The Mission, the Meaning and the Message of Jesus Christ

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by T. Austin-Sparks


This series of messages was preceded by the following note from Mr Sparks:

"The following is the first of four messages given by the editor at the Aeschi (Switzerland) Conference in September, 1968. They are the beginning of what may become a book to be published in due course. In editing these messages, some little additions have been made because, being given at the time in three languages, time was strictly limited."

The prayers which precede and conclude these messages were not published in the magazines but are included in the book published by Emmanuel Church with this explanation: "The prayers... were sent to us from a member of the body of Christ who attended the conference... All these prayers were prayed when brother Sparks gave this series of messages... In the reprinting of these messages we have added each prayer in the order it was breathed for the enrichment of the body of Christ."

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Chapter 1 - In the Gospel by Matthew

Now, Lord, we pray that as we are gathered together in body, Thou wouldest gather us together in Spirit. If our minds are not gathered together, draw them now to Thyself. Lord Jesus, Thou art the center of our lives, help us to forget everything but Thyself, help us to forget the place and the people and just be preoccupied with Thee. Help us to forget the messenger and the interpretation and help us, Lord, to listen with our inward ears to Thy voice. We are wholly dependent upon Thy Holy Spirit. Wilt Thou have regard unto our need. We ask in the Name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

I hold in hand a little book, and all that is in between the covers of that little book has to do with one thing, or three aspects of one thing: the mission, the meaning and the message of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. You know that it is the New Testament, and the whole of the New Testament is summed up in those words - the mission, the meaning and the message of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and it is that with which we are going to be occupied, as the Lord helps.

I want to underline this: that the New Testament is all summed up in those three things. As you know, it has many parts. There are twenty-seven books, but all the twenty-seven books make one whole. In some way each one of them tells us the mission of Jesus Christ, the meaning of Jesus Christ, and the message of Jesus Christ. There are twenty-one personal letters, and it is a wonderful thing that God chose to give us all this in personal letters. It is indeed wonderful what a personal letter can do when God inspires it! One-third of the whole New Testament is in personal letters. There are five historical books, the four Gospels and the book of the Acts; and then there is the one book, the Apocalypse, which contains history, prophecy and doctrine. The majority of the letters have personal names attached to them. The one exception is the letter to the Hebrews. There were evidently more writings by the apostles which have been lost, but two things of greatest importance remain to us.

Firstly, God has seen to it that everything has been preserved which is necessary to the life of a Christian. For the Christian life we do not need any more than what is in the New Testament, and I think you will agree that we have quite enough. When I was a young man I thought that I understood the Bible. Someone has said that the Psalmist must have been a young man when he said: "I have more understanding than all my teachers" (Psalm 119:99). Well, after sixty years of studying the New Testament, it is more than I can cope with today. God has seen to it that we have all that we need for life and conduct.

The second thing is this: the whole of the New Testament is a many-sided revelation of one Person. Every one of the twenty-seven books is a distinct aspect of one Person, and each one of those twenty-seven parts has a particular purpose, but very many Christians are quite unable to say what that particular aspect is. The great need is for us to read one of these books, and I advise that you read it right through at one sitting. Remember that the chapter arrangements are quite a mechanical thing not arranged until the fifteenth century. That is man's hand upon the book just for convenience, but the really valuable thing is to read the whole book through at once.

Now having read that book, you stand back from it and you ask yourself some questions: 'What does that book say to me?' Not: 'What is there in that book?' but: 'What does the book say to me? Now that I have read it, what does it amount to? What is its part of the whole? What is the result for me of having read that book?'
That is all preparing our way for the several things that we are going to consider. Our present purpose is firstly to show what we mean by what we have just said, and secondly to consider some of these parts of the whole. I want you to remember this as we go on - that we are trying to understand the very essence of Christianity. Having said that, we will start on our first part, which is the Gospel by Matthew. I want you just to look at two fragments, one at the beginning and one at the end. We shall refer to these more fully later on.

"The book of the generation of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1).

"But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, unto the mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him they worshipped: but some doubted. And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I command you: and lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the age" (28:16-20).

The Man Matthew

To reach a conclusion as to the message of Matthew we must first consider the man himself. Who and what was Matthew? Well, we know that his former name was Levi, and he got a double name - Matthew Levi. We know that he was a tax-gatherer, and he lived in Capernaum. Please believe that this is not a lot of unnecessary detail; the two things that I have just said have a tremendous history bound up with them. Matthew was a tax-gatherer and he lived in Capernaum. He was a man who was invested with Roman authority; he was employed by the 'army of occupation': he had sold himself to the enemy in the land. He had accepted Roman authority and he was a man under authority. If he said: 'I want so much as tax', all the Roman Empire stood behind him. That gave him a great deal of liberty, for he could put his own price on things, and he could be very exacting. Do you remember when John the Baptist was baptizing in the Jordan and all the publicans came to him? (I wonder if Levi was one of them! If he was, he had never been baptized.) What did John the Baptist say to these publicans? 'Do not exact more than you have a right to do!' So the publicans were men who liked to get more than they had a right to have. You are following me closely, are you not? Is your mind moving ahead of what I am saying? Levi was evidently a man who loved power, for he had imbibed the spirit of imperial Rome.

What about the time in which Levi lived? it was the time when Israel was in great weakness, for she was being ground under the heel of imperial Rome and had lost world authority. Put a ring round that word 'authority', for that is the key to Matthew.

There is one other thing to say about Matthew. The only thing that remains as the fruit of his life is his Gospel. That is something very wonderful! We don't know anything else about the subsequent history of this man. Was he an apostle? Yes - and yet the only thing that remains is a book, but what a book it is! He is the only man in the New Testament who calls himself a publican. He alone says: "Matthew the publican" (Matthew 10:3). Twenty centuries afterward we are studying that Gospel, and it has been studied all through those twenty centuries - the fruit of a converted publican. There are possibilities for us all!

Now it says that Jesus came to Capernaum, and as He passed by He saw Levi sitting at the receipt of custom. He said: 'Levi, you wicked man! You traitor to your country! You enemy of your own country! What are you doing there, Levi?' No, Jesus did not say anything like that. He looked at
Levi, He saw his account books and all his money and He saw all the people looking at Levi with anger. He knew the worst about him and He said: "Follow me!" That is all. And Levi arose and followed Him.

I think it is possible that Levi had overheard Jesus' teaching in Capernaum, and perhaps he had seen some of the miracles, so that when Jesus said: "Follow me!" he heard in those words something more than the words themselves. He heard something that appealed to his sense of authority. Jesus did not say: 'Levi, would you like to be one of My followers?' Nor did He say: 'Levi, I give you an invitation to come with Me.' I wish I could catch the tone of Jesus, but it would have been something like this: 'Follow Me!' There was authority in His voice. Young Christians, Jesus does not invite you to be Christians. He does not just say: 'Would you like to be one of My disciples?' The voice of Jesus is the voice of Divine authority. This is not a messenger of the King inviting; this is the King commanding. You refuse this call at your eternal peril. When Jesus says: 'Follow Me!' there is all the content of eternal destiny in that. This is where we strike the message.

Now note one or two other things about Matthew. Matthew already knew what was in the Bible. He knew the Scriptures, but the Scriptures had no authority in his life until Jesus came in. If you read through this Gospel by Matthew you will find that he repeats one phrase nine times, and that phrase is: "that it might be fulfilled as it is written." Now he had all that Scripture, but his Bible was not alive until Jesus came into his life, and when that happened, he said: 'Why, this is what the prophet wrote about. I am seeing Jesus everywhere now!' He could identify Christ in the Scriptures when he had wholly committed himself to the authority of Jesus. That is very instructive. You see, we are not saved because we know something about the Bible, nor because we have been brought up in a religious family. The very reality of Christianity is in an absolute committal to the authority of Jesus Christ.

Matthew's Two Focal Points

Now, just leave that for a minute, and note Matthew's two focal points. In his genealogy he says: "Jesus... Abraham... David" - 'the seed of Abraham, the seed of David'. So Matthew sees Jesus in relation to a chosen nation, and Abraham is the first of this new chosen race. Matthew sees Jesus in relation to a chosen people and then he says: 'of the seed of David'. What does David mean? David represents the Divine thought for this people, which is dominion in the world. First, then, a chosen people: that is Abraham. Then a people in absolute authority amongst the nations. That is the Divine thought.

Hold on to that very tightly. Presently Matthew is going to say to that chosen nation: "The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (21:43). This is tremendous! So Abraham is to have another nation! A heavenly people, and that people is to inherit the authority among the nations, to be the true seed of David. That is where you need to dip into the book of the Revelation: a great multitude out of every nation centred in the Throne.

The Basis of Christianity

There is another point of which I want you to make a careful note, because all the sovereign wisdom of God is found in this point. When the New Testament was put together, quite contrary to the usual way of men, the books were put in their wrong chronological order. The New Testament is not put together in chronological order. If it had been, Matthew would not have come in for a long time. When those men sat down to put the book together, for some reason which they did not know they
said: 'We will put Matthew at the beginning.' They were more under the government of the Holy Spirit than they knew! The Holy Spirit knew what He was doing, so He said: 'We will put Matthew first.' And why is Matthew first? For the best of all reasons: this Gospel by Matthew is the first message of Christianity, and it is the foundation and basis of all Christianity. What is the basis of Christianity? What would be your answer if you were asked: 'What is the essential basis of all Christianity?' The answer is in the last words of this Gospel: 'All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth.' The absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ is the foundation of all Christianity.

You notice how this idea had got hold of Matthew. It is he who tells us about the centurion who said to Jesus: "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" (8:9). I hear the echo of the voice of Jesus: "Follow me!" "He taught them as one having authority", says Matthew, "not as their scribes" - and the scribes were supposed to be their authority! The great note of Matthew's Gospel is the absolute right of Jesus to command and be obeyed, and you note that the message of the Gospel in the book of the Acts was: 'We preach Jesus Christ as Lord.' The claim of Jesus Christ is unmistakable in Matthew. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old... but I say unto you..." (Matthew 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). Six times He takes authority over "them of old", and "them of old" means Moses supremely. So on to the end, where it is all gathered up into 'All authority is given (has been given) unto me in heaven and on earth. Therefore go ye and teach all nations... whatsoever I have commanded you" - "have commanded". Matthew's Gospel is always called - by the Bible teachers - "The Gospel of the Kingdom", and the aspect of Jesus in it is that of the King. What we are saying is that the true characteristic of a true King is authority, and this is the imperative of Matthew, the erstwhile tax-gatherer, who worshipped authority so much as, first to sell reputation and honour and popularity to a foreign and hated power, and then to do the same as to this life for the heavenly, spiritual authority of Jesus Christ.

The Spirit in the World Today

Now why are we saying these things? The greatest peril that exists in the world today is the growing spirit of rebellion against authority. There is a spirit which is refusing all government and all authority in this world. It is the spirit of lawlessness, the spirit which claims independence of life and action. Children are casting off the authority of parents. They are demanding a life of absolute independence, and, sad to say, this spirit is amongst many Christian young people. If you would give them advice they will not take it, and if you say: 'That behaviour, that dress is not worthy of the Lord Jesus', they will not listen to you. But, of course, this is not only true of young people. It is a spirit that has come into the world, and that is the message of the letters to the Thessalonians, where it says that at the end the antichrist will be "the lawless one".

Spiritual Power and Spiritual Victory

I need say little more. All that sounds very hard and very terrible, but I will ask you to read again the book of the Acts, which is the book of spiritual power, spiritual authority, and spiritual victory. All the world rose up against the Christians. So much the worse for the world! Did Herod kill James with the sword? So much the worse for Herod! Read the sequel. Oh, no, here is an authority that is greater than the rulers of this world. These people may be poor people, and weak people from the standpoint of this world. They may be despised people. They may be poor, converted Levis, but they were joined to the "all authority in heaven and on earth". They were joined to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Dear friends, you and I may be poor specimens, so far as this world is concerned. We may be the
despised things and the things which are not, but Jesus Christ in us is greater than we are, and greater than this world's spirit.

But we come back to the point. The message of Matthew is the absolute Lordship and authority of Jesus Christ. Oh, may we all be found under that Lordship! It will come to mean much more than I am able to say. When all is said, it is victory at the end, for 'He must reign until He has made His enemies the footstool of His feet'.

But I do want to emphasize this thing: the beginning and the fullness of Christianity is in the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

_We do pray, our Father, Thou wouldest teach us what this means. May we be wholly committed to the Lord Jesus. We thank Thee that He is our Savior, but that is for us. We want everything to be for Him, therefore, we want Him to be Lord. Protect Thy Word in our hearts, in the Name of the Lord Jesus. Amen._
Chapter 2 - In the Gospel by Mark

Lord, Thou art the only Heavenly Teacher; none teacheth, Lord, like Thee. We cannot teach unless Thou teach us. We are here this morning as Thy disciples, those who are to be taught by Thee, take Thy Word and open it to us. Open our ears to hear, give us understanding, give us obedient hearts, lead us in Thy truth, Holy Spirit, do the work which Thou hast come to do. Our Lord Jesus said that when You would come, You would guide us into all truth. Do that work here today that the Lord Jesus may be satisfied. We ask it in His Name. Amen.

We have said that the whole of the New Testament is occupied with one thing in three parts - the mission, the meaning and the message of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and that every one of the twenty-seven parts of the New Testament contains some particular aspect of those three things. We went on to see how that is true in the Gospel by Matthew, and now we are going to see this in the Gospel by Mark.

Now I am going to ask you to look at quite a number of passages:

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1).

Those are the first words in this Gospel. Now we turn to the last words, in chapter 16:20:

"And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by the signs that followed."

"And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John whose surname was Mark" (Acts 12:12).

"And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministration, taking with them John whose surname was Mark" (Acts 12:25).

"And when they were at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John as their attendant" (Acts 13:5).

"Now Paul and his company set sail from Paphos, and came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departed from them and returned to Jerusalem" (Acts 13:13).

"And after some days Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us return now and visit the brethren in every city wherein we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they fare. And Barnabas was minded to take with them John also, who was called Mark" (Acts 15:37-38).

"Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is useful to me for ministering" (2 Timothy 4:11).

"She that is in Babylon, elect together with you, saluteth you: and so doth Mark my son" (1 Peter 5:13).

Who was Mark?
Those passages give the life story of Mark and we hardly need to take time to ask: Who was Mark? His full name was John Mark, and he was a cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10, R.V.). Now I want you to remember these details that I am giving you, for there is a significance bound up with very one of them. He was a cousin of Barnabas, and we shall have more to say about that presently. We know nothing about his father, but we do know that his mother owned the upper room in Jerusalem, and there was a lot of history bound up with that upper room! It was probably the room in which the Lord had the Last Supper before He died. John Mark knew all about that! He certainly knew all that happened in Jerusalem, at least during the last week of our Lord's life. There was a Christian man who lived in the first half of the second century, whose name was Papias, and he wrote this: "Mark, having become Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, as many as he remembered of the things said or done by the Lord." There is a very great deal to be said about that, as we shall see in a minute.

At that point, then, we want to recognize a very important principle. If you forget everything else, remember this. We are speaking about the mission, the meaning and the message of Jesus Christ, and we must recognize that those three things were written in the lives of the Lord's servants. Mark did not only write the history: he was that history. The history of Jesus Christ was very largely written in the experience of Mark, and that is what we are going to see.

Let us recognize that when the Lord gets hold of our lives, He does not just make us talkers about Him, nor does He just make us writers of books about Him. He writes Himself in our experience and such are the only true teachers and preachers. I know that I say a very responsible thing when I say that, but it is essential that when we speak or write about the Lord Jesus people see Him behind our words. That is why the Lord Jesus makes spiritual history in our experience. When we come to this man, John Mark, we have to see the man behind his Gospel, and that is why we read all those passages about his history.

The Nature of the Gospel by Mark

Let us begin by looking at the nature of his Gospel. Here we come upon a young man in a big hurry! He is very eager to get things done. He has no time for chronology, and times and places do not matter very much with him. His whole disposition is: let us get on with the work! This young man has only three words in his vocabulary. You read the Gospel and you will find them: 'straightway!' Have you noticed how often Mark uses that word? 'Straightway... and straightway...', and he goes on like that. The second word is 'immediately', and the third is 'forthwith'. Thirteen chapters begin with the word 'and'. You see, this young man is getting on with it.

John Mark does not give us any genealogy, nor introduction, but he begins at once: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ". It is the shortest of all the Gospels, but he puts into a short space a very great deal of material. He gives us just enough facts for action, so much so, that scholars believe that Matthew and Luke built their Gospels on Mark. And you notice the last words in his Gospel: "They went forth, and preached". This young man is getting on with the work! His idea is to get things done as quickly as possible.

That is our foundation. Now we begin on the message, which comes out of several things. Firstly, his title: "they had John as their minister", or, in other words, "as their attendant". They had John Mark to assist them in the work; he was a servant to the ministry. Just remember that as we go on.

John Mark on Trial
Then as to his history. The first thing that we have about John Mark's history is that he was put on trial. He was given an opportunity - "Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem... taking with them John whose surname was Mark". That provided this young man with a great opportunity. He was on probation. He had the opportunity of proving himself, and proving himself in difficulty.

**John Mark a Failure**

Secondly, John Mark was a failure. He could not stand up to the situation, so he went home. That nice upper room in Jerusalem was much more comfortable than this life with the apostles! So Luke says that "John departed from them and returned to Jerusalem". John Mark a failure.

Do any of you here feel that you have been a failure? Well, the story does not finish there. We come to the third doing, which is

**John Mark Recovered**

Why the failure? We have said that things were too difficult, but why were they too difficult? It would seem that John Mark's beginning in the work was without an adequate foundation. How did it come about that John Mark ever went with Barnabas and Paul? Do you notice the order in which I put the names? Barnabas and Paul! That order will be changed presently... but did John Mark go on a basis of family interest? Dear old Uncle Barnabas! And dear old Uncle Barnabas did want to give his dear young cousin an opportunity and it was out of family sentimentality that he wanted Mark to go with them.

Do you think that I am reading something into this? It was this very personal relationship which resulted in the separation of Barnabas and Paul. John Mark went into the work on someone else's experience and not on his own. I do want you to get the picture right! We know that Barnabas was a very loving man. He had a large heart. You remember the story of Barnabas! Paul, on one occasion said: "Even Barnabas was carried away" (Galatians 2:13) - 'You wouldn't think that Barnabas would ever be carried away!' And John Mark was captivated by this large-hearted, sentimental uncle. He was captivated by some strong, loving personality, and he was not captivated by Jesus Christ. His foundation was some man and not the Lord, and anything like that is bound to break down sooner or later. Do you remember what we said about Matthew? His message is the absolute foundation of Christianity, because it is the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ, and that was the weakness in the life of John Mark. Uncle Barnabas was lord! And the very best men are not good enough to go through this battle.

Well, the point is this: the absolute necessity for a personal experience of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It is a very dangerous thing to put a young man in responsibility if he has not got that experience! That is the ground of proving ourselves. Policy must never take the place of principle. Diplomacy says: 'Give the young man a chance', but principle says: 'Let only approved people be put into responsibility.'

Well, we see that Mark broke down on natural grounds, but he came to victory when he came under the mastery of the Lord Jesus. He could never have written this Gospel if that were not true. All his enthusiasm in this Gospel is to speak about the glory of the Lord Jesus, and nowhere do you find him speaking about what a wonderful uncle he had. It is always about what a wonderful Lord he had, and that meant a great change. We began with him as an attendant, and we end with him as a partner. He is not now just a busy servant, he is now a partner in the firm. He has passed from being unprofitable to being "profitable" - and that is the word that the great apostle Paul used about John Mark in the
"Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11, A.V.). What a big change! Do you want just to be an attendant, or do you want to be a partner in the gospel? One who is just doing a lot of things, or one who is carrying heavy responsibility? Well, we are getting nearer to the message.

The Place which the Gospel by Mark Occupies

The next thing is the place which Mark's Gospel occupies, and this again is a very significant thing. You know that Mark's Gospel was the first Gospel to be written. It was written before Matthew, before Luke and before John. Why then was it not given the first place? This is not natural at all. Seeing that it was the first Gospel to be written, surely it ought to have the first place! But the Holy Spirit knew what He was doing. He never works on natural lines, but on spiritual lines, and that is a different order from man's way of doing things.

So Mark has second place, and, oh! here is the message! All service and activity must come out of authority and submission. Matthew first: the authority of Jesus Christ and His absolute Lordship. Mark second: all service comes out of submission to the Lord Jesus. All action must follow the mastery of Jesus Christ. What is the chief characteristic of a true servant of the Lord? It is meekness. That is true of the Lord Jesus. Do you remember John 13, when He laid aside His robe girded Himself with a towel, the symbol of the bondslave, poured water into a basin, and then He - the Lord of glory, through Whom and by Whom all things were created - now divested of everything, was on His knees, washing the feet of sinful men! He was right when He said: "I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29)! Was there ever one who served the Lord more fully?

We have said that Mark was very closely connected with Peter in his writing, and I wonder if you remember the spiritual connection between these two? The Lord Jesus said something to Peter that he never forgot, and when he was about to be executed he said: "even as our Lord Jesus Christ signified unto me" (2 Peter 1:14). When and where did the Lord signify that to Peter? What was it that the Lord showed him? 'Simon, when you were young you girded yourself and went wheresoever you wanted to go. You took your life into your own hands and did as you liked. When you are old another will gird you and carry you where you would not go' (John 21:18). There you have the change between the old Simon and Peter in the end. We know that the whole history of Peter, when the Lord was here was of one who was wanting to have his own way all the time. Sometimes he would even tell the Lord that He was wrong! In other words he said: 'Lord, You are wrong in that! Lord, You don't know what You are saying!' This man must have a very deep history, for the government must be taken out of his hands and put into other hands. From being a dictator he must be a bondslave, and we know the story of how that happened: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat: but I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not: and do thou, when once thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren" (Luke 22:31-32). True service comes out of submission.

So both Peter and Mark embody the principle of subjection to the Lordship of Christ. I like that little fragment which we read in Peter's Letter. It is a very tender reference to John Mark: "She that is in Babylon... saluteth you: and so doth Mark my son". There is a lot of history in that!

Well, now I am going to say a thing which is very difficult to say. You may not all understand it, but I will try to make it simple. It is always a very perilous thing to sublimate the soul. Now you do not understand that, but let me explain. It is possible to put soulish emotion in the place of spiritual feeling and soulish emotion is just sentimentality. It is that kind of emotion which people call love: 'Oh, my dear cousin John Mark, I do want you to come with me into the Lord's work! You know I
love you very much, and I am quite sure that your dear mother in Jerusalem would like you to be a minister. Come along, Mark, and I will introduce you to Paul and get him to agree to your coming. Of course, that is all very lovely, but it is not spirituality. That is false spirituality, what I have called the sublimation of the soul. It is mistaking the soul for the spirit, and in that there is no deep brokenness of soul. Do you see what I mean?

Well, what does all this have to do with the mission, the meaning and the message of Jesus Christ? John Mark has shown us in his Gospel how very active the Lord Jesus was, how tireless He was in doing the will of His Father. There were times when they had no opportunity even for taking their food. Mark says: 'Straightway... immediately... forthwith... they went forth' and that is the story of Jesus. No, there is no laziness about the Lord Jesus! Paul's words were very fully fulfilled in His case: "Always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58). Jesus was wholly committed to the work of His Father, but - and it is a big 'but' - there was no one on this earth ever who was more in subjection to the will of His Father. Two words sum up the work of the Lord Jesus: submission and dependence. He said: "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day" (John 9:4). Yes, that is true, but He never did one work without first asking His Father if He should do it. For everything that He did, and every place to which He went, He asked the Father's guidance. With us it all seems so necessary, and the situation is so needy, and the soul says: 'You ought to do it', but not with Jesus. Do you remember the three temptations in the wilderness? They all seemed so reasonable and necessary, but never did necessity or reason govern the Lord Jesus. He was joined to heaven by the anointing Spirit. Why should the Son of God need to pray? Because He was dependent upon His Father. For guidance, for what He should do, He always referred to the Father, and for strength to do it He had to live by the Father.

That principle was written in the history of John Mark. It did not mean that either the Lord Jesus or John Mark did less because they were dependent upon the Father. I think they did much more, and they did much better, and their work remains to this day because "whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever" (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

I wonder if you have got the message of John Mark? Let me say to my younger brothers: Be John Marks in the last situation. Be utterly committed to Jesus Christ, and He will make you a very useful partner in the Kingdom.

*Lord, with all this that has been said, the one thing that we ask for is an impression. We may not remember all things, but make this deep impression on us - that a life wholly submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ will be a very fruitful life. Make all our hearts Thy throne and reign over us, Lord Jesus. Amen.*
Chapter 3 - In the Gospel by Luke

We do have very much for which to praise Thee, Lord, and our sense of continued need does not take from our thanksgiving. We do have to testify that Thou has been very merciful and very faithful with us. Having received the help which comes from God, we continue unto this day and while we have further requests to make, we do make them with thanksgiving. We bring, therefore, our petition this morning that we may have a fresh help from the Lord. We have our meetings, our ministries, we have our songs to sing, we have the blessing of fellowship but all this, Lord, will only pass with the time unless Thou dost an eternal work. We, therefore, ask that You will do an eternal work today. Do that which will remain in us all our life here and which will be shown in fruit in the life to come. Have mercy upon our foolishness, have mercy upon our weakness and help us to speak and to hear unto eternal profit. We do ask this for the glory of Thy dear Son, the Lord Jesus, Amen.

Luke, chapter 3, verses 23, 28:

"And Jesus himself, when he began, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli... the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God".

By way of linking up with what we have already been talking about, let me remind you that we have said that the whole of the New Testament is occupied with three things - the mission, the meaning and the message of Jesus Christ, the Son of God - and we have said that every one of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament contains some aspect of that mission, that meaning and that message of Jesus Christ. That is, the whole New Testament presents Jesus Christ in three ways. Then we proceeded to see some of these aspects in the New Testament books. In Matthew's Gospel we saw the foundation of all Christianity, which is the absolute Lordship and authority of Jesus Christ. In Mark we saw the activity of the Lord Jesus as under the government of His Father. Working backward, we saw that all work for God must come out of subjection to God. Of course, there is a great deal more to be said about both of those Gospels.

Now we go on to the third of these Gospels, the Gospel by Luke.

Who was Luke?

We must ask: Who was Luke? because we can only arrive at the message as we know the man. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that God's method is always to pass on His message through the spiritual history of the messenger; not to get a man to go to the library and study books, but to make the messenger the book. People have to be able to read the messenger and see the message of Christ in him. I think I dare not apply that any more closely!

This is particularly true in the case of Luke. We know that he was a companion of the Apostle Paul. He joined Paul at a certain time and in a certain place, and was his fellow-traveller for a great deal of the time of his ministry, and then, at the last, in the prison in Rome, Paul wrote: "Only Luke is with me" (2 Timothy 4:11). We know from the Letter to the Colossians that Luke was a physician, for Paul speaks of him as "Luke, the beloved physician" (4:14). I think there is a great deal bound up with that, for it is a little sidelight on a lot more. You know that the Apostle Paul is the only apostle who speaks about the Church as 'the Body of Christ', and in many ways he likens the Church to the physical body. He speaks of the members of the Body as hands and feet and ears and eyes, with all
the members dependent upon one another, needing one another, and all making one Body. Paul uses a Greek word which our doctor friends will appreciate: "syndesmos". Syndesmology is the science of ligamentary tissues, and it is by the ligaments that all the members are joined together and function.

Now, where did Paul get all that? I can see Paul and Luke travelling along together on their long journeys and talking about the Church. Presently brother Luke says: 'Paul, isn't the Church very much like the human body, with all the members and all the ligaments and all the functions making one body?' And Paul says: 'Thank you, brother Luke. I am sure the Holy Spirit has taught me something. Some day, when I get time, I will put that in writing.' And Paul did get a lot of time in his room in prison, and he wrote his letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians, which are all about the Body.

That is all very interesting, but I think there is a message in it. We have several doctors here with us, and you doctors ought to have very special light on the Body of Christ and you ought to use your knowledge for spiritual purposes. But not only doctors. Surely this says that we ought to use all our special knowledge for spiritual purposes.

Well, let us get back to Luke. We know that he wrote two volumes. Volume 1 is his Gospel, and Volume 2 is the Book of the Acts. Again, who was Luke? Well, we have said that he was a physician, but he was a Greek, the only Greek of the four Gospels. Then he tells us that he spent a time in research. Now, in order to be a doctor, of course, he had to do a lot of research; but then he turned from his medical research to research about the history of Jesus. In the first chapter of his Gospel he tells us that he made it his business to find out very carefully all that could be known about Jesus.

Now Luke, not being a Jew, did not know the Old Testament to begin with, so the first thing he had to do was to get the Old Testament and he worked his way carefully through it right from the beginning. He has put it down here in chapter 3! He takes Jesus and then he works his way right back through history, all through the Old Testament, until he reaches Adam. That was a good piece of original research! Luke says that he wanted to give his friend Theophilus the most definite, positive data concerning Jesus. Not only did he study the Old Testament closely, but he took a journey to Nazareth to do a very delicate thing - I think a thing that only a doctor could do. He went to ask the mother of Jesus about His birth, and he puts it down here. Mary told Luke the secrets of how Jesus was born.

Well, evidently Luke took more than one journey to make some enquiries. It looks as though he went to Bethlehem to see the registrar of births and deaths and to find in the records the ancestors of Jesus. Need I go into more detail? You have it all here in the first chapters of his Gospel.

So Luke was a very careful, particular student, but note this: he intended to write all this down for his friend Theophilus. That was all that he had in mind, but the Holy Spirit had a great deal more in mind. Luke did not know that he was writing the Bible. It never occurred to him that twenty centuries afterward a group of people would be in a mountain village called Aeschi studying what he wrote to his friend Theophilus, and through all the centuries between his writing it and today people have been studying his writings. The Holy Spirit had greater thoughts even than Luke's.

We never know what the Holy Spirit is going to do with what we write. Although we do not write the Bible, we may write a letter, or a little booklet, and years afterwards we discover that someone has had a blessing all through the years from that letter or from that little book. Pray whenever you write! Ask that the Holy Spirit may make you do better than you know.
Of course, all these are just fragments of the message, and not the real message. We are going to get to that very soon.


Luke takes up Jesus with Adam, then he takes him up as a little babe, and then he lands Him in glory. Do you notice the last thing that he says in his Gospel? "And he [Jesus] led them out until they were over against Bethany: and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:50-51).

Now we have come right on the line of the message: the son of Adam, the Babe of Bethlehem, the glorified Man in heaven. Luke takes up the Child of Adam and makes Him the glorified Man in heaven. Do you see the immense context of Luke's Gospel? The context is the whole human race from beginning to end. Adam was the first of the human race. Created by God with a great divine intention. It says concerning him: "Thou madest him to have dominion" (Psalm 8:6). God's thought in Adam for the human race was that it should have dominion. That is the revealed intention of God for the human race, but we know of the human tragedy: the human race in the first Adam lost the Divine intention. Put a circle round that word 'lost' and we have the heart of Luke's message.

The human race lost its Divine inheritance because it lost its right relationship with God. The whole of this Gospel by Luke is summed up in one verse: "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (19:10). Note the terms: "The Son of Man came to seek and to save." That is the mission and the meaning, and the message! In Adam universal dominion was lost to the human race. In Abraham an elect people lost their heritage; the seed of Abraham, after the flesh, lost their heritage. The New Testament is largely about that. That elect race was called by God to fulfil a special vocation - a heavenly vocation amongst the nations of this world. God said to Israel: "The Lord shall make thee the head, and not the tail" (Deuteronomy 28:13). They were called by God to be the governmental instrument among the nations, but that elect race lost their heavenly vocation.

"The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost": lost to Adam, lost to Abraham, lost to Israel, but found in the Son of Man.

The whole of the Gospel of Luke is concentrated into one chapter, the best known chapter in the whole of the New Testament - chapter fifteen. Everyone knows what is in Luke 15! It is the chapter of lost and found things. Its setting is very significant, for it begins with these words: "Now all the publicans and sinners were drawing near unto him (Jesus) for to hear him", and official Israel, in the persons of the Pharisees and the scribes, murmured: "This man receiveth sinners." That was a funeral march to the Pharisees and the scribes, but it was music to the sinners' ears! Then Jesus began to speak to the Pharisees and the scribes, and he gave them these three stories: The Lost Sheep, the Lost Piece of Silver, and the Lost Son.

The Lost Sheep

Israel had always been called 'God's flock', and God had always been called the 'Shepherd of Israel'. Jesus takes up that thought and says, in effect: 'Israel is no longer God's flock.' Really, He is implying that Israel, like the ninety and nine, is lost in its own self-righteousness and traditional security and exclusiveness. So He enlarges the concept and says: 'I have other sheep which are not of this fold, and those other sheep are these publicans and sinners.' In the rest of the New Testament the Lord's servants are called shepherds. Peter said to the elders of the Church: "Feed the flock of God"
(1 Peter 5:2), and "When the chief Shepherd shall be manifested" (1 Peter 5:4). We know that Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11) and when Israel is lost another Shepherd comes and has another flock. He makes up another flock out of Israel and out of the gentiles. Here is Luke! The new flock and the new Shepherd. From that which was lost He has found a greater flock than the one which was lost. How did this sheep get lost? The prophet Isaiah cries: "All we like sheep have gone astray" (Isaiah 53:6), and how did we go astray? How did we become lost sheep? "We have turned every one to his own way." That will take us back to the beginning of the human race when Adam chose his own way and the human race was lost.

The Lost Piece of Silver

There are many interpretations of this parable, but the most commonly accepted, and I think the right one, is this.

When a young woman was betrothed and married in Palestine her husband gave her a string of silver pieces. I expect you have seen pictures of such a young woman. You wear your necklaces round your neck, but they wore them round their foreheads. You wear a ring on your finger when you are married. Your husband gave you that when you were married and said, or meant: 'I give you this ring as a token that you are mine. I have taken you to be my own. This ring, or this string of silver pieces round your head, is the token that you have accepted me as your master and lord, and husband.'

Now there was a superstition connected with that string of silver pieces. If a woman lost it, or even one silver piece, everyone said: 'That means she has been unfaithful to her husband! She is not faithful to her marriage vows.'

Do you see the meaning of the story? Israel was the lost bride - the prophet Jeremiah said that the Lord espoused Israel to Himself, but they forfeited their honour as the Lord's bride. Israel lost the wonderful relationship of a bride to her husband, and the cry of all the prophets was that Israel was an unfaithful wife. You see what Jesus is saying to the Pharisees and the scribes: 'You have been unfaithful to your marriage vows to Jehovah! You have lost the most sacred relationship that anyone can have.' No wonder this woman is seen lighting the lamp and searching every corner of the house until she finds her lost piece of silver! Jesus enlarges the idea of the lost bride. Yes, there may be some in Israel who will be found in the Bride of the Lamb at the end, but that Bride is a bigger thing than Israel. He is making His Bride out of publicans and sinners.

I may not take the time to carry you over to the later New Testament to show you the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God "as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2), nor to speak about the marriage supper of the Lamb, but by these very references you can see that something was lost, but that which has been found is very much greater than that which was lost. The human race lost its honour because it lost its Lord, but the Revelation in the New Testament is of a Bride "without spot or blemish or any such thing" presented to the Bridegroom.

The Lost Son

Israel was formerly called 'God's son': "And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, my firstborn: and I have said unto thee, Let my son go..." (Exodus 4:22-23). Israel occupied the most wonderful position that it is ever possible to occupy. There is nothing more wonderful than to be sons of God, to be those whom God Himself has begotten, to be those who have been born out of heaven, to be those who bear the Name of God, to be those whom God brings alongside of Himself and honours them to represent Him. All that, and much more, is meant by
sonship.

Now the Lord Jesus, when He saw what Israel had lost, came to seek and to save that idea of God, to recover sonship. Sonship is a special Divine conception and is the dearest thing to the heart of God. Therefore it is the most wonderful thing that can ever be true of man, and it is that principle which is at the heart of this parable which we call 'The Prodigal Son'. All the wonderful privilege and honour of sonship has been despised by this prodigal. All that Divine conception has been regarded as of no account, and he goes out into the world and repudiates his sonship. Of course, he comes in the end to recognize what he has done. Jesus is very true to principle, and He makes this prodigal son say: "I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called thy son" (verse 21). There are principles in every one of those sentences. Israel forfeited that high position and honour. It is the principle of sonship that is the supreme factor governing!

Why did this son leave the father and the home? The prince of this world deceived him and told him that he could have something better in the world. Oh, that is what the great deceiver is always doing! He deceived Adam that way. He has deceived the whole human race in that way. He deceived Israel in that way: 'You can have something better in this world.' Jesus said that he was a 'liar from the beginning', and men are finding out today what a lie this world is.

The Message of a New Humanity

Now, having said all that, I have only now come to the message. What is the message of Luke? The Son of Man has come to secure a redeemed, new humanity. Paul calls Jesus 'the second man, the last Adam' (1 Corinthians 15:45,47). Out of Jews and gentiles Jesus is redeeming a new humanity. Listen carefully! The message of this Gospel, and of the New Testament, is this: God is not now particularly interested in Jews, nor in gentiles, nor in Protestants, nor in Roman Catholics, nor in Baptists, nor in Methodists, nor in Dutch Reformed, etc. God is not interested in those things at all! He is interested in men. All God's interest is in man, let the man be British, or Swiss, or German, or French, or any other nationality, white, black, yellow or brown. That does not matter to God, for His only concern is with man. Are you a man - and God called both woman and man 'one man' - and are you of the human race? God is interested in you as mankind, to take out of the nations, and out of the denominations, a people for His Name. Are you a "minister"? God is not particularly interested in you as a "minister", but He is interested in you as a man, and that is true of every other category. You do not think, do you, that because a man is a "minister", a servant of God, God lets him off when things are wrong? God does not say: 'Well, he is my servant so I will overlook all his faults.' Nor does He say: 'Oh, he, or she, is My child, so I will not take any notice of what is wrong.' No, God's concern with us is as people. The Son of Man came to seek and to save a lost humanity, and to make Himself the Shepherd in that humanity, to make His Bride out of that humanity, and to make His sons out of that redeemed humanity.

Where do we end? Where Luke ends, with the Son of Man, as the representative of the new mankind, glorified in heaven.

I hope I have not made you tired. It is all too wonderful and too big! I could only give you a little hole through which you see a new world, but do remember that in all God's dealings with us He is seeking to make another kind of humanity.

We are cast upon Thy goodness, Lord. We did ask that eternal values might be secured in this hour. May the eternal Spirit take hold of something that has been said and turn it into eternal value for the glory of the Lord Jesus. Amen.
Chapter 4 - In the Gospel by John

Lord, every day brings its fresh need. We feel that as we proceed in this thing together, our need becomes still greater. A little while and this time will be closed; therefore, it becomes so necessary that Thou dost work hard to get that which is in Thy heart. We feel that today brings a very special need. This day could be the very turning point of this conference. Lord, if Thou dost so view it, we ask for the special help that is needed. Lord, our need is for utterance - the release of the Word in us, and the release of us in the Word. Insofar as Thou dost take charge, do that today. Thou hast chosen to speak through man; but Lord, You must not leave it to the man, You must take over the man. Take Thine instruments out of their own hands into Thine. May this not be of man, but of God; we do not want anyone to ever say that it was of man. Our whole heart's desire is that everyone should say, "That was the Lord." If Thou wilt do this, all the glory will be Thine. So far as we are concerned, then, we put ourselves into Thy hands. Work and take the glory to Thyself, in the Name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

In order to arrive at the message of John there are two things to be noted. The first: that his Gospel is the last of the New Testament writings; and the second: the times and conditions in which he wrote.

The Place of the Gospel in the New Testament

It is very important for us to note that John's Gospel was the last of the New Testament writings. If the New Testament were put together chronologically, the Gospel by John would come after the book of the Revelation, but the Holy Spirit did not arrange that. He arranged that it should come in the place where we have it, and I think we shall see His wisdom as we go along. When the Apostle John wrote his Gospel he was a very old man, with long and deep experience.

Perhaps there is a little word of warning to young people there. Young people today are inclined to despise the old people, and to say: 'Well, they have had their time. Now it is our day. They belong to yesterday; we belong to today.' Now, young people, if that is your position, you must cut out the Gospel by John from your Bible, and I am quite sure you are not prepared to do that! When we have finished this message I hope you will be less prepared to do so.

The Times and Conditions in which the Gospel was Written

When John wrote his Gospel all the other Apostles had gone to be with the Lord. All the New Testament epistles had been written, all the Roman Empire had been evangelised, and all the New Testament churches had come into being. The great storms of persecution by Nero and other emperors were fading away. Even John was now released from his exile in Patmos. He was not writing the Revelation to the church which was in Ephesus, but he was writing his Gospel IN Ephesus. Jerusalem had been destroyed and the Jews had been scattered all over the world. That was the time in which John wrote his Gospel.

If we ask about the spiritual conditions of that time, we have only to read the first three chapters of the book of the Revelation. We are familiar with the letters to the seven churches in Asia, and in the majority of cases there was a state of serious spiritual decline. The Lord had to send through John messages of very serious warning. A very tragic state of spiritual declension had come about, and Christianity was very largely in a state of confusion. You only have to read John's first letter to realise that! John felt that he had to write for end times, and that the conditions which existed then
would be the conditions at end times.

I do not think that we today, if we believe that we are in the end times, fail to recognise very similar conditions. There was not only a historic feature in John's writings; there was also a prophetic.

Now John was evidently very troubled about the spiritual situations, and out of that troubled heart he wrote his Gospel. The question was, and is: What is the answer to such a situation? What is the answer to the problem of spiritual declension? What is the answer to the problem of spiritual confusion? John's Gospel is the answer. In this Gospel he gives what he is convinced is the need. When you read the Gospel by John always bear these things that we have said in mind.

One of the early Christian fathers, Clement of Rome, said, "John's Gospel is the spiritual Gospel", and that definition has stuck to this Gospel all through the centuries. John set himself to write not a new book on Church order, not a book on Church traditions, nor on new ideas and ways. That is what is being done now to try to solve the problem. Many books are being published on New Testament church order, and many new ideas are being introduced into Christianity. Some of them are the most extraordinary things! You cannot even find them in the New Testament! But what did John write as the answer? He wrote on two fundamental demands, two things which do not deal with the externals, but go right to the root. To use a medical term, he wrote not to deal with symptoms but to deal with causes. The two things with which John deals in his writings are:

1. The Person and place of Jesus Christ.
2. The meaning of Jesus Christ in God's universe, the meaning of Christ in the Divine economy, or order.

If we get clear on these two things we have the answer to all spiritual problems.

### The Person and Place of Jesus Christ

John begins on this matter right outside of history: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). You cannot put any date to that! Luke went right back to Adam, but John leaps back behind Adam and speaks of Jesus Christ, God's Son, in His eternal existence, before all time and before creation. Before John has finished this Gospel he will tell us that Jesus is praying to His Father, and in His prayer Jesus says: "O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:5). That was before the creation - a tremendous thing to remember!

If you were to read all that men have written and said about John you would certainly find yourself in great confusion. Some do not even believe that it was John who wrote this Gospel! Man in creation has brought his wonderful head over against the eternal Christ. There was a great preacher in London some years ago who preached a wonderful sermon on the greatness of God. He set forth the magnificence and glory of God, and all the people were holding their breath. They could hardly breathe for the wonder of God that was being set forth, and then the preacher pulled his gown up round him and said: 'There comes down the aisle there a little man, about the size of an umbrella, and he says: "Dr. Parker, I don't believe that there is a God!!"' Yes, little man and the great God!

Now, you see, John set himself to show how great is the Son of God: greater than man, greater than history, greater than time, and greater than all things.
Having introduced us to the Person, John proceeds to tell us that this One of whom he is writing created all things: "All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made" (John 1:3). He was the creator of all things, and then John brings this One into time: the great God of eternity, the great God of creation, is now present in human form: "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

Then John says that this One was the creator of light. He is the very source and embodiment of light. He is the light, and the generator of light: "...the true light, which lighteth every man" (John 1:5). Later John records that Jesus said: "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).

Further, John says that He was the source of life: "In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4).

**The Meaning of Jesus Christ in God's Universe**

Now what is it that we are coming to? John always goes beyond things to the Person, and he had one purpose in his mind when he wrote this Gospel. That purpose was to transfer everything to Christ, so that the Gospel of John is the Gospel of the great transition.

Here we see the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in putting this Gospel where it is. Matthew is the Gospel of the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ, showing that all authority is vested in Jesus Christ. Mark is the message of ministry under the authority of Christ. Luke is the message concerning God's new humanity. Leap over from Luke to the book of the Acts, which takes all those three up on new resurrection ground. John comes between Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts. He is the link between the two, the bridge over which they pass to the new dispensation. So John is the Gospel of the great transition. What is this transition? It has four aspects.

First, it is the transition from all the parts to one complete whole. Now, I want a whole conference on that alone! If you read the Gospel by John carefully you will find there, in the background, the history of the people of Israel. I dare not stay with all the details of that; but were Israel in the wilderness, needing bread? He said to the Jews: "Your father did eat the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which cometh down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die" (John 6:49-50). All the way through this Gospel John has in the back of his mind something in the history of Israel. I beg of you to read it in that light! These are all the parts of the Old Testament, and now John gathers them together and makes them complete in the one Person. Jesus is the completeness of all the parts of history.

Secondly, it is the transition from the historical to the eternal. John is showing an eternal significance to the historical. He is showing us a spiritual meaning in all these things in history.

Then it is the transition from the temporal, material, to the spiritual.

And fourthly, it is the transition from the earthly to the heavenly.

You remember the repeated phrase of the Lord Jesus in John's Gospel: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you...' How often the Lord Jesus uses that phrase! Most truly, emphatically, I say unto you...' And what was the connection of that double exclamation? "Verily, verily, ...I AM." "I am the true vine" (John 15:1). Israel was called 'God's vine', but failed to give Him the fruit that He sought. Israel was a false vine, but Jesus takes that over to Himself and says, most emphatically: "I am the TRUE vine." Israel was God's flock of sheep, and He was their shepherd. Jesus says: 'Verily, verily... I am the
TRUE shepherd'. The manna in the wilderness did not keep Israel alive for ever. "Verily, verily, ...I am the bread of life... this is the bread which cometh down out of heaven" (John 6:47-50). Everything in John's Gospel is a transfer to Jesus Christ.

The New Dispensation

Now we must come close to the real message. All this that John wrote was an argument for one thing: he was making it perfectly clear that the new dispensation which had come is a spiritual dispensation. Jerusalem had been the centre of government for the old Israel. Now Jerusalem has gone, but have men been left without a centre of government? Have we no seat of government? Why is John continually recording that Jesus was saying: 'I return unto the Father'? For this very thing! The seat, and the centre, of government for the Lord's people is now in heaven. It is neither in Jerusalem nor in Rome. The Church has no headquarters on this earth. You may do what you can to have a government for the Church on this earth, but you are contradicting this fundamental truth. Paul says that Jerusalem is above, and we are to get all our direction from above. That is how it was in the book of the Acts - the headquarters had gone from Jerusalem. Where was the headquarters of the New Testament Church? Some people have said 'Antioch', but I cannot agree. Even at Antioch they were going to their headquarters in heaven. It was there that the Holy Spirit said: "Separate me Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 13:2). John is transferring the city from the earth to heaven, and is showing that all that Jerusalem had been in the old dispensation was true of the Lord Jesus in the new.

I ask you: If it were like that now, would it not solve a lot of the problems? Would it not get rid of a lot of the confusion in Christianity? The prayer meeting, not the board room, is the way of the Church's government. Have the churches declined, as they did in the time of John? What is John going to say about this? He will teach us that the Church and the churches are no more than the measure of Christ in people. Quite early in his Gospel the Lord Jesus will say to the woman of Samaria: "The hour cometh, and now is, when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall ye worship the Father. Not in the great temple at Jerusalem, nor in the great Samaritan temple in Samaria, but God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit' (John 4:21-24).

What, then, is the Church? It is not a place, nor a building, nor a congregation, nor so many men and women gathered together. It is just the measure of Christ that is there in those people. If it is only two or three 'in Christ', that is the representation of the Church. Christ is the Church, and it is only the measure of Christ in people that makes the Church. The Church is more or less represented according to the measure of Christ. Confusion, yes, spiritual decline, yes; but bring Christ in and all that is dealt with. If we will remain on the ground of Christ most of our problems will be solved. Has Jesus gone to the Father? Yes, He has, but the Holy Spirit has come in His place. You see, we are keeping very close to John's Gospel.

Now, that is the nature of this dispensation. It is wholly a spiritual dispensation. But John does not only tell us that as to the nature, but he tells us that this dispensation is superior to all other dispensations. How superior this dispensation is to the one when Jesus was here on this earth! I wonder if you believe that. We have a little children's hymn, and, of course, we like to sing it with the children:

"I think when I read that sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men,
How He called little children as lambs to His fold:
I should like to have been with them then."
Now that is very sentimental! And it is very lovely. And lots of people still go to Palestine to see the places where Jesus was. While they are there they are living twenty centuries ago! Would you prefer to be back there with Jesus on earth rather than to be here today? Now think about that! You have missed the message of John if that is what you think. John is telling us that we are in a far superior time to the time when Jesus was on earth.

There was one word that Jesus was very fond of using: 'Greater.' You remember Jacob and his ladder - his dream when he saw a ladder from earth to heaven, with angels of God ascending and descending, and the Lord above it. Well, that was very wonderful, and out of that dream came the twelve tribes of Israel. But to Nathanael He said: "Thou shalt see greater things than these." 'You will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man, and this will produce a far greater Israel than the earthly Israel.'

**Works in the New Dispensation**

But the word that I really want to get to at the end is in chapter 14:12. Jesus has been speaking about the works that He has been doing, and then He says: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father." In the dispensation that follows the earthly life of the Lord Jesus greater works are going to be done than those He did when He was here. What were the works that He did?

At the Pool of Bethesda He raised a poor, impotent man and made him walk. That man was thirty-eight years old. They did not live so long in those days, and I wonder if you realise that even the Apostle Paul was only a little over sixty when he died. This poor man at the Pool of Bethesda only had, at most, a few more years to live, and then he died and went into his grave. 'Greater works than these shall ye do.' What are the greater works? In this context it is a far greater thing to put a man or woman on their spiritual feet than on their physical feet! It is a wonderful thing to see how we are kept by the power of God, for in the course of the Christian life there are many times when we might easily collapse. How often we have felt: 'I cannot go on any longer!', and yet, after many, many such times, we are still going on. Oh, the miracle of lives we have known which seem many times to be going to give up, but they are still going on. The spiritual is the greater work than the physical. Oh, the miracle of the walking power of the Holy Spirit! The same thing is true of all these other works of Jesus. Did He open the eyes of the blind? It is a far greater thing to have your spiritual eyes opened! Spiritual knowledge and spiritual intelligence are far superior to the natural. Did He work a miracle of feeding the thousands in the wilderness? Well, friends, would you not sooner have spiritual food than your breakfast this morning? We go on in this wilderness of a world, and the world can provide us with no food. It is a far greater work to provide spiritual food than to provide natural bread. What was the greatest work that Jesus did? After all these works, He crowns them with the raising of Lazarus. I suppose it would be thought to be very wonderful if we could raise the dead physically, but is it not a far greater work to raise the spiritually dead? 'Greater works than these shall ye do.' This is a greater dispensation than when Jesus was on the earth.

This is the message of John: the transition from the earthly to the heavenly, from the natural to the spiritual, and this will solve the problems and will answer the questions.

**The Need of Spiritual Understanding**

But when we have said all that: John knew one thing when he wrote his Gospel. He called all these works of Jesus 'signs', and he implied that the great need of this dispensation is spiritual understanding. Any ordinary person can see the thing that is done. The Jews saw the things that Jesus
did, but they were not saved because they did not have the spiritual intelligence to understand the deeper meaning. The great need is spiritual intelligence. The Holy Spirit has come to be spiritual intelligence. May He give us spiritual intelligence so that we understand the true nature of the dispensation in which we live!

We know, Lord, that it is this very thing that creates the difficulty. Oh, Lord, we do pray that we may be brought into the superiority of this dispensation, the superiority of spiritual understanding, the superiority of spiritual power - the power of Thy resurrection. Open our understanding to what we have been seeking to show this morning. Make this message alive. We pray that it may not be so many words, that it may be light and life. Watch over the word and watch over our hearts. In the Name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.
Chapter 5 - In the Book of the Acts

Lord, we have just asked Thee to do some very big things in us. We have asked Thee to completely change our minds about things. We have asked Thee to give us an altogether new idea of liberty and strength. We have prayed that Thou wouldest completely reverse our disposition. We wonder what will happen to us if Thou dost answer that prayer. All we can say to Thee is that we agree with it and we ask Thee to do these things. Make us Thy captives, Lord, in order to be conquerors, help us to deliver our souls. Lord, do Thy work in us, take hold of Thy Word this morning and use Thy Word to work in us. Lord, we do pray that what we hear this morning may be the Word of the Lord. Thy Word is like a sword that pierces, Thy Word is like a hammer that breaks in pieces, Thy Word is like a fire that melts, Thy Word is like a lamp unto our feet. Thy Word is like ointment poured forth. If Thou dost break us by Thy Word, so heal us by it. We put ourselves into Thy hands do with us as is good unto Thee. In the Name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

The importance of this book is best recognised if we were to estimate the importance of it being in the New Testament at all. I wonder if you have ever thought of what the New Testament would be without this book! Perhaps at some time you would like to read the New Testament and leave this book out. There would be a whole lot of questions that you could never answer, and you would be in complete confusion. This book, therefore, is of very great importance to the whole New Testament.

Historically, it is Luke's second volume, and it gives us the beginning and the spread of Christianity. It tells us how all the rest of the New Testament came to be written. That is the historical aspect but spiritually there is another aspect, and that aspect is backward and forward.

In the first words of this book Luke tells us of what happened in the past - that he informed his friend of what Jesus began to do and to teach. That is the backward look. Then Luke proceeds to look forward. In effect, he says: 'Now I am going to tell you what Jesus continued to do.' But there is this particular thing that we must note: all that is in this book is the securing of the ground for the rest of the New Testament. All that is in the rest of the New Testament is built upon the ground of this book. After Acts the New Testament is occupied with the doctrine, or the teaching, and the book of the Acts is the story of how the ground was secured for the teaching.

As to the backward look, this book of the Acts takes up Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and makes those four Gospels actual. Now I want to remind you of one of the first things that we said at the beginning of these messages. You remember that we said that the best way of understanding the New Testament is to read a book and then having read it, to stand back and ask yourselves the question: 'What is the main impression that has come to me by reading that book? This is of particular importance with regard to the book of the Acts, for when we stand back, after reading it, we see the Holy Spirit making the Gospels real and actual in history. Pentecost truly governs this book, but it will be well for us if we stand back again from that word 'Pentecost', and if we ask ourselves this question:

What was Pentecost?

Can your minds work quickly enough to give an answer? If I asked you now just to put down on a piece of paper what Pentecost was, I wonder what you would say! I know what a lot of you would say: 'It was the advent of the Holy Spirit.' You would be quite right. Some of you would say: 'It was
the baptism of the Holy Spirit', for that is the meaning of the word 'Pentecost' for a great many people, but when you press the question closer, what was, and what is, the baptism of the Holy Spirit? You know what a lot of people would say. It is not necessary for me to discuss that! However, what I am getting at is this: there is an altogether inadequate conception of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost has come to mean a very much smaller thing than it really is, and that is what I want to show in the first place. Not one of us will doubt the necessity of the Holy Spirit. Call it 'Pentecost', 'the gift of the Holy Spirit', 'the baptism of the Holy Spirit', or what you like, but, really, what was it?

Taking Up the Gospel by Matthew

Firstly, the coming of the Holy Spirit was taking up the Gospel by Matthew. What have we seen to be the message of the Gospel by Matthew? We have seen it to be the absolute Lordship and Authority of Jesus Christ - and that is the beginning of Pentecost. That is the first meaning of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and we do not know the meaning of the Holy Spirit until we recognise that. Now read the book of the Acts in the light of Matthew! "They... went everywhere preaching..." (Acts 8:4), and what was the chief note in their preaching? Jesus Christ is Lord! (Acts 10:36.) The absolute Lordship and Authority of Jesus Christ runs from the beginning to the end of the book of the Acts.

This is the primary test of our having the Holy Spirit, which ought not to be something subsequent to our conversion. This is not the extra gift, nor the second blessing. You look into this book and see! From the very beginning these people who came to the Lord came into His Lordship. They accepted Jesus Christ as Lord, and they came under His authority, and that was the secret of the power of the early Church. I know it was that that cost them their very lives. If you stand on the ground of the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ something is going to happen, but do you want nothing to happen? Yes, things happen in this book. All hell was stirred to its depths, all men were compelled to give a reaction of some kind, and all heaven was very interested. The supreme thing in heaven and earth and hell is the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and making Jesus Christ Lord is the first work of the Holy Spirit in a life. I do not just want to say these things; I do want them to be applied. I hope that no one will read this message without making Jesus Christ Lord in a new way, without making Him Lord in all the practical things of your life and in the way you behave in this world, in everything that people see about you, so that you are captivated men and women, young and old. So the book of the Acts takes up Matthew.

Taking Up the Gospel by Mark

It also takes up Mark. What is the message of Mark? It is that a life under the authority of Jesus Christ is marked by a consuming concern that other people should know the Lord, a great passion that others should receive the Lord and that He should have a full place in them. You remember John Mark? I hope you will never forget him! That young man in a hurry! He had lost time. He returned from the work, and there was a period in his life which was lost to the Lord Jesus. Then he was recovered and his whole spirit from that time was: 'I must make good all the time that I have lost', and so John Mark is: "Straightway... straightway... straightway...".

John Mark, therefore, is the representative of a life under the authority of Jesus Christ, and he takes the spirit of Jesus Christ and says: 'I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work.' Now you see in the book of the Acts how that spirit is found. "They... went everywhere preaching", and if you say to me: 'Well, of course, that applies to the apostles', may I remind you that it applied to all the believers that were in Jerusalem "scattered abroad" (Acts 8:4); when the hammer of persecution came down on the Church at Jerusalem and the
believers were scattered everywhere. The Greek word for what they were doing is very interesting. I notice that our interpreters have got into difficulty with this word! Well, if you don't understand the word, you know the thing. You can see it on the street any day, and after every meeting of a conference. Two or more people get together, and what are they doing? Well, they are just... gossiping! That is the word. These believers went everywhere just gossiping - gossiping the Gospel. They were talking, talking everywhere about Jesus Christ. That is actually what is said about them. That is in the book of the Acts - but that is the later spirit of John Mark in Acts. He is moving everywhere and is talking about Jesus Christ. Do you see that this book of the Acts does take up Matthew and Mark?

May I just stop here to say something especially to my younger friends? It is quite evident that after his restoration John Mark was a released young man. Before that, although he was a disciple, he was just tied up, and his relationship to the Lord Jesus was in severe limitation.

Now what I want to say is this: You will never get your spiritual release until you become one who testifies. This is a law of the spiritual life. I do not present myself to you as an example. You may not believe it, but I was a young man once! I came to the Lord when I was in my teens, but for quite a time my spiritual life was locked up. Yes, I loved the Lord, I had given my heart to Him, but my life was all tied up until the day came when I stepped into the middle of an open-air meeting and gave my simple testimony to a large crowd of people. It was an awful business! I went home saying: 'I will never do that again!', but it turned out to be my release, and from that time my spiritual life was completely free. That is when I started my preaching life, and that has gone on to this day. The point is that you will never get full release in your spiritual life until you tell someone else about it.

I had a great friend, and he was a great soulwinner. I was not very much impressed with his preaching, but he was a wonderful personal worker, and I am sure that in eternity a great number of people will owe their salvation to that man. Now he learned this principle. One day he went out and was wondering where he was to go to meet some souls and tell them about the Lord Jesus. He was just passing the army barracks, and inside the gate he saw two soldiers. One of them was on guard; he had his gun over his shoulder and was marching up and down. On the other side there was another soldier, just standing and watching. He had the stripes on his arm, and was just watching to see that things were done properly. My friend walked in through the gate, and when the soldier came to stand still, quite contrary to regulations, my friend asked him if he knew the Lord Jesus. Well, the result was that this soldier accepted the Lord Jesus. My friend said to him: 'Now that you have accepted the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, shout over to that other man and tell him what you have done!' He had much experience, and he knew quite well that while we keep it to ourselves we are not free. If you are an apostle, go everywhere preaching the Lord Jesus. If you are just a simple believer, talk about the Lord Jesus everywhere and you will be a true John Mark. The book of the Acts takes up that principle of the Gospel by Mark.

**Taking Up the Gospel by Luke**

What about the Gospel by Luke? What did we say about that? We saw that the message of Luke is the message of a new humanity, a new kind of man, and this new kind of man is after Christ. It is not mankind according to Adam, but mankind according to Christ. Is it necessary for us to point that out in the book of the Acts? The work of the Holy Spirit is not only to make Jesus Christ Lord and to make us active witnesses to the Lord Jesus; it is also to make us like the Lord Jesus. It is to reproduce the Lord Jesus in us, and this is the proof as to whether we have received the Holy Spirit. This is what Pentecost means: a change in our nature from Adam to Christ.
Taking Up the Gospel by John

And then we pass on to John. You remember what we said about John's message? Everything in this present dispensation is of a heavenly character and is spiritual in its nature. I will gather that up into one word. Near the end of John's Gospel he gives us that wonderful prayer of the Lord Jesus. Jesus is praying, is pouring out His heart to His Father, and the burden of His prayer is these men the Father had given Him. He is praying for them, and what does He say to the Father about them? "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14). That is New Testament Christianity, and the work of the Holy Spirit is to make that true of every one of us - "not of this world". Romans 12:2 says: "Be not conformed to this world", and do you know what the literal words are? "Do not take the fashion of this world." That is very searching!

Well, I must leave that word with you, especially to the younger people. Are you trying to be like the people of this world in your fashion? I will say no more, but I will ask you to ask your own heart about that. You will never overcome the world on its own ground. The Church has tried to do that, and the world has defeated it. Our victory in the book of the Acts is on the ground that we are not of this world. So the Acts takes up John, and, as I said, makes ACTUAL Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Teaching For the Spiritual Life

When the ground has been secured and men and women have responded to that fourfold message, then the teaching follows. We have the forward look from Acts. All these people in all these places mentioned in the Acts will receive the teaching for their spiritual life.

Now note this again. The teaching demands the position. Unless you are in the position the teaching will do you no good. You may have it all in your notebook, or, if you have a good memory, you may have it all in your head, but it will do you no good whatever unless you are in the position. We can only understand the teaching, and grow up into Christ, if Jesus Christ is absolute Lord. There are multitudes of Christians who have just come to a standstill in their Christian life. You try to talk to them about the fuller things of Christ and they look at you as though you were talking in a language they had never heard before. They do not understand what you are talking about. Well, they have come to the Lord, but for them the Lord is not absolute Lord, and therefore they cannot understand the teaching. They are still babes in Christ. For spiritual understanding and spiritual growth complete committal to the Lord Jesus is necessary.

Again, we cannot understand the teaching or grow up into Christ unless we are very practical in our Christian life. That is John Mark - being very practical about the Christian life. Not just theory, nor doctrine, but practical life. That is essential to spiritual knowledge and spiritual growth.

Then we cannot understand the teaching or grow up into Christ unless we are dedicated to be like Christ. That is Luke - manhood after Christ. If your heart is wholly set upon being like the Lord Jesus He will give you an open heaven, that is, the Holy Spirit will come and teach you and work in you according to Christ.

Finally, we cannot understand the teaching, nor grow up into Christ unless we are not conformed to this world. There is really no such thing as a 'worldly Christian', that is, from the New Testament standpoint, but actually there are many Christians who are still of this world. Do you know, dear friends that this world lies under a curse? Do you believe that of the devil? He was cursed in the Garden of Eden. The symbol of Satan is the serpent, and the serpent has no wings - it cannot get off
the earth. The symbolism is that this earth is a cursed thing, and the Scripture says that "the whole world lieth in the evil one" (1 John 5:19). If you touch this world you touch death, that is, spiritual death. The Word of God knows what it is talking about, and therefore, with very great meaning, it says: "Be not conformed to this world." If you do Satan will make a mess of your life. Brother Watchman Nee always spoke of this as 'the earth touch'. If he saw any Christian who was not going on with the Lord, who had no spiritual power in his life, he said: 'There must be an earth touch somewhere.'

Does this all sound very serious? Well, it is serious. It is not my desire to be hard, but I am trying to help you to see the way of a true Holy Spirit life, and so I come back to what I said about Pentecost. Do you see how much greater Pentecost is than what people think it to be? This is what Pentecost meant in the book of the Acts, and this is what it will always mean. So I say to you what the Apostle Paul said: "Think on these things."

Once more we pray, oh Lord, make this all very real to us. Oh, teach us what it meaneth, make this true and real in our lives. May the presence of the Holy Spirit in us mean these things. We can only ask Thee to do it. Thy Word has been given, ours is the responsibility to respond to it. So help us, Lord! In the Name of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, Amen.
Chapter 6 - In the Letter to the Romans

Our hearts are very much out to Thee, oh Lord, concerning this hour. Thou hast been very gracious to us during these days. We can see that having received the help which comes from God, we continue until now. Our confidence is that having helped, Thou would still help. However great the help Thou has given, we are still in need. We are very ready to confess our dependency upon Thee; take account of this, we pray, for unless the Lord helps us, we are helpless. If it could please Thee, give a very special blessing this afternoon. Crown this ministry with something very definite. Again, it is the voice of the Lord that we want to hear. Deeper than the speaking and the interpreting, may we all be given an ear to hear the voice of the Lord. In Thy great mercy and faithfulness answer us, we ask this all for the glory of Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In this series of messages our object has been to reemphasize the true nature of Christianity, and we have gathered that into three things - the mission, the meaning and the message of Jesus Christ. In the four Gospels we found the foundation position of Christianity, and in the book of the Acts we saw that position preached by the Apostles and the scattered believers. There that position was demonstrated by the Holy Spirit by signs and wonders - what the New Testament calls the 'powers', that is, the many aspects of the power of the Holy Spirit. And it might be as well for us to note that that was the object of the Holy Spirit's working at that time - to demonstrate that the message was true, to give evidence of the truth of the foundation of Christianity. My own conviction is that the signs and wonders relate to beginnings, to the foundation position. They do not belong to the later development of spiritual life, but to the elementary stages of Christianity.

Then in the book of the Acts the position proclaimed was accepted in various degrees. What was proclaimed was received with varying degrees of understanding. Some received the message very earnestly, with a whole-hearted committal to the position, and among these were the Thessalonians, the Ephesians and the Philippians. These, and those like them, made a very whole-hearted committal to the Lord, but the response of some was a compromise between Judaism and Christianity. Their attitude was that Christianity was only a plus to Judaism, and they very largely remained Christian Jews. Thus they had failed to recognize the true nature of Christianity. There were others who made a response, but with a compromise with paganism, that is, they brought over their paganism into Christianity. Of these the Corinthians are an example.

Now the letters of the New Testament were intended to explain and reaffirm the true nature of Christianity, on the one side to correct the misunderstandings, and on the other side to recover from declension. Such were the letters of John.

This is the way in which we should read the New Testament: A fundamental position made clear - that is the Gospels. A fundamental position demonstrated - that is the book of the Acts. Then there follows the section dealing with fundamental experience. The position is not enough: the experience must follow. So the later part of the New Testament has to do with the basic experience of the position, that is, the true nature of Christianity in spiritual experience. I will not go back over the Gospels, but let me illustrate from the Gospel by Matthew.

We have seen that the message of the Gospel by Matthew is the absolute Lordship and authority of Jesus Christ. Now many people believed that as a doctrine, and accepted that as a position at the beginning of their Christianity - as far as they understood it - but there can be a very great difference
between \textit{believing} that Jesus Christ is Lord and \textit{experiencing} that truth. Many of these letters in the New Testament show that the people accepted it as doctrine but did not live accordingly.

We are now going to look at the letter to the Romans, for this is a very clear example of what I have been saying. It is the foundation of Christian \textit{experience}, a correction of misunderstanding and an explanation of the true foundation of experience.

\textbf{Right Standing with God}

Many definitions have been given to this letter. The disciples of Luther and his school have their own name for it. The reformers always called this letter to the Romans by one name, and most of you will know what that is, but I am going to use one title for this letter. It is a phrase found in a later translation: "Right standing with God" - a position which is absolutely acceptable to God. Everybody will agree that it is essential to true spiritual experience! That is not only the position of the New Testament - it is the issue of the whole Bible. Before God can do anything in any life there must be a right position with Him. You will remember how often in the Old Testament God had to stand back from men until they got into a right position with Him, and that is brought out so clearly in the New Testament. It decides everything as to whether God is going on with us and we are going on with God. If God is not going on with you, then examine your position in relation to God. He is waiting for something, and that is your adjustment to Him.

Let us take a very simple example in the Old Testament. You remember the Prophet Elijah. After that great event on Mount Carmel Jezebel, the queen, threatened his life. Now we are not going to blame Elijah, for if we do we shall be blaming ourselves! Jezebel threatened his life, and then Elijah fled for his life. He fled to try and save his life. The next thing we see is Elijah under a juniper tree and saying: 'Lord, take away my life.' What does the Lord do? Does He get under the juniper tree with Elijah and say: 'Poor Elijah, I am so sorry for you!?' No, He stands outside and says: "What doest thou here, Elijah?" In effect, the Lord said: 'I am not going to get under juniper trees, Elijah. That is not the right position with Me. If you, Elijah, want Me to go on with you, get out from under your juniper tree. I am not coming on to your ground - you must come on to Mine!' The juniper tree is a cul-de-sac, and the Lord does not believe in those things. We must be in a right standing with God if He is going on with us. That is the message of the letter to the Romans.

\textbf{The Representative of the Human Race}

As you know, the first five chapters of this letter are divided into two sections. The first section has to do with the pagan world, and the second section has to do with the Jewish world, and at that time these two sections comprised the whole world. The Holy Spirit, through the Apostle Paul, shows that both sections - that is, the whole human race - are not on good standing with God. The whole race has fallen out of God, and it is in that context that the mission, meaning and message of Jesus Christ are presented in the New Testament. It is in that relationship that the Lord Jesus is introduced, and He is introduced as the representative Man. You will see in chapter 5 how He is connected with Adam, and in chapter 4 He is connected with Abraham. He is of the seed of Abraham. Adam represents the human race as a whole, and Abraham represents the human race in Israel, but all are gathered together on to this ground: Not one man is found to be in right standing with God. The statement here is: "There is \textit{none} righteous, no, not one" (3:10).

From chapter 5 we move into chapter 6, and I advise you to remove the chapter divisions. Chapter 6 is not a new chapter, but is the continuation of chapter 5. In chapter 5 all men are dead, which is how God views the human race. 'In Adam all died', and the argument here is that it is the same with Israel.
Israel is a part of the human race and is included in this position: 'all are dead'. What is it that we come to immediately we begin to read what is chapter 6? It is a baptism. And what is this baptism? Well, of course, it is the baptism of the Lord Jesus, but what does that mean? Jesus is the representative of the human race. He is the Son of Man. Why must He be baptized? That is, why must He die and be buried? Because He is taking the place of the whole human race. The Cross of the Lord Jesus is a demonstration of the fact that all men have died, and the Apostle Paul says here that when Christ died all men were represented. The Cross was a universal baptism. Perhaps you would think that I was preaching heresy if I were to say that every unsaved person has been baptized, but please understand me. All men have died in the death of the Lord Jesus, so it is the whole world that has been baptized in the Cross of Jesus Christ. In the death of Christ the whole world is dead in the eye of God, but, although all men have been baptized in the death of Christ, all men are not raised in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The death is universal, the baptism is universal and for the whole race, but the resurrection is selective. On resurrection ground only one Man in God's universe is in right standing with God. You remember how, after His baptism the heavens were opened and a voice came out of heaven saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). God did not say: 'This is My beloved world. In it I am well pleased.' On resurrection ground only One is in right standing with God.

This, then, is the message of chapter 6. To be in right standing with God men have to say: 'His death was my death. When He died I died. That is my natural position in the sight of God.' But then, secondly, men have to say: 'His resurrection was my resurrection.' You know the simple words of Romans 6:5: "If we have become united with him by the likeness of his death, we shall be also by the likeness of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him." To be in right standing with God demands that we shall be, by faith in Jesus Christ, dead and raised. We have to accept His death as our death. The world will not do that, and Israel would not do that. Therefore the world and Israel remain dead in the sight of God, and it is only those who have accepted that by faith and have then taken their position in Christ risen who are in right standing with God. It is only with such people that God can go on.

And remember that this is not only an initial position; it is an abiding principle. Paul said: "Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body" (2 Corinthians 4:10). In effect he said: 'I die daily. Every day the Cross of the Lord Jesus has a meaning in my life.'

The Position Established

Now let us go on with this letter. Chapter 6 shows the position of spiritual experience. We move on, without dividing into chapters, and presently we come on to what is shown as chapter 8, and here we find what has happened in chapter 6. A great divide has been made.

First, the position is established: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (verse 1). All the condemnation has been exhausted in the death and burial of Christ. To those who by faith are in Jesus Christ risen from the dead there is no more condemnation. I wish we knew the truth of Christianity! If there is no condemnation, then we must be in right standing with God! There is no controversy between God and us. Do you not see how important it is for us to recover the true nature of Christianity? There are many Christians who live out their lives under condemnation. Even when they pray they bring their miserable selves to the Lord, and say: 'Lord, I am no good. I am a miserable creature!' And what does the Lord say? Well, sometimes He does not say anything at all. If He did say anything, it would be: 'I told you that two thousand years ago in the Cross of Jesus Christ. I knew more about you then than you know about yourself, but if any man is in Christ Jesus
there is no condemnation.'

But the Apostle goes on with a provision. He uses this little word: "Who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit" (verse 4), that is, those who walk on the ground that they have died with Christ and risen with Christ. The great divide has been made by the Cross between flesh and spirit. What do we mean by that word 'flesh'? The flesh is the self-life: my will, my desires, my ideas, anything that is just me. If you know anything about yourself, you know that you are not good, and you will agree with the Apostle Paul, who said: "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing" (7:18). The flesh is the self-life in any, or all, of its forms. So that this statement in verse 4 of chapter 8 could be: 'Who walk not after the self-life.' 'I am going to have what I want. I am going to take the way that I want to take.' The self-life has very many complexions.

Now these people do not walk after the flesh. It says: 'They walk after the spirit.' What is that? That is the God-life - not the self-life, but the God-life. Now it is: 'What God wills, what God desires. It is God's thoughts that I want.' There is no condemnation if we walk the God-life.

What does this word 'walk' mean? Well, we are on a spiritual journey. That comes out a little later. We are on the journey of a new nature, and on this journey there is a new discipline. The journey is not geographical, but from what we are in ourselves to what we are in Christ. You know, you can shorten that journey, for you get there sooner or later according to this discipline. What is the end of the journey, of this spiritual walk? Now that comes out at the end of this chapter 8: "Whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son" (verse 29). That is the end of the Journey.

There are two conformities here in this letter. In chapter 8 it is "conformed to the image of his Son", and in chapter 12, verse 2 it says: 'Be not conformed to this world'. 'Be not conformed to this world, but be conformed to Christ.' That will determine how quickly you are covering the journey and how quickly you are getting to the end! Those who are conformed to this world are making very slow spiritual progress, but those whose hearts are wholly set upon being conformed to Christ make very quick spiritual progress.

You can see these two kinds of Christians. I can see today many young Christians who have started on the journey but have either come to a standstill or are making very slow progress, and when I look to see why it is I see that it is because they are taking the fashions of this world.

So the true nature of Christianity is to be conformed to the image of God's Son. That demands our acceptance of His death as our death, and demands that we live on the ground of His resurrection. It also demands that we do not live the self-life, but that we do live the Christ-life. The life of the Lord Jesus is to be reproduced in us by the Spirit, and that is what it means to "walk after the spirit". It does not say: 'Stand still', and it does not mean: 'Take a first step.' It means: 'Keep on walking and do not allow this world to stop you going on with the Lord.'

Well, that, in brief, is the message of this letter to the Romans. This is the foundation of Christian experience. You have accepted the foundation position; now accept the foundation experience, and that foundation is standing in right position with God, seeking His grace that in every day, and in every thing we are in good standing with God. On that ground we shall reach the goal - conformity to the image of His Son.

I do not think that there is anything to be desired more than that. What is the greatest desire in your life? Is it not to be like your Lord, and that all that is true of Him shall be true in you? May the Lord
help us to understand!

Now go back to your letter to the Romans and read it again in the light of these words: 'Being on right ground with God.' It is the letter of an utter committal to God in Christ through the Cross.

We do ask Thee, Lord, to write this deeply into our hearts. We want to go on with Thee, Lord, but more than that, we want Thee to go on with us. We want Thee to be able to commit Thyself to us - not to have any reservations toward us - then teach us from this message the way of being on good ground with Thee. May we all be those who make quick progress toward the goal. In the Name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.
Chapter 7 - In the Letters to the Corinthians

We have, in these messages, been seeing that each part (book) of the New Testament has a particular aspect of Christ to present for the Church in this dispensation. The writer in his apprehension of Christ has this burden and urge, and when we have read all the writings we have a very comprehensive presentation of our Lord. There is, however, another feature which is so very rich and helpful. It is that these separate documents are what they are in value because of their immediate practical context. It is the situations to which they are addressed which bring out the many-sided fullness of the mission, meaning and message of Christ. History, both temporal and spiritual, makes the Christ so necessary, but also so appropriate. This is so very clear when we see the background and occasion of these writings. The Letters to the Corinthians - or the Church in Corinth - are particularly rich in the drawing out of Christ, as I trust we shall see. Oh, for a pen dipped in the fountain of Divine inspiration to show even something of what is embodied of Christ in these Letters! One's heart fails before such an undertaking.

When "Corinth" or "Corinthians" are mentioned, the reaction is immediately that of a frown. The disorders, the wrongs, the sins, and all that is reprehensible at once take the foreground of the mind. Truly it is a terrible and distressing state of things, and it may be excusable if a major question is asked as to whether that IS Christianity. There is no passing over of it lightly and this element, of contrast and contradiction is not to be excused. The strongest things are said about it by the writer of the Letters. Face it! Take it all for what it is! Hide nothing! Having done so ask your major question: Why did God ever allow all this, and why did He allow it to be put into a document which would go out to ever-widening circles through an ever-increasing length of time? Why did not God cover this shame, this reproach, this contradiction to His own nature and will? When you have done all that, and asked that ultimate question, you have really only given the answer. God has never done that, either in the history of His greatest servants, nor in that of His chosen people. Over this strange way of God, a way that we think we would never take, we have to ask a very significant question: Would there be gain or loss from the standpoint of all future time if all this delinquency and wrong had been covered over and not have been allowed to be known to posterity? There are different ways of putting that question, but, have we, and the Church through the centuries, gained from the Letters to the Corinthians, seeing what it was that necessitated these Letters? There are two main things that have to come out of the answer to that basic question. Firstly, the values that have accrued, which have been drawn out by the situation being dealt with. Secondly, why was it that such a situation could exist among Christians?

These two matters are going to take us a long way, and into deep and very profitable waters or mines.

Let us, then, begin by gathering together some of what we may call

The Spoil of Battle

That there was a battle, and a very hot one for God's testimony in Corinth, does not need arguing. Putting aside, for the moment, the tragedy and shame of the situation there, what of the values drawn out by it?

We have been accustomed to speaking of the Letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, with Philippians sandwiched between, as the high-water mark of New Testament revelation. In their own
realm that may be true. That is, as a revelation of the eternal counsels of God relating to the Church, as such, it is true. But in the realm of Christianity and the meaning of the true Christian calling and life, is there anything comparable in the New Testament with some of the parts of the first Letter to the Corinthians? Take, for instance, that brief section in chapter 2, verses 9-10:

"Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, And which entered not into the heart of man, Whosoever things God prepared for them that love him. But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God."

What of the statements in chapter 6, verses 2 and 3, statements which most commentators and exegetes pass over because they cannot explain them:

"Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?"
"Know ye not that we shall judge angels?"

What a startling way of awakening us to the calling in Christ! What shall we say of chapter 13? Is there anything in all literature to compare with that? Read it in the various versions, such as Moffat's, the Amplified, etc. This is indeed a superlative standard for attainment. No wonder Paul himself elsewhere - and later - wrote: "Brethren, I count not myself to have attained."

But pass on to chapter 15, this utterly breath-taking presentation of what the Apostle called: "The gospel which we preached". When we read on to the description of the different categories of the resurrection bodies of the saints - sun, moon, stars, glories; the change and transformation from corruption to incorruption, and all the other details - we are left standing, gasping, with one immense question: 'How did Paul come to know all this?' The only possible answer only increases the wonder of the revelation itself. It must be all of a piece with his statement about the Lord's Table in chapter 10 verse 23: "For I received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you...". Being in the past tense - "I delivered unto you" must link this on to the second Letter, chapter 12: "I knew a man in Christ fourteen years ago... caught up into Paradise and heard unspeakable things...". Chapter 15 of the first Letter must be just the fringe of the "unspeakable things".

Have I established my statement and argument that the sad and deplorable situation at Corinth was sovereignly in grace made the very occasion of drawing out some of the most sublime things in Divine revelation? Thank God for sovereign grace!

Now we must get nearer to the particular purpose of these messages, namely, what Christ means in this situation.

To reach this we have to note some major features. The Letters to the Corinthians are full of vivid contrasts. Over against each other there is the contrast between:

The old creation and the new;
The natural and the spiritual;
Darkness and light;
The earthly and the heavenly;
The temporal and the eternal;
The Old Testament and the New; etc.

In between these contrasts stands Jesus Christ with what He means to each. His back is toward the first set with the mighty "No!" of His Cross. His face is toward the second category with the mighty
"Yes!" of His resurrection.

In this way Christianity is shown to be severed and rent in two.

**Christianity Split in Two**

There is here revealed a *Christianity* to which Christ (in His mission, meaning and message) says positively "NO!" Over that Christianity is written a large "CANNOT".

This is taken up for emphasis and pronouncement early in the first Letter, and runs on through the many matters which are standing for judgment and correction. Only space forbids us tabulating these points of Divine veto. Let the reader read the Letters and note the points at which Christ says in effect: "Not so!" In that way - in the end - the inclusive and comprehensive verdict is: 'You will never get through to God's end in that way!' To help in seeing this we can note where the Corinthians are placed in spiritual history and geography. Pick out the allusions to the Old Testament in these Letters. Two things rise up in bold relief. One, the old creation with its darkness, chaos, disorder, 'voidness', and features of judgment. Two, Israel in the wilderness. We will take this second for our present purpose. Quite clearly, Letter one and chapter 10 puts the Corinthians (and a certain kind of Christianity) in the position of Israel between Egypt and the Land of Promise, and it does so with a very strong warning. The same position is postulated in Letter two, chapter 3, at verse 7 to verse 16.

What, then, were the features of that position in Israel's history?

1. They were out of Egypt, the realm of judgment by sovereign grace, and baptized "in the cloud and sea" *positionally*.

2. They were in the way of the "heavenly calling", and God's purpose.

3. They had the *TOKENS* of the supernatural life and position, e.g. the Manna, and Water, etc: the "mystery of Christ", "and that Rock was Christ." They knew the sovereign virtue of the blood of the Lamb. Many were the evidences that God was with them and for them. But with all that there hung over them continually the threat and peril of missing the *inheritance*, which - alas - that generation did do. This is *the* warning to this certain kind of Christianity in Corinthians. Why was that? What does "Corinthians" say to that position? Probably the answer is found in two particulars; one, it is possible to be out of the world *positionally* and for the world to still be *in* you. Egypt, even after all its judgment, still continued to pull back and maintain its hold. It was never a very difficult thing to hark back to Egypt. From the Corinthian Letters it is easy to see that the world had its pull, its influence, its attraction, over the *soul* of these Christians. The writer was very sure that this could be disastrous regarding the inheritance in the case of those whose *standing* did not lead to their heavenly state. In this connection it is that he so strongly discriminates between

**The Natural Man and the Spiritual Man**

Literally this is the man of soul, and the man of spirit. His summing up of this difference is that the man of soul cannot and does not go through. He does not come to maturity, but, even after years, he is still a "babe" (3:1-2). It is "he that is spiritual" who can, and does, go through! Paul strongly emphasizes the veto that rests upon the one when he says that "the natural [soulical] man cannot".

Christianity has been very slow to even recognize, to say nothing of accepting, this great divide. For want of this discrimination (resulting from a deep ploughing and cleaving work of the Cross) a
Christianity exists which is *not going through to what God intends*, and multitudes of Christians are aware of it!

The universities and colleges may make doctors of medicine, philosophy, art, etc., but be quite sure, a man of the Spirit with the knowledge of "the things which have not entered into the heart of man" can no man nor university make! This is the argument and verdict of the New Testament.

The inclusive point, then, is that *Christ is Other*. He is the other Man, the Man of the Spirit. His knowledge, wisdom, ability, are of another order. The *real* effect of the indwelling and *mastery* of the Holy Spirit is to *show* and make Christianity a reproduction, a representation of Christ; the mission, meaning, and message of Christ is to produce that essentially other kind that He is (see 2 Corinthians 3:16-18).

But read the two Letters again!
Chapter 8 - In the Letters to the Corinthians (continued)

We have seen that, in the Letters to the Corinthians, the Christians are spiritually in the position corresponding to that of Israel in the wilderness. That means that we have to see how Christ is applied to that situation. Every part of the New Testament, i.e., every book, brings Christ into view in some particular way or aspect in relation to some particular situation because the whole of the New Testament is comprehended by the mission, the meaning, and the message of Jesus Christ. We have seen that the position of believers in Corinth corresponding to Israel in the wilderness means that they were positionally out of the kingdom of darkness; baptized into Christ; in the good of the passover lamb - flesh and blood; on the ground of justification by faith. positionally they were in the Kingdom of heaven and on supernatural ground. All this was true by reason of sovereign grace. But now, all that was objective and what was positional had to be made inward and their condition; that is, it had to be made their own spiritual state. Many were the inconsistencies and contradictions between position and condition, and God could not accept that. Hence the serious warning drawn from the tragedy of Israel - the disaster in the wilderness in failure to "go on" to the purpose of salvation. In our last message we put our finger upon one real cause of the disaster, and this will have to be kept in view as we proceed into these Letters. In the Corinthian letters we shall find Christians at the point where Israel were at Sinai, and two things will stand out among others, or one thing in two aspects. Those two things are

**Spiritual Seeing and Spiritual Hearing**

A moment's reflection will at once bring to mind how very much those two things were the very substance of the mission, meaning and message of Jesus Christ, and, moreover, the governing principles of the whole New Testament.

With Israel in the wilderness these two things related respectively to the Tent of Testimony and the ordering of progress. They are both in the later chapters of the Book of Exodus through the Book of Numbers. The Tent of the Testimony, or the Tabernacle, was central and in view for all to see. The tribes were so arranged as to face the Tabernacle on all sides and from all directions. From the door of the Tabernacle the silver trumpets sounded, to be heard by all the people in connection with all order and movement.

The principles were seeing and hearing: *the seeing eye,* and *the hearing ear.* Put together they represent the Lord Jesus as central and supreme, and the Holy Spirit as God's voice concerning Him. Sit back with those facts and think of the Corinthian letters in their light. So, we come to

**The Place of Christ: The Place of the Holy Spirit**

in relation to spiritual order and progress in a Corinthian situation.

*The Place of Christ*

We must step back and join the Apostle when he was contemplating his letter to Corinth, after he had received the information about the situation there.
The Apostle had known about Corinth before his first visit five years earlier. Morally it was the worst city in the world, and such was the situation there that this courageous servant of God said that he was with them then "in much fear and trembling." However, out of the 400,000 population, a company had turned to the Lord and they represented the "Church of God in Corinth". But during the five years of the Apostle's absence there had been this grievous spiritual decline which we find described in this letter. Indeed, it was a decline for in the later part of the letter (chapter 15) the Apostle reminds them of "the Gospel which was [then] preached to them, and which they believed". What a Gospel! Knowing what he was going into at Corinth he had made a very definite and firm resolve: it was "to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ, and him crucified". He says here that he laid the Foundation, which was Christ. In five years they had built upon that foundation almost everything but Christ. Hence, he returns to the Foundation and is brokenheartedly ("with many tears") starting all over again. They had sent him a letter in which they asked for his mind on eleven matters, and the very fact of their not knowing what was right or wrong on such elementary matters shows how they had lost sight of Christ and the mind of the Spirit. The letter is largely an answer to the questions, but what we are taking particular note of is his approach to the whole tragic situation. We have said that he returned to his original premise - "Jesus Christ, and him crucified". In no Letter is the name of Christ so continuously introduced. It occurs no less than nine times in the first nine verses. Throughout the entire Letter, in every particular and problem, it is as though the Apostle was challenging as to how that, and that, and that corresponded to the Foundation, to Christ. That certainly, whatever he said, was his standpoint. Was it the divisions and partisanships? The challenge is: "Is Christ divided?" Those unhappy and deplorable conditions, he says, are due to immaturity, a baby measure, and the immaturity is not growing up into Christ. The spiritual eye was blinded to Christ by being occupied with other objects. Even Paul, Apollos, and Peter - he says - were between them and Christ. Paul positively refused to allow his own or any other man's name to justify a party or sect! The names mentioned probably represented a personality complex; or an aspect of truth complex; or a particular, temperamental, traditional, or positional complex; but, whatever it was, its effect or tendency was to obscure Christ, and Paul would have none of it. The irony of the situation was that there was a party which would not join the other sects because they were superior and claimed: "We are of Christ." That sounds good, does it not? But Paul is not having that, either, because it embodied the party spirit as much as any other. Paul is against the spirit of things!

We may observe that many things which started out well and good have in time become more marked by their spirit than by Christ. You meet the superior mentality that 'we are the people' and 'they are not of us'. This is as big an abomination as any pronounced sectarianism. It is not that we say that we are of Christ, but how much of Christ and the Spirit of Christ is evident in us? The plummet, or plumb-line, by which the straightness or crookedness is determined is Christ.

So Paul brings Christ alongside of all the eleven questions presented to him in the letter from Corinth. The question of marriage, of non-marriage; of sex; of mixed marriages; of dress - head-covering of women and men; of behaviour in the assembly and at the Lord's Table; of meats offered to idols; of 'tongues' and prophesying, etc. While saying some things as from the Lord, and others as his own Christian judgment, in effect he is raising one question over all and making it the final criterion: 'How does this accord with Christ?'

Would that we always, in all things, so challenged the practical matters of our life in a world like this! Not what the world does or thinks; not what is current in the world, or even with some Christians, but is this well-pleasing and honouring to Christ? Not even: 'Is there any wrong in it?' But - positively - is it governed by love of Christ?
So, as with Israel in the wilderness, Christ has the central place and is always in view.

But that is only one half of the matter. The other half is

**The Silver Trumpets - The Voice of the Spirit**
(Numbers 10:2,8,9,10)

*The place of the Holy Spirit*

Trumpets have an interesting place in the Bible, from the first in Numbers 10 to the "last trump" of 1 Corinthians 15:52.

In the wilderness their function was to sound "an alarm", to call to battle, to call to a feast (the Feast of Trumpets), to order the camp for journeying, etc. When all is said about them, a trumpet presupposes an ear to hear. It has no meaning or sense if there is no hearing. Hence, it is unprofitable for the Lord to speak unless there is a hearing ear. The Word of God repeatedly unites these two. "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear" - but what? "What the Spirit saith unto the churches." The trumpet-sound then is the voice of the Spirit. This was from the door of the Tent of Testimony, that is, with Christ as the governing meaning. Order amongst the Lord's people, individually and collectively. Progress toward the goal and inheritance. To warn of dangers, and to stir to battle. All this is a matter of hearing the voice of the Spirit. If we bring the principle over to Corinthians we shall - or ought to - be impressed with how large a place the Holy Spirit has in these Letters. Very soon in the first Letter we come on the principle which is an absolutely basic truth, and which runs right through the entire New Testament. This goes right to the heart of the Corinthian situation, as it does to every situation which is one of spiritual declension and weakness. We could fill a whole book with this one truth, because the New Testament has so much show about it. But we can here do no more than indicate it. Right here, then, early in the first Letter to the Corinthians (chapter 2:6-16), it is

**The Illuminated Spiritual Mind**

The fuller truth is that Christ may be - or may have been - presented in great fullness and yet not understood. The Tabernacle was there complete for all Israel to see, but it was a thing, a sacred thing, and it was known that God was with it, but it was not understood. It was a comprehensive representation, but what it all meant was not understood. The Holy Spirit was present, but the people's minds were not illuminated. It could hardly be said that the "things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard (note, eye and ear) nor hath it entered into the heart of man" had really become a *dynamic revelation* to those Christians. "The Spirit searcheth the deep things of God", but things were pathetically shallow and superficial at Corinth. No one who was hearing the voice of the Spirit in an inward way could possibly behave as they were behaving. I have to confess that it is one of my greatest perplexities how a true Christian can behave, look, and go on so long without the Holy Spirit so speaking in them that changes in conduct, appearance, and habits are spontaneously made without anyone else saying anything. I have to ask: 'Where is the Holy Spirit in them?' Here I just must say some relevant things which - although enlarging this message somewhat - are very appropriate to our times. We are in a time in this dispensation when deceiving spirits are invading this earth to such an extent that - to use our Lord's own words - "if it were possible the very elect would be deceived" (Matthew 24:24).

It should be clearly understood that the most outstanding and definite form of deception is *the simulation of the Holy Spirit*. The Christian is so utterly dependent upon the Holy Spirit for
everything, especially in the knowledge of Christ that to simulate Him (the Holy Spirit) is the master-stroke of evil spirits. The true Spirit is assailed by false spirits, and chiefly so by imitation. Their imitation will often, or usually, be thought to be something very spiritual. There is a false spirituality. Its most subtle form is to push secondary spiritual things up into a primary place and exaggerate them so that they are believed to be all-important! You have it here in 1 Corinthians, and the Apostle labours to correct this because of its perils. See what he says about the graded importance of gifts. To these poor deluded Corinthians certain gifts of a display, and spectacular kind were the height of spirituality. This opened the door wide to the false in many ways. The sum of all deception is the projecting, assertion, and intensity of natural (soul) force. Deception came into this world through the soul of Eve, and Satan's link with humanity is just there. This is basic to Paul's strong corrective teaching, and in the first part of this first Letter he lays this as the foundation of all that follows. His warning corrective about women asserting themselves vocally and in other ways in Church life and matters, and his - to some people - strange talk about "covering" and "the angels" has a far more sinister implication than will be regarded.

Another form which deception takes is (and perhaps you will find it hard to believe it) superiority to the Word of God. Yes! It is possible to be so 'spiritual' as to blatant violate the plain Word of God on the plea: "I felt led", "The Lord showed me", and so on. A man can neglect his plain duty as laid down in Scripture to wife and family, and eventually lose all influence with them and their respect because he is so 'spiritual'. We say this in particular reference to the Christian family. A wife can be so 'spiritual' as to violate the plain injunction: "Wives, be in subjectation to your own husbands." He may not be so 'spiritual' as you think he ought to be, but the Lord will honour the wife who, with the Cross in her own soul, honours His Word. The Word of God says that if a man does not work he should not eat. It is possible to be so 'spiritual' as to spend many hours, and even months of life doing nothing of any vital account. These are only examples of superiority to the Word of God; there are many more, and much worse.

The projecting of soul-life will most certainly result in deception, and the fruit of deception is just this: many psychic experiences, such as 'voices', apparitions, coincidences, which just go so far as to seem of God and then abort and nothing comes of them. They leave a trail of unfinished, incomplete and disappointing 'experiences'. Satan can lead the intensely soulish person 'up the garden', as we say.

Now all this is in the Corinthian Letters and explains Israel's tragedy in the wilderness. Why did a journey of nine days develop into forty years and then end in tragedy? This Letter tells us, and Hebrews 4:12 (with context) puts it concisely and precisely! The soul-life asserted itself against or over the truly spiritual.

I expect that I shall get into a lot of hot water for saying some of these things, but things are in a very serious condition in these times and we MUST be faithful. I confess that the more I have got into these Corinthian Letters the more desperate I have felt the situation to be, and the more impelled to seek the explanation.

Well, we have not finished yet, but, dear readers, do you not now see why the Apostle said: "Nothing... but Jesus Christ, and him crucified" - "Christ - crucified"? The Cross is the solution!

Back, for a moment, to where we started. We said that the silver trumpets were the voice of the Holy Spirit, and that a hearing ear is essential to hear "what the Spirit saith". And then we have gone on to raise questions about hearing. But do note, please, how we have related the hearing. We said that first Christ has to be seen by the spiritual eye. The Spirit only speaks about Christ! Then we said that
order, movement, waiting, or going, when and where, were consistent with Christ in character, nature, and holiness. And the great altar was at the door through which the way of the voice of the trumpets was heard.

There is one more message in relation to our particular theme at this time before we leave the Corinthian Letters. We have observed that, by many allusions, these two Letters find the believers to whom they were addressed, spiritually where Israel were when in the wilderness, that is, between Egypt and the Land of Promise; between the Exodus - the coming out - and the Eisodos - the entering in. We have seen how precarious that position is, and therefore how strong the warnings are as taken from Israel's tragic failure.

We are now seeing how our main title above applies to that situation. The Second Letter to the Corinthians has some very rich things in it. Of course, commentators almost universally interpret or define it as the Letter of the Christian ministry, and that is summed up in the words in chapter 4, verse 1: "Therefore seeing we have this ministry." We have often taken that clause in the particular connection, i.e. the ministry of the Church. But for our present purpose we light upon another immensely rich and comprehensive phrase. In the same chapter, verse 4, we have: "...the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ"; and then, in verse 6: "...God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." How rich! Break it up: "The glory of Christ." "The gospel of the glory of Christ." "The light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." "The face of Jesus Christ." "The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God." "The knowledge of the glory of God." Every clause is a theme!

In the context the Apostle makes a great transition with a comparison and a contrast: from Moses to Christ. He is emphasising the startling and shattering effect upon the people of the glory of God ON the face of Moses. He is very strong on that point, and thus prepares the way for his particular message. The comparison is in the same glory, but the contrast is threefold: one, the glory IN the face of Jesus Christ, and, two, the exceeding glory of the latter, leading to three, the effect in each case. The former was a ministry of death, the death-sentence of the Law: the latter was life, the life which comes by grace. This is the transformation implicit in the wilderness, it is the ministry of life in surrounding death. It is the glory of grace in the realm of condemnation. All this, says the Apostle, is focused in "the face of Jesus Christ". The face is the register, the index, the medium of character, of personality. The glory was on the face of Moses. It was not his own personal perfection of character, divine nature. It was in the face of Jesus Christ, "who is the image of God" (4:4). It was therefore a surpassing glory. Earlier the Apostle says that we are "reflecting... the glory of God". It is not inherent in us; we are but "mirrors" (3:18, margin).

The point of all this, for Corinthians and for all Christians, is that in a wilderness world like Corinth, and the world generally, it is not necessary to perish, to die. It is not necessary to fail and not reach the inheritance. Israel's tragedy need not overtake us, because, although we are but "vessels of fragile clay" (4:7 - Conybeare), there is "the exceeding greatness of the power", which is "of God, and not of ourselves" (4:7).

This is the Mission, the Meaning, the Message of Jesus Christ to His Church as in the world where there is nothing else to help. It is the message to "pilgrims and strangers" here.

The Apostle will take much space in this Letter to meet the cruelty, opposition, criticism, slander, and discrediting work of his enemies, some of them Christians. His inclusive and most powerful answer to them is in this "God hath shined into our hearts." It is the glory which we have beheld in
the face of Jesus Christ. We may be poor and despised "earthen vessels", but there is a "treasure" within, the power of which will bring us to glory. By this spiritual experience and possession we can, and shall, reach God's end "while we look, not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen", which are eternal (4:18).

This is true for the wilderness journey, but, says the Apostle, it is true for our "ministry"; a heartening word - if challenging - for the ministers of Christ.

But there is another tremendous allusion running through these two Letters. We have heard the Apostle say that what had happened to him and other Apostles was like that which happened in the creation: "God, that said, Light shall shine" (or: "Let light be") "hath shined in our hearts."

In the second Letter, chapter 5, and verse 17, he says: "If any man be in Christ there is a new creation." God said: "Let there be light." "There is a new creation." In the first Letter, chapter 15, he refers to the two Adams, the first and the last, in contrast: the earthy and the heavenly. It is not difficult to discern that "in the face of Jesus" we have the new and heavenly order of man and creation. This surely, being in the Corinthian Letters, is set over against the disorder and chaos, the darkness and confusion in the old creation spiritually, the "natural man" of the early part of the first Letter. If this is true, and not just our imagination, we can surely see that the position of Israel in the wilderness, and of the Corinthians correspondingly, is that of transition from the old creation - or before it - to the new; from fallen Adam to the New Man, the Last Adam.

"We all, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed (being changed) into the same image."
Chapter 9 - In the Letter to the Galatians

Familiarity with this part of the New Testament, as it does with so many things, has resulted in the loss of the tremendous impact which it had when first written, read, and circulated. In its nature, its purpose, and its necessity there is nothing in the Bible more contemporary, and suited to Christianity's need. It has been boxed up in a doctrine, although a fundamental doctrine, and a phrase now describes it: whereas it is really an earthquake, a revolution, a cataclysm. As I have meditated with it some vivid pictures have lighted upon my mental screen.

I have seen a man named Shammah standing in a plot of ground full of lentils and, singlehanded, mowing down the Philistines with his sword until none were left to challenge him. I have seen the hordes of Philistines menacing Israel and taking cover behind the giant Goliath, who, day after day, struck terror into the hearts of the men of Israel. Then the youth David resolving that this had gone on too long and too much and must come to a settlement; which settlement he made to the discomfiture of the whole Philistine army.

Then to come to much later history in this country, I see that meeting of barons at Runnymede with King John sitting, pen in hand, at the table, with a fierce and rebellious look upon his face as the barons have decided that a long regime of injustice must cease and a new charter of equity must be signed for all time. There is no way of escape for the monarch.

These episodes and epochs fit so well into the Letter before us. A campaign of misconstruction of Christianity has been following the Apostle Paul from city to city wherever he has gone. He, the most patient and tolerant of servants of Jesus Christ, has borne long and humbly with the assaults upon himself; his character and his credentials; his integrity; but it had reached the point where the very true and right nature of Christianity itself was being changed. At this point toleration reached its limit and this New Testament Shammah drew his sword and said: 'The day of reckoning has come. This has gone far enough.' The fire in his bones had reached white heat. Flaming words leaped from his lips: "If we, or an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel, let him be accursed; I repeat, let him be accursed." His sword clave to his hand that day and he defied to the death the uncircumcised-in-heart Judaizers of all time.

But when we have said all that, and we could say much more like it, we have yet to come to the real and positive issue in question and battle. We have to ask what really was, and is, at stake? Many related questions have to be answered, but the inclusive statement, which governs all those questions, is nothing less or other than

The True Nature of Christianity

That was, and has repeatedly been, the real and true nature of the Mission, Meaning and Message of Jesus Christ. What really did He come for? What did His Person mean? And what actually is His message?

May I here insert a brief parenthesis? While this ministry is to all the Lord's people, I know that many of its readers are servants of God in positions of responsibility and influence. To them I do address this message in a particularly earnest way. My brethren, you are surely aware that there is a very serious and vicious invasion of this world by spirits of confusion. nothing is escaping this.
While it is true of nations and internations, it is particularly so in Christianity. From the general realm of Christendom in ever-narrowing circles to evangelical Christianity and then still inward to the most sincere believers, and to any servant of God who counts for God, there is involvement in complications and perplexity almost to a paralysing degree. New, exotic, fantastic, extreme, peculiar, odd, unbalanced, and singular movements, teachings and practices are following rapidly upon the stage; and many dear people of God are being caught in these, only to end in disillusionment and cynicism. Bewilderment fills the air, and because of this, Christianity is growingly in disrepute. It does, therefore, become imperative that all in responsibility and who have influence shall know where they are and be committed to making clear to God's people what Christianity really is. We are here seeking to make some small contribution to such a ministry.

Coming back to our Galatian Letter, we seek to see what it has to tell us by way of answering our main question: What is Christianity? There are subsidiary questions which lead to the answer. Is Christianity a take-over and continuation or adaptation of the Old Testament system and economy of ritual sacramentarianism, ceremonialism, ordinances, vestments? Is Christianity the reproduction of the Old Testament system in a mystical form? That is, the keeping of the ritual and ceremonial but attributing to it a spiritual or mystical meaning, so that it can be said: 'Well, of course, it is not the thing itself, but what it implies'? This is what sacramentarians say and teach, and many evangelicals. But a virtue is attached to the actual means employed. Further, is Christianity an ideology, that is, a system of ideas, the result of the mental and intellectual activity of religious minds? In other words, is it a philosophy regarding God, man, human destiny, good and evil, and human conduct? Is it a system of regulations, laws, precepts, rules, technicalities, statutes, nice points? Is it another system of: 'Thou shalt', and 'thou shalt not'? Is Christianity a tradition, a historical succession, an inheritance or hereditary?

To all of these, and more, the Letter to the Galatians, and the whole New Testament say - or thunder - a positive and categorical 'NO!' Any one, or all of these, would make what the Apostle here calls "another gospel", and he says of such, even if (supposing such a thing might be) "an angel from heaven" should preach it, let that angel be accursed! There is no compromise here. The sword is drawn and these "Philistines" (above mentioned and defined) are to be mown down without mercy. Paul is, after all, no more vehement and implacable than was His Divine Master when confronting those who would mislead and distort the truth of God and confuse the would-be seekers after the truth.

What, then, is the answer? This Letter before us has rightly been called 'The Magna Carta of Christianity' and that in a brief statement of doctrine: 'Justification by Faith.' Yes, true; that is fundamental to Christianity, but we cannot stay there. With every bit of our being we believe that, but when we have said it, have we really defined that which has composed and constituted faith? Justification by faith can be theology, doctrine, creed, a wonderful concept. Look into this Letter and see what it was that led this apostle to his position. He based everything in his Christianity, his salvation, his life, his ministry, his endurance, and his eternal hope, upon one thing. It is stated as basic to the Letter itself: chapter 1, verse 15: "When it was the good pleasure of God, who separated me, even from my mother's womb, and called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me..." Or in another translation: "When he who had chosen me and set me apart even before I was born, and had called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son within me..." What, then, is the answer?

The Inward Revelation of God's Son

This is a strong line running through the Letter in various connections, as indeed it does through all his writings. He says: "Christ liveth in me." He emphasizes the change from the outward to the
inward, the objective to the subjective in the matter of the Law, the covenant, the spirit of sonship, etc. Everything now emanates from the indwelling Christ by the Holy Spirit, and this is what he means by the great emphasis upon spiritual liberty. He has come into the meaning of the Lord's words: "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" - freed by the life and power of Christ within! The Spirit of sonship within makes Christianity, and nothing else does! God revealed His Son within. We then have to ask what Paul saw initially when that revelation came to him, and what was its effect?

Of course, all that we have from the pen of this Apostle was by revelation, but in this Letter there is that which was basic to all the rest. I must, however, pause for one emphasis. Paul takes pains to stress that this knowledge of God's Son which made Christianity for him was personal, direct, and independent. He says: "It was not after man. Neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:11,12). This is true Christianity. Whatever God may use as a vessel or channel of instruction, such instrumentalities can never impart Christ, put Christ into us, work the miracle of giving the faculty of sight to the blind. It just has to be something done by the almighty Spirit of God so that we exclaim in wonder: 'I see!' Apart from that, our Christianity at best is secondhand and objective. The emphasis of the true teacher must be upon this personal knowledge of the Holy Spirit as Lord within. Sooner or later Christianity will be put to the ultimate test on this all-inclusive ground and issue.

We can now ask what Paul saw on the occasion to which he refers? What did he see as to God's Son? The full answer would necessitate a going back to the Damascus Road epoch; but what does this particular Letter show? The answer is summed up in one word: the Cross. His three references to the Cross in 'Galatians' have three connections. "I have been crucified with Christ" (2:20); "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the passions and lusts thereof" (5:24); "But far be it from me to glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (6:14).

The three relationships are: (1) The personal - "I have been crucified". (2) The life of the dominion of the flesh - "crucified the flesh" (that is the self-life; "flesh" is self-gratification). (3) The world - 'crucified to the world'. The standards, systems, and ambitions of this world.

The Cross in this threefold relationship is Christianity. We can never cease to be amazed that the man who would gladly and vehemently have hailed Jesus of Nazareth to crucifixion came to see that he was really going to be crucified Himself; but now he is glorying in it for other reasons. No wonder he says, "called me BY HIS GRACE".

What is this saying to us? It is saying clearly and powerfully that true Christianity issues from a devastating experience of the Cross. To see Christ, 'God's Son' crucified, is to see ourselves transfixed and desolated. Sooner or later this must come to us if our Christianity is to be the expression of the indwelling Christ as crucified, risen and exalted.

The true Christian and the true Church is a crucified person and Body!

What was the effect of this 'revealing of God's Son' in him? It had the effect of giving Paul a new dimension and a new horizon. It was the end of one history and the inauguration of another. Formerly the Cross was an intolerable offense; later it was the power and wisdom of God. The Cross was the meeting-place of two histories: the one it closes; the other it commences. The former history has been proved false. The new begins the true. This Letter says that one Israel has come to an end, and a new 'Israel of God' has been born. That one Jerusalem 'below' is no longer the true (if ever it
had been) and the "Jerusalem which is above" has taken its place. The old history was based upon a visualized new age centring in Israel's institutions, Jerusalem, the temple, the Law, the Sabbath. The new history is based upon the enmity of all that demonstrated in the Cross, now centred in a spiritual nation, a heavenly Jerusalem, a holy, heavenly temple, "not made with hands", a Law of "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus", and a "Sabbath Rest" reserved for the new people. This is Christianity according to the New Testament, and Paul's revelation of God's Son within.

Let us now sum up.

We fully recognize that the real occasion of this Letter was - and is - the true ground of man's right standing with God, and that that issue is here fought out conclusively. Nothing must be allowed to interfere with that!

But, when we have acknowledged that, we have not settled every relevant element of conflict. Why is it that, when evangelical Christianity has rooted and established that doctrine in its fundamental creed and faith, so much conflict still remains in the evangelical realm? This is more or less present in early Christianity even when that basic ground is accepted. Looking more closely into the controversy in this Letter, we find that it was not only the foundation that was being settled, but what was being \textit{PUT ON} the foundation. All the Apostles, even Peter and James, were not quite transparent on that (see Chapter 2:11-14). There was controversy among the chief Apostles, \textit{not on the doctrine}, but as to their \textit{innermost} position. Outwardly and doctrinally they assented, but deep down in their religious constitution a drastic "circumcision" - cutting round and between - had not as yet been consummated. There was still a carry-over of birth, upbringing, tradition, heredity, inheritance. In Paul, who had been more utterly rooted, and more vehemently absorbed in Judaism than any of them (1:11-14), this radical severance, this spiritual surgery, had been effected. The remnants and relics of historical Judaism and natural religion on the one side, and the thorough-going emancipation - by the Cross - on the other set up a conflict, and the real cause was the threat to change the true nature of Christianity - the Gospel. It was a subtle and dangerous insinuation of mixture; the Old Testament prohibition by God of ploughing with ox and ass together, or the wearing of a mixture of wool and cotton. Paul, because the Cross had ploughed so deeply into his very being, saw through this threat to the purity of Christianity, and was roused to "the defence of the gospel".

So we come to the age-abiding conflict, not only between Law and Grace, but the true nature of Christianity and the things which have been associated with it. People can be called Christians who have no experience of new birth, regeneration, or personal knowledge of or walk with the Lord, and there are many whose conduct, appearance, and associations are not only a denial of Christ, but a contradiction of common decency. The range is from traditional 'Religion' to downright worldliness, with varying shades and degrees.

So, we close by saying that the real battle is that for the true nature of Christianity. The call is for "men whose eyes have seen the King"; men who can truly say: "It pleased God to reveal his Son \textit{IN ME}." Men who will be heart-burdened for the purity of the Gospel, and who will pay the heavy price of the testimony of Jesus. It will be in 'Christianity' itself that they will meet the forces that make it so costly. It has always been so.
Chapter 10 - In the Letter to the Ephesians

It is not our intention to enter upon a general exposition of this Letter. Our present concern is with some of the questions which it raises in the light of history, and that history at, and from, the time when the Letter was written.

Firstly, there was the situation at the end of the Apostle Paul's life. Here is a man writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit about the greatness of the Church; its eternal election and vocation; its Divine unity, interrelatedness, manifold function, and spiritual warfare. All this and much more, with a background of his relationship with churches in Asia, and particularly with Ephesus. We remember his extended time of ministry in Ephesus and the wonderful response thereto (Acts 19:19). Later he said to the elders there that he had not 'shunned to declare (unto them) the whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:20), and when meeting those elders on his journey to Jerusalem, we read of the very touching farewell to them and how they wept and sorrowed at his departure. And now, at most seven years later, he writes to Timothy that "all they in Asia be turned from me" (2 Timothy 1:15). If Paul died (by execution) in the year A.D. 67 and John wrote the Revelation in the year A.D. 95 (as is most strongly believed) then in less than thirty years a very big spiritual change had taken place in Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7): "Thou hast left thy first love... From whence thou art fallen..." etc. Paul's triumphant ministry; Paul's departure sorrowed over; and now Paul repudiated, discredited or forsaken. And yet, this Letter is Divinely preserved and blessed to countless believers through all the centuries!

But what of subsequent history? Through all these centuries to what degree has there been in this world a representation and expression of the Church as we have it in "Ephesians"? Where in all the world can we find such an expression in our day? It would seem that the last and least company of Christians is involved in the struggle for unity, for impact, for spiritual ascendancy! Anything precious to the Lord is so bitterly assailed that its fellowship and fullness are all too soon disrupted. It is quite evident that when Paul wrote his last Letters - to Timothy - there was an incipient movement toward what has now become almost general - the institutional Church with form but without organic life. With all the books that have been written on "Ephesians", and all the extolling of it as "the greatest document ever penned"; with all the acclaiming of it as the greatest revelation of the Church, where can we find anything that approximates to it in reality?

The questions confronting us with this Letter in hand are:

Is it just idealistic? Do we have to say in regard to it what Dr. Campbell Morgan said about Ezekiel's Temple: "It is just what God would have had if He could have had His way"? or again: Is this Church of "Ephesians" for the future in the "ages of the ages", a phrase used so much by Paul? In which case is it futile to labour and hope for it now? Are we to accept the "total ruin" theory? Comprehensively, with all the wonders and glories of the beginnings of Christianity, was there ever anything wholly corresponding to this Letter? Are you shocked with these questions? Do you think that, after all, it is just a comparative approximation, more or less? That position can hardly satisfy those who have stood for the revelation in the Ephesian Letter.

Therefore, is there some other answer? Is the answer in the direction of a misunderstanding and misapprehension of the Letter? It is here that we touch what will not only answer our distressing questions, but put us into the realm of the immense spiritual values and dynamics of the revelation
contained in this document. But let there be no misapprehension here. It will be the greatest challenge and test to Christendom and Christianity, while at the same time involving in a very real conflict with all the cosmic forces which have so bitterly fought against the true understanding of this Divine revelation!

Far from being only idealistic or mystical, we shall see as we proceed that it is an intensely realistic document. There are one or two things that must be recognized before we can proceed to consider its answer to the confrontations mentioned.

**The Comprehensiveness of "Ephesians"**

This is not a new and different presentation of truth, but an inclusive embodiment of all New Testament teaching. The Gospels are here. (See our early chapters.) "Romans" is here, for the total setting aside of the first Adam is implicit here. "Corinthians" is here, for the "spiritual" man is demanded, and the "natural" man would spoil everything here. "Galatians" is here, for there can be no compromise, no mid-course, no perversion or two contraries here; and so on.

Having pointed that out, let us proceed to consider four factors which support the present-age validity of "Ephesians".

**The Standpoint of "Ephesians"**

This can prove to be the most testing, searching, and revolutionary factor in Church history. The point of view certainly does determine everything. Five times in the Letter the word "Heavenly" is used (1:3,20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12), relating respectively to the believer's blessings; Christ's exaltation; the believer's position; the Church's vocation; and the Church's warfare. Everything is viewed from above, but that 'aboveness' is not confined to location. It means another way of estimating, defining, judging. It is a different mindedness from the earthly. On this matter the statement of God is: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9). It becomes necessary, therefore, for us to be brought to the place where we see what God is looking for and at, as so vastly different from our own mentality. This is the key to everything, and, as we have said, most revolutionary. Our mentality as to the Church is almost, if not entirely, earthly.

What are we looking for and at in this respect? Let us sift down from what may be the largest to the smallest. Is it a national Church, Roman, Anglican, Greek, Dutch (Reformed), etc.? Is it denominational, Methodist, Baptist, Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Independent, etc.? Is it 'Free' or 'State', Undenominational, Interdenominational? Is it 'Open' or 'Exclusive'? Is it something with certain particular characteristics and techniques of practice, form, and behaviour? Is it a 'New Testament Church', or churches, with certain things taken from the New Testament to constitute it? Is it a cathedral or a building, great or small? Is it a place at all, whether simple, plain, or ornate? Is God looking down from the "Heavenlies" and focusing His attention upon, or looking for, any of these? Is this what He wants? Do these things interest Him at all? Is He impressed with the regalias and adornments; with the pomp and processions of display? Do our ecclesiastical and ministerial attire and dress, robes, vestments, gowns, hoods, impress the Almighty? Does He look down upon them with admiration and wonder? Does He view them at all, or ignore them? If He does behold them, may it not be with pity, or even amusement? Poor little people playing at churches and chapels, like Jesus' children in the market-place playing at weddings and funerals! Is any or all of this what takes the eye of "He that sitteth in the heaven"? (Psalm 2:4).
All or any of this may be our way of viewing the Church, and it is wholly an earthly view! If we saw from Heaven's standpoint, how foolish so much of it would become to us. Just as the biggest things of earth, whether people or mountains, are all the same in elevation when we look down from a high aerial position, so the things so important to man down here lose their importance when we see God's standards of values.

**History's Verdict**

The verdict of history is clearly that God does not either tie Himself up with, nor preserve things on this earth in themselves. Tennyson, the poet, said:

"Our little systems have their day;  
They have their day and cease to be."

Paul said: "The things which are seen are temporal [transient]" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

History's verdict upon things which have ceased to fulfil the essential purpose of their existence, however greatly they may have served a Divine purpose at some time, is that God has left them and they have either been destroyed or left desolate. So it was with the Tent at Shiloh, the Temple in Jerusalem, the 'Churches' in Asia, and numerous other places and things. Nothing is sacred to God if it does not fulfil its Divinely intended purpose. The world, and history, are strewn with such relics; desolation, abandonment, death, and coldness declare God's 'No interest'. Men strive to keep something going; try to live on a past; but the responsibility is left with them, and the limitation of God's sponsorship will slowly wear them out unless the Divine intention is recovered. The Wailing Wall in Jerusalem is a symbol of history's verdict, and centuries of tears testify to God-forsakenness.

That is all very sad and tragic, and we yearn to get away from it, learning its lesson, and to come to the answer to it all. We ask again, what has been

**Heaven's Focus Through the Ages?**

We have seen that the Letter to the Ephesians (so-called - it was a circular letter) bounds all the ages from eternity to eternity. Its range is from "before the foundation of the world" (1:3) unto "the ages of the ages" (3:21). But what is the focus of this Letter in that eternal context? There is no missing it. One fragment focuses all.

"Unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever" (margin: "unto the ages of the ages").

You must read this whole Letter (which you can do in a few minutes) with the object of seeing the place and mention of Christ in it. (And the companion Letter, Colossians, with it.)

This Letter goes back before Genesis, and takes up Genesis. In both a Person is brought into view and that Person is never again lost sight of. By personal figures; by types, symbols, prophecies, and a thousand means; in feasts and ordinances, that One Person is ever present, latent or patent! By name He is the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christos. Every anointing points to Him. He is the focus of the ages and the eternities. What is Heaven exclusively looking for and looking at? Emphatically, only that which is essentially that Person. Not now symbols, figures, types, representations, but reality, actuality! No, not the "Church" as something objective! No, not the Kingdom of heaven as
place and object of perception! "The kingdom of heaven cometh not with observation" (Luke 17:20). It is a fallacy to think and speak of the Church without meaning Christ Himself. They are not subject and object! They are one. The Church is His Body, His wife; they are "one flesh" (5:31). This is "Ephesians". It is equally fallacious to think and speak of the Kingdom of heaven and not mean Himself. They are the same. In the Gospels the two are brought together. The Messiah is present both as King and Kingdom. The very nature of the Kingdom corresponds to that of "the Son of Man". It, as He, is from heaven.

All this, and what it implies, was an absolute revolution in Messianic mentality.

How does it all answer the tremendous questions with which we began, in relation to the Letter to the Ephesians? In this way. What God and Heaven are looking for and at is not something called the Church, nor for local churches, as such. God and Heaven are looking for Christ, in His nature, heavenly nature; in Spirit and Truth; in eternal life; in conduct and behaviour; in virtues and character; in influence and impact; and in victory over sin, Satan and the world. It is positively not locality in terms of geography, but "Wheresoever two or three are gathered together in [into] my name, THERE am I." That may be on a ship or in an aeroplane, neither of which can be fixed in locality. Christ MAY be in Ephesus, or Laodicea, or any other place, but it is the Christ which defines the Church, not the place! Christ may be in the congregation, the institution, the denomination, while none of them - as a whole - may be in Christ. We seek Him. We gather unto Him. He is the Ground; we meet on Him.

There is a vast amount in "Christendom" and "Christianity" to which we have to deliberately close our eyes, and "not know after the flesh", while we seek for what there is of Christ in people. "Our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son." If we cannot find Him, then there is no heavenly fellowship.

How well I am aware that many questions will be provoked by what I have said, and perhaps the most difficult is the one concerning gathering together, and what has become the problem of local churches. The procedure of men has been to start from the outside or from some more or less advanced point of Christian development. To form a church or churches. The names may vary; churches, assemblies; congregations; meetings, etc. Some form, either of doctrine, creed, or practice and procedure has been conceived, often with a greater or lesser degree of Scriptural authority; sometimes with a reading into Scripture of an interpretation or meaning which is not really there in truth. Sometimes there is a part of the whole truth, so that it is a certain aspect of the truth for which the particular group stands. The reasons and occasions of the numerous 'bodies' or sects or companies are as manifold as there are such bodies. Too often it is something 'formed' by men, and something which they set out to do. To say this is to touch the root of most of the trouble in Christianity. But let us approach it positively.

We are being taught by the Letter to the Ephesians, and what is it saying? We have seen that the Church is Christ, all its parts being parts of His Body. Is that true? Do you believe that? Not that He has no personal existence apart from His Body, but He is the very personality within the Body and only death can separate the two. If this identification with Christ is spiritually true, as the New Testament teaches, we have to ask: How did Christ come into being? Did He appear as a full-grown man? Was He made with hands? Was He put together as a composite entity? Did someone, or a group of people, get some ideas as to what He should be and then get to work to give them a form? Perhaps you are smiling, or are scandalized that such things should be asked. But is that not that which largely expresses the mentality concerning the Church and churches? But how did Christ come into this world? Was it not simply by birth? There was a seed (that is a Scriptural word about
Him from Genesis onward) and that "seed" held the life in which was all the nature, the complexion, the capacity, the form, the purpose, and the destiny of that Entity. That seed was born, and for reproduction was 'planted', fell into the ground and died (John 12:24). The Church is the issue of that seed, holding the same life and potential. The true Church - wherever found - must follow the history of Christ spiritually. It must be born, "not made with hands". "God dwelleth not in temples made with hands" - a statement for which Stephen forfeited his life. It must be begotten of God, born of the Holy Spirit, circumcized (in heart), baptized into His death; raised together with Him, anointed for its ministry; led into the battle of the ages, and joined with Him on heavenly ground. It is Christ, always, everywhere! This is "Ephesians". But one word more remains to be said. It concerns

The Basis of All

This Letter to the Ephesians (so-called) is a kind of culmination, a summary. The spiritual sequence is right, if the chronology is not in order. The Cross stands central, universal and supreme. The Church here as the Christ corporately expressed stands on the full ground of the Cross. It is not just the local Cross, the historic Cross, it is the cosmic Cross. In that super-mundane realm Christ - by His Cross - stripped off the principalities and powers (Colossians 2:15) and "led his captivity captive" (Ephesians 4:8), and by His victory placed His Church above all. But this is inclusive of Romans, Corinthians and Galatians. See what the Cross means in those situations, and then gather that together and you have "Ephesians".

Our "Church ground" must be Christ, only Christ, and this must decide everything and be the answer to all our "Church" problems. But let us hasten to add, that the Letter before us does show how very great are the values of a corporate expression of Christ anywhere. These values are to the individual believer and to the world around. Such matters are bound up with this body presence of Christ as protection and covering; building up and maturing; rooting and grounding; spiritual power and ascendency; mutual functioning and ministry; a testimony and impact in the realms of satanic and angelic intelligences. All this is in the Letter as related to a true expression of Christ. If we ask: 'Can such an expression be?' our answer is: 'Yes, if not in perfection and completeness, it can be in vital measure.' The tenses of "Ephesians" may help us. The past: "You did he quicken when you were dead." That was the beginning. There is much that is retrospective as to their hitherto spiritual history. The present - the continuous present - the bulk of the Letter is concerned with growth, building up, "UNTO the full-grown man". Future, "that he might present to himself a glorious church". "Glory in the church... unto the ages of the ages."

Note: The eternal and present criterion or test of "Church", whether universal or local, is the presence of Christ. Is He found there? If we are in the Spirit, can we meet Him, and truly say: 'The Lord was there today!'? The presence of Christ determines whether that is the true Church. The measure of Christ will determine, not basic relationship, but the measure of fellowship, spontaneous spiritual mutuality.

The standpoint - a heavenly position, not earthly. The focus - "Christ - all, and in all." The basis - the Cross, initial and continuous. The dynamic - the "power that worketh in us".

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Chapter 11 - In the Letter to the Colossians

[The following note written by TAS preceded this chapter in the magazine:
"Note: In the sequence of this series of messages, the next in order would be the Letter to the Philippians. This has been included in the other series - last month's issue, "The Battle for Life". Hence, we proceed to "Colossians"."

The chapter which was in the previous issue was chapter 4 and wasn't based on the book of Philippians. We think TAS may have meant the series entitled "Christ Our All" which was published in the magazine concurrently with the first chapters of this book and is a meditation on the letter to the Philippians.]

In 'Philippians' the climax and crown of all is in one clause: "the Name which is above every name" (2:9). That is the point at which the Colossian Letter begins. The supremacy of Christ is horizened in 'Philippians' by two clauses: "Equal with God" (2:6) and "the Name above every name" (2:9). In 'Colossians' the One who was equal with God is presented as the Creator of all things and the Upholder or integrating centre. But here we are brought to the farthest range of His victorious work, and the utmost realm of that "Name". We are not going to take time in telling of and explaining the Gnostic error which called forth this Letter from the Apostle. The conclusion which we shall point out will do all that is necessary in that connection.

Having declared that Jesus Christ was the Creator, the Container, the Consistor and the Upholder of all things, the Apostle makes one flashing and devastating declaration: "He stripped off the principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it (the Cross)" (2:15). This is terrific! It links the Cross with that immense revolt against God and His 'appointed heir of all things' which took place in a dateless past, before creation: the occasion of the "casting down" of Satan and the angels which "kept not their first estate" (Jude 6), a rebellion which has built up a vast world kingdom and system which determined to exclude or prevent Christ from His inheritance. The serried ranks of spiritual forces are opposed to God and all His rights. A cosmic conflict for the government of this world and its occupants has been operative through the ages, and for the universe. This conflict from outside made its first historical impact upon the first couple, and it looks as though that battle went in favour of Satan. From then on an innumerable host of hostile forces were let loose to press home this advantage. The two major spiritual weapons of Satan and his hosts are sin and death. God's counter to these are righteousness and life in similar sequence. Upon these two pairs the whole Bible rests. Thus it is that something more than historical (i.e. earthly) redemption is essential; it had to be cosmic, universal, super-mundane.

'Colossians' is set in that context, and its focus is the supremacy of Christ and the range of His Cross. The Cross there is seen as cleaving a devastating rift between the two cosmic and world rulers, and between the two forces of sin and death, on the one side, and righteousness and life on the other.

But what a different complexion it gives to Christ crucified! The broken, battered, pierced, bleeding, despised and rejected "Man of Calvary" is not just Jesus the Nazarene dying at the hands of evil men; He is fighting out to an eternal issue the battle of the eternities with the cosmic forces of the universe, and settling forever the question of sin and righteousness; of death and life, and laying down the foundation of human destiny!
There are two ways of seeing that drama of Calvary. One is that of a human tragedy with all its horrors and pathos, giving a place to Satanic triumph and sinful man's evil power. This interpretation would spell the defeat of God, the vanquishing of righteousness, and the victory of death. Such an interpretation would give credit to all the planners and executors of Christ's destruction and make the crucifixion to be a vindication of the Jewish rulers, who were the primary schemers and actors in the work. But there is another and still deeper interpretation and power. The Bible speaks of a Wisdom, a profound wisdom which is hid in God from before times eternal, hid from men, hid from devils, and hid from Satan himself. This means that both men and the evil cosmic forces are in darkness and blindness, and are deceived, so that they really do not know what they are doing in their hatred, malice and spite. The result is that, all unconsciously and blindly, they are only carrying out what God intended, and fulfilling the very purpose which they intended to destroy. This is exactly what happened at Calvary. A great work of cosmic redemption was accomplished there through the very means being used by Satan with the idea of totally preventing it. So Paul speaks of "Christ crucified, the wisdom and power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:23-24).

The Bible views the human race and the world as being in the prison and authority of this great spiritual system headed by Satan. Man is wholly unable to free himself; he has neither the wisdom nor the power to do so. A Man must come to his rescue and, because it is sin and death which are the binding power and basis of the arch-enemy's hold, the Rescuer and Deliverer must draw both the enemies and their power on to Himself (like Samson and the Philistines) - "through death destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14).

This the Final Adam did when He "to the rescue came". The original commission of the Apostle Paul was couched in these words: "I send thee, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God..." (Acts 26:17-18). There you have it. While redemption has many aspects, which are represented by the various words and terms used in the Gospel, that is the outermost and all-inclusive range and realm in this cosmic redemption.

We have, in much fewer words than are really required, ranged the Gospel of our salvation, but surely we have said enough to show how much greater salvation is than is often so cheaply presented in evangelism. One sometimes thinks that Satan must be very pleased with the cheap and easygoing presentation of this that - to him - spells such devastation! We are called to a very great heavenly vocation in the ages to come and to "attain" is through the most terrific debacle in the history of this universe. Read again the Letter to the Colossians in this light. It is surely not without significance that - in the Holy Spirit's ordering - this Letter is the last doctrinal document from the pen of the Apostle Paul before the Letters on the Lord's coming, the consummation of all things, although the chronological order would be otherwise.

*Lord Jesus, receive the grateful thanks of Thy people. We bow at Thy feet. We would be Thy humble servants for evermore. Help us by Thy grace to be faithful until the end. Amen.*