us measure its form and submit ourselves to its laws. It can only be realised in resurrection experience, when all that belongs to the old order has been put away in judgment. That is why Ezekiel for a long time had no positive vision, and for a while had no message at all to Israel. The Lord closed his mouth until the city was destroyed, the old House burned up and all lingering hopes about that old order were gone. Then, and only then, was the way clear for the new beginning.

After chapter xxxix there is no further occurrence of the phrase: "Then shall they know that I am the Lord"; but the new emphasis is stated in another expression: "He brought me . . .", "The Spirit brought me . . .", "He brought me back . . .", "He brought me through . . ." What tremendous changes would come into the Church of to-day if not only individuals but communities and assemblies were willing and committed to be brought by the Spirit into all the will of God. This is all God asks. He has no earthly form to be imitated; no pattern or model church to be reproduced. He seeks a people cut off from their old life by the judgment of the Cross, fully on resurrection ground in Christ and committed without reserve to obey the Holy Spirit at all costs. This would surely make way for the return of the glory!

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far as we are concerned. So this chapter has a very big context.

And in saying that, I have enunciated a law, a principle, which you will do well to remember: namely that, in order to have a Christian life that is really full, you have got to have it in its full setting. I have always felt, and the longer I live, the more strongly do I feel it, that it is a mistake just to try to keep people to little fragments—what is called the 'simple Gospel'—even at the beginning. If you are to have a great Christian life, you need to see from the beginning what a great thing it is you have come into—what a tremendous context the Christian life has! Right at the beginning, indeed even before they have made a beginning, people need to be impressed with this, that it is no little thing to be a Christian. That gives them a very good starting-point. If they start on that, they will make better progress, and they will arrive at some-

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thing much fuller, in a quicker way, than if things are just doled out to them in little fragments as they go along.

So remember that, and if sometimes it seems too big for you, just say: That is a very good thing; I would not have it as small as I am; there needs to be something very big to get *me* anywhere! For the bigger it is, the mightier is the dynamic and the motive for the Christian life.

## THE GATEWAY TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

This eighth chapter of Romans, then, in its last section particularly, represents a strategic point in the movement of the whole letter, as you will see. You know that the first seven chapters are what we might call the Gateway into the Christian life. I am not going to stay for an explanation of them, but that is what they represent: seven chapters on the gateway into the Christian life. The word that will be written on the portal of that gate is 'Faith'—you know that. And on the gate itself, 'The Cross'. Faith in the Cross of the Lord Jesus is the way in, and seven chapters are taken up with the Way In. And then, when you come to chapter viii, you find what is inside: what kind of situation, what kind of a life, this is, that you have come into.

Chapter viii presents to us the real nature of the life into which we have come. And I suppose it is one of the most elementary things, which you have heard and noted many times, that in this chapter there is one word that stands out—one word. One of the first things I did in Bible study, as a young fellow, was to underline the words in different chapters, to see how many times particular words occurred. When I got to this chapter, and underlined one particular word, I found that the chapter was simply smothered with this word. You are familiar with it: it is the word 'Spirit'. If you go through this chapter, you will see that there is really very little else left to talk about. It all springs from, centres in, and circles round this matter of the Spirit. It begins there: "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (v. 2). We are now *in*, through the door, you see; we are in; and what we find here is what we may call—

## THE LIFE IN THE SPIRIT.

We need to understand what kind of life that is, what it really means; because with it we come into the peculiar character of a dispensation that is altogether new. There have been other dispensations in the past—dispensations in the Old Testament—which we will not mention in particular.

But now those dispensations are past; one has followed the other, and the Old Testament, with all its different phases and stages, is closed. With the New Testament, a completely new age has been introduced, with a character all of its own, a character that never was before. You and I live in a period of time, marked off by the coming of the Lord Jesus in the first place, and by the coming of the Lord Jesus again, which is a particular phase in the whole course of the ages, with its own peculiar aspect and character.

Now, the peculiar characteristic of this time in which you and I live, is that it is the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. I am sure you will agree with me that we do need to know what is the order of things, from God's standpoint, in the time in which we live. In the Old Testament, they had to learn that for themselves, as to their own times—what times they were living in. You and I have got to know this: what is the time we are living in? And the answer is that this is the age, or dispensation, of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has come; He has introduced a new order of things entirely; and, until we understand that order, we shall not make any progress in our Christian life. It is very necessary for us to understand that.

## "JOINED TO THE LORD"

In the first place, the effect of the Holy Spirit, simply but fundamentally, is that He joins us to Christ; He brings about a vital union with the Lord Jesus. "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (I Cor. vi. 17); it is a spiritual and inward union with the Lord Jesus. The words and language are, I know, so simple, and perhaps so well-known, that they may not grip you very forcefully, but out of this everything comes. You and I, if we are truly born-again children of God, have got to know that, right inside of us, a union has been effected between Christ and ourselves, and ourselves and Christ; that we are joined to Christ. That union has been effected; we have been made one—one.

Now, you see, if you are one, you are not two! That seems quite obvious, of course; but there is more to it than it sounds. Very often, you know, we are two: even in the Christian life, the Lord is 'that', and I am 'this'! The Lord's way of illustrating this, you remember, is the marriage bond. Paul says: "The twain shall become one flesh. This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church" (Eph. v. 31, 32). 'One flesh'. Now, if that union is what it ought to be, those two people are so one, that to separate them

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is to cut one person in two, and only leave two bits, two halves, and not a whole. That is the illustration of our union with Christ. We are not complete until we are united with Christ ; our completeness is in union with Christ.

If we haven't got Christ with us, we are only half here. If we lose the Lord, we have torn our very person in two ; we have torn ourselves asunder, or we have been torn asunder—that is the effect of it. You know that spiritually, although the division may not be ultimate and utter and final, we can—by disobedience, by playing with sin, by disobeying the Lord, by this or that—bring about such an effect, so that we feel: Well, something has happened ; the Lord is there and I am here, and we are not together. It is as though we have been torn in two, are not complete.

We could dwell much upon that. But, you see, that is the beginning of the Christian life ; that is the very foundation and basis of the Christian life : we and Christ have been made one—*one* ; not two—*one*! To divide, now, is not merely to walk away and have an independent life—it is to destroy your own identity, to tear your own spiritual personality in pieces ; and that is how it is, if we get away from the Lord in any way.

So here, the very first thing that we find about this life in the Spirit, is that there has come about between us and Christ, and between Christ and ourselves, a oneness, which is not in any outward sense, but in a vital, inward reality. And, in greater or lesser degree, I am sure you know that that is quite true.

### THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

We must not stop with every part of this life in the Spirit, but the next that this chapter tells us is this: "The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God" (v. 16). The first thing is: "The law of the Spirit of life *in Christ Jesus*" (v. 2)—the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus—that is the union: union with Christ. Now, the Spirit in us bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. How does He do that? Again, forgive me if I seem to be talking to you as to the Kindergarten, as to little children. How does He do it? Well, the Holy Spirit does not constantly speak in our ear, and say: You know, you are a child of God ; you are a child of God. He says what He does *on the basis of* our being children of God—that we know it. We *know* how others can do certain things that we cannot ; we *know* that we cannot take even our cue from others ; there is something that we have in our own heart which

makes us aware that this is, or this is not, according to the Father's mind. Putting it into language, giving it terms, that is how it works out ; it is like that. The simple truth is this—we *know*: "the Spirit beareth witness" ; we know.

I have many times in my life fallen back on that quite deliberately. Coming to very real testings and trials, and going through dark times, and many adverse circumstances and conditions ; being tempted to wonder, to wonder if after all you are the Lord's—those questions that can come up because of many things, experiences, and so on : many times in my life I have just fallen back on this—'Yes, but what about this and that from the beginning?' I can recall, again and again, occasions when the Lord Himself definitely held me, or spoke to me, and made me know that this was right, and this was wrong. It was something that I never received from outside ; I never got advice, counsel, or anything ; but I knew it in myself! I could tell you of instances like that, again and again, right back from the beginning of my Christian life, where I could not do something that I did before I was the Lord's. Something said: 'You just can't—no, not now! You just cannot do it.' It was as real as, or more real than, any audible voice. And that has gone on through life, again and again, in different connections.

It sounds very simple, but I have had to say to myself: Yes, but what is that, coming right from the inside? That is the Spirit bearing witness with my spirit that I am a child of God. A child of God does not behave like that ; a child of God *does* behave like this ; a child of God does not do those things ; a child of God *does* do these things. That is what it amounts to all the way along. The Spirit says: 'Others can ; you cannot ; you are a child of God.' Well, that is simple, but it is very real—the Spirit bearing witness. That is to be the basic law of our Christian life. And every one of you who is a child of God ought to know what I am talking about, and I am quite sure you do, at least to some extent. If you have not gone very far with the Lord, or if you are not even the Lord's yet, let me say : This is what it means to be a Christian. It is something real on the inside.

### A DIFFERENT CONSTITUTION

Now we come to another thing in this chapter. As you look at it, you will find that this means that we are constituted in an altogether different way from all other people. The Holy Spirit, coming inside, has created and constituted a new kind of human being, a different kind of humanity from all

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the rest of humanity. That is saying a tremendous thing ; and yet it is not something advanced in the Christian life—this is something fundamental to it, belonging to the very beginning. We use the word 'species': well, the Holy Spirit has created and constituted a new and different species of humanity. The fundamental reality about a true child of God is that he is *different* from all other people who are not children of God. The difference is not that they have decided to be religious, and to go to meetings, and company with Christian people ; do this thing and that thing, and give up a lot of other things—that is not it at all. Their very being, their very constitution, has been changed ; they are different people.

You know how true this is. When you have really become the Lord's, and this great change has taken place, this 'something' has happened inside, and you go back into the world, you know that there are two kinds of humanity in your office, in your workshop, in your factory, in your school, or wherever you are. You are one, and the others are another! Although, on the outside, in outward appearance, and so on, there may be no visible difference, yet there is just the same difference as there was between the Lord Jesus, when He was here on this earth, and the other people in the world. While He could understand them, they could never understand Him. It was just as though they were living in two different worlds. As He said: 'You are from beneath ; I am from above' (John viii, 23). And that is exactly true of every child of God. We too can say: I am from above : this is no longer my place ; this is no longer my home ; I am no longer at rest here in this world. I have got a new nativity ; I have got a new location ; I have got a new country, a new land : here in this world I'm just an alien.

That becomes a very real thing to the child of God. It is sometimes a very unpleasant thing to feel out of it, but it is something we have to accept. Never try to violate it—never try to be at home in this world. If you do, you will be doing damage to your new constitution—because it is that, you see, that is your testimony. It is not that you *try* to be different at all. Never try to be different ; never put it on! Never try to create the impression that you are different. The difference is *there*, right enough! If you want any proof of that, you will find that, from the moment of your new birth, the Devil knows you! You are a marked person, just as Christ was a marked man when He was here.

As far as this world was concerned, and those who were under the enemy's control, Jesus could never do anything right: everything He said—that

which in anybody else would have been accounted good—was wrong ; everything that He did well, they found fault with it. I was reading about this only to-day ; it is an amazing thing. As He was going about the country, up and down the length and breadth of that country, doing good, casting out demons, healing those who are sick—leaving behind Him a veritable trail of folk made whole and delivered, set free, blessed with a new life and a new outlook—here come along those other people: 'By the prince of the demons he casts out demons!' (Matt. ix, 14, etc.). They put it all down to the Devil—He could not do right! And the Devil knows the children of God as he knew the Son of God. And, somehow or other, a lot of things come to us which would never come to us if we were not children of God. It is for that simple reason—that we are different, and we are known.

And it is sensed: sometimes it is almost uncanny how men of this world sense it. They are not able to explain it ; they are not able to say why they take these attitudes toward us ; they just cannot tell us. In fact, if you ask, 'Why do you look at me like that? why do you feel like that about me?', they say, 'Well, I don't know why, but somehow or other . . . somehow or other . . .!' You see, that is just it ; they can't explain it, they don't understand it at all. But—but—there it is: a fundamental difference of constitution. You might be people of different races altogether, who have no understanding of one another.

Well, it is like that. The Spirit coming in makes us different, and it is just that difference that is the basis of everything for the future. Never try to modify or reduce that difference. But, at the same time, never make it artificial: never make people think you are a 'goody-goody', that you are 'putting it on', and trying to be different—none of that. You are different, right enough ; you won't have to 'put on' anything if you live in the Spirit. We are constituted differently, and we must understand that that is a fact. That is really what it means to be 'born of the Spirit'.

## LED BY THE SPIRIT

Now, we have been constituted by the Spirit according to a Divine and heavenly order, and the course of our Christian life should be one of getting further and further away from the old order. I believe that that is what is meant by the words here in this chapter: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (v. 14). "Led by the Spirit of God". Now you may take hold of that and apply it to 'leading' in many things. It

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may apply to being 'led' about *things*; this is what we call 'guidance'. But, whatever it means for such guidance in particular matters, I believe the setting of these words demands a wider interpretation than that. You cannot lift these things out of their great context; and this is, as we have seen, a tremendous context—'from eternity to eternity'.

You see, God started up something—that is the point that this chapter brings into view—He started up something, before this world was, where *we* are concerned. "Whom he foreknew, he . . . foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son" (v. 29). That is, right back there, God started up something, and swept down into the ages with that purpose, moving toward that great goal. And what was that goal?—conformity to the image of His Son.

Now, what is being 'led by the Spirit'? Well, take the illustration of Israel. God came down into Egypt, into the dark world of their bondage and tyranny in Egypt: He came down with His great purpose; He took possession of them; and then He gave them the symbol and figure of the Holy Spirit in the Pillar of Cloud and Fire. Paul says: 'They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud' (I Cor. x. 2). What was the pillar of cloud and fire given for? Well, it is an illustration. It is a type of the Holy Spirit. It was given to lead them into the Land of Promise, where God had intended them to be. That was the purpose for which He had come down into Egypt, and got hold of them, and pulled them out, and brought them into the Wilderness. The Spirit was ever moving ahead of them, in the Pillar, to get them into the Land.

That is being "led by the Spirit". As the Lord said, speaking of His people: "Israel is my son . . . Let my son go . . ." (Ex. iv. 22, 23)—'Now these are the sons of God, who are led by the Spirit of God'. But what does it mean? It means that you are moving on, ever moving on in this way of the Spirit, in this leaving of the old order further and further behind, and getting nearer and nearer to the heavenly order. Now, if the Christian life is normal, this is true of the Christian life. This is not something abnormal; this is 'the *normal* Christian life'! This is what is real about it—that the more you go on with the Lord, the less and less do you find it possible to accept this world and to settle down here, and the further you seem to get away from it, or it seems to get away from you. The things of the Lord get nearer and nearer, and more and more engrossing, taking up more and more of your life. You find that, whereas, at one time, you could divide your time, you could spread it out over things, now you are more and more being

absorbed—not obsessed, but absorbed in the things of the Lord; you have not time for other things.

Even your work—well, you go to work, you do your work, you give yourself to your work, you do it honestly . . . but—but—the thing that has got a grip of you, inside, is the Lord's interests—the Lord's interests! 'Being let go', you go to your own people! (Acts iv. 23); and they are the Lord's people. Is that not true? If you are going on with the Lord, oh, what you want is more and more of that which belongs to your own constitution, the heavenly order of things. That is what it means to be "led by the Spirit of God". Whatever 'guidance by the Spirit' means in things, in details, this is what it means here in this great context: it means that the Spirit is leading us on nearer and nearer to the fulness of Christ. We can, of course, test our lives by that.

### SPIRITUAL QUALIFICATION

The next thing, in the life of the Spirit, is that the Holy Spirit gifts us, and qualifies us for a place, a part, in this great purpose of God. This again is something that I want you to take to heart, because it means so much. In this realm, the matter of natural qualifications is not the argument at all. I remember—and you must forgive if I put in a word of testimony, because I want to keep this near to life, because it is real—I remember how, early in my Christian life, I was very conscious of many lacks and deficiencies and defectivenesses, and things that I wished I had had. There were ambitions that I was never able to realise; desires that I had in this life for learning, for becoming qualified in this or in that, and so on: many doors were closed to me when I came to the Lord, and so I had to face life pretty much without this background that I wanted.

And then I came early to see that this matter of natural qualifications is not the argument with the Lord at all. I saw this from both sides. On the one side, there are many who have very great natural qualifications, or qualifications acquired through study, or through all manner of advantages, but they are not necessarily spiritual people. And it never does mean—and you can prove this—that, because you have got a tremendous background of scholarship, education, or qualification of that kind, you have a special aptitude for grasping spiritual things. I have been amazed, again and again, when meeting some quite 'highbrow' people—Christians—who have had all the advantages of academic training, to find that, when I have talked to them about the Lord, they just have

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not known what I was talking about. They can't grasp it at all! And then I have met others, who have none of those qualifications and advantages, and you can go with them on spiritual things as far as you like, and they have got it—they see.

That is a great thing to learn early in the Christian life: it is not what I have, or what I have not got, naturally—the Holy Spirit is qualification for what God wants! The New Testament speaks of 'gifts of the Spirit'—and, while we have some catalogues of those gifts, I am quite certain we have not got a full list of the 'gifts of the Holy Spirit'; not all the gifts that the Holy Spirit will give are mentioned—qualifications, equipments, for a place in the whole range of Divine interests and values. Do take that to your heart. It may be that you are one of the least, and that you feel there is not much hope for you; but, if you have got the Holy Spirit, He can and will qualify you for something that is your particular part in the whole. And people can say: 'You know, he, or she,—not very much naturally, perhaps; you would not think very much of them if you looked at them; but, but . . . he counts; she counts, you know; and this is the way in which they count.' It is like that; the Holy Spirit has come to give us something we have not got naturally, and we cannot get naturally—it is the particular equipment of the Holy Spirit.

Now, don't think in terms of wonderful, public gifts; it may never be that. In some simple, quiet way, you may be an effective faculty in the whole body corporate. That is what this means, to have the Holy Spirit: that we are something more in accountability than we are or could be naturally, even at our best. It is something different. The Lord will not always tell you what your gift is, but other people will know—that is just where you count for the Lord; just how you, particularly, mean something for the Lord.

### CORPORATE VOCATION

I want to come to one more very important aspect of this whole matter of the Spirit. Supposing we take an illustration; perhaps we can get at it best that way. Let us go back to the Old Testament, to the last section of the book of Exodus, which, as you know, contains the whole account of the making of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness. And you will know that it was through the Holy Spirit that the whole thing was made, constructed; that the Spirit came upon certain men for that work, and then, under those Spirit-governed men, gathered all the people together. *All* the people came into action.

While it does not definitely say so, it as good as says that the whole nation was in this business. They were all doing something about it; they all had something to give. Some had linen to give; some had other materials to give; but they all had something. I suppose you could see 'sewing parties' all over the camp, and men at work busy at this thing and that—some on wood, some on gold, some on silver, some on brass—all the different materials; everywhere they were occupied with the work, and it was all under the direction and instruction and counsel of Spirit-filled men. That is to say, they were all under the government of the Spirit. The Anointing, so to speak, spread itself all over the whole mighty host for work.

Now my point is this: the Holy Spirit creates corporate vocation. (Is that too difficult in language?) Just think: here are some women making a curtain for the Tabernacle. Well, are they going to have their own little 'tabernacle', made of their one little curtain, all to themselves? Here are some men making a part—just a part—of wood, perhaps to be overlaid with gold: is that the Tabernacle? Are they going to have a special little tabernacle of that thing that they are making—a little church of their own? It is nonsense, you see. Now you see what I am getting at. All this, by the Spirit, is one thing—it is a corporate vocation: that is, they are not each living and working for their own little bit, they are living and working for the whole. They have got the vision of the whole, and their whole life is taken up with the whole—not with just their little bit as an end in itself. They are living and working for the Tabernacle in completeness. The Holy Spirit has brought them together, and bound them into a one-ness in corporate vocation. All the vocation is one, because they are under one Spirit.

Well, that is an Old Testament illustration; but in the New Testament, what does that mean? What does that mean now? If you and I are really under the government of the Holy Spirit, under the anointing of the Spirit, as we should be, we shall not have any little private things of our own, any little 'hole in a corner' business of ours, any detached and unrelated thing to which we are giving ourselves. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of unity, and of unity in vocation. What it will amount to, dear friends, is this: we shall live for the whole. And if it is a matter of our local relationships—such as here—none of us is to be living other than for the whole: we ought to be living for the complete thing; the corporate vocation ought to have got a grip of us. Our position must be: 'I am not living and working as an indivi-

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dual: I am living and working as a part of a whole. And, in the appointment of God, for the time being, my local 'whole' is here, and I am living for that; I work for that; that is my vocation.

Now, there is a tremendous amount bound up with that, if you realise it; and it is all in the Word of God, I am giving you in a few words the sum of so much. So many people are wondering about their service: wanting to be in the Lord's work, or to do something for the Lord—some sort of ministry, some sort of work—and to know what their work is; and they are asking: What is my work? What is my ministry? What is my job? It is always 'my', 'my', 'my' . . . The answer is: Your job is 'they', is 'them'. Your vocation is a related thing. You will find the Holy Spirit coming in and using you when you link yourself on with all the rest, and become part of the whole. If you keep yourself in any detachment, He may not do anything at all with you; He will just leave you; you will be doing nothing, and be counting for nothing. We have to recognise this great law of Divine revelation, that the Spirit makes us one in a great vocation. The vocation is not our personal vocation at all; it is the vocation of the whole; it is the vocation of the Church.

You see, we are really in "Ephesians". "Walk worthily of the calling" (or 'vocation') "where-with ye were called" (iv. 1); and the context all concerns the *relatedness*—our relationship one to another in vocation. This is not *my* vocation; this is not *your* vocation, as something personal, as something detached. It is the *Church's* vocation; it is not yours; it is not mine. Whenever people go off on a personal, unrelated, line (and I am speaking after fifty years' experience), they become an end in themselves; and when they go, that is the end. The thing started with them, and it finished with them; and now you have got to start all over again. I have seen this sort of thing happen again and again—people who were unrelated in their work, and when they went, that was the end of the work.

But that is not God's idea, and you will agree with me that we don't want it to be like that. We are not living unto ourselves, and dying unto ourselves—not by any means. If we are going right on, and the Lord's work is going on and on, we must recognise that the vocation is a corporate vocation; it is the vocation of the Church, and only of indi-

viduals as in a related way. This is a very important thing to recognise. And you come into blessing that way; you come right in—no detachment, no unrelatedness: the Lord can in some way let you contribute to the whole, and there is a real blessedness about it. Whereas, in a personal way, you make no contribution at all; in an unrelated way you would not mean anything—at any rate, the Lord is not putting His seal upon that—He will, if you come right into oneness with all the rest.

And so we go back to our illustration from the Old Testament. The people found their inspiration, and the Lord's blessing upon them, as they saw all the time the whole, lived for the whole, and regarded everything, every detail, as a part of the whole. And *you* live for the whole! If the local company is where the Lord has put you, live for it, work for it; not for yourself, but for it. But even so, as a local company, don't just work for your own ends. Have the whole view of God's Church, and you will find that the Lord's blessing is there. There may be difficulties, but the Lord will stand by you; and there will be something that would not be there if you just became a little company by yourselves, in a corner, living for yourselves, turned in on yourselves. No! have this great vision of God's purpose.

Well, now, these are a few things about the Life of the Spirit—this Divine character of things in this dispensation. We started from within—the Spirit doing His work within, working out in relation to others; then the Spirit of unity, the Spirit of purpose, the Spirit of vocation, embracing the whole Church of God, the whole instrument of His eternal purpose.

Now I suggest you go back to Romans viii, and read it once more, very carefully, fragment by fragment, and, as you ought to do in all your Bible reading, ask yourself: What has that said? What is it that that says? And what does that say to me? Not just, What does it say in the Bible? but, What does that say to *me*? How do *I* get involved in that? I think, if you will just read it again, you will find that that chapter will take on new meaning, new light, and new values: because, as I have said, it is the link—the link. You have come in now; you were out, but you have come in. Where are you going? Well, the end of that chapter is: conformity to the image of His Son. That is where you are going. How? By the Spirit within, and living in the Spirit.

T. A-S.

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

### CHOSEN TO SERVE THE KING

**I**T had been lying in its cool bed, unnoticed and unwanted, for a very long time—so long that no one could ever remember it being anywhere else. From time to time, when various jobs needed doing, men had come along and chosen some of its neighbours; but then, most of these were bigger and more important-looking, so that it was no wonder that they were picked up and given places where they were of some use in the world. This one, though, had never been chosen. It had not even been considered.

This is the story of a round, smooth pebble, lying in a stream in the valley of Elah, in Palestine. On the whole Elah was a quiet place. Sometimes a few men would come down near the stream, looking around for suitable stones with which to fill in a hole in a wall, or for mending their houses, and would choose the ones they wanted. These were always the large, squarer stones—the more important ones. At times, a wandering boy would idly pick up some of the stones which lay by the brook, to throw them at a bird or some little animal. The boys were not very particular about their choice; they usually picked up what was nearest. But, in any case, they rarely took them actually out of the water, nor did they ever spare a thought for our little pebble and its companions.

As we have said, Elah was usually a quiet place. But of late all this had changed. An army had come there—indeed two armies gathered in great numbers, and on this side King Saul and the men of Israel had pitched their camp. It was a busy time for everybody, and stones were in great demand. Big stones for making camp fires, and for holding down tents; flat stones for sharpening tools and weapons. It was even whispered around the stone family that one specially fine stone had been chosen and taken to the camp for the important task of sharpening the king's sword. It was a great honour to be so chosen. The little pebble was not likely to be jealous. It was too small and insignificant to fill any place of honour. Yet even such a common stone ought surely to have some useful work to do.

Things grew very tense in the camp of Israel. It was clear to all that matters were coming to a head. Then, one day, a young man walked down to the brook and began to search around on the ground. He was not a soldier; as a matter of fact, he carried a shepherd's staff in his hand, and, as

he prodded here and there with this staff, looking very intent and thoughtful, it seemed certain that he was about to choose some of the many stones which lay around. Which would be chosen? Some were more prominent, and might have been expected to suit him; but he passed them by, as if saying to himself, 'Too big! Too big for me!' He came and looked carefully into the water of the stream. Right near him was a stone which had not been long in the water. It was a very likely choice—or might have been thought to be so; but after he had taken a look at it the shepherd seemed to shake his head, 'Too sharp!' It was too sharp to be of use to him. All this time the little pebble lay in the stream with its four fellows. They had been so long in the rushing water that all their sharpnesses had been worn away. They were very smooth. And they were quite small. Yet, as the shepherd saw them, his eyes lit up. He stopped, bent down, picked up and felt each one of them, and then, having made up his mind, dropped them quickly into the shepherd's bag which he carried, and walked purposefully away.

So the five smooth stones were carried along in the leather wallet. And then, as they came to a halt, there was a dreadful roar, which made them all shake together in the shepherd's pouch, and almost shook the ground around them. But their new master did not shake at all. He stood quietly still while the roaring went on—the roaring of the giant's voice, as he made the most blood-curdling threats as to what he would do to their master, and cursed him by his gods. When the roaring was over, the shepherd spoke very firmly and clearly, telling all who could hear him of his simple faith in God. Then, as the giant moved forward, he began to run. No, he did not run away. That was what all the other Israelites did whenever Goliath came near. David, the shepherd, was different. He ran towards the enemy, and as he ran he put his hand into the leather bag and took out his chosen stone. It was the little pebble of the brook! He put it into his sling, swung it round and hurled it at the giant. "And the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell upon his face to the earth" (I Samuel 17. 49).

You boys and girls will know the story of David's famous victory over Goliath. You will know, too, that it was the one smooth little stone from the brook which did the work for David.



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That little stone has become world-famous. When it lay in the stream, unwanted and forgotten, there was little chance that it could ever be used in a special way or attain to much honour. Yet no stone was ever so highly prized as that one: it was actually taken to Jerusalem and brought into the very presence of King Saul (I Samuel 17. 57). Everybody marvelled that such a small and insignificant pebble could defeat such a mighty foe. Of course they did not praise the stone; that was not to be expected. But they praised David, who had first chosen it. It was he who had carried it in his pouch and then slung it with such deadly effect at the giant, and so he got the glory. The pebble

had no praise, but it did have great honour—the honour of being chosen by the great David to be used for his wonderful victory.

In the New Testament we are told of how the Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd, chose those whom He could use for His glory. And, just as David turned aside from the big and impressive stones to choose the humble smooth pebbles of the brook, so we are told that the Lord did not choose many great and mighty people, but He chose the weak and the despised, and “the things that are not, to bring to nought the things that are” (I Corinthians 1. 26–28). He will choose you, if you are lowly enough to let Him use you.

H. F.

## THE ARM OF THE LORD

### IV. THE CROSS

**MOST** of us, as the Lord's people, would probably agree that there is at the present day a very great need for the Lord to show His power. That might be a personal confession: we would each say, individually, ‘There is a great need for the Lord to do something in my life—to do some new thing, some mighty thing, in me personally, and perhaps in my ministry.’ Further, many of us would confess that such a need exists in the circle of believers with whom we are connected and related—a need for the Lord to move in power in a new way. But could we not widen the field to the farthest limit, and say that there is a very great need for the Lord to do something mighty in the whole Church and in the whole world?

To whom, then, is the Arm of the Lord revealed in this way? Before going further with that matter, let me present a hypothetical situation.

#### AN IMAGINARY SITUATION

Suppose that a very complicated and serious malady has afflicted a patient—let that patient be ourselves, or a company, or the Church, or the world—and a doctor is consulted, who, after serious and careful consideration, with some considerable experience and knowledge, and no small amount of good authority, comes to a quite definite conclusion about this matter, and says he knows he has the remedy. He has no question about it at all. But certain factors present him with considerable difficulty in his desire to help.

Firstly, he has to explain that his remedy is not going to be pleasant—indeed, it is going to be painful; it will go against all the predisposition of

the patient; and it will demand real co-operation and persistence, perhaps over an extended period, calling for much patience and faith. Then, he meets another thing. The patient has heard about the remedy before, perhaps many times, and the reaction is: ‘I have heard such a lot about that cure; there has been so much talk about it. I think you are a one-track man, who has nothing but that one thing; perhaps you are even a crank. Can't you vary it a bit? Can't you introduce some other line a little more palatable? Must we be tied down to this one course?’ A further objection is: ‘You know, this is not a very popular thing. Public opinion has got criticisms about this; there are many different minds on the matter.’

These are things with which he is confronted. What should he do? Should he give way to these deterring factors, and abandon the case, or should he get on with the job? Let us look at the matter from another angle—from the standpoint of the patient. What should be the logical attitude of the patient in this matter? Should it not be—‘Well, the situation is serious, there is no doubt about that, and it is very complicated. What are the alternatives? Do I know of any alternatives? Are there prospects or ways and means in other directions? Ought I not to be fair and honest, and give this a thorough trial? Do I sense the seriousness of my condition sufficiently to make me brush aside all public opinion, all personal feelings and reactions, likes and dislikes, and really give myself to this matter?’

Now, that is exactly the position in which we are. The great need in the spiritual life of God's people is widely acknowledged. And yet there are

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all these arguments flying about: that there is so much talk about this particular thing—we have heard it again and again; that public opinion is so greatly divided on this matter; and that this is something that goes altogether against our grain. But does not the crux of the matter lie, firstly, in whether we realise that the situation is serious enough to warrant our brushing aside all secondary considerations, and really giving the remedy a thorough chance and test; and, secondly, in whether we have any alternatives—whether there are prospects of this whole thing being bettered along any line other than this?

### THE ONLY REMEDY

Of course, you are saying: What is the line? what is the remedy? what is it that you are talking about? Perhaps you have already drawn your conclusion. The remedy, the only remedy, but the sure remedy, for the whole of our spiritual maladies, is the Cross—the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not pleasant to our flesh; it runs counter to all our likes and predispositions; it is not popular; Christian opinion is greatly divided on this matter of the work of the Cross. And so on . . . But, after all, we are left with our condition; we are left with our need; we are left with the situation; and whether you realise it or not, the situation in Christianity, amongst Christians, is a very critical one. Take, for instance, the whole matter of divisions amongst the Lord's people. It is a blight; it is an evil thing; it is the working of a deep-seated disease; it is undermining the constitution of the whole Church of God. So we could go round the need, facing it from many standpoints; and we should find that, without exaggeration, the situation is a serious one.

The Word of God offers us this one remedy. It is fully and thoroughly documented; it has the most established authority behind it. Again and again, both in individual life and in collective life, it has proved itself to be the answer. The Word of God offers us no alternative, no prospect along any other line. The Cross is the answer.

Let us look again for a moment at the prophecies of Isaiah. This section that we have been considering, from verse 13 of chapter lii to the end of chapter liii, shows the Cross to be *the* remedy for a many-sided and most complicated situation in this world. You see here all the things that go to make up the situation. Sin! sin! "He bare the sin of many"—the word there is 'error', 'failure'. Transgressions!—a stronger word still, meaning 'rebellions'—"He was wounded for our trans-

gressions". Iniquity!—which means 'our perversity'—"The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Errors and failures and rebellions and perversities—these are the beginning of the malady. Sicknesses, griefs, sorrows—so you can fill in more and more details of the case from the words of this chapter; and when you put them all together, you say: 'That patient is in a very poor state; that indeed is a serious outlook!' And the chapter as a whole has just one object: to show that the Cross of the Lord Jesus is the remedy for it all, the answer to it all. The whole thing is dealt with and cleared up by the Cross.

### THE EXALTATION AND VINDICATION OF CHRIST

But here we **must stand back** for a moment to take account of **two things**. At this point a question is asked, "**To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?**" and **then** the rest of the chapter is the answer to that question. That Arm of the Lord is **God coming into this situation**, coming in with **skill, with power, with wisdom**, with ability, to deal with it and to clear it up. And the chapter says that **the Cross is the Arm of the Lord**, coming in against this whole condition. The arm of the Lord is against this state of things. That is the first thing.

But there is something further. The arm of the Lord comes in with a new condition, a certain, clearly-defined end, in view, which is nothing less than the exaltation and vindication of Jesus Christ. That is our second thing. The Arm of the Lord is for that, but His exaltation and vindication demand that the Cross shall clear up this situation. Of course that gathers the New Testament into it: it was because the situation was cleared up at Calvary that Jesus was exalted and vindicated. Note that the exaltation and vindication of Christ is in power and posterity. Those two things bound this section. Right at the beginning (lii. 13) we have: "My servant . . . shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high." And then, towards the end of the section (liii. 10, 11): "He shall see his seed . . . He shall see of the travail of his soul . . ." In power: "very high"; in posterity: "His seed"—in other words, His Church.

Now, that brings matters very closely home to us, because the first challenge of all this is as to our concern for Christ's exaltation and Christ's vindication. That is the issue that is raised. Let us ask ourselves, individually, this question: 'How much am I, personally, really concerned for the exaltation and vindication of the Lord Jesus?' If you were asked this question, personally, in private

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conversation, I have no doubt you would say: 'I am very greatly concerned about it. Indeed, there is nothing that I would desire and work for more than for His exaltation and vindication. What greater thing have we to live for or work for than this?' You would say that, I am sure. But do we realise that the proof of our concern, and that which measures our concern, is our preparedness to accept the Cross? There is no way to the exaltation and vindication of the Lord Jesus other than the way of the Cross. We shall prove whether we really are concerned, and, if so, how much we are concerned, by the extent to which we are prepared to accept in ourselves this work of the Cross, clearing up every situation that is dishonouring to the Lord.

#### THE CROSS THE ONLY WAY TO THIS

It is so easy for us to talk or preach about the exaltation of the Lord Jesus, His enthronement, His glorifying—it is wonderful to talk about these things; and of course, this Church of His, the Church of Christ, the Church which is His Body, is a very great thing—the great Masterpiece of God. Yes, we like to talk about it. But the test as to whether all this has a grip upon our inward life is just how much we will let the Cross work in us: for these great things—His exaltation and His Church—are not possible of realisation, except by the work of the Cross in believers.

This is a challenge which arises at once, and it is very searching. It will come to that, sooner or later, in any case, as we go on with the Lord. All our language, all our talk, and all our pretensions, will be challenged by this. The Lord will say: 'Yes—but are you prepared to allow the Cross to work in you in *this* particular matter, and in *that*—in that particular *relationship*, in this thing about *yourself*, and in that thing in your *connections*? Are you prepared to let the Cross deal with *those things*?' The answer to that will prove whether after all we have a concern for Christ's exaltation and vindication. Our concern for these will be shown in our estimate of, and our attitude toward, the Cross.

If, on the other hand, we take the line: 'Oh, we have heard so much about the Cross; it is this one-track thing'—if we can take any such attitude as that, in any way to belittle the Cross, or make it something less than God has made it; if our attitude can be one which under-estimates the importance of the Cross: then that is proof that we have not yet become inwardly gripped by this concern for the exaltation of the Lord Jesus.

Do not forget that He Himself would never have been exalted, but for His Cross. There was that mighty "*Wherefore . . .*" Wherefore? "*. . . Becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore . . . God highly exalted him . . .*" (Phil. ii. 8, 9). But for the Cross, He would never have been exalted; and, in principle, He never is exalted, except in so far as there is a work of the Cross in His people. It is so clear, is it not, that, if the Cross has not dealt with things in you and in me, the Lord Jesus cannot be glorified in our lives. And as for His Church—the Church would never have come into existence but for the Cross, and, but for the Cross, it can never have a present expression. Its beginning, its continuation, its growth, its consummation, are always by the law of the Cross; and every bit of addition to, or increase in, the Church, whether spiritually or numerically, is by means of the Cross. There is no other way. So it is a very real test and very real challenge to us.

#### THE CROSS POSITIVE, NOT NEGATIVE

Now here, again, the Spirit of God shows that God's ways and means are always positive and not negative. I want to say that with emphasis; let us underline it in our minds. God's ways are always constructive and not destructive; they are purposeful, and not just ends in themselves. And if God's inclusive, comprehensive means is the Cross, let it be understood, once and for ever, that by the Cross He is working to an end—a large end. The Cross is never intended to end with destruction; it is never intended to end with a negative. God is working for some great thing, and He uses the Cross in this positive way.

You see, the weakness in our apprehension of the Cross is largely due to a *misapprehension* of the Cross. Our idea of the Cross is that it is destructive, it is negative, it is death. We revolt against that; we don't want to be always talked to about this death of the Cross—death, death, death. It is indeed possible so to preach the Cross as to bring in death; but that is a mis-preaching. That is not God's interpretation of the Cross at all. Let me repeat: the Holy Spirit here shows quite clearly that God's ways and means are always positive and not negative; they always have in view something more, and not something less; not an end, but a new fulness.

If only we could really grasp that, it would transfigure the Cross. When the Lord confronts us with the challenge, what do we do? We revolt, we draw back—we don't like it! Why? Simply because we

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have not seen that, in this application of the Cross, God is set upon securing something more in our lives—in our fellowships, in our companies, in His Church—something more than there has ever been before. That is God's law. God is not a negative God. Other gods are negative gods, but our God is not a negative god. He is not working to bring things to annihilation; He has very large purposes before Him in all His ways and in all His means.

What we really have to see is that, whatever the Cross may negative—and it will of course negative some things—it is God's most positive instrument for securing spiritual, heavenly, eternal values. The Cross is God's most positive instrument for securing the enlargement—not the annihilation—of *that which will abide for ever*. While it is true that the Cross, in the first place, does represent God's 'No', and that we cannot have God's 'Yes'—the Arm of the Lord—until we have accepted His 'No': yet once we are willing to come and accept God's 'No', then the way is clear for us to come right into His 'Yes'. And, mark you, God's Name is not 'No'! His Name is 'Yea and Amen' (II Cor. i. 20)—He is "the God of Amen" (Is. lxxv. 16)—the Positive, the 'Verily', the God of purpose.

So it is very necessary for us to move on to this settled basis, that God always comes in with a mind to create (or to recover), to build and to increase. If only we could believe that of the Lord—even in our most devastating times, when everything seems to be taken away, and all is stripped from us; when everything seems to be going, and we think we can see an end coming: if only we could believe then that God is working—not to bring values to an end, but to increase them! That must be our ground—that He is ploughing, He is digging; He intends a harvest; He intends something more. He knows why He is doing it in that way—we don't. But we can be sure of one thing: God is at work by the Cross to make things safe for Himself.

THE CROSS MAKES THINGS SAFE  
FOR THE LORD

Now, just supposing the Arm of the Lord were revealed to you or to me; supposing the Arm of the Lord were revealed in the locality where we live, in the place of work where we are engaged, or in the company with which we are connected; supposing the Lord came out with His mighty arm, and showed that arm in prospering, in increasing: what would happen? Perhaps you will not agree with this, because you feel that it would not be true in your case; but that is just where

our hearts are deceived. I can tell you what would happen. You and I would come into the picture; you and I would begin to strut about in this thing, now that it is growing and enlarging and prospering and becoming something to taken note of. We should be walking round just like peacocks, with our tails all spread out; we should be metaphorically, if not literally, wearing a badge with 'Superintendent', or 'General Manager', or something like that, written large across it! We should begin to talk about the thing; and if people began to talk about us, how pleased we should be!

That is the infinite peril, and God will not run the risk of allowing that in something that is wholly of Himself. The Lord must make things safe for Himself, so that, if He does stretch out His mighty arm and do something, you and I will not begin to pocket the credit; we shall be a hidden and a covered people.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this. Has this not been perhaps one of the deepest underlying laws of the revealing of the Arm of the Lord through the whole course of Christianity? Why was there that growth, that expansion, at the beginning, which has never been paralleled through the centuries since? Because the Church was stripped and peeled and emptied, broken and battered and bruised and persecuted, because it preached Christ crucified as the wisdom of God and the power of God—and the world would not have it. The Arm of the Lord was revealed to that. The Church was not trying to avoid the offence of the Cross in order to find a place in this world. No, it preached the Cross; it was not ashamed to preach Christ crucified. It cost everything—but the Arm of the Lord was revealed.

What a tremendous lesson for us!

We are brought back to this chapter in Isaiah. This chapter, which is the quintessence of the New Testament and of all God's ways, shows that the Arm of the Lord is revealed to that humbled, emptied, despised, broken and crucified Servant. It is an abiding law. Let there be no mistake about it—if you and I have an assertive spirit, a self-confident spirit, a 'managerial' spirit, or anything like that, the Arm of the Lord will not be revealed. But if we find that He is stripping, emptying and pouring out, seeming to bring to nought, we may be sure He is doing it to make things safe for Him to stretch out His arm. Do you believe that? I say again—He is the God of the positive and not of the negative; He will stretch out His arm if only He is allowed to complete, to perfect, that work of undercutting everything that would take glory from Himself. You and I do not know how much

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there is in us of that kind, do we? We think we have just about touched bottom, we have come to the end; there is nothing left in us. But what would happen if the whole situation suddenly changed—took the upward road, and began to enlarge? *We* should come in again—our inveterate flesh would at once begin to assert itself! The Cross is the great clearing instrument; it is the only way of the glory.

### THE CENTRAL PLACE OF THE CROSS

Now, I want you to note what a wonderful place this chapter occupies in Isaiah. You will recall the analysis of these prophecies. The first thirty-five chapters are occupied with a wide sweep of judgments, beginning, as always—note that—with the people of God. That is a Divine law: how can He judge the world until He has judged His own people? Chapters xxxvi to xxxix form a short interlude dealing with Hezekiah; and then the final section, chapters xl to lxvi, is occupied with restoration and rebuilding. Now, midway in the last section, which has twenty-six chapters, and is occupied with the new prospect, with recovery and rebuilding, comes this chapter liii. Is that not significant? It gives the Cross the central place in building, in recovery; and that is always true, is it not? But perhaps you might react, and say, 'Isaiah is ancient history—far away and long ago!' I would therefore like to put in here a long parenthesis.

This whole sequence that we have just considered is carried right into the dispensation in which you and I are living. It is brought in, or introduced, in Paul's letter to the Romans; and (as we shall see in the next chapter) it is completed in that same Apostle's first letter to the Corinthians. You remember the letter to the Romans. The first section opens up the sweep of Divine judgment over the whole race of Adam; it is God's 'No'. It leads up to the focal point of chapter vi: the Cross. That chapter is placed over against the whole situation which has gone before, declaring that the Cross says for ever 'No' to all that. But when we pass from chapter vi, through chapter vii, into chapter viii, we find we are moving out of that old situation into a new, from the negative to the positive. In chapter viii we come into an altogether new prospect, an altogether new opening up. "There is therefore now no con-

demnation . . ." All that which was condemned has been dealt with in the Cross. We are "in Christ Jesus"; and 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made us free from the law of sin and death'.

This new and wonderful prospect, then, is in view. What does it amount to? It says this: God, who ever had in view the building of His wonderful and glorious Church, "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing", looked at the situation among men, in order to find that which would serve as a foundation for His building. But what did He find? He found the state of things that is described in those early chapters of the letter to the Romans. What a description it is—the sin, the corruption, the tangles, the complication—a hopeless picture of human depravity. That is what He found when He came to lay a foundation for His glorious Church, and He said: 'I cannot put a foundation on that; I cannot found My Church upon that. I must clear the ground, clean up this whole situation, burn it in fire'—and so the Cross did that. The Cross, in the intense fires of judgment, like the mighty Brazen Altar, dealt with that twisted, distorted tangle of human nature. Now God has His foundation—Christ crucified. Now He can proceed to build His Church.

This is the interpretation of the Cross. It is God's means of getting rid of everything that makes it impossible for Him to do what He wants to do, to carry out what He has in mind. He has a mighty purpose in view, but He finds things in the way, and He says: 'These must be dealt with.'

Let us, however, in closing this chapter, return to the positive note again. When we hear the phrase, 'The Cross', let us guard our minds against that sudden uprising—'Oh, the Cross again, the Cross again, the Cross! It is all death, it is all crucifixion, it is all negative!' That suggestion must be resolutely refused—it is Satan's twist given to God's most wonderful instrument for realising His glorious purpose. When we hear 'The Cross', let us say: 'Ah, that means prospect! That means a clearing of the way; that means something more, not less; that means that God's Arm is going to be revealed!' Let us join with Paul in saying: 'God forbid that I should glory in anything, *save* in the Cross . . .'

(Gal. vi. 14).

T. A-S.

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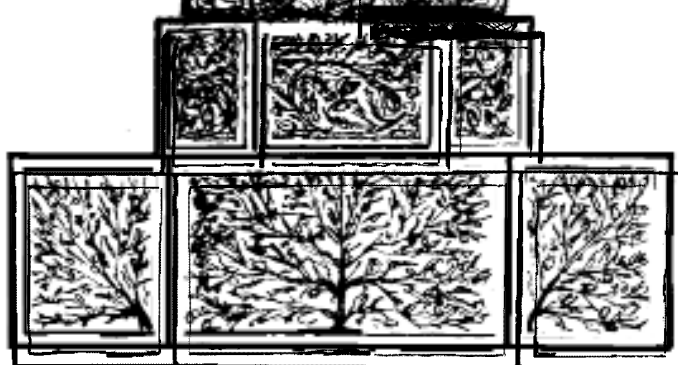
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'Personal' letters should be addressed to  
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## A PERSONAL WORD FROM THE EDITOR

I am breaking a rule which has been observed for many years, when I enter a quite personal note in this paper. But necessity is laid upon me. On a date in September of this year an event occurred, the coming of which had become known to many of my friends. The result was that, on that occasion, cables, letters, etc., reached me from many countries, from—and between—the Far East and the Far West. A memorial of over seven hundred and fifty signatures was compiled. It is impossible to write a personal letter to all these friends, so this is my one alternative.

Let me say at once that I was overwhelmed with your love, and the Lord's goodness in this. Most of those who sent a message know something of the great cost, spiritually and physically, associated with the forty years of this ministry. I confess that the conflict, especially in recent times, has often had the effect of "casting down". The Lord seems to have been secretly storing up this surprise for a certain day, and, as I have said, the testimonies to spiritual value in the ministry were simply overwhelming, and led to deep worship. No words can express my gratitude, so I give up any attempt.

I thank you, my beloved friends, for your love and kindness. May I yet receive more grace to justify your confidence.

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

## EDITORIAL

## "ACCORDING TO CHRIST"

(NOTE. During the many years of this spoken and printed ministry, very much has been said regarding the Church. This has led to not a few enquiries for advice from many who are in difficulty over this matter. Many of the enquirers are in responsible positions in the Lord's work. It is a sign of the times that there is such a very considerable revival of concern in relation to the Church. Many conferences on the subject are being held, many 'church' movements are afoot, and a very considerable literature is being published.

It is not our intention to enter the field of discussion and controversy in relation to this matter in general. The questions which reach us are almost entirely to do with the essential nature of a 'New Testament church': how such a church is formed, what are the principles which govern it, and similar questions.

There is a good deal of dissatisfaction and unrest among many sincere believers and servants of God, due largely to the poor or even bad state existing in so many churches. In not a few cases it is due to error in teaching, or disorder and sin. Many complain of spiritual starvation, and still many more are tired of mere formalism and spiritual death. While the perfect church has never yet existed on this earth, and while there always have been, and always will be, faults and weaknesses, or worse, there really is a need for a reconsideration, and a recovery, of the essential nature and function of the Church; and therefore, while making no claim to be expert in this matter, we feel constrained to offer what we feel we may have of light in this direction. This we propose to do in one or two editorials.)

Question: What is the Church, and what are the churches?

Have we in the New Testament a clearly defined and completely set-out plan of the Church, its order, constitution, methods and work? Is there a concise and worked-out system in the nature of a 'blue-print', which is ready for copying and reproducing everywhere, and can be recognised as true to type in every place? The answer is decidedly No! But if we mean: Is there in the New Testament a revelation of God's mind as to the Church, in its nature, constitution, and vocation? it is no contradiction of the above when we say: Yes, decidedly Yes!

It is possible to take parts of the New Testament, as to doctrines, practices, work, methods, and order, to piece them together, and to frame them into a system to be adopted and applied. This is the mechanical or 'ecclesiastical' method, and it is capable of an almost endless variety of presentations, resulting in a very large variety of organized bodies, every one of which claims the New Testament for its authority. This in turn issues in rivalries, competitiveness, controversy, and, eventually, in the presenting to the world of a Christianity divided into a vast number of independent and unrelated parts, far removed from 'all speaking the same thing'. The external and objective approach to the New Testament, with a view to studying it as a manual or text-book of Christian life, teaching and work, is a false one, a dangerous one, and—so far as any real spiritual outcome is concerned—a dead one. If God had meant successive generations of Christians to *imitate* the first and proceed on the mass-production principle, surely He would have seen to it that in some way a precise and unmistakable prototype existed, with adequate safeguards against all the confusion and misapprehension which has actually eventuated.

When men, Christian men, contemplate a project which is intended to last for a considerable tenure, they set down precisely their 'Principles and Practice', consisting of their doctrines, their purpose, their practices, their methods, and so on. God did not commission or allow His first Apostles to act in this way, so that we might have a Jerusalem or Antioch Blue Book or Manual for Christian churches. In the Divine mind it is all definite, fixed, precise, and permanent, but when we come to the New Testament, and especially the formative period as covered by the Book of the Acts, everything seems so fluid, so open, and so subject to proving. There is the most wonderful and sublime reason for this; but, before we come to that, let us point out that the approach to which we have referred above is the cause of more limitation, stagnation, deadly legality, than can be measured. In doctrine, it means that the doctrinal compass is boxed and no new light is allowed as to God's Word. Of course, this is the peril of orthodoxy. The intense desire to safeguard the Scriptures can lead to a sealing off against any new light from them as to meaning and interpretation, and this makes for a static spiritual position.

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Spiritual pride, bigotry, exclusiveness, suspicion, are some of the unholy brood of this legalism. If Satan cannot force to the one extreme of superiority to the written Word, he will try the opposite of bondage to the letter without the spirit.

The merely objective approach of which we have written may or may not be characterized by all of the above-mentioned features, but it will most certainly be limited in its spiritual power and results. It may very well result in the responsibility being made to rest upon men, so that all kinds of devices and expedients have to be resorted to in order that the work and institution can be maintained and furthered. Christianity has almost entirely come to be such a thing now, and it is practically impossible for the vast majority of Christians—their leaders especially—to understand or even believe that God can do His work without committees, boards, machinery, advertisement, organizations, appeals, reports, names, deputations, patronage, propaganda, publicity, the press, etc. Unless these things are present with a 'recognised' backing, the thing is not trusted, even if it is believed to exist.

We are aware that the foregoing is mainly negative, but it is necessary in order to lead to the positive, to which we now proceed.

We have said that the New Testament has within it a revelation, precise, definite, and full, as to God's mind for this dispensation, and that in that revelation there is an answer to all the questions of What? Who? and How? in all matters of the Church's constitution and vocation. What is that revelation? The answer is that it is not a system, as such, but a Person. That which in the New Testament is secondary, and a consequence, has now been made primary. That is, the results have been made the first and governing things, whilst that which comes before them as the cause is overlooked. If we will look again, we shall see that anything that came into being under the Holy Spirit's first activity was the result of a seeing of Christ. By that we mean what the Apostle meant, when he recorded the substance of his prayer for believers: "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of your heart being enlightened, that ye may know . . .", etc. It is a seeing of the immense significance of Jesus in the eternal and universal order.

With the Apostles that seeing was subsequent to the days of physical association. During the forty days after His resurrection it was like the dawning of a new day. First, those intimations, as when the uncertain light just passes over the

heavens. Then more steady and certain rays, leading to the Day of Pentecost, when the sun appeared in full glory over the horizon, dispelling the last shadow of uncertainty. On that day they saw Him as by an opened heaven. The mystery of the past was dispelled. The Bible lay open like a new book. They saw Him in the light of eternity. They began to see that, while He was the glorified, personal, Son of God, He was Himself the embodiment of a great, a vast heavenly and spiritual order and system. This *seeing* was absolutely revolutionary. It was a crisis out of which a new world and a new creation was born. True to this fundamental principle, all that vast revelation, which has come down the centuries from and through the Apostle Paul, took its rise from that crisis described by him as: "It pleased God . . . to reveal his Son in me" (Gal. i. 16). 'I received it . . . by revelation of Jesus Christ' (vs. 12). All the implicates were in the crisis; the full content was a progressive and ever-growing revelation.

While there was some initial testimony, the Apostles did not formulate in conference an enterprise, a mission, with all the related arrangements and organization. The new life forced off the old leaves and dressed the new organism with a new vesture *from within*. The might, energy and urge of the Holy Spirit within produced a *Way* and an order, un-thought-of, unintended by them, and always to their own surprise. What was happening was really that Christ was taking form within them, individually and corporately, by new birth and growth. The believers and the companies were becoming an expression of Christ. Here we come upon the essential nature of the Christian life and the Church.

What, in the thought of God, do Christians exist for? What does the Church exist for? What do local churches exist for? There is only one answer. The existence and the function is to be an expression of Christ. There is nothing less and nothing more than that. Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, and all between! Let that be the starting-point; let that be the governing rule and reality in *all matters* of life and work, and see at once the nature and vocation of the Church. This vast, incomprehensible heavenly system, of which Christ is the personal embodiment, touches every detail of life, personally and collectively. But remember, only the Holy Spirit sees and knows how it is so; hence, as at the beginning, there has to be an utter submission to and direction by the Lordship of the Holy Spirit. What the blood-stream is to the human body, the Divine life is to and in 'the Church which is His

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body'. What the nerve system is in the physical realm, the Holy Spirit is in the spiritual. Understand all the workings of those two systems in the natural, and you begin to see how God has written His great heavenly principles, first in the person of His Son, and then in His corporate Body. As an individual believer is the result of a begetting, a conception, a formation, a birth and a likeness, so, in the New Testament, is a true local church. It is a reproduction of Christ by the Holy Spirit. Man cannot make, form, produce or 'establish' this. Neither can anyone 'join' or 'enrol', or make himself or herself a member of this organism. First it is an embryo, and then a 'formation' after Christ.

So, all talk about 'forming New Testament churches' is nonsense. The beginning is in a seeing of Christ, and when two or three in one place have seen Him by the Holy Spirit, and have been "begotten again by the word of God", there is the germ of a church.

That, then, is the starting-point. But, how drastic that is, in the matter of reconsideration and recovery\*. If we did not know that, both in New Testament times and in the world *to-day*, such churches existed, we should be right in viewing all this as either mysticism or idealism; as unreal and impossible; but it is only when there has not been that vision of Christ, and when there is a weddedness to a merely traditional system, that it can be so regarded.

We shall have to stop looking at the Church and churches, and look again, long and earnestly, at Christ; for to see Him by the Spirit is to see the Church.

Let us summarise what we have said.

1. This consideration is in answer to requests for advice as to the true nature of the Church, and especially of local churches.

2. The objective approach to the New Testament, with a view to formulating therefrom a pattern to be imitated, copied, and reproduced as 'New Testament churches', is wrong. It only either leads to a variety of conclusions, and therefore 'denominations', or results in something fixed, static and legalistic: This in turn leads to rivalries, suspicions, fears of 'sheep-stealing' and loss of 'members', etc.

3. The origin of the Church, and of churches, was a Holy Spirit revelation of Christ. As truly as Jesus said: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father", so truly, although it does not put it into a

similar precise sentence, the New Testament teaches that he that has seen Christ has seen the Church: for, although Christ retains His personality, individuality and distinctive identity, the Church is the corporate expression of Him.

So truly as there was a "mystery" as to Christ, in the days of His flesh, which could not be truly seen and recognised apart from an intervention of God, as giving sight to the blind, the Church as the Body of Christ demands a similar eye-opening work of the Holy Spirit for a potent and dynamic knowledge of its true nature and vocation. (Eph. i. 17, etc.)

The recognition of the Church is an event which is of such a revolutionary character as to emancipate from all merely traditional, historical and earthly systems: as see the Apostles and especially Paul.

4. The Church was not formed by any conference, convocation, organization, council or plan.

The Church, and likewise the churches, were *born*. A living seed—the truth concerning Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit—was deposited. The Word and the Spirit, united with the quickened spirit of believers, formed an embryo, and this produced an organism. The whole process was biological as opposed to mechanical. "Not of blood (bloods), nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John i. 13). The Church, and any true church, is as much a birth by the action of the Holy Spirit as is any true child of God. "Two or three" in Christ is a local-church nucleus.

5. The function and vocation of the Church, and of the churches, is to bring Christ into any location on this earth. The test is ever and only that of whether, and how much, Christ is found, met with, and ministered *there*. Anything and everything that does not truly bring Christ in, or minister to His increase, has no place in a true church.

*In purpose and nature* the Church is Christ, and so are the churches locally—no more, no less.

Having said that, before we go on to the constructive aspect of this matter, there are two important discriminations and distinctions to be made.

Firstly—

*The Church is not co-extensive with 'Christianity'*

What is called 'Christianity' is an enormous conglomeration and mass of contradictions. The Church is no contradiction within itself, and it will not allow its name to cover any contradictions. Christ is neither divided nor contradictory. The thing that now goes by the name of 'Christianity'

\* see introductory 'note'

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embraces between its two poles almost every conceivable complexion and inconsistency. At one pole it has the complexion of a liberalism which denies every fundamental truth—as to the person of Christ, the authority and trustworthiness of the Scriptures, the atoning work of the Cross, the bodily resurrection of Christ, and so on. But all this is included in the title 'Christianity'. At the other pole we have hard, cruel, bigoted legalism, which can resort to physical force and the use of lethal weapons for its defence or propagation. We know of instances of actual physical fights between leaders of what would be called 'evangelical' (or 'Fundamentalist') bodies. This also is included within the term 'Christianity'. Between the two extremes there are many things which bear a character that is the most violent contradiction of Christ.

No, the Church is not co-extensive with that confusion and Babel of tongues. Anything that refers to the Church in the New Testament shows it to be quite different from what—in general—is called Christianity. "Christian", originally, just meant 'Christ one'. It is a master stroke of the great maligner and discreditor of Christ, on the one hand to have put that title upon so much that really will not bear it, and on the other hand to have confused the Church with it, so that the word "Church" can apply to almost anything; a building, an institution, a denomination, etc. The Church is holy, sacred, undivided, heavenly, and all of God. Not merely ceremonially sacred, but intrinsically so.

The second thing, by way of distinction, is that there is a—

*Difference between being in the Church and understanding what that means.*

It is not an essential difference, but one that can result either from an imperfect apprehension of Christ or from an inadequate instruction. The bulk of the New Testament is concerned with bridging this gap. That is, it is occupied with making believers understand what they have come into through faith in Jesus Christ. This knowledge is shown to be of very great and vital importance. Whatever may be the cheap and frivolous teaching of many, that the only necessity is to be 'saved', and everything is all right—a teaching which accounts for no small measure of the present deplorable condition in Christianity—the Apostles most positively did not take that view. They 'laboured night and day' that believers should know what they had come into. All the eternal counsels concerning Christ and God's eternal purpose as to Him are bound up with the Church. There are very many and very great values in a

true Church life, that is, a true Body relatedness, and there can only be very great loss in not knowing or apprehending this.

That which is called 'Christianity' is not impregnable; the Church is! 'Christianity', so called, is not eternal; the Church is! 'Christianity' is going to be shaken to its collapse. The Church will not be prevailed against by the very gates of Hades. Someone who speaks with knowledge and authority has recently written: 'It takes no particular prophetic gift with a fair degree of accuracy to see what the outcome will be. From some direction harsh reality will strike swift and hard and the millions who have taken refuge under the glass roof of popular Christianity will find themselves without a cover: then, bitter and disillusioned, they will turn in fury against the gospel, the Church and every form of religion. Cynicism, materialism and unbelief will blanket the world again as it did after World War I.' Those are hard words, but they are only another way of saying what is prophesied in Hebrews xii. 26, 27.

The Apostle Paul had given much time to Asia, and had 'not shrunk from declaring the whole counsel of God' there (Acts xx. 27). Nevertheless afterward he placed on record the substance of his fervent prayer for those saints; and that prayer concerned that into which they were called in Christ, the context showing that the Church is the very complement—"fulness"—of Christ, without which He is by no means fulfilled. Although there have been, and are, distinguished Bible teachers who hold that not all born again believers are in the Body of Christ, it is not necessary to hold that view to see that the New Testament not only teaches, but thunders, that it is imperative that all born again believers should come to "full knowledge", and that relates to Christ and His Church. There is nothing in all the realm of Divine revelation that has suffered such furious and many-sided antagonism from the forces of evil as the knowledge of the true nature of the Church. This Paul has clearly indicated at the end of that immense document on this subject—"The Letter to the Ephesians". Nothing has suffered so much confusion and misapprehension. This is itself significant, and indicates how important it is, and how necessary it is, to have a right and true understanding. It would be well-nigh impossible to describe what a tremendous impact would be made upon this world and the kingdom of darkness by a true realisation and expression of the Church. It would be no less an impact than that of the very throne of Christ, as exalted "far above all". There is also made clear that to believers who have their

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life on a corporate basis there are many and real values, as contrasted with the weakness, poverty, and perils of mere individualism.

In New Testament times all hell rose up to prevent the local churches from coming into being. The significance of the presence of the Apostles in any city was fully recognised by the evil forces, and they—the Apostles—had either to be driven out or killed. The very existence of a local church was a testimony to, and an embodiment of, Christ's victory and authority over the evil powers. When the Church was born out of such travail, its spiritual life must by any means be shortened. Like

Moses at the hands of Pharaoh, and Jesus at the hands of Herod, the babe must be slain. Someone or some few will have to travail initially (and maybe, as with Paul, "again") for churches which are a true representation or embodiment of Christ. The significance of Christ in any place is too great to go unchallenged, and no form of opposition will be left unused in order to prevent or to discredit.

To be able to go on 'happily' and tranquilly in worldly favour is no testimony to spiritual significance. The contemplation of 'New Testament churches' must take these facts into account.

EDITOR

(to be continued)

## THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE CHURCH, AND THE NATIONS

## VII. POSSESSING THE INHERITANCE

WE have pointed out that the whole of the New Testament is the spiritual and present-time counterpart of the book of Joshua. Beginning with the setting aside of one nation, and its loss of the inheritance through unbelief, we are shown the bringing into being, by resurrection out from that nation, of a new people, a new nation, by way of the Jordan—that is, the Cross—and the absolute government of the Holy Spirit, as represented by the "man with his sword drawn in his hand"—the "Captain of the host of the Lord". The object of it all? The bringing of the people of God into their full inheritance in Christ. The New Testament is concerned with that in a spiritual way. Those are but aspects of this one great truth: that God, from eternity, has had in mind an elect people, to bring into the fulness of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Now we can find this first chapter of the book of Joshua condensed into two or three verses in the New Testament. Those verses are in the letter to the Colossians, chapter ii, verses 1 to 3:

*"I would have you know . . ." Let us give due emphasis to every part of this statement. "I would have you know". It is easy to see that this is a dominant feature in the first chapter of the book of Joshua—the leaving of people in no doubt, in no uncertain position. "I would have you know how greatly I strive for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts may be comforted, they being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understand-*

*ing, that they may know the mystery of God, even Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden."*

## ASSURANCE AND UNDERSTANDING

Those three verses tell us what the beginning of the book of Joshua is all about. The emphasis of the Apostle is upon 'standing fully assured' (Col. iv. 12): having absolute assurance, certainty, and confidence, as to that to which we are called—both as to that which the Lord really wants, and as to *all* that the Lord really wants—standing fully assured about that. If, after reading that first chapter of Joshua, you stand back and consider, you have to say: 'There is no doubt about what the Lord means there!' You are left entirely without any question. You are fully assured as to the Lord's mind on the matter, from His side.

"Unto all riches of the full assurance of *understanding*". Understanding is a great factor in assurance. If you have not understanding, you have not got assurance. "Understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. v. 17). It is a tremendous thing for assurance and confidence, really to understand what the will of the Lord is. That is the first, the primary thing, that we need to understand.

I trust that you are set wholly and strongly upon that understanding—that it is no mere passive interest with you. For, you see, when you begin this book of Joshua, you find yourself in the atmosphere of a tremendous energy; there is nothing passive in this whole book. And the whole

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book is represented in this first chapter. Things are positive, definite, strong; there is nothing weak here; it is all emphatic and imperative. That is a necessary state of heart and mind for coming into the full inheritance. Make no mistake about it—we do not drift into all God's will. We come there by a very definite concern to know what the will of the Lord is.

I am not speaking of day-to-day affairs, either privately or in business; I am not speaking about knowing the will of God in this and that in the make-up of life: I am speaking about that whole will of God lying behind our being called by His grace into fellowship with His Son (I Cor. i. 9). When that is settled, everything else will fall into line, will be given by God its meaning and value, and all things will work together for good when we are in line with His purpose (Rom. viii. 28). 'I would have you know, understand, what the will of the Lord is.'

### CONFLICT

And then, as we have already seen, in relation to that full and entire will of God, there is a great *warfare*. The atmosphere becomes charged with conflict, as the book of Joshua shows. It is the book of warfare all along. We therefore need to be fully assured, and have clear understanding, as to why it is that the enemy contests this thing so bitterly. There is no doubt that he does; it is perfectly clear, as we have said, that, immediately you go beyond a certain point in the Christian life, and seek to move on with God in the greater fullness of His purpose, then you come into a new realm of spiritual opposition and antagonism, arising from every quarter, and coming along every line and by every means. *Why* is that so? It is most important that we should be filled with understanding on that matter.

Well, you have only to read that letter to the Colossians throughout, and its twin-letter to the Ephesians, and you will soon discover why the conflict. It is no less a conflict than that into which the Lord Jesus, under the anointing and government of the same Holy Spirit, was immediately launched in the wilderness. It came out full and clear at last. The enemy had been trying to get at Him in different ways, but at last the whole thing is dragged out—"the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them" (Matt. iv. 8). Ah, it is out now; now we know what it is all about! That is no small issue. "The god of this age" (II Cor. iv. 4), "the prince of this world" (John xii. 31, etc.), "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. ii. 2), the 'world ruler of this darkness' (Eph. vi. 12)—

all these titles of the adversary indicate that he has a mighty kingdom and a mighty range of influence that he must preserve at all costs. But he knows that Christ and His Church are destined to oust him from his kingdom, to take it from him, and to supplant him in it for the ages of the ages.

To have 'understanding' on that is to bring some assurance, some confidence, some strength. We need to realise that no less an issue than that lies behind the conflict, which so often focuses down on fragmentary things—what seem to be mere incidents; but their object is the putting of us out, instead of our putting him out. And so we need "full assurance of understanding". There is nothing so weakening and destructive as the lack of understanding. We must ask the Lord to open our understanding.

### (1) A VITAL UNION

Now, this understanding rests upon several things. First of all, it rests upon a vital union with the Lord Himself. Here is this constant reiteration and re-emphasis: "I am with you"—"I am with you"—indicating the union between the Lord and His people. That is the simple but fundamental beginning of this whole matter of the will of God. Until a real, a living union is established between you and the Lord Himself, you do not understand what the will of the Lord is for your life and in your calling by His grace. Again, this union and this oneness with the Lord Himself is basic to an understanding of the whole conflict in which we are found. It is only when that union is established that the conflict begins.

Now note this. While Jesus was the Divine Son of God before birth, and at birth, and during the thirty years of His life, there was something of a special character that happened after His baptism at the age of thirty. That something was that God the Holy Ghost came in a particular way and united Himself with the Son of Man. And then the trouble began; then the conflict started; then the enemy came out! It was to get in between those two—the Father and the Son—in some way that the enemy was making his assaults. I cannot stay with the theology and the doctrine of that; but there is no doubt about it that, all along, the enemy's object was to get between Christ and His Father—to drive a wedge in there, to separate them. That would be his great triumph. If he can do that, he has captured all—the whole battle is his. This union was essential to all the purpose of God; this union was essential, as it was basic, to the whole triumph in the conflict.



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Do remember this, that what the enemy is after is to get you away from the Lord—to make a breach, create a gap, and then to widen it as fully as he can, until you find that you are here, but the Lord is there: the Lord is not with you here—He is somewhere else. The enemy is always trying to do that, in a thousand ways; because he knows that, while you and the Lord are together and continuing together, his hopes fade and vanish. This assurance and understanding rests upon our union with Christ, made and preserved.

### (2) HAVING THE SPIRIT

That, of course, as I have indicated, means our having the Spirit. A Christianity without the Holy Spirit is something which very much gratifies and serves the enemy. An unspiritual Christianity—a Christianity which is not really the Christianity of the Holy Ghost—the enemy loves that, and he will sponsor that; he will seek to build that up. And he has a great deal of success. Many who bear the name of 'Christian' might well be challenged, as Paul challenged those at Ephesus at the beginning: 'When you believed, did you receive the Holy Spirit?' (Acts xix. 2). Having the Holy Spirit is the basis of understanding what the will of God is, of understanding the whole purpose of our salvation, and of understanding all the wiles of the devil and the fury of the oppressor.

### (3) WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

But that is not enough. This "full assurance of understanding", because it is a progressive thing and not attained all at once, can only become ours as we walk in the Spirit. Although the day of the Spirit had not yet come, it is what the Lord Jesus meant when He said so much about 'abiding': "Abide in me, and I in you . . ." "If ye abide in me . . ." (John xv. 1 - 10). That is explained later, in the epistles, as being the life of 'walking in the Spirit' and 'by the Spirit' (Rom. viii; Gal. v. 16 - 25; etc.). Our growing understanding, and therefore our growing assurance, depends upon our abiding in, and walking in and by, the Spirit. This is all implicit in the book of Joshua.

### (4) THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION

And then, one other thing. It rests upon the knowing of 'the power of His resurrection' (Phil. iii. 10). What a large place the power of resurrection has in this whole book of Joshua. This people was a 'resurrection' people. They stood, in the

first place, over against the generation that died in the wilderness. They lived while that died; they went through Jordan, the figure of death, and came out of death triumphant on the other side. And there is more than that in this book. But they came into the constant experience of the power of His resurrection.

We learn much, you know, along that line; we come to a great deal of understanding and a great deal of assurance in that way. In this battle with death, and in our being allowed, from time to time, to go into, if not in our being taken into, experiences where the circumstances seem more powerful than the life of God in us—where we are really having an experience of death, where the sentence of death seems to have been passed, and we, like Paul, despair even of life (II Cor. i. 8 - 10)—it is there that we learn, as Paul did, something about the power of His resurrection. We are thus brought to a greater measure of the full assurance of understanding; and by this understanding we are made strong.

Yes, there is something to learn in those death experiences. We need, when we are in them, to be more 'on the spot' (if I may put it like that), and to say: 'There is something in this experience of death that I must wring out of it—something that is going to be, as it were, 'stock in trade' or 'ammunition' against the enemy. I am going to learn something. I am coming out of this, by the power of His resurrection, and it is going to count in the matter of the inheritance.' The enemy would overwhelm us in those deep hours—carry the whole thing too far, and swamp us. Blessed be God, the Spirit is with us, and He brings us into a thousand resurrections.

This is the fourfold basis of the "full assurance of understanding", and the Apostle calls that the "riches". We are wringing them out of the Land; we are digging them out of these mines, out of these hills, of the Heavenly country. "In whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden". That is a great phrase, is it not? Remember the word to the people: "A land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass" (Deut. viii. 9b). There were *hidden* resources, but they have got to be dug out, and it is real spade-work to get hold of the values of a deep and dark place in spiritual experience.

### TAKING STOCK

Now, that sounds all very good and right and inspiring. But you will notice in Joshua chapter iii, something took place which is very often overlooked.

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*“And Joshua rose up early in the morning, and they removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel; and they lodged there before they passed over. And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the midst of the camp; and they commanded the people . . .” (Josh. iii. 1-3).*

They lodged before the Jordan three days, before going over it. This is not something to be rushed into; this is not something to be done just as the result of impulse. We may feel that it is a great idea—‘the fulness of Christ’, ‘the inheritance’, these ‘treasures of wisdom and knowledge’—wonderful! wonderful! most entrancing! But stay, stay; you are in for a big and a long fight. You are not going to come into this inheritance without real cost and real conflict. Stay! Many a Christian life would have been saved from wreckage if there had been, at the beginning, a little deeper and fuller consideration of what it all meant.

What is it that we are called to? Are we called to a ‘religious picnic’? a life of ‘spiritual joviality’? What are we called to? The Lord Jesus left no one in the dark about the cost of discipleship. But—but—how different is the appeal to-day! You would think that it was all going to be just one unbroken joy-ride—that it was going to conform to the idea of the man who was very fond of ski-ing, who said: ‘My idea of Heaven is one eternal swish downward and no walking back!’ You would think that that is the Christian life, from a lot of the things that you hear. The result is, many do not go very far; they either stop too soon, or they just lose out altogether.

So here at the Jordan, before taking the plunge (if I may put it that way), before committing themselves, before going into the river, there were three days’ pause, while they weighed it up. ‘Do you mean this?’ We must be faithful with one another. While we so strongly emphasize the will of God in all this; while we make the appeal to go on, to go on; while we speak of the riches and the glory of the inheritance, the treasures of wisdom and knowledge—we must be faithful, and so we say: Take time to face the whole thing. Lay a sound foundation, so that you will be able to say, when the difficulties come afterward, and the enemy comes in like a flood: ‘Yes, but I weighed it up; I weighed it up; I faced what it would involve; I calculated. I am not where I am on a flimsy impulse. Mine is a soundly considered position; I know why I am where I am.’ It is very important, for the whole campaign, to pause for ‘three days’ before you make your advance. Now, of course,

that need not be taken literally; but it does represent a state of the heart, a facing of things with God, a reckoning up in His presence.

### SPIRITUAL RESOURCES

There was another aspect of this, as you notice. During the three days they ‘prepared the victuals’: “Prepare ye victuals”, said the officers of Joshua to the people (i. 10, 11). It is only another aspect of the same thing. You have got to have something to move on; you have got to have some support for this. You really need to have resources for this movement. Presently, when the manna ceases, and the old corn of the Land is fed upon, the situation may change. But here is a crisis; here is a turning point. And, to carry you through this crisis, you must have some real spiritual foundation, some substance.

Here, of course, we meet with the whole necessity of soundly instructing young converts, or young Christians, or those who want to go on further with the Lord. They need to be instructed, provided with the Word of the Lord in this matter. What a sorry and sad situation may exist, of spiritual immaturity, weakness and defeat, because just there, at the crisis, there was not an adequate basis of the Word. Let us, then, lay a foundation, truly and surely, and see that we have victuals, we have substance, we have resource, something for our strengthening, to go upon.

### POSSESSING THE INHERITANCE

*“Now Joshua was old and well stricken in years; and the Lord said unto him, Thou art old and well stricken in years, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed” (Josh. xiii. 1).*

*“And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, How long are ye slack to go in to possess the land, which the Lord, the God of your fathers, hath given you?” (xviii. 3).*

Perhaps you are thinking that the first of these quotations looks like a contradiction of what I was saying previously about the ‘young man’ Joshua. If you think like that, you must think a second time! There is a good deal of encouragement for the old men here, not discouragement! The main part of Joshua’s work began at that point. Up to that point, it is true he had led them in battle; he had led them against the many enemies, and he had subdued the country, but he had not yet brought them into their full inheritance. From this point, you will notice, it is all settling in the inheritance. Joshua does a very great

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deal, after this, of consolidating everything. That is the point. We must not stop until all that God intended has been entered into. The tragedy, of course, of these people was that they stopped too soon. For that very reason we have the story related in the book of Judges—the most tragic book of the Bible.

The Letter to the Hebrews is one strong argument against stopping too soon. 'Having laid the foundation, let us not go over it again, but let us go on—let us go on' (Heb. vi. 1, 2). 'Let us fear lest, a promise being left to us of entering into His rest, any one of us should be deemed to have come short' (iv. 1). That is the great burden and object of that letter, is it not?—to go right on! There are two sides to that.

There is, of course, the imperative. In Joshua i you have the imperatives: "Arise, go over . . ." We *must*, because the Lord wills it and calls us to it. Then there is the perfect: "To you have I given it"—'I have . . . it is yours.' And there is the expressed purpose: "Ye are to . . . go in to possess". It *must* be. But if that 'must' should sound hard, should seem to put an onus and a burden and a strain upon the Christian life, remember—when God says it must be, He means it *can* be. God's commandments are God's enablings. If He says: 'Thou shalt', He means: 'Thou canst'. And because it must be, and it can be, then it *should* be. Those are the two sides—the imperative, and God's provision for all that He wills. What He requires, He makes possible, He provides for; indeed He commits Himself to it.

## GOD'S COMMANDS ARE HIS ENABLINGS

It is a wonderful thing how—difficult, hard, painful and costly as may be this way of the fullest purpose of God, and all the conflict which is bound up and associated with it—it is just marvellous how we do survive, and more than survive. If

there is any realm in which the miracle of His sovereign grace and His sovereign power is manifested, it is in this realm of the fuller purposes of God. A life in such a realm is a life of the 'wonderful works of God'. Perhaps that is why He allows it to be such a contested and difficult way, that He might show His wonderful works. That is how we must read the Word of God; that is how we must read Abraham and Paul and others: as men whose lives throughout were subjected to the most terrible testings and tryings, sufferings and adversities, sorrows and disappointments, in one realm, and yet who, at last, triumphed so wonderfully; and we have the record of their marvellous triumph.

You cannot read that eleventh chapter of the letter to the Hebrews without marvelling every time. I say to myself: 'I could not do it'—and we all know that we could not do it. Listen! "These all died in faith, not having received the promises" (v. 13). What are you going to do about that? *They died without receiving the promises!* One after another died without receiving the promises. And yet it says: 'They died in faith'. They did not die saying: 'God promised and He has not fulfilled; God is not faithful to His promise. I give it all up; I cannot believe God any longer.' "These all died in faith, not having received . . ." —"*in faith, not having received . . .*" I say, I could not do that. But God can—the grace of God can. And it is a long list that we have here.

And so, what God calls to, He enables for. It *can* be, because, from God's standpoint, it *must* be. I trust that you have seen something of the clearly defined lines of God's will and God's purpose for us, in having called us into fellowship with His Son. You can see what it involves us in, but you can see that God has committed Himself to that. When we are on this line, He will say: 'I am with thee whithersoever thou goest.'

T. A-S.

(to be concluded)

## CHALLENGE TO UNBELIEF

*"Be ye free from the love of money; content with such things as ye have: for himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee. So that with good courage we say, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear: what shall man do unto me?" (Hebrews xiii. 5, 6).*

FOR most purposes we can understand well enough what the Word of God says without know-

ing the original language. In this case, however, added power is given to the message if we realise that as it is written the phrase contains no fewer than five negatives. It is as though the Lord had said, No! No! No again! No! and then one more No! Well may we ask the reason for this emphatic language. Evidently the Lord feels strongly over this matter. The suggestion that, after all, He might fail His own, or forsake them, is one which

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strikes at the very heart of His good Name. Even He could hardly speak more emphatically than He does in this fivefold denial of such a possibility.

Satan has one temptation which served him well at the beginning, so he uses it again and again. True, he keeps up-to-date in the manner in which it is presented, but still the essential snare is the same. It is the temptation to unbelief. It comes as a question—as a suggestion that it may be dangerous to commit oneself wholly to the Lord; as a suspicion that, if you do rest everything on Him, you may after all be let down.

How can we answer the tempter? Certainly not by argument. Long ago King Hezekiah showed great wisdom when he forbade the besieged Jews to reason with their Assyrian attackers. "But they held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not" (Isaiah xxxvi. 21). It is always unwise to parley with the tempter; he is a far better debater than we are. Hezekiah took the threat back to the Lord in prayer and got the answer from Him. Faced with a similar pressure to capitulate to unbelief, we, too, shall find that our wisdom consists in letting the Lord give the answer. Surely that is the purpose of this verse. This is the answer! He Himself has declared, No! Never! No! Never! Never! Nothing less than such an assurance can get us through to God's end in our salvation.

#### HE COULD NOT CARE MORE

Does the Lord really care about us? The truth is that He could not care more. There is an unwholesome phrase in popular use to-day about those who 'could not care less'. No Christian should feel like that about anything. But if this unworthy expression represents one extreme, how glorious is the alternative—He could not care more! That is what the Letter to the Hebrews is about. It assures us that for the humblest believer the Lord's love and concern are as great as they could possibly be.

Hebrews opens with the words which describe the position, possessions and personal standing of the Lord Jesus as God's Son, Heir of all things. It suggests that He was not content with all this personal glory. He was not satisfied. He did not sit down, even though He had so much. It was only "when he had made purification of sins" that He sat down (i. 3). Is this not wonderful? It was not enough that He was the great Son; He could not rest until He had made us sons also. It was not enough for Him to be "appointed heir of all things"; He would not sit down until He had

finished the work to make us co-heirs with Him in glory. His great creation activities had been crowned with success. To this day men are constantly discovering new wonders in the physical creation; there seems to be no end to the perfection of the infinitely vast and the infinitesimally small works of God. Jesus Christ made them all. It is "by the word of his power" that they all function. Yet this could not give Him the rest of heart which He sought. It was not until He had rescued fallen man from his lost condition by making purification for his sins that at last, at long last, He felt justified in ceasing from His works. He sat down. So He has proved to us how much He cares.

Think, too, of the qualifications which He obtained to be our Helper, our Saviour, and what a great price He paid for them. "Wherefore it behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren . . ." (ii. 17). "One that hath been in all points tempted like as we are . . ." (iv. 15). In *all* things, and in *all* points. How dare we wonder, even for a moment, if He really cares? If you are a sick person, and the doctor can relieve and cure your condition, you can be truly thankful that he took the trouble, as a medical student, to go through ail the drudgery and hard work of the long years of preparation in order to qualify to help you in this way. Suppose, though, that it were necessary for him to qualify by actually experiencing all the painful sufferings of your illness; suppose that to know all about your troubles he first had to pass through them himself—then how much greater would be your gratitude. It is this which is said about the Lord Jesus. He qualified as our Helper by undergoing all that we can ever suffer. This is love indeed. He could not care for us more than He does.

#### HE COULD NOT DO MORE

In this fivefold emphasis, the Lord Himself asserts that He could not have done and could not do more for us than He has already done. This is the epistle which is often distorted by the Accuser to cause the distressed and the melancholy to despair. Yet this same book is the one which insists more than any other that Christ has already done everything necessary for our perfect salvation—"salvation to the uttermost" (vii. 25)—and that even God can do no more. Is there anything lacking in His faithfulness? He Himself answers that question with five thunderous denials.

This work of redemption is so wonderful that it has left the Father perfectly satisfied. He it was

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who said to the Son: "Sit thou on my right hand . . ." (i. 13). God could not talk like that to angels. However perfect, in its degree, their service might be, it could never bring this kind of contentment to His heart. He never told them to sit down. To the Son, however, this is just what He did say. Looking back into the past, with all the folly and failure of man that had so grieved and thwarted Him; looking on into the future to all the high plans which He had purposed for the human race, He could find nothing lacking, nothing imperfect in the whole range of Christ's redemptive work. 'Well done', He said to the Saviour. 'The fight is won, the task complete, the glory assured. Now sit down!' "Sit thou at my right hand". He did not say this just because of His personal delight in the Son, for there had never been any question about that. He said it in resurrection—He said it in connection with our salvation. He Himself sent the Son to perform this work of redemption, and now, by exalting Jesus Christ to the throne, He has let us all know that in His opinion there is nothing more that can or need be done. It is perfect. In this manner, then, it is the Father Himself who has said that faith can never, no, never be forsaken.

Clearly the Lord Jesus also was satisfied with His own work. "He, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down" (x. 12). It was not only that the Father told Him to sit down, but that He Himself took that position, in order to show that He had no questions or reservations about the perfect efficacy of His own labours. This is contrasted with the human high priests, who never could sit down at their work and never thought of doing so. It is true that no provision was made for the High Priest to sit down in the Holiest; but, if there had been a seat, surely none of them, not even the godliest—not even Aaron himself—would ever have dared to make use of it. They were far too conscious of their imperfection. All the time they would have had a haunting fear that perhaps something yet remained unfinished, and it would have been a justifiable fear: for their work was never completed, never sufficient in itself, but always pointing on to the only Priest competent to deal with sin. "But he, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down". He knew in His own Spirit that nothing more needed to be done—that indeed nothing more could be done.

This is the burden of the Letter to the Hebrews. It is a call to share the confidence of Christ, and to count on the amazing and effective power of His finished work. In the light of this, how foolish, and as a matter of fact how insulting it is, for us to

listen to the insinuation that after all He might fail or forsake us. No wonder that His denial of this possibility is so emphatic.

God also speaks to us through His triumphant servants. In addition to the "great cloud of witnesses" from the Old Testament, who compassed about the first readers of this letter, there is now a much greater company of New Testament saints who have finished their race and wait for us to join them. What is the common testimony of these triumphant servants of Christ? Is it not that they ran the race set before them, "looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (xii. 2)? Without that vision they could never have got through. These saints in glory fought the good fight and overcame by faith only because they were convinced that it was safe and right always to rely on Christ. They ran the race by keeping their eyes on the fact that Christ had sat down. Those who succumbed to doubts as to the Lord's reliability, and so either gave up or took matters into their own hands, did not lose their salvation, but they lost their testimony. They had no message to bequeath to later generations. Thank God for those who kept their eyes on the enthroned Christ. They, and the writer of this Epistle among them, have become further means by which God Himself gives His fivefold denial to fear or unbelief.

How foolish it is to doubt the Lord. Yes, and how sinful. How much compromise with our own conscience, how much disregard of the clear teaching of the Word of God, how much weak yielding to circumstances or men, how much talk instead of action—or action instead of prayer—is due to basic unwillingness to believe that the Lord means what He has said. Let us not seek fresh assurance from Him. He has already spoken and He has already done all that He can do. The Father is satisfied; the Son is satisfied; the overcoming saints have been satisfied. Who then are we to doubt? The Lord has spoken. It is for us to act on His word.

## HIS DIRECT ASSURANCE

These words, as we see from the margin, are a quotation from what the Lord had said to Joshua. It was this assurance which urged him on to the conquest of the inheritance. In the first place Moses gave him the promise: "He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Deut. xxxi. 6). God spoke to Joshua, but at first He spoke through His

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servant Moses. It must have been wonderful to receive a message like this through God's greatest servant; yet, before he could enter the Promised Land, Joshua received an even more direct guarantee: "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Joshua i. 5). This was no longer the servant speaking about his Lord—"He will not . . ."; it was God's personal assurance—"I will not . . ." It is in this direct way that the Lord has spoken to us.

The promise as given by Moses to Joshua was true enough. He spoke from his own experience. Soon, however, Moses died. As a matter of fact, the assurance was his parting message to his successor, and as such must have been prized by the younger man. Yet it is doubtful whether this was enough, in view of the heavy responsibility now placed on Joshua. After Moses' death he was commanded to go forward in faith and take possession of the Land of Promise, and for such a fight of faith he needed even greater encouragement. Then it was that the Lord Himself spoke the word of promise: "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee".

This lies at the heart of the Hebrew letter. It is a reminder that, while they had a precious heritage from their national leaders of the past, from Abraham and Moses and Aaron, something new had come to them in Jesus Christ, who is the direct speech of the Father to all believers. There are no intermediaries now between the soul and God, and no human institutions to support or preserve us. "Moses my servant is dead". That involved a direct personal dependence on God by the new generation. For us, the whole structure of a religion based on outward things, on personalities and on tradition, on earthly considerations and safeguards, has passed away. We are cast utterly on a spiritual relationship with God. Like Joshua, therefore, we need to know the direct speaking of God to our own hearts, and so we are reminded that "himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee." It is the essence of the new dispensation that the believer has an inward anointing and a personal life with God.

This Epistle reminds us that, like Joshua, we stand at the threshold of a great spiritual inheritance which waits to be possessed. There is no question about the Lord's intention that this "land" of promise and of fulness shall be entered into by His Church. There is equally no doubt that some, through lack of faith, may fail to enter in. Obstacles and enemies await us if we choose to "press on". The giants are there right enough, as are also the threats of the walled up cities and the

seductions of the goodly Babylonish garments and the wedges of gold. There are mountains of difficulties, and there are dwellers in the valleys with their chariots of iron. Kings with their armies will fight against us and Gibeonites with their wives will try to deceive us. All these Old Testament hindrances to the will of God have their New Testament counterpart in Satanic attempts to prevent the Church from becoming what God meant it to be. It is not an accident that the Christianity of our day is so different from that described in the New Testament. It is the work of the Deceiver. It is not modern conditions but age-long spiritual enemies which keep the people of God in wilderness conditions. For this very reason we need the re-assurance that was given to Joshua, and, like him, we need not only to have it passed on from others but to receive it directly from the Lord Himself. So we have His five solemn denials that we shall be let down if we venture all on Him.

#### ENEMIES OF FAITH

Faith has two main enemies: they are self-interest and fear. Both of them are referred to in connection with this promise. The first warning is timely as well as significant: "Be ye free from the love of money". Is our course with the Lord governed by any considerations of personal gain? If it is, then it will not be the way of faith. Such self-interest permeates the atmosphere of the world of to-day in which we live. The prime concern of everybody seems to be to receive more, to possess more; not to be outdone in the scramble for material advantage. Any such mental attitude in the Lord's people is regarded as a serious breakdown in faith. We can go further and say that this not only applies to desire for actual money, but includes any kind of self-interest. Only those who are blessedly "free" from all such concerns can appropriate this fivefold Divine undertaking to see us through.

The other modern curse is the fear of man. This is the second great enemy to faith. Those who have truly grasped the implications of this promise are delivered from this fear. "So that with good courage we say, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear: what shall man do unto me?" We live in a world of fear, where in almost every aspect of life tremendous pressure is put on the individual to bow to the gods of might and expediency. This is bad enough in political and industrial relationships, but it is infinitely worse in the spiritual realm. It is clear that great efforts were being made to shift the Hebrew believers off their spiritual

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ground. The massive weight of the traditional, the official and the popular threatened to crush them if they did not conform. Unbelief was their greatest peril, as it is ours—unbelief caused by the fear of man. What could they do? What can we do?

Quietly and with dignity go straight forward to the Lord's goal, in utter faith, recalling the Lord's pledged word that He cannot and will not fail us, nor forsake us.

H. F.

## THE ARM OF THE LORD

## V. BUILDING UPON GOD'S FOUNDATION

**WE** have seen that, with chapter liv of Isaiah's prophecies, there commences a movement of God toward recovery and rebuilding. The Cross has cleared the way for this new prospect. From chapter liv onwards, a number of bright, hopeful notes are struck. For instance, at the beginning of chapter lx:

*"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."*

The way having been opened, the ground cleared, and the foundation laid by the Cross, the Lord is facing the whole matter of the recovery, restoration, and rebuilding of His people. There is a new prospect, a new hope, a new message of encouragement. But, with it, a new note is struck. In these later chapters of Isaiah, there are both lights and shades in this new prospect. The sun shines: "Thy light is come . . . the glory of the Lord is risen"—it is like the sun rising on an early summer day; and then it is as if a heavy cloud comes over the face of the sun. It may be only passing over, it may be only temporary, but you wonder whether the whole prospect is going to change; whether the bright time is passing, if that is the end.

It is just like that in these later chapters of Isaiah. The sun—the glory of the Lord—has risen; there is a bright prospect; but then, here and there, you come on darker things, such as chapter lviii, beginning:

*"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and declare unto my people their transgression . . ."*

From time to time there are these dark clouds, that seem to pass over the face of the sun, even in the presence of this new prospect; and they bring to the heart a feeling of uncertainty. Is this 'radiant morn' too soon to pass away? We are conscious of mixed feelings: we do not yet feel assured that all is going to follow through on this new prospect, to work out according to the seeming promise.

From the Lord's side, of course, there is no question: the Lord has for Himself His new ground, and He shows Himself as One who means

to be positive. *He* is not of two minds; there is no shadow cast by His turning or changing. Everything from the Lord's side shows Him to be One who is out for something—really after a new day, a new situation. Yes: for His part, the Lord is positive.

## A CHECK ON THE ARM OF THE LORD

But it would seem that He is having to go carefully. He wants to go tight out, to have no reserves, but . . . but . . . there seems to be something that is still holding His Arm in check; He just cannot go right ahead, as He indicates He would do. The old ground has suffered a fiery purging in the Cross; all that stubble, all that tangle and network of thorns and briars, has been dealt with by the fires. He has come in and got His foundation: but . . . there seems still to be a question. You cannot read through these chapters without feeling: 'We are not through this business yet; we are not right out on the other side; we are not sure how it is going to work out yet.' The Lord is pretty sure; the Lord is encouraging; the Lord is saying that, as for Himself, *He* is not holding back for any reason from *His* side; but there is something that He is encountering.

Let me put it like this. The ground has been cleared, and the foundation has been laid; but now comes the question: What is going to be built upon that foundation? And that is just where the uncertainty comes in, not as to the foundation, for that is settled in the Cross—but as to the superstructure: what is going to be imposed upon the foundation? The Lord is not sure what His people are going to put upon *His* foundation.

So far as the Old Testament is concerned, the more immediate answer to the question as to the new building on that new ground is found in what we call the post-exilic prophets, the prophets after the Exile—Zechariah, Haggai and Malachi. We see there what the people would put upon the foundation; the new building, 'of what sort it was'. But if you should raise the objection, again, that that is 'Old Testament', let me remind you

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that I said in the previous chapter that the counterpart of this can be found in the New Testament, in our very own dispensation. We saw that Isaiah liii finds its parallel in the letter to the Romans, where the Cross encounters all the rubbish and evil and tangle, deals with it in fiery judgment, and clears the ground for a new prospect. That new prospect is brought into view in chapter viii of Romans; God has now got His foundation. But what is the counterpart of these later chapters of Isaiah?

### RIGHT AND WRONG BUILDING ILLUSTRATED IN I CORINTHIANS

The counterpart—so patent as you look at it—is in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Writing of his first arrival in Corinth, the Apostle said: "When I came unto you . . . I determined"—the language is: 'I deliberately made up my mind'—"not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (I Cor. ii. 1, 2). The foundation has been laid: "As a wise master-builder I laid a foundation" (iii. 10), and the foundation is Christ crucified. The Cross, as Paul so clearly sets forth in his letter to the Romans, has provided the foundation; and that foundation has been laid in Corinth. But as you read on in this verse (iii. 10), your heart almost stands still. You hear Paul saying: "I laid a foundation; and another buildeth thereon." He shows that it is possible to build on this, either "wood, hay, stubble", or "gold, silver, costly stones"; and that every man's work is going to be tried by fire, to discover what sort it is. If any man's work is burnt up—what happens? Well, "he himself shall be saved"—he will just get in—"yet so as through fire"; he will have lost everything.

So there comes this very big question: What are you going to put upon that foundation? what are you going to superimpose upon that ground of the Cross? Are you going to bring back things that are absolutely contradictory to the Cross? If so, you see what happens.

Now in this first letter to the Corinthians there is much about building, in many connections. It is perhaps a little unfortunate that, in a number of passages in the New Testament, and consistently throughout the letters to the Corinthians, the original words for 'build' and 'building' have been rendered 'edify' and 'edification'—although the Revised Version often gives 'build' or 'build up' in the margin, and the compound verb, 'build upon', is usually—for example in I Corinthians iii. 10-15—translated thus. But during the 300 years since our Authorised Version was made, the word

'edify' has lost some of its force, and present-day usage might tend to give us the idea of the acquisition of head-knowledge, which of course is not Paul's meaning at all. The root meaning of the word survives in our word 'edifice', and Paul is all the time talking about spiritual *building*—the building up of true spiritual character.

I would suggest to you that you should follow through the nine occasions in this first letter where the words 'edify' or 'edification' are used. The whole matter of spiritual gifts, for instance, is summed up in that one word—Do they build up? If they do not, they are of no value in the purpose of God; they can be ruled out; they have missed their point—for even Divine gifts can miss the point or be side-tracked; we shall have to touch on that again. It is the spiritually constructive side of things which receives such emphasis in this first letter to the Corinthians. The foundation—Christ crucified—is laid. Now for the building!

### WHAT GOD WILL NOT ALLOW ON HIS FOUNDATION

And, when you come to the building, a real battle starts up. The question is: What is God going to *allow* to be put on His foundation? For right through this letter we find a long series of 'No's'—things to which God says: 'No, not *that* on My foundation, please; I have no place for that. You may spend your whole life on that, but it will all go up in smoke. It is not suitable to My foundation; it is not according to the Cross of the Lord Jesus.'

Now, it would take a long time to consider all the things in this letter to which God says: 'No'. We will just touch on two or three, as representative of much more. As we read the letter, with this in mind—Will God allow anything like that to be put on His foundation?—and as we see the answer, surely our reaction must be: Very well, let us have the Cross deal with that immediately. We don't want that to be held over until it is too late, and we just scramble into Heaven, without anything that we can take with us of a life-work—for that is the issue. We don't want to postpone or refuse the operation of the Cross until it is too late to save our life-work, to save the fruit of all our energies.

#### (1) CARNALITY

We begin with chapter iii. "*And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not with meat; for ye were not yet able to*



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*bear it : nay, not even now are ye able ; for ye are yet carnal : FOR*”—this is the description of carnality—“*for whereas there is among you JEALOUSY . . .*” Let us weigh it, even if it be to our own judgment and condemnation ; it is better that the Cross come right in now. ‘There is jealousy among you?’ God says ‘No’ to that: ‘I cannot have that on My foundation. My foundation is the Cross, and it says *No* to that.’

Paul continues: “*There is among you jealousy AND STRIFE . . .*” Strife! We must think this through and face it honestly. It may seem very elementary, but we are not facing the world, the unconverted, here ; we are right in the Church, amongst believers ; we are dealing with those amongst whom God’s foundation has been laid ; with those who are “called to be saints” (I Cor. i. 2) ; that is, who are regarded by God as His own people. Strife? God says ‘No’ to that on His foundation. Is that found among us? You know what is going to happen? Sooner or later, it is going to be exposed as wood, hay and stubble—that is the value of it—and it is going up in smoke.

“*Are ye not carnal, and walk after the manner of men?*” You are not allowed to walk after the manner of men on God’s foundation—you are just not allowed. God says ‘No’ to “the manner of men” on His foundation. “*For when one saith, I am of . . . and another, I am of . . .*” Here we must fill in the appropriate names ourselves: names that are right up to date ; names right in our own circle, in our own assembly ; names of our own Christian world, or historic religious names. ‘One says, I am of . . . and another, I am of . . . ; and yet another, I am of . . .’ They all express human partialities, human preferences, human likes and human dislikes, which produce divisions. God says: ‘No, not on My foundation ; that is not My Church, not My building. I never build with material like that, and neither may you. You may have a wonderful set-up—of your own making—with stuff of that kind: but it is all going up in smoke. However much you may have seemed to have, in the end you will have nothing.’

## (2) WORLDLY WISDOM

And how much there is here in this early section about “the wisdom of the world” (i. 20)—the wisdom of man, man’s mind about things. God says: ‘None of that on My foundation ; there is no place at all for your mind on My foundation ; there is only place for the mind of the Spirit.’ If we have not got the mind of the Spirit, we have no right to be doing anything on God’s foundation. But after

all, are not these the very things, the very troubles, that are blighting Christianity to-day? They are ! And do not let us think of Christianity in a detached, objective way. This comes very close to home. These very things may be causing mischief, even amongst ourselves: we may be bringing on to God’s foundation a mind, a mentality, which is not the mentality of the Spirit. For that is what it amounts to—a mentality. “*Who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God*” (ii. 11). These are two different mentalities, you see—the natural mind and the spiritual mind. God says: ‘None of the natural mind or mentality at all on My foundation.’

Paul here calls this the ‘world’ coming in, and constructing something upon God’s foundation ; and God says: ‘There is no place for the world in any form on My foundation.’ If you look at it closely, you find that this searches out so much: the world’s standards or judgments or values—how the world thinks, how the world does things. These Corinthians were trying to make an impression, and moreover by natural means. The Cross of Isaiah liii is not a very ‘impressive’ thing, judged by worldly standards, is it? There is nothing there that would popularise the Gospel—rather does it cause offence.

## (3) SOULISH APPEAL

Are you trying to make the work of God successful by an appeal to the natural man? Now, I hold no brief for ugliness or for crudeness ; I believe that God is a God of beauty. But if we think we are going to make God’s work successful or acceptable by display, by appeal to the soul of man—artistically, aesthetically, and so on—we are on wrong lines. Let me put it another way: the source of any ‘appeal’, any ‘impression’, any ‘grip’, any ‘overwhelming’, must lie *essentially* and *only* in spiritual values, of an inward kind, not in what captivates or gratifies the natural fancies of people. The Arm of the Lord will not be revealed to the ‘natural man’ or to the ‘world’ in any way for its good ; only against it.

As we move on in this letter, we find that the Cross touches so many other things. It touches our feelings—our natural emotions, our natural passions ; there is much about that here. And, as with our mentality, so also with our emotions, the Lord says: ‘None of that on My foundation, none whatever.’ There is so much here to which the Cross says ‘No’, as to building. I invite you to look at

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it more closely; it is not my purpose to give an exposition of the letter to the Corinthians. I want to come to the positive side.

For there is a positive side to this letter. What is it that God says *may* be put on His foundation? It would be very pathetic, would it not, if the letter were all negative, all: No, no! never! Take note of that, because you may recall that I said, earlier, that you can never come into God's 'Yes' until you have accepted God's 'No'. But there is a very mighty 'Yes', in this letter. What is it? Perhaps we think we know it. Well, maybe we do know it, as to the words; but I suggest that we know practically nothing of the thing itself.

### MISAPPLIED SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Let us look, then, at Chapter xiii. Here the Apostle writes off everything that is not spiritually constructive. It may have been something that God gave, but it has been taken hold of by man and used for man's satisfaction, gratification, pleasure, or even glory. The mentality and emotion of the natural man have been brought to bear upon Divine things—spiritual gifts, such as tongues, and so on—and have robbed them of their value to build up, and made them just occasions for display. There has been glorying in these spiritual gifts. The Apostle here writes that all off, and says that they were never given for that; even though given of God, they amount to 'nothing'—that is the very word he uses here—when it comes to building. "If I . . . have not love, I am nothing." Paul dismisses these things; but notice that he is all the time reaching after the positive through the negative.

"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal." *Exeunt* spiritual gifts which have failed to fulfil their purpose in building the House of God. Let us not cling to anything that does not serve that purpose.

"And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains . . ." That is quite scriptural—that is what the Lord Jesus said: "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove" (Matt. xvii. 20). That is perfectly scriptural; and yet you can be perfectly scriptural and have faith like that, and it can mean nothing. If it fails to build up the House of God, if it does not result in this scriptural structure, it becomes negative. *Exit* all knowledge of mysteries, and secret lore, and faith that removes mountains. 'Out you go if you do not build up! That is the

value of you—nothing!' "If I have all faith . . . but have not love, I am nothing". With all that, I am nothing!

"And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned . . ." If I am a philanthropist, and am most charitable, even sacrificial, in my giving; even if I am a martyr, and give my body to be burned; that can all be done without any constructive value in the building of the House of God. If I do all these things, "*but have not love, it profiteth me nothing*".

That, then, is the showing out of court of things—wonderful things in themselves—but which have failed to serve the purpose for which they were given, namely, 'spiritual building'.

### WHAT GOD WILL ALLOW ON HIS FOUNDATION: LOVE

Now for the positive. Let us bring in that to which God says: Yes! He says 'No' to that, and to that, and to that; but now, where does His 'Yes' lie? Here it is—*Love!*

"Love suffereth long . . ." There were some who, because their rights were injured or taken from them, dragged their brethren before the magistrate, right away. "*Love suffereth long, and is kind . . .*" You may put that on the foundation; that is something constructive, is it not? "*Love envieth not . . .*" When you quietly work your way, like this, into and through every clause, do you not want to stop and say: 'Say no more—that finds me out too much'? But we must go on, for, after all, it is what God is calling for.

"Love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up . . ." Go back to the beginning of chapter viii, and you will read this: "Knowledge puffeth up, but love buildeth up". There is a great deal of difference between 'puffing up' and 'building up'. 'Love is not puffed up': there is nothing false, artificial, make-believe, pretend, about love. The false thing is like a rubber balloon: you can blow it up pretty big, but you have only to put the tiniest point of a needle in it—and where is it? It is gone. Paul says it is no use putting that on God's foundation.

"Love . . . doth not behave itself unseemly . . ." Unseemly behaviour: we could spend much time on that, could we not? Is this seemly? does it become a Christian? does it become the Lord Jesus? does it become that holy House of God? does it become the Cross of the Lord Jesus? Love is seemly; it does not behave itself unseemly. "*Love . . . seeketh not its own*"—does not want its own way, does not work to its own ends; does not draw to itself; "*is not provoked, taketh not account of*

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*evil ; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth ; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth . . . ”*

You may think that I am not saying very much, but I am saying a great deal. I would like to give you that passage in a translation which I think a classic:

*“ I may speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but if I have no love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal ; I may prophesy, fathom all mysteries and secret lore, I may have such absolute faith that I can move hills from their place, but if I have no love, I count for nothing ; I may distribute all I possess in charity, I may give up my body to be burnt, but if I have no love, I make nothing of it. Love is very patient, very kind. Love knows no jealousy ; love makes no parade, gives itself no airs, is never rude, never selfish, never irritated, never resentful ; love is never glad when others go wrong, love is gladdened by goodness, always slow to expose, always eager to believe the best, always hopeful, always patient. Love never disappears.”*

You may put that on the foundation, for God says *Yes* to all that. To whom is the Arm of the Lord revealed? To that ; just to that.

There is a most pressing need that we should face this matter of what the Cross sets aside, and what the Cross brings in ; what may be put on God's foundation, and what may not. It concerns every one of us quite seriously, as to what there will be at the end : not what there is now, however showy and popular, and however enjoying of man's approval and applause it may be. God is

moving to build up: He shows what He cannot and will not use in His building, and then He says : ‘ *This is what I will use ; this is the material for the building of My Church. This is what really builds : “ Love buildeth up ”.*’

May the Lord smite our hearts, if need be, to enlighten us as to what the real values are. Not even spiritual gifts are the real values, *unless* the effect of them is real spiritual increase amongst the believers. That is the test. It is not the things themselves, not their presence, not even the fact that the Lord gave them. The test of every gift is: Does it really build the Church? does it really build the House? is it really resulting in a larger measure of Christ?

For these things may be an obstruction to Christ. This letter to the Corinthians makes it so clear that the possession of spiritual gifts is no guarantee of spiritual maturity. Here you have the most immature of the churches—Paul says: ‘ I have fed you with milk ; you are still babes ’—and yet characterized by all these gifts. It is not that the gifts are wrong, but that they have been sidetracked ; they have not served the purpose for which they were given—that is, bringing to the full measure of Christ. That is the object, and that object is only achieved by love.

May the Lord give us that kind of love! This is not natural love ; this love springs out of the Cross. It is the love which comes right out of the work of the Cross *within us*. We cannot get it by striving after it ; but, as the Cross does its work in our hearts and in our natures, it will rise and grow. The Lord increase our love!

T. A-S.

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

## THE UNOPENED BIBLE

**A**LBERT Black, hungry and hopeless, sat on the rough bed in his cheap lodging and thought of home.

When he had first decided to come to South America he knew that it would make his parents unhappy, but he did not care. He cared for nobody but himself. He had despised the Christian home in which he had been brought up, finding his pleasure with flashy and idle companions. Only the fact that he worked in his father's business made him pay heed to what was said at home, but he longed to get away from all restraint and ‘ see life’, as he called it. And when his chance came, when one of the bad crowd with whom he mixed found him an opening abroad, he had taken it

readily and sailed for South America. That was how he came to be sitting unhappily in this dirty room with no money and no friends.

The day before leaving England, when he was packing his bags, his father had come into his room with two gifts. The first was some money in a wallet (which Albert had been very glad to accept), and the second a Bible, at which he pulled a long face. Mr. Black had taken no notice of the face, but had quietly said: ‘ Albert, I know that it is no use asking you to read this every day, but at least I would like you to promise never to part with it. Carry the Bible with you wherever you go, and turn to it if ever you are in trouble.’

Trouble! Albert had had plenty of trouble. He

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had never opened the Bible, but at least he had kept his promise to carry it round wherever he went. Was it really only five years since he had made that promise? To Albert it seemed a lifetime. He had drifted about from one place to another, sometimes working, more often idling; had borrowed money and never paid it back, and had come down and down in the world. Now he was in great want. He was learning, as the Prodigal Son had learned, that the world of pleasure and sin is a far from happy place. And like the Prodigal, too, he had lately been thinking more of his father and of his father's house.

Truly he was at his wits' end. He had sold most of his possessions, including the wallet which was his father's last gift. He wondered whether the Bible might be worth something, whether perhaps he could at least exchange it for some food. Moodily he took it out of his bag, and began to unwrap the paper and open the cardboard box in which the book lay. There was nothing written on the box. He opened the cover of the book, expecting to see some writing inside; but no, his father had not written anything at all. It seemed, though, that there was a piece of paper in between the leaves of the Bible, so he shook it out. Imagine his surprise to find that the 'piece of paper' was a banknote for £50!

Mr. Black had put the note in between the pages of the Bible, rightly guessing that Albert would probably never open the book so long as things went well for him. It was only when he was in real trouble that he looked in his Bible. Already humbled by his failure, this reminder of the thoughtfulness and love of his patient father broke his hard and wilful heart. For the first time since arriving out there, five years ago, he wrote home, not knowing how his father would receive the letter, or even if he was still alive. But Mr. Black was alive all right, and as full of love as ever; and so before many weeks were past, Albert was on his way back to England and home.

At the very first opportunity, he confessed to his parents how badly he had behaved, and told them how sorry he was, and asked their forgiveness. As he spoke of his poverty and hunger, he remarked how strange it was that he should have been carrying around that little package, thinking that it was of no value, when all the time inside it there was more than enough money to meet his needs. 'To think that I had riches in that Bible all the time, and I never opened it!'

He was speaking, of course, of the banknote. But Mr. Black reminded him that there are riches far greater than money can buy, the riches of God's pardon and love. These, too, could have been found in that Book. All those who have a Bible, really have a storehouse of spiritual wealth, for the Scriptures are given to tell us of the Lord Jesus, and to lead us to know Him as Saviour.

By this time Albert was ready to listen to his father, and to pay attention, as he had never done before, to what he had to say about trusting Christ as his own Saviour. He finished up on his knees, confessing his sins to the Lord and asking for Heaven's pardon as well as the pardon of his parents. Of course he received both.

Ever afterwards, one of his favourite verses was: "In whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1. 7). He remembered how he had carried £50 about with him, thinking all the time that he was poor: how that his father's gift was lying in that Book, just waiting to be claimed and used. It reminded him, also, that the unopened Bible had kept him from enjoying the far greater riches of God's love.

We may not find a banknote in our Bibles, but we can find what is far better—the Saviour, who is "rich in mercy", and the great gift of God's love, which is free to all who will receive the "riches of his grace".

H. F.

## LOVEST THOU ME?

*Reading: John xxi.*

**WHAT** a full chapter this is! We need now to read the Letters of Peter, for I believe that they are the best commentary on this strange but very instructive chapter.

The Lord was risen from the dead: His disciples had seen Him; they knew that death was overcome; and yet, in spite of that knowledge, here in the lives of at least seven of 'the eleven' there was

a hollow; there was something missing. Peter himself was keenly conscious of it. Waiting times are our most difficult times. And Peter, who would ever be 'doing', who was by nature restless, impetuous, could not endure such waiting. So he makes his decision: 'I am going fishing. It is better than doing nothing. I am going back to my fishing.'

What a long night that must have been! and what opportunity it must have afforded for the

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

return of memories! I am sure that that is what happened to Peter that night on his boat ; catching nothing.

I think we may assume that it was the same old boat. Here Peter was, in his old boat on the Lake. What memories must have come back to him! The memory, for instance, of another night, when he was doing exactly the same thing, and just as fruitlessly. How well he must have recalled the Master's words: "Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught" (Luke v. 4). What a revelation of the Lord that had been! He would remember another night when they were 'toiling in rowing' and getting nowhere (Matt. xiv. 24; Mark vi. 48). The Lord had come to them, walking upon the waves; and he himself had been able to step from the boat and walk upon the waters. This memory must have come back to him. There was yet another memory that must have come back to Peter that night, the memory of his Lord asleep in the boat, in the storm of all storms; and then the calm! (Matt. viii. 23-27). What a difference the presence of the Lord had made in all these incidents. But such things were not happening now. It was the same boat; it was the same sea; he had the same Lord; but those things were just not happening. Why?

It is very evident that, even after the resurrection with its lessons, there was something in the minds of these disciples that had to be dealt with. Even on the eve of Pentecost, they still had their own ideas of the way things ought to be done. "Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts i. 6). What a mistaken question! But such was their mind, their horizon. And there were other wrong ideas that had to be displaced.

## "APART FROM ME YE CAN DO NOTHING"

Another memory—a very vivid memory—that must have come to Peter towards the close of that long night, was a word that the Lord had uttered only a few days before. On the way to Gethsemane, speaking of the vine and its branches, He had said: "Apart from me ye can do nothing" (John xv. 5). And on the vessel that night, surely Peter must have been saying; 'How true it is—how true! Oh, that the Lord would come! Without Him we can do nothing.' The truth that the Lord had stated was being worked out that night; it was being wrought into the very fibre of Peter's being. The Lord has said it to us, too, many times: "Apart from me ye can do nothing"; but how often He has to bring us into circumstances where we not only know the words, but learnt the lesson—"Without Me—nothing, nothing!" However accom-

plished we may be in our own particular 'fishing'; however experienced; however successful we may have been in the past, we have still repeatedly to learn that, take the Lord away, and . . . Nothing! *Nothing!!*

But now the scene changes. The morning is breaking and the Lord comes. How gracious the Lord is! Peter says that in his first letter (I Peter ii. 3). From the lake side He calls to them! "Children, have ye aught to eat?" Then to their dispirited 'No' He replies: "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and ye shall find." They cast on the right side of the boat, and again they take a miraculous draught. Now the Lord is not doing this merely to work a miracle. There is something behind this.

Again let me say: How gracious the Lord is! He might very well have called His followers to the side of the lake; might well have singled out Peter, and have said to him: 'Peter, what are you doing here? I thought you had left these. Did I not call you from all this? Why have you returned to it?' But the Lord does not do that kind of thing; we do, but He does not. What He does is to press home the lesson, not only that without Him we can do nothing, but that if He is in anything it makes all the difference. That is the lesson we must needs learn. 'You have toiled all night, and have caught nothing; now obey My voice, do what I command, and the result will be, not nothing, but much.' Such is the grace of the Lord. In his letter, Peter will tell us that the Lord is like that—very gracious, very long-suffering, very patient, very kind. The Lord is like that.

Thus, with us, as with those early disciples, the Lord will seize upon every opportunity to press home, ever more deeply, the lesson that He, and only He, is indispensable.

Before we pass on, we need to recognise this further point. The Lord was not setting His seal on Peter's going back to the old things. How easy it is for us to imagine that: to say: 'The Lord has blessed, the Lord has used; here we are back in the old boat; it is all right, the Lord has blessed; we can go on with the old accepted things!' But these disciples never went back to the boat again. The lesson is, not that certain things, with the Lord's blessing upon them, are what we need: but that we need the Lord. The things may change; the forms may pass; but if the Lord abides, nothing else matters. That is surely the lesson to be learnt here at the lake side.

A further thought emerges from the Lord's gracious handling of the lapse of His disciples. It is that He does not insist upon mere rectitude. It

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is possible for us to be very concerned with the correctness of things and yet not to have the presence of the Lord.

The Lord might have said: 'You had no business to go back. After the years of My teaching; after My call; after My injunctions to you; after My promises—did I not say you should be fishers of *men*?—surely you know better than this! Why have you gone back?' But the Lord is gracious!

There is a correctness that is very cold, and very cruel, and very critical, and very censorious. Such was the righteousness of the Pharisees. The Lord Jesus said that the righteousness of His own must *exceed* that of the Pharisees. Theirs was a righteousness that killed—the letter of the law: His is a righteousness that ministers life, the life of the Spirit.

### THE CHASTENING IS IN LOVE

And so, the Lord does not ruthlessly condemn their failure, their defection, their going back—He does not do that; He is too gracious. He lays hold upon it, and holds it before them in such a way that they may learn the lesson. The Lord is like that. If you read the book of Hosea, you will find that He is just like that. The pruning knife—and that thought had accompanied the words of the Lord Jesus: "Apart from me ye can do nothing"—the pruning knife cuts; it does not tear. The Lord must, of necessity, cut; the knife must sever. But let us remember, when we are in the hands of the Lord for His discipline, that His is a tender hand, a gentle hand, a nail-scarred hand; it is a gracious hand that holds the pruning knife. He will do what is necessary, but no more than is necessary. He is gracious, He is forbearing, He is loving, He is kind. But here is the lesson that *must* be learned: If the Lord is not in a thing—*Nothing!* If the Lord is in it—*Everything!*

Now, surely, we can see the lesson. The setting, the circumstances, the surroundings, are secondary; the Lord alone is essential—He is *the* essential. I feel that we need to be reminded of that in our individual lives, and we need to be reminded of it in our life together.

### LOVE FOR THE LORD THE ONLY BASIS OF SERVICE

The second thing that arises, I would suggest, from this passage, is that service (and into that word you can bring all that ought to be brought into it)—service for the Lord must spring out of a love for the Lord, *for the Lord*. Peter had made his loud protestations: "Even if I must die with

thee, yet will I not deny thee" (Matt. xxvi. 35). There was a real measure of love for the Lord in that declaration and intention, but it is evident that there was a large measure of self-love there too. It was necessary that Peter should be taken by the risen Lord and made to know that, if he was to serve his Master, it must be one hundred per cent love for Himself.

"Simon . . . lovest thou me?" "Simon . . . lovest thou *me*?" "Simon . . . lovest thou *ME*?" At the third repetition of the same question, Peter comes to the place where he is utterly broken, and, looking into the face of his Master, says, in effect: 'Master, You know; You know everything—my weakness, my impetuosity, but withal my affection for You. If everything else goes, I love You . . . I love You . . . I love You.' And the Lord Jesus says to him: 'That is enough; that is all right; that is what I want. Now you can feed My sheep; you can tend My sheep; you can feed My lambs.' It was the Cross in the first part of this passage; it is the Cross here in the second. The Lord had said to His disciples: "If any man will come after me, let him . . . take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark viii. 34). He says the same words to Peter here: 'Follow Me.' The basis of the relationship of the Good Shepherd with His flock is just this: "The good shepherd *layeth down his life* for the sheep" (John x. 11).

So to Peter, preparatory to His commissioning him as an under-shepherd of the sheep, He says: 'Do you love Me? really love Me? Is yours a self-sacrificing, self-denying, self-forgetting love?' Peter could not rise to that level—'Yes, Lord, I love you, but not like that. You know my heart, that I love You, but not like that.' We know well the two words that are used here for love—the one meaning 'to have affection for', and the other 'to love passionately'. Peter could not rise to the level of the second; but later he will, and in his letters the word he uses for love is invariably the second. In his first letter he makes it quite clear that the basis of being a true under-shepherd—and we may all take this to heart, though the words are addressed specifically to elders—the basis of ministry to the Church, to the flock, is pure love for the Lord, a love from which all that is personal has been purged. If our service for the Lord is less than we would have it, ought we not to go back to the Lord, and ask Him for a love like this—"Whom not having seen ye love (passionately)" (I Peter i. 8)?

### OUR WALK MUST BE IN LOVE

And finally, it is a love that, in a right kind of way, is detached. Of course, you will realise that

## A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

all that I am saying needs balancing—I am not denying fellowship. But if our individual lives are lacking, our fellowship will break down. Our failure in individual responsibility to the Lord cannot be covered or remedied in the assembly. The Lord says here to Peter: 'Peter, your place in My purpose can only be safeguarded by your careful walk with Me' (see 1 Peter ii. 11 - iii. 11, and particularly ii. 21). The Lord tells Peter what is to be in his life later (John xxi. 18, 19). Peter was quiet for a moment, for he knew what the Lord was saying; then, catching sight of John, the old Peter came up again: 'What shall this man do?' Oh, how we are caught out like that! The Lord says to you and to me: 'I want you to do this or that'; we listen for a moment, and then we say: 'Yes, but what about So-and-so?' The Lord said to Peter: 'Peter, that is nothing to do with you; My purpose for John is not My purpose for you. In the grand, great purpose, it is the same, for I have the Cross for John as I have for you.'

He did not actually say this, of course, but history gives us the sequel. John had to spend long

years in hard labour and confinement in the Isle of Patmos for the testimony of Jesus; and, if tradition is right, he also paid the utmost price with his life. But what the Lord is saying to Peter is: 'Peter, if you will watch your own steps, you will have as much as you can do! Watch your own steps, never mind your brother. In the other sense, tend the flock; feed them; care for them; nurture them. But do not watch your brother like that: watch yourself!' It is the message of the Cross; bearing the Cross. Some of us have heard this for years, but we still need it.

May we close upon what I feel is a more positive note. Surely, in all these three aspects of the chapter, it is the Lord that matters; the Lord in our lives, and the Lord in our service. May He come in, individually and corporately, in a new tide, sweeping our hearts with His love; overturning all that needs to be overturned, but coming in like this. His coming draws near: would it not be grand if the Lord came in in a fresh tide of love and life that carried us right through to His coming? May it indeed be so!

C. O.

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