

Sparks

"A Witness
and a
Testimony"

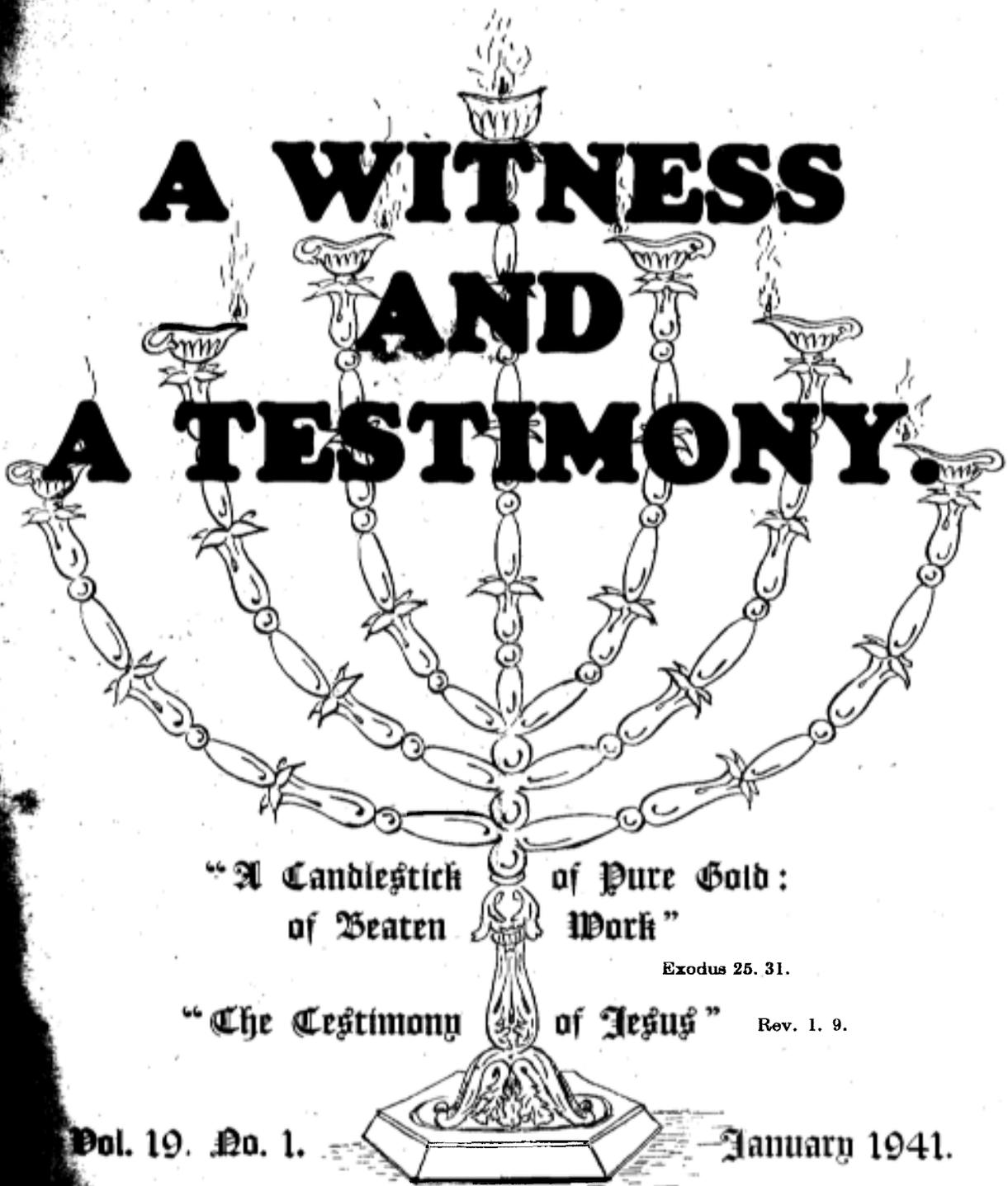
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A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY.

“A Candlestick of Pure Gold:
of Beaten Work”

Exodus 25. 31.

“The Testimony of Jesus” Rev. 1. 9.

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A bi-monthly ministry by which it is sought to lead the Lord's people into His full thought for them.

"A Witness and a Testimony"

Maintained
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those who are helped by it.

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1941

NO. 1, VOL. 19

God's Spiritual House

No. 1

The Exaltation of God's Son

READING: I Chron. xxii. 1-19; xxviii. 5-7; xxix. 20, 22-25; Acts ii. 30-36; vii. 47-49; I Pet. ii. 4-5; Heb. iii. 6; xii. 5, 9; Eph. i. 20-23.

I have been very much occupied of late with this matter of sonship in the House of God, and am led to the conclusion that something of this is to be the Lord's message at this time. There are many aspects of this spiritual house. How many of them we shall be able to consider must remain to be seen.

I am quite sure that this matter is very relevant to what is happening at this present time on the earth. In particular, there is a very real and living message in it for the Lord's people, and I trust that we shall seek to adjust ourselves to that fact and not regard this as just some further measure of Bible teaching which may be more or less familiar.

Christ Exalted on High—the Keystone of Testimony

We shall begin with what the Scriptures so clearly indicate as the point of commencement of the House of God, namely, the exaltation of the Son to the place of supreme authority and glory. The spiritual house, (which house are we,) prospectively exists for this very purpose of proclaiming and rejoicing in the fact of the

exaltation of God's Son. The passages which we read from the Old Testament, which are prophetic, pointing on to the spiritual house, all bear out this fact and show it in type in a very wonderful and clear way. David's greatest son—for God had given him many sons—was brought out into clear view as the one chosen of God to be exalted to a place of glory and power above that which had been given to any before him; and it is interesting to note that, while Solomon was ordained and chosen of God for that position, he did not come out as distinguished for it until someone else made a bid for that position. You will remember the little incident of Adonijah, who subtly worked to get the throne, to get what God had appointed for Solomon. By that subtle movement to usurp the throne appointed for another, Solomon was distinguished at once, brought out and proclaimed as the one chosen by God. That is only in passing; but it is interesting to notice that it was when God's Son and God's appointment concerning His Son was assailed, and His place sought after in a conspiracy, that the Lord Jesus was marked out, brought out into the light as the One whom God had chosen. That is something which recurs. There it was in the case of Solomon. It was so in the case of the Lord Jesus at the beginning of

this dispensation. That will happen again at the end when Antichrist makes his bid for world domination, and then God will bring out His Son as the One chosen and anointed for that position, and all will then be manifestly put in subjection under His feet, as they are now spiritually and potentially. That in passing.

The house which was brought into being through and by Solomon, came in specifically on the basis of Solomon's exaltation, on the ground that he was the appointed one and that God had summed up all things in him. When Solomon was brought into his place, then the house came into being; and all the things that are said about Solomon are very wonderful things. They all speak of his glory, of his power, of his wealth, God's thought for the one who shall have the throne, and the house becomes the very symbol of the glory of the Lord, the exaltation of the king. The house which is to be built for the Lord is to be exceeding magnificent. That house reflects the king, the one who is the son over the house in type.

We foresee by these Old Testament scriptures just what we have in the New Testament, and so we can come at once to this first and primary thing about the spiritual house of which we are called to be living stones, that our very existence is for the proclamation—in what we are as well as in our testimony—of the exaltation of God's Son.

Now, everything begins there, with the exaltation of Christ, and that firstly in heaven. It was when He was at the right hand of God exalted that the Church had its beginning. Everything came out from that, and in the beginning things in the Church spiritually were very glorious and very wonderful. I have no doubt but what angels took account of what was then going on to the glory and praise of God, and we have also reason to believe that demons were tremendously impressed. Everything took its rise from the exaltation of God's Son, this even "greater than Solomon".

The Essential Counterpart of the Heavenly Exaltation

But for us, while that remains true, and has many blessings associated with it, to have practical beginnings the exaltation of the Lord Jesus has to be an inward thing, and the beginning of everything for us necessitates there being a counterpart of that Son's exaltation in heaven

in our hearts; that what God means by His having glorified His Son is a thing of spiritual reality within us. He comes to absolute enthronement with all things in subjection to Him. You notice how the account of Solomon's enthronement concludes. "And all the princes, and the mighty men, and all the sons likewise of king David, submitted themselves unto Solomon the king" (I Chron. xxix. 24). He was doubly enthroned—"They made Solomon king the second time". Now you have your ground, if there is one, for a "second blessing"! You talk about second blessings. Here you are, this is what it is, the second thing. What God has done in heaven is done in our hearts. We have reason to rejoice and feel greatly blessed that God has raised Jesus from the dead and set Him at His own right hand. Tremendous things are bound up with that for us. But the "second blessing" is that this becomes something of reality in us, and that what is true in heaven as to all things put under His feet, submitting themselves to Him, is true within the kingdom of our lives. That is the way of the fulness of the blessing.

All things, as I have said, spring from that, begin there. Life itself begins in reality when Jesus is absolute Lord within. We do not come into the fulness of blessing when Jesus is not more than Saviour. The fulness of the blessing is known when He is Lord and has everything within us under His feet, submitting to Him. It is the way of blessing. You see, all the blessing that God meant for man, the fulness that was to be man's inheritance, was lost because Satan, seeking to usurp the place of God's Son as Lord, by his propaganda worked subtly and made man believe that he would lose everything by remaining in subjection to God. 'Why not be as God yourself?' said he. In other words, Why have a life limited by being subject to God and dependent upon Him! Along that line, man lost all the fulness, and now all the fulness comes back by being absolutely subject to God's Son, and submitting to Him in all things. That was the great lie of Satan, and this is why Satan does not like Jesus Christ being Lord, and why he so strongly contends against any ministry that has in view that object, of bringing the Lord Jesus into His rightful place as supreme Lord in God's house. It is because by that his lie is exposed and the work which he achieved through his lie undone.

The whole question is that of the universal

Lordship of Jesus Christ, and it is that which is coming out to-day as never before in the history of this world as the supreme issue. Who is going to be Lord in God's universe? Who is going to have world dominion? The enemy is still seeking to reach that end through man along the line of the lie, and we have never before known of his method being so tremendously, so universally and so insidiously employed—the lie! So much so, that for months past, this world has rocked on this question. Who can be trusted? Who can be believed? Who is speaking the truth? What man can you have confidence in? There has spread over the earth such an atmosphere of discrediting by lies that you almost look at those of your own household and wonder whether they can be trusted. That is a terrible reality in many lands. You dare not open your lips within the most limited circle, because truth faileth, trustworthiness has been smitten almost to the ground. The lie, the propaganda of lies: and all, mark you, with this one end in view, namely, to get a grip on the dominion of this world. That is Satan's work behind what we see going on, and when Jesus Christ comes into His place as absolute Lord in you and in me, something results which declares that Satan has been defeated; the lie is exposed. The truth is that subjection to Jesus Christ is not a miserable life as a vassal. It is a life of triumph, a life of victory, a life of glory, a life of fulness. It is the blinding work of the enemy with men, to make them think that to belong to the Lord, to have the Lord in their lives, means they are going to lose all that is worth while, and be shut down, and all the time be poor cringing creatures, hardly able to lift their heads up, going about as beggars. That is Satan's lie. The Old Testament brings it out here so clearly that, when all things were subject to, submitting themselves to, God's appointed king, it was a time of fulness such as the people had never known: and so it is when Jesus is Lord in heaven and within.

In those days, following that great day of Pentecost, the Church knew something of liberation, enlargement, enrichment, glory, power and fulness, and it all sprang from the fact that Jesus was Lord. They lived upon that ground and in the appreciation of that great fact. Life commenced there, testimony commenced there and services there, and all our service for the Lord should spring out of this. There is no true service which does not spring out from this fact

of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. You see, every revival or great spiritual renewal has been by the Lord coming back into His place. Go again over the Old Testament, and you have instance after instance when the Lord was brought back into His place—it was a wonderful time. Think, for instance, of the days of Hezekiah, of Josiah, when the Lord was given His place anew in a wonderful way. They came back to re-enthroned the Lord as Lord in their midst in an utter and full way, and they were great days. If you pass your eye over history, you see that all real spiritual awakenings—call them revivals or renewals—have circled round this one thing, that the Lord was brought back into His place. He was given His place as absolute Lord, and people went down before Him. That was the secret of it, and it is like that.

What is true in history, true in the wider way, is true in the individual life. So much of our trouble, our declension, our spiritual weakness and failure, is because He is not Lord. We are thankful to know Him as Saviour, we believe that He is in heaven glorified, but there is a good deal of controversy within us on points. It all amounts to this one issue, namely, the utterness of His Lordship within, and, when those matters and controversies are settled, we find a new uprising of life. You can always have a little revival in your own heart on any one point where the Lord has a controversy with you. Test it. It may be only one point, but you know that one thing is holding you up. You have to get clear on that one thing, and when at last you go down with that thing under the Lord and put it under His feet, you have a little revival in your own heart and you come out with new life, new testimony, new release. Spread that over all things, and the kingdom has come. It is just like that.

The Cross and the Lordship of Christ

Well, this, His spiritual house, has been brought into being for no other purpose or no greater purpose than that—just to stand entirely in the enjoyment of the proclamation of the exaltation of the Lord Jesus. When you come to think of it, is not that the primary and deepest meaning and purpose of the Cross? The Cross may do many things, touch many questions and many issues, but when you get down to the meaning of the Cross at its deepest, it relates to the deposing of other gods. That was the great issue in the twenty-fourth chapter of Joshua,

you remember. In reviewing the whole situation, Joshua has all Israel before him, and he begins with the history of Israel right back in the time of Abraham's father. 'Abraham's father lived in Ur of the Chaldees and served other gods. Then Abraham came out from the serving of his father's gods and crossed over the river and came into the land. After this your fathers came into Egypt and there they worshipped the gods of the Egyptians; but at length they also came out over the river to serve the Lord.' The whole issue was other gods and the river between the other gods and the Lord every time. Now then, what about you? says Joshua. Are you going to allow the river really to stand effectively for what it means? Are you going to allow that river really to stand between you and the other gods which you worshipped and served in Egypt? "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." What about you? So the river was always related to other gods. The Cross, in its deepest meaning, touches other gods, other lords, other objects of worship receiving the good of our lives, and deposes them all, and brings the Lord into His place, so that we say, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord". That is the meaning of the Cross. It touches everything that stands in the way of the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ. It gets right down there.

The Lord Jesus Exalted as our Kinsman

But then there is this other or further very blessed fact about the exaltation of the Lord Jesus. He is exalted as our Kinsman. The exaltation of Christ is the exaltation of our Brother. That comes out, you see, in the record. David said, "Of all my sons, (for Jehovah hath given me many sons,) he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of Jehovah over Israel" (I Chron. xxviii. 5). Then later, when speaking of Solomon's enthronement, the record says, "And all the sons of David bowed down and did obeisance to Solomon and submitted themselves unto him". A great thing—his brethren all looking up to him as on the throne and acknowledging him as king. That is a permanent factor in all the types about the exaltation of the Lord Jesus.

In the book of Samuel, again, you have that time when Absalom had usurped the throne and brought a great deal of misery and suffering upon the people to whom he had promised so much;

and then Absalom was slain and the people were stranded. For some time everything was in a state of suspense, until there arose a questioning among the people, and someone said, "Why speak ye not a word of bringing the king back?" That became a rumour, and it got out over to where David was. David heard what was being said, and he took hold of it and sent a message to Zadok and Abiathar for the people, expressing himself thus: I am your flesh and your bone; ye are my brethren: why speak ye not a word of bringing the king back? His appeal for his place was on the basis of his kinship and they brought him back on the basis of that appeal.

Now, what is the meaning and value of that? Well, God has exalted our Brother, God has exalted our Kinsman, and that Kinsman is God's Son, and He is going, as the Apostle puts it, to bring many sons to glory because He is the first-born among many brethren. The exaltation of our Kinsman means that the family is coming to exaltation. His enthronement is the earnest of ours; and, beloved, we are never sure of coming to our exaltation, our fulness, until we recognize the Lord Jesus in His place as our Kinsman-representative. It is an exalted family, it is a household, you see; God's house for the Son, and then sons. But the Son must have His place before the sons can have theirs; but, having His place, the sons have theirs guaranteed to them. Our Kinsman is exalted, and that says a great deal; because He is not exalted just as a despot, just as an officially appointed monarch whether we like it or not—God has chosen Him, selected Him, put Him in that position: now then, Bow the knee! Oh no; He is our Brother, our Kinsman, and there is such a tie, such a link, such a oneness of life, that He cannot be there apart from us. There is an inward spiritual oneness with Him in His exaltation which spells something very big.

Perhaps I can illustrate it best by reminding you of Mordecai. You remember Haman again, in the train of these many usurpers, and Haman's devilish device to destroy all the Jews. Mordecai is in the place of rejection, ruled out. Then, by one of those marvellous acts of Divine sovereignty which make even a sleepless night of the most tremendous value in history, the king could not sleep one night. Would that all our sleepless nights were as profitable to the Lord as his was! He commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles, and they were read

before the king; and he read something about **Mordecai**. Someone had lifted up his hand against the throne and a certain man, a Jew, had brought the thing to light and saved the king's life. Then the king said, "What honour and dignity hath been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" Then the story develops and it comes to the point where Haman goes home one day to his wife and all his friends and tells them of what had happened. He, who thought the king was going to honour him, has been made to honour Mordecai, and as he tells them this, the discerning answer made to Haman was this: "If Mordecai before whom thou hast begun to fall be of the seed of the Jews, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him". If he is of the seed of the Jews, you cannot prevail, your days are numbered! There is something about that, you see. It is this kinship with the Jews on the part of the exalted one which secures both their deliverance and the enemy's undoing.

Oh yes, this kinship with the Exalted One means for us deliverance and the overthrow of the enemy. There is a very great deal bound up with the exaltation of the Lord Jesus, and Satan knows it. He knows that his days are numbered when Christ is exalted in any life. When we come to that exaltation-union with the Lord Jesus in our own hearts, Satan is in despair. It is like that.

The Need for Diligence and Discipline in the Light of a Day to Come

Well now, we must stop somewhere, and I think we might just stay here by pointing out that this house, with all the significance of sonship, the Son and the sons in God's House, has a present spiritual meaning. It is something which has to be realised in a spiritual way now. It indeed is the great spiritual matter for all the children of God. If we ask, What is the issue in this dispensation where God and His people are concerned, the answer surely is this, that there shall be a house, a spiritual house, which stands in the good of the exaltation of the Lord Jesus. That is the issue, and that is to be a spiritual thing now.

But I also want you to remember that, so far as manifestation is concerned, this lies in the future; and upon that hangs this wonderful and terrible little word 'if'. "Christ as a son, over God's house; whose house are we, if..." He-

brews xii. which treats of God's dealings with us as with sons, has a big "if" there also. "If ye endure chastening, God dealth with you as with sons." It is rather a strange way of putting things. It almost looks as though you are not a son if you do not endure chastening. Well, that is what it means. The "if" is in view of the fact that you and I have not yet come to the fulness of sonship. It will be the fulness of sonship in manifestation which brings in the House of God in all its glory. It is something future, it is prospective. If...if...

You notice, in that connection, how that Israel in the wilderness is so often called up as a warning. They did not become, in God's intended sense, His house. They have perished in the wilderness. They did not suffer chastening. They would not let God deal with them as with sons along the line of child-training. They did not come to their adoption as sons. They fell short of the glory of the inheritance of the full purpose of God; and that is brought over to Corinthians and to Hebrews as the warning. We are His house if...if...if...

Now, what is the significance of this? Oh, it is this, that what God's Son is in glory, He becomes in us now progressively; that Christ is being more and more entangled in us as the Son over God's house. I think it is so patent, as hardly to need pointing out, that the course of our spiritual experience under the hand of God is always with this one thing in view. All our difficulties, with the Lord, all our bad times, are on the principle of submission to the Lord, with a view to the Lord having His place. Is it not like that? The Lord is finding us out by child-training. Take up the child and put the child under training, and you will discover what is in the child, whether the child is going to be compliant or not, whether the child is going on with you or not. Put the child under discipline, and you will find out all the revolt that is in the child's nature. That is how the Lord is dealing with us.

This word "chastening" is unfortunate, because it is confused in our minds with punishing. It is nothing of the kind. God is not punishing His children at all. The true meaning is child-training, and Satan always turns God's dealings with us into punishment in our minds. It is not that. What He is working at with us is to bring us to the place where He is utterly Lord and can do as He likes with us, and we have no question

at all. None of us has reached that point yet, but that is what the Lord is doing, and there is a big "if", you see. We can say we are not going to have any more of this discipline, we are not going on with it. Well the throne is in view, not only for Him but for us. The Lord has a great purpose for His sons in union with the Son as joint-heirs and as fellow-rulers in His universe. It all springs out of the fact that Jesus Christ is

Lord in heaven and in us, and then that this Lordship is wrought into us in a perfect way. All our training is in that direction. So it is prospective, it is future, and the "if" is there. We are God's house if... May the Lord so triumph in us that the "if" greatly loses weight and power and place, and eventually ceases to be at all, and we are His house. T.A-S.

"Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory"

No. 1.

The Church's Vocation

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil... Again, the devil taketh him unto an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and he said unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him...Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. iv. 1, 8-10).

"Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever" (Matt. vi. 13).

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."

"Lead (or bring) us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

"...showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; ...said unto him, All these things will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me."

"Deliver us from the evil one: For *thine* is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever."

As one who greatly believes in the Revised Version, perhaps it becomes necessary to say just a little word here, because the Revised Version leaves that Doxology out of the text and puts it in the margin. It is a very great question indeed as to whether the Revisers were right in doing that. Out of some fifty original authorities, only eight omit that Doxology, and there-

fore an overwhelming mass stands for it; and personally I feel, and I believe a great many others feel, that there is every reason in the Word of God why it should be retained in the text. For me, the greatest reason is the significance of it, and I have tried to allow the Word itself to suggest that significance by bringing together these two different parts. I am quite sure that most of you have perceived the complementary element in these two passages, how they go together in principle, how they are a part of each other in meaning. We shall, therefore, seek to abide rather in that realm of spiritual values than of mere technical interests, with regard to the Word of God.

We are not going to dwell upon fine points in what is called "The Lord's Prayer", but to look at some great spiritual features which come up in this great final clause of the prayer. "Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one; for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory"—Kingdom, power, glory, as belonging unto the Lord for ever and ever.

The Real Issue Behind Temptation

The first thing of which we take note is the significance of that little conjunction, "for". "Deliver us from the evil one; *for* thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory". Carry that back to Chapter iv., where the kingdoms of this world and the glory thereof are offered by Satan to the Lord Jesus, and refused with a reminder from the Scriptures: "Thou shalt wor-

ship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve". That surely corresponds to the first declaration, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory". Bring us not into trial, but rescue us away from the Evil One; for Thine is the kingdom. When you translate the words thus literally, you get nearer to their significance. Trial in this particular respect from the Evil One's standpoint would have as its objective the inducing of us to have the kingdom as on the lines of this world and lose it as on God's lines; for that is exactly what it meant in the case of the Lord Jesus. That is the essence of the enemy's pressure and assault, to bring us down and to cause us so to compromise for an easier way as to come into present possession of a kingdom on earthly and temporal lines, and miss the great thing which God has reserved in heaven for us. That is the object of all Satan's trying of us, as of the Lord Jesus, and it was because the Lord Jesus was able to see through the enemy's strategy and effort and detect what he was after in offering something seen, something tangible, something present, something great, apart from suffering and sacrifice and in the place of that which was eternal in the heavens, though costly for the time being; it was because the Lord Jesus was able to detect this, and perhaps feared that His Church would not see through the enemy's strategy, that He said to the Church, 'Pray thus: Bring us not into trial, but rescue us away from the Evil One'. In other words, Save us from falling a prey to this subtle thing which, under intense pressure, would make us turn away from the kingdom; unseen, heavenly and eternal, to something offered us now, glorious apparently, yet in reality a thing which must come under Divine judgment and be destroyed and prove to be an empty substitute for the great and glorious thing which God has for them that love Him.

Now that has a very real message for us in itself. I have no doubt that it goes to the heart of everyone of us, for we all know that kind of pressure and temptation from the enemy. It is ever present. Ah yes, and when adversity is strongest, the evil most intense, the suffering keenest, and the way before us most obviously the way of the Cross and of rejection and of ostracism and of loneliness, then the enemy's suggestion, to turn aside and have something here and now, both gathers force and gathers point. If only we will let go something and take

a lower level, a less utter position, we can have something; we can have some of the glory of this world, we can have a kingdom *now*. Thus he is ever seeking to bring us into a position where, with that fiery dart, he can lay us low and rob us of the kingdom. The Lord Jesus says to His own, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke xii. 32); but Satan is always seeking to offer a kingdom as well.

The Vocation of the Church

Well, that is only a fragment of the message in these words. There is always bound up with the simplest and briefest statement from the lips of the Lord Jesus a very great deal of Divine meaning, much more than lies on the face of things in the actual words themselves. Thus here in these words, amongst the most familiar words on Christian lips, in what is called "the Lord's Prayer", we have something of tremendous meaning. It has been but little recognized, but it can be caused to stand out by bringing together these passages from chapter iv. and chapter vi. in the way we have done. To me, it says so clearly that the Lord calls His people to pray and to take up a certain position in prayer. That position is set forth as a stand for God's rights against the counter-claims of the adversary, the claims of the adversary to power, to authority, to the right to give, and to glory. On the one side, he displays himself as one who is in a position, and that of great authority and power, and he seeks to show off his power, to make us conscious of his power in respect of his position, and this, of course, unto his glory. On the other side, there is God. God is not always vaunting Himself, nor making His authority and His power and His glory a matter of display. Between these two stands the Church—the people of God stand in the gap—and this prayer puts the Church in a parallel position to that of the Lord Jesus in the wilderness. There, on the one hand, we see Satan standing out and making a display of his authority and his power; that is, of his rights, what he can do, what he has the ability to do; and of his power and of his glory. On the other hand, God! But where is the display of power, authority, glory? It is hidden, it is not in manifestation at all. In between the two, the Lord Jesus is standing as in the gap and repudiating this, that is demonstrating itself, for that which is not seen, not at the moment mani-

fest, but which to Him is the supreme thing, far more real than this and, moreover, eternal. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve": For Thine, not his, is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.

The Inward Nature, Character, and Cost of True Testimony

But that is taking a tremendous stand when you are in a wilderness and have nothing whatever to prove it, and all you are conscious of is of the fierce and bitter assault of the Devil in power and ostentation. It is something which belongs to an inner relationship. Do you see the significance of that? The point, beloved, is that the Church is called to stand in that gap and, toward the ostentatious display of assumed right, authority, power and glory, to maintain a position of fixed repudiation; but toward that unseen spiritual, eternal, heavenly reality of the kingdom and the power and the glory, not now ostentatiously displayed, but hidden, to stand as a testimony. And when you have said that, you have summed up the Church's vocation. In this prayer, the Lord Jesus puts the Church there. These petitions may become personal, but remember, the Lord Jesus did not say, 'When you pray, pray after this manner—*My Father*'. No, it is "*Our Father*". The deepest and the inmost reality about the Church is that it is a spiritual family, and that means that it is the Father's glory and power and kingdom which has become the real concern of the Church.

This is not some temporal thing, this kingdom, this power, this glory. This is something which is our Father's, and we have an inner, heart relationship with this. That is what I meant just now when I said it is a matter of an inward relationship. Our King? True, He is our mighty Potentate on high. Yes, quite true, but not so presented here. "*Our Father*": "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory"; and what is implied is a repudiation of any kind of relationship with that other one and all that belongs to him.

Well now, all that I have to say for the present is wrapped up in that. What is the Church's vocation? To occupy the position into which it is put by the Lord Jesus in prayer; to stand in the gap for a testimony, as over against all that is display and ostentation and demonstration from the Evil One, to the fact that "Thine is the

kingdom and the power, and the glory". That is not a mere testimony in words. Oh, if all the people who use those words so frequently, perhaps almost every day of their lives, as a formula, really came into the spiritual meaning of them, what a time they would have! What an awful time they would have! You know it is true that we cannot really in a spiritual way make a declaration without drawing upon us some challenge. In a formal way, out of the mere mental conception or by way of learning by heart, you can say anything, go to any length, and not meet any challenge at all. But come into the wilderness in the power of the Holy Ghost and say something, touching ultimate forces, and then your testimony—"Thine is the kingdom"—will become more and more a grim thing, and there will be times when, in face of the enemy demonstrating fiercely and furiously, you will be on your knees simply wrestling to hold to that position—Thine is the kingdom!—nevertheless, Thine is the kingdom! It is standing in battle for something. Thine is the power! Thine is the glory! That is what we are here for, to maintain that position for God. That issue is becoming a very real one for many of the Lord's children to-day in an outward way, as well as in a spiritual.

The Conflict for World Dominion

Now, just look at these three words—kingdom, power, glory. They represent two histories from eternity to eternity. On the one hand, Satan seeking a kingdom, world domination; displaying power, terrible power. Look at it to-day: awful power, ruthless power, startling power, to that end—world domination. That has been so all the way through the centuries, Satan seeking to build his kingdom, and in doing so displaying his power, and making for himself a reputation, glory. Is this not reflected in some of the great episodes in the Scriptures? Is it not that which is seen in Egypt? A kingdom, a sphere of supreme government in the earth, power, display of power, glory, and all at the expense of what was of God; for the chosen seed was brought under that power in that kingdom to be made the instrument of that glory. The Pyramids, again, an abiding monument to the fact that a great world power or kingdom exploited something that was of God for its own glory. Of Babylon the same may be said. "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the

royal dwelling place, by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty ? ” said Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel, interpreting the dream, said, “ God hath given thee a kingdom ” : but that kingdom, that Gentile kingdom, was taken for the glory of a man and not the glory of God ; and that was the interpretation of the dream. Nebuchadnezzar was driven from amongst men to have his habitation with the beasts of the field, because he gave not glory to God in his kingdom, and when he came back and his reason returned unto him, and he walked again in Babylon, his great proclamation was to this effect, This God of heaven is the only God.

So we could pass down history and see it repeated again and again. But to-day we have it perhaps more manifest than ever. A kingdom, world domination, a display of awful Satanic power, all for the glory of Satan in the Antichrist eventually, so that he, sitting in the Temple of God, claims to be God, taking God’s place. A kingdom, power and glory in the place of God.

Now, I said that many of the Lord’s children are right up against that thing in a literal, as well as a spiritual way to-day. How far all will be involved in the outward and literal expression we do not know, but we are all involved in this thing spiritually. It is a mighty thing that we are in.

There is the other side—*His Kingdom, His power, His glory*. But the ground of the testing for us is that His Kingdom now is not a Kingdom to be seen, His power now is not a power which is being outwardly displayed, His glory now is something which is in the heart in a spiritual relationship and knowledge of Himself. It is what He is, what we know Him to be. The Church has to stand for that against this other. It comes down to us in our lives every day, is pressed home to us, and is going to be pressed home—to be able at all times to stand under intense trial and say, “ Thine is the kingdom ”. Ask friends just now in certain parts of Europe whether it is easy to say that right into the face of the Lord as the hordes of iniquity sweep on and do their devastating and devilish work and seem to meet with so little power to resist or throw them back, and no display from heaven. It seems they are doing as they will. Then ask these children of God whether it is easy to say after all, Nevertheless, Thine is the kingdom, and Thine is the power, and Thine is the glory ! It is a very living question. It presses in upon faith.

That is where we are. That is our vocation, that in the heavenlies in a spiritual way we stand for God in the breach and maintain in spirit and in faith that testimony.

A Final Word on Temptation and Vocation

Let us get away from all the romantic elements, (if indeed there be such,) of a great world situation, and see that this comes right down to our own personal life. It is the supreme question in all our personal trial, our sufferings, our afflictions, and all that we meet at the enemy’s hands. It lies behind all our temptations ; *for all temptations are one in essence*. The one end of them all is to force us, or entice us, to let go the heavenly for something that may be had here and now. All trial has that at its heart. You know quite well that in the secret place, under trial and difficulty and adversity, it is always this question that is cropping up—‘ Must it be like this ? Is it necessary for it to be this way ? Are we not being too utter, too heavenly ? Could there not be something of real gain if only we were to (we would never use the word) compromise ? ’ Yes, that is what it means ; to let go a little, slacken a little, drop down a little. In some form or other, that is the heart of all our temptation, and the question which it raises is whether we are standing for God’s rights or for something that will come to ourselves.

Now you have got the heart of it, of this temptation of the Lord Jesus in the wilderness ? In order to stand firmly for the rights of the Father right through to the glorious issue, He had persistently to refuse to listen to suggestions which would bring Him advantage, get Him out of a difficulty, make His way easier. Showing Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, the Devil said, “ All this power will I give thee and the glory of them...” The Lord Jesus refused. “ Thine is the kingdom ” ! If we go to Daniel, we meet the same declaration : ‘ The kingdom is the Lord’s ! He gives the kingdom to whomsoever He will. He will give the kingdom to the saints ’. We will wait for that, we will stand for that, and we will repudiate the other. Whatever Satan might give us would be a very poor substitute indeed.

I do wonder if you see the point in this word. It is simply one thing. The Church is here, by the Lord Jesus, placed in a position. It is a prayer position, and the earnest of that which is fully developed in Ephesians vi., the conflict

with principalities and powers, world rulers of this darkness, spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies; and we are bidden there to pray with all prayer. The Church is to function in prayer against an assumption, against a demonstration, against a claim, against an ostentation, against presumption on the part of the Evil One, all of which is to get us drawn into his domain and under his power, and to use us for his glory. To resist that, to stand against that, to stand

clear of it all for God's rights is the Church's business. Thine is the kingdom: Thine the power: Thine the glory, for ever and ever! That is our calling, that is our vocation. There is much more in it than that, but that is where the thing begins, where the Lord Jesus puts His people by this prayer as in a testimony to God's rights, against the one who would deny the Lord those rights and appropriate them himself. The Lord strengthen us unto it. T.A.S.

The Lamb in the Midst of the Throne

No. 3.

The Passover in Relation to Divine Purpose

"This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you" (Ex. xii. 2).

"And this day shall be unto you for a memorial, and ye shall keep it a feast to Jehovah: throughout your generations ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever" (Ex. xii. 14).

"Thou shalt therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year" (Ex. xiii. 10).

"Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover...And the day of unleavened bread came, on which the passover must be sacrificed...And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: for I say unto you, I shall not eat it, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he received a cup, and when he had given thanks, he said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves...And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and gave to them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. And the cup in like manner after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood, even that which is poured out for you" (Luke xxii. 1, 7, 14-17, 19-20).

"For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took bread; and when he had given thanks, he brake it,

and said, This is my body, which is for you: this do in remembrance of me. In like manner also the cup, after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood: this do, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim (narrate) the Lord's death till he come" (I Cor. xi. 23-26).

"Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep with the blood of an eternal covenant even our Lord Jesus,..." (Heb. xiii. 20).

I think it unnecessary to stay for long to argue or discuss so obvious a thing as the connection between the Passover and the Lord's Supper. There is little doubt that the Lord Jesus, in the upper room, brought the two together; took up the Jewish Passover, lifted it on to higher ground, invested it with the Divine thought and passed it on as something for the new order of things, that is, for the Church. In doing so, He gave spiritual meaning to all that had been set forth in type in the Jewish Passover, and the first thing which was taken up and has become a primary factor in the Church is what we may call the date question.

The Passover the Beginning of Spiritual History

"This month shall be unto you the beginning of months"; that is, history begins at that point. In the same way that the Passover became marked of the Lord for Israel as the be-

ginning of their spiritual history, so the Lord's death marks the beginning of the history of the Church and of every one of its members. That, of course, is a simple fact which everyone will accept.

But there is something within that fact which has to be recognized. We were pointing out in our previous meditation that in Exodus xii. we begin by finding the whole world, as represented by Egypt, and by Israel in Egypt, lying under judgment; but especially by Egypt, in that the purpose of God in the world had been persistently refused and rejected. His purpose had to do with His son, His firstborn. It had to do with firstborn sons. They are represented by Israel in a corporate way. God's purpose was bound up with His Son personally and corporately. That purpose had been made known, and again and again, and yet again, the world had refused the purpose of God. Therefore it is brought fully and finally under the judgment of God.

Spiritual history begins by coming into line with God's purpose and, from the moment of our so coming into line with God's purpose, it is that purpose which governs and constitutes history, gives character to history. It is that purpose concerning His Son which is ever the ground upon which God is making spiritual history, and thus it is that the beginning of everything has, as its deepest meaning, a oneness with the purpose of God. That may not seem to convey very much to you, but I would stay just a moment, because, unless we grasp the fullness of the Divine thought in redemption, we are not going to make very good progress. Israel's slow, tedious progress in the wilderness was due to their failure of heart-apprehension of Divine purpose. They were all the time turning in upon themselves as to the gains and losses to themselves of this way; as to the advantages and disadvantages of having come out to the Lord; as to how it would affect or was affecting them. Thus they were all the time governed in their relationship to the Lord by the effect of things upon themselves. To-day things are fairly favourable, and they are ready to go on with a bound. To-morrow things are not so favourable, and they are all of a haste to go back with a run. According as the life affected them, so was their reaction or response. They had failed to see that this whole thing was related to God's purpose. Their blessing and gain, of course, lay in the purpose of God being realized. Beloved, it is important for you

and for me to know that we are not just saved for the sake of being saved and blessed and given heaven and delivered from all sorts of troubles. We are saved unto God's eternal purpose, and we have to allow purpose, that purpose, to govern when things are not going easily or favourably, and not allow ourselves to drift away from the purpose. The beginning of history is the beginning of the realization of God's purpose. History is the history of God's purpose begun and carried on in our spiritual experience.

Redemption is Unto God

Now this purpose is bound up with the Church, designated in Hebrews xii., as we remember, "the Church of the firstborn". This is the antitype of what we have in Exodus iv. "Israel is my son, my first-born... Let my son go that he may serve me." That is the purpose. It is bound up with the Church of the firstborn ones. Thus you come to Exodus xiii., and you have the separation or consecration of the firstborn unto the Lord. On the ground of the Passover, the Passover lamb, the firstborn are separated unto God. This brings in this very definite and positive fact, that redemption is unto God Himself. You will remember a very positive word on this matter in Acts xx. 28. "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." And in Rev. v. 9, "Thou... didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every... nation". Purchased unto God, redeemed unto God—the absolute proprietorship of the Lord over the redeemed. This is a thought which needs to be more deeply rooted in our consciousness. It will save us from many of the weaknesses of our Christian lives. God Himself has shed His own Blood to purchase unto Himself a people. If God has done that, beloved, if He really has purchased us with His Blood in relation to a purpose which is infinitely precious to Him, then, given the chance, He will effect that purpose and reach His end and perfect that which concerneth us. Thus it is that the Apostle says, "The God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep with the blood of an eternal covenant... make you perfect in every good thing to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight". If He has His chance, He is going to reach His end in His Church. He has purchased

the Church with a great price, and He is not satisfied just to have us out of Egypt, out of the world, and called by His name. He is going to give Himself right on to the end to the accomplishing of the thing which He has in His heart and which has governed Him in our redemption. We are purchased unto God. It brings a tremendous amount of help to remember that. As we go on, we are more and more deeply conscious of our utter worthlessness and the impossibility of our ever being of value. We become more and ever more conscious of what is in the way in our nature, and we despair if our eyes rest upon ourselves. Our deliverance, our way through, our hope and our assurance, lie with God. Our hope is in Him, and the foundation is this, that He purchased us with His own Blood in order to accomplish a work upon which He has set His own heart; and, given the chance, God will never be defeated. He will perfect that which concerneth us.

The book of the Revelation has this amongst its many values, that it shows us the end reached, and there the Church of the firstborn ones, the Bride, the Lamb's wife, has become conformed to the image of the Lamb and is with Him in glory. The thing is done and we see God's end reached. He purchased with an object, and if you and I give Him the chance and do not rebel as did Israel, He is going to perfect that which concerneth us, "make us perfect in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight".

Spiritual History in the Making

If we did but recognize it, if our eyes were fully opened, we should see, amongst other things, that He is doing this by deepening and strengthening in us in the inward man a revolt against ourselves. If you and I were once for all delivered from this dead body, this nature of ours in the old creation, and we had no more consciousness of it, no more trouble with it, no temptation in our flesh whatsoever, there would be no reason whatever for our remaining here on this earth, no reason at all. We ought, in the moment in which that takes place, to go to glory. Why, then, are we here? One of the greatest realities of our spiritual history is this, that, on the one side, we are more and more coming to know the depth of sin and iniquity in the old creation which is about us. It is still with us. But, on the other hand, there is in us

the hatred of it, the growing revulsion against it, the deepening cry for deliverance from it, and the love for something other than it. Beloved, that is one of the chief values in our spiritual history. Of course, we would think it to be the greatest value if we could get rid of all the other at a stroke; for if you are perfect, all your longings are at an end and the goal is reached. But it is by this deepening and strengthening of a revolt against something and a reaching out for something else, that the Lord is instructing us and working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight. He is building up an inner man. You and I must never expect, while we are here on earth, that we are going to be other than increasingly conscious of the depths of sinfulness in the old nature. The tragedy would be if ever we were to surrender to that and say it is always to triumph, and not recognize that there is a Spirit in us which is of the new creation, which is not that at all, but which is walking after God, walking after holiness, and that the strength of our loathing of that which we find in our flesh is the measure of the work of grace in us. The people who are farthest on are not those who are least conscious of sin in themselves, in their old nature, but those who have the greatest revolt against themselves. I believe that is what was in the heart of the Apostle Paul, when, so late in his life, he wrote those words to the Philippians recorded in the third chapter, that cry to "be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own, but...the righteousness which is from God by faith...Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but..." Here, late in life, the consciousness of that man is that there is a long way yet to go. This intensity of going on with God, despite all this other, this is spiritual progress. It is the capacity for blushing at our failures, the capacity for being ashamed of ourselves, the sensitiveness over our own spiritual weakness and moral breakdown. That is spiritual growth, that is spiritual refinement. God is working His purpose in us, and I think we should not be wrong in saying, if we be truly of those who have really been going on with God, that so far from feeling we are most holy, we shall, with our last breath, feel most desperately the hopelessness of our old nature, and reach out most tremendously unto Him as our righteousness.

What is the point of this word? Well, God took the initiative in redemption and took the

initiative with purpose, and paid the greatest price that can be paid to secure a vessel for His purpose. Then, if that is true, God will carry through His work and make a full end of it, if we will but remember that it is not a matter of the present advantage to us. It is not a question of how this in the meantime affects us. The one question is, What is God getting out of our experience? This trouble, this trial, this affliction, this adversity, this suffering to-day, how shall we view it? Shall we view it as Israel persistently reviewed their difficulties in the wilderness with the 'I' looming large? If we do, then it is a wilderness indeed. But if we view everything in the light of God's purpose, and apprehend that purpose by faith, then at the other side of this trial, of whatever nature it may be, we shall be seeing that the Lord has got some more territory in us, the Lord has gained something. The older we get, the longer we go on with the Lord, the more we are able, although never sufficiently able, I fear, to regard our difficult days in this way; not to murmur and exclaim, Oh, some more suffering! but rather to take the position, The Lord has something in this. Let

us not look at the things which are seen. Let us believe God, that over at the other side of this we shall be saying, Yes, the Lord got something through that! He has redeemed us unto Himself, and He is working all the time unto Himself, and we believe that, when the Lord has secured the territory He would have in us, then He can lead us into His territory and give it to us.

I think those are the two sides of Israel's history. Israel never got the land until the Lord got what He wanted in them. Joshua and Caleb represented men in whom the Lord had obtained a full place, and the generation which followed that first unbelieving generation represented a people in whom the Lord had secured what He had all the time been seeking; and when the Lord has got what He is after in us, then He can lead us in to enjoy His fulnesses. Remember that we never come into the blessing until the Lord has come into His portion. To-day is the day when the Lord is getting something for us it is dark. To-morrow, when the Lord has got what He is after, then we too have something and it is light. T.A.S.

The Normal Christian Life

No. 2.

The Relationship of Revelation to True Experience

READING: Romans vi. 1-11.

The death of the Lord Jesus is inclusive. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is also inclusive. In I Cor. vi. the Lord is spoken of as the last Adam and the second Man. The Scripture does not refer to him as the second Adam, but as the last Adam; nor does it refer to Him as the last Man, but as the second Man. As the last Adam He is the sum total of humanity; as the second Man He is the Head of a new race. As the last Adam He gathers up into Himself all that was in Adam; as the second Man, having by His Cross done away with the first man in whom God's purpose was frustrated, He brings in another Man in whom that purpose is fully realized. When He was crucified on the Cross He was

crucified as the last Adam. All that was in the first Adam was done away with in the last Adam. We were all included in His death. As the last Adam He puts away the old race; as the second Man He brings in a new race. It is in His resurrection that He stands as the second Man. We died in Him as the last Adam; we live in Him as the second Man. Our old history ends with the Cross; our new history begins with the resurrection. "Wherefore if any man is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new" (II Cor. v. 17, R.V.M.). The Cross terminates the first creation, and out of death there is brought in a new creation in Christ, the second Man. If we are "in Adam" all that is "in Adam" be-

comes ours by "free grace"! There is no need to make up our minds to lose our temper or commit any other sin; it all comes to us freely and despite ourselves. Likewise, if we are "in Christ", all that is in Christ comes to us by "free grace", without any effort on our part.

The Necessity for Revelation

Romans vi. shows that the death of the Lord Jesus is inclusive. In His death we all died. None of us can progress spiritually without seeing this. If we have not seen Him bearing *our sins* on the Cross we cannot have justification: if we have not seen Him bearing *us* on the Cross we cannot have sanctification. Not only have our sins been put on Him, but we ourselves have been put in Him. How did you get forgiveness? You realised the Lord Jesus died and bore your sins on Himself, that His Blood was shed to cleanse away your defilement. When you saw your sins all taken away on the Cross, what did you do? Did you pray? Did you say, "Lord Jesus, come and die for my sins?" No, you did not pray at all, you only thanked the Lord. You did not beseech Him to come and die for you, you thanked Him because He had already died in your stead. Now, what is true of your forgiveness is also true of your deliverance. The work is done: therefore there is no need to pray, but only to praise. God has put us all in Christ, so that when Christ was crucified we were crucified too. It is done. Thus there is no need to pray, "I am a very wicked person, Lord please crucify me". That is all wrong. You did not pray about your sins; when then pray about yourself? Your sins were dealt with by His Blood, and you were dealt with by His Cross. It is done. All that is left for you to do is to praise the Lord. When Christ died, you died; you died in Him. Do you believe in the death of the Lord? Of course you do. Well, the same Scripture that says He died for us, says that we died with Him. "Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him" (Romans vi. 6). I could turn it round and say, Christ has been crucified with our old man. Some of you came here in twos. You might say, My friend came with me; but you might also say, I came with my friend. In history, (not in doctrine) we can say with equal truth, I was crucified with Christ, or, Christ was crucified with me. Has Christ been crucified? Then can I be uncrucified? I believe in the death of the Lord Jesus, and I believe in my own

death just as surely as I believe in His. This is the Gospel. Why do you believe the Lord Jesus died? Because you feel He has died? No, you have never felt it. You believe He has died because God has declared it to be a fact. How do you know the thief of the cross was crucified? Because the Word of God tells you so. You believe in the death of the Lord, and you believe in the death of the thief: now, what about your own death? Have *you* died? How can you know? You can know, for the simple reason that God has said so. If you feel Christ has died, He has died, and if you do not feel He has died, He has died. If you feel you have died, you have died, and if you do not feel you have died, you have died. These are Divine facts. That Christ has died is a fact, that the thief has died is a fact, and that *you* have died is a fact also. Let me tell you, *you* have died. *You* are done with! *You* are ruled out! This is the Gospel for Christians.

Our crucifixion can never be made effective by will or by effort, but only by accepting what the Lord Jesus did on the Cross. Our eyes must be opened to see the finished work of Calvary. After my conversion I studied the Scriptures and knew that the Lord Jesus had died, and knew that I must die too; for I was too bad to live. So I tried to die, I tried to live as though I had died. With what result? The same old temper showed itself, the same old sins; there was no deliverance. For seven years after my conversion, despite all my efforts to die, I still could not enter into the experience of the death of Christ. One day I was upstairs sitting at my desk reading the Word and praying, when the Lord opened my eyes, and I saw that I died when the Lord died; and from that day the question of my death has been a matter of the past, not of the future. I can always look back and see my death as an accomplished fact. When I made this great discovery I jumped up from my chair, rushed downstairs, laid hold of my cook and said, "Do you know that I have died?" He looked puzzled: so I went on, "Do you know that Christ has died? Do you know that I am just as dead as Christ? Do you know that Christ is not a tiny bit more dead than I?" From that day to this I have never for one moment doubted my own death. Friends, this is the first step into a normal Christian life. If we are to live such a life our first need is of revelation. May God open our eyes to see what He has done for us in His Son.

The Fruit of Revelation

Some of you, prior to your salvation, may have tried to save yourselves. You read the Bible, prayed, went to church, gave alms. Then one day your eyes were opened and you saw that a full salvation had already been provided for you on the Cross. You just accepted that and thanked the Lord, and peace and joy flowed into your heart. Now, salvation and sanctification are on exactly the same basis. You receive deliverance in the same way as you receive forgiveness of sins. For years maybe you have tried to exercise control over yourself, and improve yourself, but all to no purpose. When you see the truth you will cease to do anything. Revelation stops all human effort. In writing to the Romans, Paul said, "Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him" (Rom. vi. 6). *Do you know this?* The whole question of deliverance begins with knowing. Without knowing you cannot have deliverance. The first four chapters of Romans speak of faith, and faith and faith. Without faith no one can have forgiveness of sins and justification. In the next four chapters you find no mention of this kind of faith. The condition of living the normal Christian life is (1) Knowing, (2) Yielding, (3) Walking in the Spirit. Living a normal Christian life must begin with a very definite "knowing"; not just knowing something about the truth, not just understanding some doctrine, not a mere intellectual knowledge, but an opening of the eyes of the heart to see what we have in Christ. When you have seen, then you know beyond all possibility of doubt.

How do you know your sins are forgiven? Because your Pastor told you so? No, you just know it! If I ask, How do you know, you simply answer, I *know* it! Such knowledge comes by revelation. You know it in your own heart, you see it in your own spirit. A light has shined into your inner being, and you are persuaded of the fact. It is not because anyone has told you, and not even because Romans vi. tells you. That would not be good enough. *You know it because God has revealed it in your heart.* You may not feel it, and you may not understand it; but you know it, for you have seen it. Once you have really seen yourself in Christ, then nothing can shake your assurance of the fact.

Now, if you ask a number of believers who have entered into the normal Christian life how they came by their experience, some will say

this way and some will say that. Each stresses his own particular way of entering in and produces scripture to support his experience; and unfortunately many Christians are using their special experiences and their special scriptures to fight other Christians. The fact of the matter is, that whilst Christians may enter into the deeper life by different ways, we need not regard the experiences or doctrines they stress as mutually exclusive, but rather as complementary one to the other.

The second half of the first section of Romans speaks of three different steps by which we enter into the fuller life. If we would live a normal Christian life, then we must take all three steps; not one, or two, but all three. The first step is revelation; revelation, that is to say, not of myself, but of the work of the Lord Jesus on the Cross. When Hudson Taylor entered into the normal Christian life it was thus he entered in. He had first tried to get into Christ, but had found himself always slipping out, so to speak. When the Lord showed him he was already in Christ as the branch in the vine, he no longer tried to get in, but could praise the Lord he was in. Think of the bewilderment of trying to get into a room in which you already are. Think of the absurdity of asking to be put in. If I recognise the fact that I am in, I make no effort to enter. If we had more revelation we should have fewer prayers. Much of our praying is just because we are blind. Once I was sitting with a co-worker seeking to lead a man into the fuller life. Said the man, "The best a man can do is to pray". But if God has already given you everything, what do you need to pray for? we asked. "He hasn't", the man replied, "for I am still losing my temper, still failing constantly: so I must pray more". I said, Well, do you get what you pray for? "I am sorry to say I do not get anything", he said. I tried to point out that just as he had done nothing for his justification, so he need do nothing for his sanctification. Then my co-worker said, What is this on the table? "A flask." Can you imagine this flask praying, Lord, will You have mercy on me and make me into a flask. "It would be nonsense to pray like that", the man said; "it is a flask". Well, said my co-worker, you *are* dead! You *are* crucified! Why pray to become dead? Why pray to be crucified? It is just as absurd. You do not need to pray to the Lord to do anything, you merely need your eyes opened to see that He

has done all. That is the point. We need not work to die, we need not wait to die, we *are* dead. We only need to recognise what the Lord has already done, and praise Him for it.

The Cross Deals with the Root Cause

Now, suppose the Government should wish to deal drastically with the question of strong drink, and decide that the whole country shall go dry, how could the decision be carried into effect? How could we help? If we were to search every shop and house throughout the land and smash all the bottles of wine, or beer, or brandy we came across, would that meet the case? We might rid the land of every drop of alcoholic liquor it contains, but behind these bottles of strong drink are the factories that produce them, and if we only deal with the bottles and leave the factories untouched, there is no permanent solution to the problem. The drink-producing factories must be destroyed if the drink question is to be permanently settled.

We are the factory, our actions are the products. The Blood of the Lord Jesus dealt with the question of the products, namely, with our sins. The question of what we have done is settled; but what about the question of what we are? Our sins were produced by us. Our sins have been dealt with, but how are we going to be dealt with? Do you believe the Lord would cleanse away all our sins, and then leave us to put away the sin-producing factory? Do you believe He will put away the goods produced, but leave us to deal with the source of production? No, He has done away with the goods and also done away with the factory that produces the goods.

On "Knowing" and "Reckoning"

Note again Romans vi. 6. The tense is most precious, for it is the "once-for-all" tense. The thing is done and it cannot be undone. Our old man has been crucified once for all, and he can never be uncrucified. This is what we need to know. When we know this, what will follow? Verse 11, in which we have the exhortation, "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin", is the natural sequence to verse 6. When we *know* that our old man has been crucified we shall spontaneously *reckon* ourselves to be dead. When we know, then reckoning follows naturally. But we must not lay too much emphasis on the matter of reckoning. People are always try-

ing to reckon without knowing. They have not had revelation first, yet they try to reckon, and soon they get into all sorts of difficulties. When temptation comes they begin to reckon furiously—"I'm dead, I'm dead, I'm dead"; but in the very act of reckoning they lose their temper. Then they say, It won't work; Romans vi. 11 is no good. Of course Romans vi. 11 is no good without Romans vi. 6.

What does reckoning mean? Reckoning is the only accurate thing a person can do. An artist paints a landscape. Can he do it with perfect accuracy? In history, who would vouch for the absolute accuracy of any record, or in geography for the perfect correctness of any map? Even in our everyday speech, when we try to tell some incident, with the best intentions to be honest and truthful we cannot speak with perfect accuracy. What then can a man do that is utterly reliable? Arithmetic! There is no scope for error there. One chair plus one chair equals two chairs. That is true in Helsingor and it is just as true in Copenhagen. If you travel south to Berlin or north to Oslo it is still the same. All the world over and for all time one plus one equals two. One plus one equals two in heaven and earth and hell. Why does God say we are to reckon ourselves dead? Because we *are* dead. If I have Kr. 15.00 in my pocket, what do I enter in my account-book? Can I enter Kr. 14.00 or Kr. 16.00? No, I must enter in my account-book that which is a fact in my pocket. It is because I am really dead that God tells me to count it so. God could not ask me to put down in my account-book that I am dead if I am still alive. Reckoning does not mean that I have only Kr. 14.00 in my pocket, but hope by entering Kr. 15.00 in my account-book that such reckoning will make up the deficiency. If I have not got Kr. 15.00, yet try to reckon—"I have Kr. 15.00; I have Kr. 15.00; I have Kr. 15.00; will such reckoning affect the fact that I have only Kr. 14. in my pocket? Reckoning will not make nothing into Kr. 15, nor will it make Kr. 14 into Kr. 15. But if it is a fact that you have Kr. 15 in your pocket, then with great ease and assurance you can enter Kr. 15 in your account-book.

After you reckon yourself dead with Christ, the Devil will come and say, "There is something moving inside; what about it? Can you call that death?" What will you say then? Now, you must choose! Will you believe

Satan's lie or God's truth? (We are not here denying the reality of the "flesh", but speaking of being moved from a revealed position and fact, namely, our death with Christ.) I may not feel that I am Mr. Nee, I may even forget that I am Mr. Nee, I may even dream that I am not Mr. Nee; but when I am sleeping I am Mr. Nee, and when I am awake I am Mr. Nee; when I remember it I am Mr. Nee, and when I forget it I am still Mr. Nee. It is a fact which nothing I experience or fail to experience, can alter. So also, whether I feel it or not, I am *dead* with

Christ. Whether my experience proves it or disproves it, the fact remains unchanged. If you stand on that fact, then Satan cannot prevail against you. If you have any doubt about the fact, Satan will surely get you; but if you have no doubt, then it does not matter what Satan does, you can well afford to laugh at him. If anyone should try to persuade me that I am not Mr. Nee, I could well afford to do the same. Let us, then, hold fast to the fact that when Christ died, we died also.

W.N.

God's Purpose in Testing

READING: I Cor. ix. 26-x. 13. II Tim. ii. 15.

I think probably most of us are conscious of the fact that this period of time is one in which, in a peculiar sense, the people of God are on trial. Of course, there is a purely human side to that. We are in the various nations of the earth as men and women who are seen and known by other men and women, and in that quite simple earthly sense, this is a time when the Church of God, as in the sight of men, is on trial.

On Trial Before the Lord

But it is not of that I am thinking. That which I have in mind has nothing to do with the approval or disapproval of men, either worldly men or godly men. All that has its place, but the fact which is of peculiar importance to us is that this day, and indeed every day, we are on trial before the Lord. Running through the New Testament, indeed through the whole Word of God, there may be found this thought of God proving His people, and out of such provings there arises either one of two results. On the one hand, there is a word immediately connected with this thought of proving which speaks of successfully passing through the test, an emerging without having failed, and that is known as "approved". The result of proving may be "approved". On the other hand, there is the opposite word, also arising immediately out of the matter of being put to the proof, and, although it is never translated in this way, its meaning is "disapproved". I want, as the Lord

shall enable, to seek to draw your attention to this matter.

All the time, in a variety of ways, God is bringing us through experiences which are meant to test us. They do test us and they are meant to test us. God is Himself putting us to the proof. There is a reference in the first letter to Thessalonians, in which the Apostle speaks of God as "He who trieth or who proveth the heart," and that, just in a very simple phrase, explains what God is doing. He is proving the heart. He is proving, putting us to the test, and seeing right down into the very centre and spring of our being, how we react under that test. Now I know, from one point of view, that sounds rather harsh. At the best, it seems to breathe the atmosphere of the school-boy and examinations, which are not exactly a matter of enthusiasm—at least, they used not to be in my time! But with the Lord there is always the same purpose, which I suppose governs even the examinations; not a desire to floor, but a desire that we should be approved. With the Lord, of course, there is so much more in view, and all the time with Him, as with us, it is a matter of the heart: "God which proveth the heart". I believe that would help us in many of our circumstances and experiences, if we could have this key to them and interpret them in the light of this word. God is watching us and proving us by that very circumstance. It is possible, blessedly possible, and moreover the Lord's desire, that we should emerge approved; but it is possible, sadly

possible, for the people of God under trial to be disapproved.

Tests in the Spiritual Realm

Now, let us consider first of all, how the Lord tries us and tests us and puts us to the proof. How does He not? Is not this the very atmosphere of the life we live? There is, of course, the purely spiritual proof, the trial, the testing, the temptation, which is simply and only between ourselves and the Lord, or rather only in the spiritual realm, with no evident connection with things seen or experiences undergone in a physical or mental way. I think that is perhaps more rare. You remember some of John Bunyan's long drawn out conflicts which seem to have been purely on a spiritual basis quite apart from any circumstances. Well, there is this purely spiritual realm. For example, there may descend upon us, a kind of darkness, a kind of apathy; more than that, a despair, a heaviness, a sense of the unreality of things, and that then becomes for us a spiritual testing-ground, as to whether we accept that or whether we will rise against that and refuse to live in that atmosphere.

Tests in Practical Ways

But I am thinking more of the practical ways in which the testing comes to us, though we must remember all the time, of course, that the test is essentially spiritual in character. The Lord is trying the heart. The trial comes to us in very practical and simple ways of daily life, sometimes in very acute ways, very deep trial. Peter, making use of this same word, speaks of the "fiery trial". "The proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire..."; and it is surely in the adversities, the tribulations, the painful experiences of life that the Lord is testing our hearts. The Bible abounds in instances of this. The word of the Lord tried Joseph in this way. The people of God in the wilderness were allowed to suffer hunger so that the Lord could try them, to make them to know what was in their heart. Thus it is throughout the Word of God, until we come at length to the book of the Revelation and find the church at Smyrna in the hands of the Devil. Yes, that may sound an extraordinary thing. We thought we were delivered out of the hands of the Devil when we were saved. Well in one sense, praise God, we

were. But the Lord says, 'Satan shall cast you into prison'; and there the purpose is perfectly clearly expressed—"that ye may be tried". The Lord is all the time allowing such experiences in order to find out, or rather, shall we say, in order to bring out, what is in the heart.

Now, I do not know what your trial may be, for the variety of trials is legion. They may touch our position as the Lord's servants: we may seem to be on the scrap heap. They may touch our daily life, something purely personal, or relationships with others. But the fiery trial comes to the people of God. What for? Well, our first reaction is to cry that we might be delivered from it. We cannot conceive of anything else as the will of God, but our being delivered from it. Well, deliverance of course is a very important thing, but it is not what the Lord has set His heart on. He delivered the Israelites from their hunger. He gave them their request when they asked for meat, but He did not approve them. "With most of them God was not well pleased." That takes us back to what Paul says of himself: "lest I should be rejected", which is the word "disapproved". Though the word is not exactly the same in both instances, they are related words and carry the same meaning. God disapproved of the majority of His people, though He delivered them out of their difficulty. No, the first thing is for us to realize that just where we are, in that peculiar circumstance which is ours and only ours, and perhaps known only to us and the Lord, the Lord has a purpose. He is putting us to the proof, and the result means a great deal to Him and to us—the result in that realm, not of our deliverance so much, as our heart attitude in the trial. Well, that is adversity.

Of course, some people are tried by prosperity. Do not forget that, when you hear of others being tried and in difficulties, and you think you are not and cannot understand why you are not, you are none the less on trial, just as much on trial. Do you not think that the church at Laodicea was being tried by the Lord just as much as the church at Smyrna? The former possessed everything, and that was its downfall. Thus the Lord may allow things to go very smoothly and comfortably for us, but we are still on trial to know what is in our hearts.

Or the Lord may offer us a way which is a nice way. Oh, how often that comes, that kind of test! The offer of prosperity. You remember

how Abraham met that in various ways in his life ; the possibility, the prospect, of going the way, for instance, that Lot chose, or of accepting the gifts that the king of Sodom offered to him. It might have seemed to him to be a way of the Lord : and there do come periods in our lives when a way is opened to us, or a prospect presented, which is very agreeable, which may even seem to be an answer to our prayer. It may come to us almost miraculously, with extraordinary touches of coincidence, or, as we feel, confirmation that the thing is of the Lord ; and the Lord allows all that for one thing, to try what is in our heart. Do we accept that and eagerly seize all the " confirmation " because we want to go that way, or do we rather suspect that, even more than if it had been a way of hardship ? In all these ways, we are under test.

Or it may be in our daily life and work. You remember when the Apostle came down to practical things, he found those who had to work for their living more or less in two categories. There were those who had unpleasant masters and positions. Well, the Lord had put them there to try them by adversity in their daily work as to whether they would do it unto Him. Others, again, had kindly or easy-going masters, but it was just as much a test under them, as to whether they would do their job properly and fill all their working day. Do let us realize, dear fellow-Christians, that we are on trial every day. It is not so much before men ; it is before the Lord, and it comes down to very practical and simple things, with the Lord all the time proving the heart. That is where the real crux of the whole problem lies, in the heart.

The Test of Time

Then, of course, there are many other ways in which the test comes. It comes with time. I am not thinking so much of our getting old, as of the time-factor of perseverance. When anything is new, we feel full of enthusiasm ; but the time test finds us out as to whether we continue with the same enthusiasm, the same freshness. When you first opened your mouth in the prayer meeting with great trembling, when you found you could pray (though not with your own strength), it was a joy to come into things ; but do you go on, or does time find things getting stale ? Oh, the curse of staleness which is in everything of this world, and which tries to come into the things of God ! That is another of the tests.

Tests in the Assembly

But then there is another realm altogether of our testing, beyond the merely personal one, and I think this is a very important one, namely, the realm of fellowship, or, if you like, the church or the assembly. It is a very blessed thing to have fellowship with other children of God, but at the same time our corporate life together is an acid test that the Lord is always applying to us ; in this way, namely, the matter of love. Now I know that the ideal assembly would be so filled and flooded with the love of God that you, as one member of it, would have no difficulty and no problems. But where there are problems, these things are meant by the Lord to try us. What is our heart attitude ? Oh, we can stand off, we can pursue our own personal life with the Lord and feel that it is a pity that things are as they are ; and we can fail the Lord by doing that. The Lord is not letting us off with that critical attitude toward the thing, as if we were not a part of it. What, then, of this matter of love ? Well, you say, I have tried to make contacts. Yes, with whom ? With the people that you would like naturally, that you would like to be friendly with. That is natural, not spiritual. There are sure to be some who would welcome the fellowship, though they may not be the ones you would choose. That is just the point. It may be the ones you overlook in your turn. Thus all the time this question of our mutual life together in love and helpfulness comes back to our own hearts.

This is all so true in the matter of our corporate prayer together. We may feel that our contribution is not wanted. That may be pure imagination on our part, or, shall I say, pure invention of the enemy, or there may be something somewhere to justify in a measure our feeling that way ; but the Lord will never allow us to stand off and keep quiet and stand out because things are not exactly and perfectly what they should be over there in the assembly. Now, we may do that, but if we do let us know this, we are failing the Lord, we are failing under the trial, under the test. That thing, whatever it may be, real or imaginery, is not an accident, it is not something beyond the purview of the Lord. It is something that He is applying to our hearts as a test. All kinds of tests arise in the gathering. You know how sometimes a prayer gathering seems to get so flat and heavy. What is your attitude then ? Do you sit back and wait

for something to happen? There is never a gathering in which you are present but that the Lord is testing your heart. I do not say that when such a moment arises, you ought immediately to break forth into utterance. But the Lord does require of us an attitude of spirit which is strong and positive, never critical, never merely passive, but always alive unto Him. It may be that, when some other brother or sister is having a difficult time and cannot get through, we are sitting back and letting them get on with it instead of helping them on. But I simply mention these things as illustrations of the one point that I feel the Lord would stress before us. In our private life, our corporate life, our secular life if you like, and in our walk with Him—on every point we are being tested by the Lord and He is proving what is in our heart.

The Purpose of the Testing

Now He is doing that, as I have said, with a purpose, and the purpose is expressed in this word that surely we should covet to be applied to us by the Lord, this word "approved". That is what matters supremely, that in the trial and through the trial we should be able to abide the test and be approved of the Lord.

The Apostle, in writing to the Corinthians, is very careful to make it known that it is the Lord's approval that is the point at issue. "Not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth" (II Cor. x. 18). You see, in a bitter trial, that is something to realize, the possibility of the Lord commending. He whom the Lord commendeth is approved. Is that not a goal worth aiming at? Is not that a star to guide your course? Is not that adequate recompense for every trial of life?

Now, this has nothing at all to do with our acceptance in Christ, nothing to do with the Lord's favour and love to us. He loved us when we were far from Him. He loved us in that peculiar way in which He loves His own immediately we were in Christ, and He will love us to the uttermost. No, this is not a question of the Lord's love in that simple sense. It is something more than that. It is the Lord's acknowledgment of facts, His approval of things that are, or unhappily His disapproval of things that are not. So that this is the goal of all His tests.

Now I know that when life is difficult for us we are apt to feel just as a small boy feels about the examiners, that they are purposely trying to

catch him, to reject him. Well, we are tempted to feel like that about God, but let us remember if the Lord wanted to reject and fail us, He could do it very easily. It would be no difficulty to the Lord to get us completely out of the running in a half a minute. The Lord is not out to upset our faith. The Lord is not desiring to destroy us, to drive us to despair. He could have done that long ago. No, the Lord has only one purpose in view in trying us, and it is that we should come forth approved. That is the blessedness of the man who endureth temptation. All the time the Lord is working with us to produce that in us which can meet with His approval.

So the Apostle, writing perhaps specifically of Christian work, but surely including every phase of Christian life, tells Timothy to give diligence to be approved of God. I hope you do not make that verse to mean Bible study. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God,"—to be a Bible student—"rightly dividing the word of truth." It is not a question of study in that sense of the word. Actually, the real word the Apostle uses, translated "diligence", gives the idea of being swift to be found approved of God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed. Now, that is the Lord's goal with us all the time, and, while we do not want to be always turning in on ourselves and thinking about ourselves as we pass through every phase of life and experience day by day, it does give a solid ground under our feet for all the way of life when we realize that the Lord's purpose at every turn is to try us in order that we may be found trustworthy and be approved of Him. That is His purpose. And that can happen in the secret of your own heart, at home or in the gathering. It can happen just like that quite as much as in any outward feat of prowess that may seem to merit commendation of the Lord. It is a heart matter. It is not the one who goes out pioneering in foreign lands, who bears great hardship, who is necessarily commended by the Lord. This question is simply one of being found able to pass through the test without failing under it.

Of Failure Under Testing

So I am forced to turn to that other side, the sad one, of the possibility of the Lord's children breaking down under the test, and there are two very solemn passages which deal with this. One we have read in I Cor. x. Another is found in Hebrews vi. where the same word is used con-

cerning the earth which, instead of bringing forth a harvest and fruits, brings forth thistles. Of that it is said that it is rejected, and that is this word "disapproved". Sometimes it is translated in our Bible "reprobate", which means to have failed in the test; you did not pass the probation. These, then, are likened to the unfruitful earth, which is rejected (reprobate), nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned". Perhaps I should deal with this first.

It is a very solemn passage, and you will remember it opens with the question of pressing on from the first principles of Christ. I do not know whether this adequately covers all the exegesis of that passage, but I would suggest that, what the Apostle is concerned with is the fruit, the after experience, of those who have known the Lord. Now, he says, you must be firmly established on the fundamentals and have had a true experience of Christ in those things; and there is no emphasis that can be too great for us to impress that on one another. You must make a clean, true start and be firmly founded. Then he goes on to speak of those who have not proceeded in the light of that firm foundation, and he says this, You cannot lay the foundation again. Once it is laid, you cannot begin again. Until you became Christ's, there was a whole period of your life, longer or shorter, which before God is blotted out, finished for ever. Once, however, you have begun to build on that foundation and time has gone on, you cannot have this part blotted out and begin again. It is a very solemn thought, but I believe it is truly implicit in the passage there. After you are really on the foundation of true life in Christ and you have gone on for a time and, instead of being fruitful as a result of receiving the Divine rain from heaven, you have only brought forth briars and brambles, you cannot wipe that out and start again. Thus from the laying of the foundation, there is commenced a period in which all the time the Lord is looking for fruitfulness. We know that in one sense unfruitful parts are blotted out, but they represent loss to the Lord and to those concerned. Moreover, if that condition be persisted in, I do believe that the Apostle here says, not that eternal salvation is forfeited, but that we do come nigh unto it. "Whose end is to be burned." All the thorns and thistles are to be burned. That is the sad possibility of those who are rejected, disapproved. They failed under the test. They are not cast

away, they have not forfeited their soul's salvation, but they have not passed through the test, they are not approved of the Lord in that sense, although they are accepted by Him. The curse is destruction, and to this they themselves come very near. In that destruction everything except their soul's bare salvation is lost. The fire burns because all is unfruitful. That is spoken of true children of God.

But we pass on to the Apostle Paul, who is not beyond applying the possibility of such an experience to himself, and this phrase which he used at the end of I Cor. ix. is exactly our word "disapproved": "Lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be disapproved"—found to have failed in my tests. You can be a preacher, and a helpful preacher at that, and fail in your test; because, you see, tests are not in preaching, they are in the heart. The Apostle goes on to expound from the Old Testament something written with the intention of our enlightenment; and there again I do not believe he would draw the conclusion from the fall of the great majority of the Israelites in the wilderness, that salvation is a precarious matter, but he is simply enlarging upon this possibility in his own life which became a sad reality in the case of the Israelites. They were not approved, not commended. They failed in the test.

The Source of True Hope

Then the Apostle brings that passage to a close with a very comforting word that has often been our joy. God does measure the tests when He applies them to us. Of course, we think He might measure them better sometimes! That is our infirmity; but do not let us doubt the fact that God does measure, and He never, never will permit that which is beyond our endurance. It is faithfulness that applies the test, but He is faithful also to make a way of escape. I must confess I always interpreted that phrase, "will with the temptation also make a way to escape", as meaning, "that we may run away from it"! But it does not say that. The thought is not of a means of running away, but a means of bearing it, and I do believe that would mean great help to us all if we could have that as the chief and primary object set before us all the time; not a way of escape to flee, but a way of escape to stand the test. That should be our Divinely given ambition, every day and all the day, not

to find the easy way but to be found faithful to the Lord in the way that He leads us. We are being proved, whether we like it or not. It would be a sad thing to be disapproved, even though we were to find a way out of our difficulties, a sad thing above all for the Lord.

The Supreme Motive for Endurance

You remember when Peter speaks of that "trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire", he names as its object, that it "might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ". Our faith, tried and purged by the fire, emerging having passed the test, is found to be unto praise. Whose praise? Whose honour? Whose glory? Well, since it is at His appearing, I take it the first thought is to the Lord's praise and honour and glory. Oh, here is a faith for the achievement, the attainment of fresh glories to Christ! Will you regard your life in that light? Your tests, your trials, your assembly problems, all the variety of ways which are real experiences where the Lord is proving you; will you regard them as in His intention meant to realize something more of glory for the Lord, that, when the approved saints shall be manifested, approved, commended of God, the glory will be Christ's? Oh, the wonder that such and such a person endured that trial, the wonder to Christ who sustained them! Oh, the wonder, that that person, so quiet, so unrecognized, such a nobody in the assembly, contributed so much of spiritual life all unknown. The praise will be all to the Lord. It will be a wonderful day when the Lord gets credit for the triumphs of His saints.

Have you noticed what James said concerning

the blessedness of the man who endureth temptation—"when he is proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him". That is why he stood the trial. That is why he is approved—because he loved the Lord. There is the golden key which opens the lock, even love to Christ. Think of Christ Himself: He was tried in the crucible and He was proved. We know that. No ground of disapproval was ever found in Him. He was not reprobate, not rejected, not unfruitful. He was found faithful in all the multitudinous and various tests applied to Him. He emerged approved. And what was the secret of it all with Him? Was it because He felt, 'Well, if I fail to pass this test, I shall lose something'? There is no hint of that in the Gospels, no hint that the Lord was ever weighing up what He would lose if He failed. That is an insufficient motive. It is insufficient to keep us from sin and certainly from failing the Lord in our hidden, secret conflicts. The Lord had something better than that to keep Him steadfast. Was it because other people would lose, what mankind would have lost, if He had failed? We must remember that, when we fail, others lose. But, although that doubtless would be present in the Lord's mind, and I think would strengthen Him in His resolution to go in the way of holiness, I am sure it was not the chief thing. The chief thing was love to the Father. How could He fail the Father? He could not! How can we fail the Lord if our hearts are moved with love to Him?

May the Lord strengthen our hearts in love to Him, that in the tests and until the final test, by His grace and His faithfulness, we may be able to endure and know the blessedness of the man who receives the crown of life. H.F.

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“The Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus”

No. 7.

Jacob and the Law of Life (continued)

READING: Gen. xxviii. 10-12, 19; John i. 47; Gen. xxxi. 13; xxxv. 1, 6, 7; I Cor. i. 20; ii. 14.

We have been considering the sevenfold operation of life as represented for us in the book of Genesis by seven persons. In our previous meditation, we arrived at the sixth, namely, Jacob, and it is with that which Jacob represents as God's way of life that we shall again be occupied in this meditation.

The House of God, the Church, Bethel, is our particular object in view, and if we take Jacob again as our illustration, we are brought to see that everything, so far as the Church is concerned, must begin from its heavenly side and not its earthly. That is a governing fact in the life of Jacob, and we shall see how that interprets his life.

The Law and Rule of the Heavens

It is significant and impressive that, as Jacob goes on his way at the beginning of his pilgrimage, not only of his pilgrimage on earth but of that spiritual history which was behind all the happenings and events and incidents of his earthly life and walk, the first point at which he stops, though only for a night, is Bethel, and Bethel comes in for the very first time in the Bible as from heaven. This is the first reference to the Church in the Bible, and it comes in with Jacob; and it comes in as out from heaven, that is, from its heavenly side, and that becomes a law which governs and interprets all the rest of Jacob's career and spiritual pilgrimage. What is instituted at that point is the government of that which is heavenly, and, when that government is introduced by God, you expect that what is merely earthly will, from that moment, come under the condemnation and discipline of God to its destruction, so that the whole may become progressively heavenly according to its origin, its source, its inception. We have to ask this all-inclusive question: Where does everything be-

gin and whither does everything lead? The answer is one. Everything begins in heaven and everything leads to heaven and is consummated in heaven. That is only another way of saying, that everything is of Christ. Everything that has come out of heaven is of Christ and is in Christ. “All things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and in him all things consist” (Col. i. 18-19). Though the corresponding truth is not given, there are plenty of statements which also set forth the fact that He is after all things, and not only before all.

Now that, you see, is symbolically gathered up in Jacob's ladder: something from heaven reaching down on to the earth, with the Lord above it, and the angels of God ascending and descending. Now, carry that over to John i. and you see the principle at work in this word: “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile” (no Jacob!). And then to Nathaniel: “Thou shalt see greater things than these... Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man”. It is Christ who links heaven with earth, and earth with heaven, and in whom all the Divine communications are made to man. It is Christ who fulfils the word “where God revealed Himself unto thee”.

The House of God is Christ. But remember, while that is true of Christ personally, what we are made to see as the unveiling of the mystery is that the House of God is Christ corporately expressed in the Church, which is His Body, and it is in Christ corporate, in the Body of which He is the Head, that there is the revelation and the communication of God. It is there in that House of God, the Church, that we have what Jacob called “the gate of heaven”. That is God's Bethel.

So, while recognizing that everything has first to be seen from its heavenly standpoint, and as being out from heaven in Christ, we have to see this second thing, that Jacob must be ruled out.

in order to make room for "Israel". That is to say, all that is of man must be ruled out so as to make way for a Divine order of things in the House of God. Jacob, as Jacob, was impinging upon Divine things, upon the birthright. Yes, it was quite true that in the sovereignty of God Jacob was the chosen one for the birthright, but no Divine election can ever be taken as a one-sided thing. There are always two sides to Divine appointments. One is the sovereign act of choice, the other is the fitting of the elect vessel to come into that for which it is chosen. So, although Jacob may, in the line of Divine sovereignty and election, be the one to whom the birthright is secured, as is also the case with the Church as the antitype, there is another line which Divine sovereignty takes, namely, the clearance from the ground of all that which is Jacob; because it is not Jacob as Jacob who can inherit. It will be "Israel" who will inherit.

Let us note this other thing which is both important and interesting, that it is in a particular way with Jacob that the "house" comes in. Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation, and they are always called "the seed of Abraham". But you never read of the "house of Abraham", although he was the father. Then, although God again and again announces Himself as "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob", you never read of the "house of Isaac"; but you do read of the "house of Israel". So all that goes back to Jacob.

Now I think you see the significance of this. "Israel" represents that which is heavenly and Divine, which has supplanted that which is earthly and of man. Jacob typifies the earthly. You know that in the days when Israel was out of the way, when there was spiritual declension, the Lord addressed Israel as "Jacob", but when according to His mind as "Israel". That is the heavenly side. So really the House of God comes in, not with Jacob as Jacob, but with "Israel"; the same man, but now translated to heaven, so to speak, now the heavenly man. "Behold an Israelite in whom is no guile" (no Jacob). I think that was a tremendous commendation of Nathanael. The Lord, who knows all things, was able to say, There is a truly spiritual man, a man with a spiritual insight and judgment and appreciation of things. There is no "Jacob" there. I think that is what He meant.

Well, I think that is enough for the principle. The House of God is that which demands

the setting aside of all that is according to man and the bringing in of that which is according to God, that which is heavenly.

Heavenliness Part of a Divine Order

Then we find that heavenliness is not just some abstract sort of thing, but that it comes in as part of an order of things, a heavenly order; an ordered life, an ordered relationship, everything according to a heavenly order. What it is necessary for us to see next is what a perfect Divine order would be. I suggest that to you as something to meditate upon, to contemplate.

You see, beloved, so very much now is corrective, because of disruption and disorder. There was a beautiful Divine order at the outset, an order in every realm, in every direction. Everything was in its place, in its right relatedness, functioning in perfect order; no friction, no contradiction, no unrest, no strain, everything full of rest. God declared it to be very good. If God says that, then, in the light of His standard of things, such an order must be very good, for His standard is so much higher than ours. To have a certain measure of order, without friction and contradiction, strain and stress, makes us feel we have something very good; but oh, how much higher is His standard! When God says of a thing, "It is very good", it really must be good.

But then disruption came in. Everything became disordered and the harmony in God's universe was destroyed. There is strain, there is conflict, there is no more rest, and since that time things have continued to be governed by this element of disorder and disruption, and the Divine order has never been recovered in the world. Disorder is everywhere. Disruption is everywhere, in everything. It is in the elements. It is in humanity. It is in all relationships. It is everywhere. And now, so far as God is concerned, all is on a corrective line because of that disruption.

First of all, the disorder, the disruption, is in man himself. Man is no longer a harmony, a unit; he is all in disorder. Then the disorder is found in man's relatedness. All the relationships of man are disordered and upset. Then it is in the world that man has made. Man has made this world and set up the present order; which is disorder from God's standpoint. Everywhere in this world there is disorder. I need not stay to show how true it is. Everywhere in this world

we find what is not God, and what God did not mean. The order has gone and is no longer seen.

So now, when we come to the first letter to the Corinthians, the first thing that is introduced is the world; and the second thing is man, natural man; whilst the third thing is the relationships or related life of man. Then you recognize that the whole of that first letter to the Corinthians is a corrective letter. It touches the world, it touches man, it touches man's relationships; it is all corrective. Then what has it inclusively to do with? Its concern is with the Church, which is Christ's Body. Is Christ divided? is a question it will put to us; and as directly it will answer that in Christ there is no schism, no disorder. So you move on through the letter and you find that a true spiritual apprehension of the Church according to God's mind will see the correction of all the disorders that have come in through Adam: and these are dealt with in the letter one by one.

We will put that in another way, and perhaps a little more simply. Where the Church, the Body of Christ, is spiritually expressed according to God's mind, nothing of the disruption and disorder that came in through Adam has any place; it is ruled out. The world is ruled out. The natural man is ruled out. This disorder in human relationships is ruled out. The Church represents a perfect Divine order, and that makes demands upon all who claim to be in it, and we find one fundamental demand right here at the beginning of this corrective letter: "I determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." The one fundamental and all inclusive demand made upon those who claim to be of the Church, which is Christ's Body, is that, through the Cross of the Lord Jesus by which the world is crucified, and by which the natural man is crucified, and by which all that is disruptive in human relationships is crucified, only Christ shall be known, only Christ shall be recognized; for here we touch the mystery of the very nature of the Church. It is Christ from heaven, nothing of this world, Christ corporately expressed. It is a Christ according to God's mind as the heavenly Man, and not according to man here. It is Christ as the embodiment of a heavenly order. I dislike the word system, and I very often use it in its bad sense, but it can be used in a right and good sense, and, if you will bear with it, I would say that Christ is the embodiment of a heavenly

system; and when we come into the Church, which is His Body, we come into a heavenly system of things, a Divine order. So that the sphere of this perfect, Divine order is the Church, the Body of Christ, which is called "the Christ". Now, that leads us to some practical applications of the general truth.

The Increase of Christ the One Object of the Divine Order

The first is, *that order, this Divine heavenly order in the Church, is governed by the law of Christly increase.*

Whatever obtains in God's appointment, only obtains with one object in view, namely, the increase of Christ. Everything that God has ordained as a part of the heavenly order in the Church is ordained with that end in view. With much that is meant by an expression to which I am about to refer, I will not stay, and certainly not for purposes of criticism; but, by way of illustration, we sometimes hear the phrase used of certain men that they have "taken Orders". By that we understand them to have entered into a certain ecclesiastical realm, or that they are "priests in Holy Orders". Now, my point is this, that when it comes to the heavenly order of the Church, all ministries, all appointments, all positions, all relationships exist solely for the increase of Christ. That is the thing which governs all. No one has any position or ministry which is merely official. What is position in the Church from the heavenly standpoint? What is ministry in the Church from the heavenly standpoint? What is the significance that attaches to all the relationships of the Lord's people? They are all, by Divine intention, for the increase of Christ. I suppose that we will accept that, so far as the special ministries are concerned. Yet that might need examination. Such as exercise those special ministries are not there to give addresses or to preach sermons. In the heavenly order, there is no ministration of any kind which does not mean a ministration of Christ to the increase of Christ, so that the Church becomes more fully Christ in expression, and any ministry that does not, or that cannot, lead to that is not in the heavenly order. Office in the Church is something wholly other than that which is merely ecclesiastical, by vote or appointment. The thing which governs any office or position in the Church, as according to the heavenly order, is that this one and that one have something of

Christ to give, have that which represents an increase of Christ ; for the Church is Christ in corporate expression.

Are you aspiring to office, to position in the Church ? I will tell you how to get there. Aspire to have a measure of Christ more than your brethren. The Holy Spirit will see that, in a Spirit-governed church, you have a place and a ministry. That is the law which governs position in the Church. It is not that the church votes with a show of hands as to who the officers shall be. The Holy Ghost singles out men who have something more of Christ than the average to bring the Church up into a fuller measure of Christ.

What, then, of all the members of the Body ? The same law governs. You may put all the responsibility on to such as may minister the Word, and say, It is their business to bring Christ to us, to build us up in Christ. Well, they will point you the way, they will minister to you the Word of God in life. But then, your very membership in the Body of Christ involves you under this very same law, that you personally are also committed to be a joint of supply in the Body. You are committed to the work of the mutual building up of the Body and the increase of Christ. Our very partaking of Christ, our being members of His Body is governed by this, that we are a contributing factor in the increase of Christ. We have to get away from this "pulpit and pew" conception of things and have an entirely new mentality. The Church builds itself up by its mutual ministration, and such building up is through an increase of Christ. Beloved, let me emphasize that and underline it. Take hold of it if you forget everything else, that your being in the Church, which is His Body, means that your being there implies an increase of Christ. It must be that. Is there something more of Christ there because you are there ? That is the law which governs. Do stir yourselves up to this. Recognize your personal and individual responsibility. The Church is Christ in His corporate expression ; you are the Church. How much of Christ is represented by you for the general increase and building up of His people ? The law which governs everything in the Church ; ministry, position, relationships, is the law of the increase of Christ.

Now, I have used the word "relationships". Yes, you see how far from being merely technical and ecclesiastical and official and legal all this is,

and how it resolves itself into one thing, namely, life. When you get the Church according to the heavenly thought of God, according to the heavenly order, governed by this law of the increase of Christ, then you have life ; not ecclesiastical systems and orders, but life. It is the way of life. It is the course of the operation of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. We will come at this question of relationship from a fresh position, or by a fresh proposition.

The Divine Features of Authority and Subjection

There are two main aspects of the Church, the Body of Christ. The first of these is authority and the second is subjection. These are the two things which mainly govern the Church as principles.

Now, Jacob, when he supplanted his brother with his wit and cunning and guile, was after authority, the place of supremacy. He, as the younger, was seeking to get ascendancy over his brother. Well, God had ordained that, and Jacob need not have used any cunning or wit whatsoever. God would have seen to that had Jacob trusted Him. Nevertheless, it was this that was in his heart, to get authority, pre-eminence. What he had to learn in the course of twenty years was that authority is reached by the way of subjection ; and for Jacob, prince in Bethel, the House of God, those two things go together—authority and subjection. You cannot and you must not separate these two. God has joined these two together. Authority is by subjection ; subjection leads to authority. I believe moreover that God has chosen a very beautiful way of setting that forth.

God originated it (as Paul tells us in the great Church letter, Ephesians,) right at the beginning in the Garden—"Male and female made he them" : husband and wife ; the man and the woman. Have you ever recognized that to be pre-eminently a Church principle. If you trace that to heaven, to the mind and the heart of God, you will find He has the Church in view ; Christ and the Church, His members : the Husband, the wife ; the Bridegroom, the bride. This relationship, this human relationship of husband and wife, is seen therefore, in the mind of God, to have to do with a much bigger thing than that which is merely personal, individual, as amongst men on the earth. It is but the setting forth, or it is intended to be the setting forth of a great sublime conception of Christ and the Church,

and the two governing laws of Christ and the Church are authority and subjection. How will the Church come to reign? By subjection to Christ. How did Christ, the Head, come to reign? By subjection to the Father. Authority and subjection are inseparable. It is a dual law, established in heaven. These two things, male and female, are both very sacred in God's sight, and neither of them must be the other. If so, you have upset the Divine, heavenly order. They are there to represent something very holy, something very sacred.

If you look more closely, you will see that both these features are to be found in the very person of Christ Himself. Oh yes, how much we owe to the subjection of Christ to the Father! What do we owe? Well, to this, on the one side, we owe all the revelation of God in Him. By His subjection to the Father, the revelation of God in Him came forth. "The Son can do nothing out from himself, but what he seeth the Father do; for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise" (John v. 19). Subjection to the Father meant that He saw what the Father was doing and did the works of the Father. In the works of Christ we see the works of God, we see what God is like; we see God's mind, God's thought, God's desire.

It is to His subjection that we owe the revelation of Divine love. The Father's will was that He should lay down His life, and the laying down of that life was an expression of the Father's heart for us. He laid down His life for our sins that He might redeem us unto God. All the love of God is brought to us by the subjection of the Lord Jesus. Remember that.

Then, what fruitfulness has spring from His subjection. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die..." Is not that subjection? What is the opposite of that? I refuse to die, I refuse to give up my life, I refuse to let go my soul; I cling and cleave to myself, to my own. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die (that is, if it surrenders itself, if it lets go its own life, if it denies its own rights) it bringeth forth much fruit." This is immediately succeeded by the statement, "He that loveth his life (his soul) shall lose it; and he that hateth his life (his soul) in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John xii. 24-25). That again, in a word, is subjection.

Follow the matter through with this word:

"He became obedient unto death, yea, the death of the cross" (Phil. ii. 8). Obedient—that is subjection. That is the female side, that which is represented by the woman. What we owe to it!

Yes, but then there is the other side. Oh, the power, the mighty power, that we find in Christ! Oh, the life, the positive, risen life that we have in Christ! Oh, the deliverance that is ours through the mighty deliverer, Christ! Oh, the keeping power that is to us-ward because of the Cross! That is the side of authority. The side of subjection is His love for us; the side of authority is His defence of us. The side of subjection is His tender compassion, His merciful kindness to His own. His authority is the coming forth of His power against the enemies of His own. That is the man and the woman.

The Practical Expression of the Divine Features in the Church

Now, that is brought right into the heart of the Church. So you come again to the first Corinthian letter. You know all that is said about man and woman and their respective places in the Church. If this heavenly relatedness for the increase of Christ is established, it will work out to tremendous enrichment and not impoverishment. What is the woman's place in the Church? It is to express that side of Christ which is always the gracious, sympathetic, helpful side. Do you think that the woman is to be suppressed? I do not, and I do not think the Word of God teaches that. It is a matter of order and position unto life, and if I were to put it in quite ordinary, common, everyday, human, language, I should put it like this: Man is there to represent the authority of Christ, but he cannot exercise his authority without subjection. Otherwise what happens? He becomes a lord in the House of God. He does that of which the Apostle speaks, he "lords it over God's heritage". He needs the woman, as representing subjection, to come along and say, "Now, my dear, gently: do not do damage, do not hurt the Lord's interests by that assertiveness, that officiousness. Remember that you need bearing with by the Lord". Do you see the principle of subjection at work? The two cannot be broken asunder, the Lord needs them both; and I believe the Lord has expressed this relationship in the Church to gain, not to loss; to increase, not to impoverishment; that there shall be

always maintained according to this principle of the subjection of Christ that tenderness, that gentleness, that care for susceptibilities which takes the rough edge off government. Oh, we have to govern, to use authority, if we are called to do so, as men who ever remember how much we ourselves are in need of the mercy of God. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. vi. 1). Can you hear a woman's voice in that? That is a side of Christ that is necessary to right government.

I am only able to hint really at what this means. What I have all the time in the background of my mind is that all things, relationships and everything else, in the House of God are for the increase of Christ. You dear sisters, do not think that the New Testament anywhere says that you are to be suppressed and ruled out. You have a very essential ministry, as representing something in the House of God which is for the increase of Christ, and those who are on the other side need you and cannot fulfil their ministry without you. It is not good for the man to be alone, said the Lord, and that has a very much deeper meaning than just having human companionship. Put that in the positive way: it would be very good for a man to have a woman if she is the right kind according to God's thought. You must keep the balance.

But neither of these must be the other: otherwise if it is so, you get the heavenly order upset at once. That is why the first letter to the Corinthians is corrective of disorder in every realm. You see, the world is ruled out because it is in disorder. The natural man is ruled out because he is disordered. The relationships which are according to that disordered realm and which have come into the Church, must go out, and heavenly order must come in. I do not believe that anything that Paul said about woman in the Church can rightly be interpreted as meaning that she has no place. I believe it to be just the other way round. But all that he said was to get order where there was disorder. It was a matter of heavenly order. In your right place you can function fully: but you have to be in your right place and keep it: otherwise life goes out. Perhaps I have not satisfied you altogether on these matters, but I am dealing with principles. The law of life operates along the line of a heavenly order.

So then, we are able to see that everything rests upon God's purpose concerning His Son, and everything is governed by the consideration of how His purpose can be realized. The method which is approved of God is that which is most directly calculated to bring about an increase of Christ, and all else is ruled out by God. Order is not technique. It is not arbitrary. It is an embodiment of heavenly principles which are established for the increase of Christ; or, to put that in another way, Order is the way of life when it is the heavenly order. Disorder is the way of death.

Now you understand Jacob's life. He started out with the disorder that inheres in the natural man. He started out with the wisdom and cunning of this world. He was chosen to bring into view the House of God, and service in relation to the House of God—Bethel, and a dwelling in Bethel. Therefore this man must be taken in hand and all that is of the natural man must be got rid of as disorderly, and all the worldly element in him must be destroyed. If there is to be a House of God, it cannot be the house of Jacob; it must be the house of "Israel". That is the spiritual and heavenly side of things.

A Vital Lesson

I wonder how much of this is recognized by you to be of practical value. You may have many questions, but I think it does at least bring before us one thing, that in order to there being movement toward fullness of life in Christ, there must be a spiritual relatedness of the Lord's people. There must be that fellowship between the members of Christ which provides an opportunity for the increase of Christ in an ordered way. That is a matter which ought to exercise us very much. I am quite sure there are a lot of people who are suffering far more than they need because they are out of relatedness with the Church, the Body of Christ, in a working and practical way. I believe that merely personal, independent, unrelated life and movement of the Lord's people exposes them to great evils. If only there were a bringing in among the Lord's people, there would be a curing of many ills, and deliverance from much unnecessary suffering. The word that was spoken by Haggai still holds good: money is put into a bag with holes; there is dearth, there is barrenness, there is an altogether inadequate result to your spiritual energies. Then as the

Lord questions with His people about the cause, His answer to them is, Because of My house. If you have My house as the central, governing object of your life, there will be many blessings where there are no blessings now. There will be life where there is death now ; there will be deliverance where there is bondage now ; there will be light where there is darkness now ; there

will be safety where there is deception now. We little realize how much suffering in all of these ways there is to-day because of independent action and a want of relatedness with the Lord's people. Ask the Lord about that. If it is His mind, and you have exercise with Him about His end, He will most surely show some way in which this can be remedied. T.A.S.

Prayer in the Name of Jesus

READING : Psa. lxxxix. 19-37 ; Heb. vii. 13-14 ; vii. 18-22, 28 ; xiii. 20-21.

There is an aspect of prayer in the name of Jesus, other than that which first comes to mind, which we do well to consider together. To him that is spiritual, the first consciousness concerning true prayer is that it must needs take its rise in and from that new and Divine life that the children of God share in common. But, given this, what is the significance that attaches to prayer in the name of Jesus ? What is the power that lies behind a petition that is really of the Spirit ? The scriptures we have read are full of meaning in this connection. They set forth the unique relationship between the Father and the Son, and the commitment of the Father to the Son, on the ground of what the Son is and what He has wrought. But note that this commitment on the Father's part is to the Son as Son of Man. The Lord Jesus Himself forcibly states this in the fifth chapter of John's Gospel. "The Father...hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the *Son of man*." The whole section should be read from verse 19.

The Obedience of Abraham

Aforeshadowing of what we have above seen in the case of Abraham. You will recall the Lord's oath to Abraham, after that, in spirit, he had offered up his well-beloved son, in obedience to and love of the Divine commandment, and was only stayed from the deed itself by God's own intervention. "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, because thou hast done this thing... that in blessing I will bless thee..." What de-

light God found in that ready heart of Abraham !

The Man of God's Right Hand

But it is alone in "the man Christ Jesus" that this cleaving to and delight in God's will finds its perfection and immeasurable fulness. In the Son, the Father had One who came, not primarily because of God's compassion for man in his sin, and the suffering that sin has brought upon him, true though that be, but pre-eminently for the Father's own sake and the satisfying of the Father's desire. From eternity God has had a desire, and the Son has become the occasion of its manifestation, its security and its consummation.

"Because thou hast done this thing" ! Of the Lord Jesus it is written that He "counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men ; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God hath highly exalted him and..." If, for the Father's glory, the Son has espoused the Father's will, even unto death, then the Father, on His part, in that very bringing to pass of His glory, will have it that the Son of His love shall in all things have the pre-eminence.

Because Thou hast done this thing ! Is eternal life God's gift to man ? Then in and through this One alone shall man receive it. Is there to be a covenant in relation to God's purpose ? Then it shall stand fast with Him. Is there to be an Advocate and High Priest ? Then this is the One whom God will exalt, and that with an oath. How precious is this Son to God ! But mark that it is as glorified man that He has been received

up and set at God's right hand, with all power committed to Him in heaven and earth.

The point receives emphasis again in the familiar but most significant words of the Lord Jesus at the close of the first chapter of John's Gospel. "Ye shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man". This speaks of One who as Man is the pivot and hub of the whole Will and Eternal Purpose of God. Everything is secured in this One and everything is to be worked out through Him. All Divine activity is by means of Him—the angels of God ascend and descend upon this One. Every ministry of the Holy Spirit is in relation to this Man, and the eternal glory of God in Him and by Him. "Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself." These words alone find their full fulfilment in the Lord Jesus.

In the Throne Because of Righteousness

But further, the Lord Jesus is in the presence of God as Man in His own right—By His own blood He entered in once for all; a proof of an infinite victory, itself the fruit of infinite suffering. He has overflowingly fulfilled all righteousness, vindicated and satisfied every demand of the holiness of God, and in the power of the eternal Spirit has, as man, met and overthrown sin, Satan, and death. He has thus met every righteous claim and removed every obstruction to the free and righteous working of God in fulfilment of His purpose, and of man's blessing in that purpose of His glory. And because He has "done this thing", in a very real sense God cannot righteously deny access to this One, nor withhold Himself from the request of His lips. Nay rather, to this One, God has given the name that is above every name; this One He has exalted, and to this One has He sworn.

The Ground of True Prayer

What, then, is it that governs true prayer? What will give real strength to our coming into the presence of God to lay hold on Him to do the things He has promised. Well, first of all, that we see the true ground of all such asking. The Lord does not give us His help because our circumstances are difficult or because we are in this or that form of suffering, deeply as He feels for us in it. That is not primarily the ground of His hearing and helping at all. Rather are these

very difficulties and sufferings, in the case of the children of God, related to an end God is seeking, and the work of the Spirit in our hearts is, first of all, to bring to light the fact itself and thus intelligently to relate our asking to the end God is seeking. When by the Spirit that has become the goal of the Church's praying, we are also found upon covenant ground which God has established in His Son, to whom He has further committed Himself by "the word of the oath". This is what gives such strength to prayer in the name of Jesus. Yes, God is committed to this Man.

We have, then, two sides to this question. On the one hand, you have the Father committed to do all that the Son shall ask, because He has fulfilled all righteousness and wholly satisfied the Father's heart. The Son for His part is wholly concerned for one thing, namely, to bring to consummation that eternal purpose of God which He has made secure in His Cross. Then, on the other hand, the Church is brought by the Spirit into the asking of the Son; for the spiritual law by which the consummation of God's purpose in Christ is reached involves this further feature, that what Christ works and asks on high as Man at God's right hand, shall be wrought into and voiced through His members on the earth, joined to Him in oneness of nature and life in the Holy Spirit, that what is true of the Head shall be true of every member of His Body.

The Cost of the Way—Christ is to be All

But how much this involves. This is no bringing of our mere human desires and making use of the name of Jesus to gain our end with God. No self-born prayer is a prayer in the name of Jesus. No, as we said at the outset, true prayer has its rise alone in that new and Divine life which is ours in Christ Jesus and by His dwelling in our hearts. The Cross must be laid upon all that is of the old creation in us, and only what is of Christ comes before God with acceptance. But then, all that is truly of Him comes in before God in all the value of His righteousness and all the virtue of His precious Blood. The Throne is set in motion by aught that is of Him.

Do you see then, beloved, that the true praying of the Church is no less a thing than the very praying of Christ Himself in His members through the Holy Spirit. Not that this is a sovereign act nor mechanical. Rather is it born

out of deep exercise and much suffering, by which the hearts of God's children are purified and all that is self-born in their desire supplanted by that pure and holy concern which is the Son's for the glory of God by His name.

What a working by the Spirit in the hidden and inward parts of the life this means. What self-discovery! What repentance! What fleeing from the natural motions of the heart! What costly raising up of the righteousness of Christ in every movement of the daily walk, that our state may accord with all the wonder of our God-given position as righteous in His Son. Yes, for the Church to pray truly in the name of Jesus, and to bind and loose in His name, He must be Lord within and without in the life of every member. But as this work is done, the Church's praying becomes more and more that of its Head, finding expression through His members. It is not that of themselves they elect to pray for certain things, but that in holy intimacy with the Head there is a discerning of His mind, and of the Spirit they are accordingly led to pray and to bind and to loose according to the will of God. Such prayer is effectual. It is with authority. It stands in all the meaning of Christ's righteousness and all the power of His precious Blood, not as mere doctrine but in truth; and it brings God in in all the wonder of His covenant and oath.

The Surety of His People

What a calling this is, and what a responsibility devolves upon every member of Christ to "walk circumspectly, not as unwise but as redeeming the time." Is the cost of the way too great? Is the responsibility overwhelming? His grace has made provision for this also. There is a very precious thing that we may note in the passage we have taken from Psalm lxxxix. It occurs in verses 30-35.

"If his children forsake my law,
And walk not in my ordinances;
If they break my statutes,
And keep not my commandments;
Then will I visit their transgression with the rod,
And their iniquity with stripes.
But my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him,
Nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.

My covenant will I not break
Nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.

Once have I sworn by my holiness:
I will not lie unto David."

These verses deal with God's correction of our waywardness. You will note there is an unlooked for change from the plural to the singular number at verse 33. After reading the three previous verses, we should expect to read here, "But my loving kindness will I not take from them—the children. But it is not so. It is the singular case that we have here. Here we have something very precious. God's mercy and faithfulness to usward are because of Christ. The covenant stands fast with Him. The force of the verse is therefore this: "But my loving kindness will I not take from him"—and therefore not from the children. Here is the children's hope to fulfil the course. This One in the Throne is there as Head and Representative of His people. As Advocate and High Priest, in all the merit of His person and atoning work, He secures that no waywardness in those whom He is bringing to glory shall prevail to destroy the flow of grace to meet their need. Nay more, He is there to secure by the same means, not only their coming to the goal, but every grace for the present fulfilment of their high calling. That is the import of the passage in Hebrews xiii, 20-21. Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep *with the blood of an eternal covenant*, even our Lord Jesus, make you perfect in every good thing to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, *through Jesus Christ*; to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Let us then anew "consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, even Jesus; who was faithful to him that appointed him..." and let us put ourselves once more in His hands, that in Him we may find grace for every discipline of the way and enter upon so great a calling with deeper appreciation of what it is for the Church to pray in His name.

There is the hope and ground of our prevailing, and of seeing the purpose of God fulfilled and brought to perfection. May the Lord in His grace hasten the day when we shall see Him and the work shall be finished.

K.P.O.

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God's Spiritual House

No. 2.

Assurance as to God's Rest and Satisfaction in Christ

"...having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved...to the end that we should be unto the praise of his glory, we who had before hoped in Christ" (Eph. i. 5-6, 12).

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

"And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John xvii. 5).

We are at this time being directed to take account of God's spiritual house, and in our previous meditation we were thinking of the first and pre-eminent feature of this spiritual house, in which we, in Christ, are living stones, as being the proclamation or setting forth of the exaltation of God's Son. We noticed that everything, so far as God's house is concerned, takes its rise from that exaltation. What happened on the day of Pentecost was the spontaneous outflow of that exaltation of God's Son to the right hand of the Majesty on high, and the secret of life, of power, of victory, in those first days of the

Church's life and history was this very fact. Its life flowed out from this; its testimony was this, that Jesus as God's Son was exalted to the throne on high. You know that was the testimony of Peter on the day of Pentecost. You know that was the note of Stephen. You know the Apostles continually testified to that great fact, that God had made Him Lord and Christ, that He was exalted. I repeat, everything came out of that, and it resolves itself into the great element of assurance, something which is always very necessary; and if there was a time when it was more necessary than at any other time, this is that time.

The Assault upon Assurance

In our previous meditation, we referred to the fact that the great spiritual enemy has pursued his ambition for world dominion along the line of the propagation of a lie, his great "fifth column" propaganda, and he has made great headway by the campaign of lies to the undermining of assurance and confidence.

There is another thing which he has done and is doing in a spiritual way, which is so clearly seen at present working out along temporal lines, and is indeed the confessed and published strategy of those who are now being driven and

used and governed by Satan toward world domination by the elimination of Christ. They have put it on record that their strategy is to work secretly within the national life of their enemies steadily through the years, with a view to bringing about internal disintegration by the breakdown of confidence: and how they have done it and are doing it! I do not want to dwell on the earthly, temporal and political side of things, but it does disclose the principles of Satanic activity, this working subtly and secretly behind the scenes within the life of their enemies with a view to destroying confidence, and so bringing about collapse from the inside. Indeed, the phrase which is in print in that connection is, We will make our enemies defeat themselves! Well, they have done it in many countries.

Now, take it as a clue to what is happening spiritually. Oh, how Satan has pursued that course right through history, to destroy confidence; for confidence is a tremendous factor. You see how nations seek to bolster up and stimulate assurance within their own borders in order to secure strength against their enemies. What will they not do to reassure people, to put confidence into people? Satan knows that an assured people set him the biggest problem and represent the most impossible situation for him. Now, if you look at those first days of the Church's life, one outstanding feature was this assurance. They were men without questions, people without doubts. They could speak with authority because their hearts were settled; they were not divided inwardly. There were none of the seeds of internal disintegration. The basis of that assurance and settled position was just this, that the Holy Spirit had come and in them had mightily registered the fact that Jesus was on the throne. "Jesus...by the right hand of God exalted." They had no question about that, and therefore all doubts were set at rest. The exaltation of the Lord Jesus, when it becomes something settled in our own hearts, is a mighty factor in testimony, in life, in service, and unless we have it we are altogether at a discount.

Now, in days such as those in which we are living, the strategy of the enemy is to undermine assurance. I am not speaking about world things now, but spiritual assurance. The House of God is therefore built by this means, the assurance that Jesus Christ is exalted, and you cannot

build without it. In the case of David and Solomon, we noted how the bringing in of that house for the Lord God which was to be exceeding magnificent, all sprang from the fact that God had secured both His king and the throne for His king. God made a covenant with David. God took an oath with David that of the fruit of his loins should one sit upon his throne, and his throne should be established for ever. Now, that is transferred, as you know, to the Lord Jesus. It only had a merely figurative and very imperfect fulfilment in Solomon. Solomon came to a shameful end, but in the days of his glory he was a figure of another. Thus in the book of the Acts we have those words quoted from the Psalm:

"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,

Till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet" (Acts ii. 34-35).

The Apostle uses those words in connection with this other word to David:

"David...being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of His loins he would set one upon his throne; he foreseeing this spake of...the Christ",

spake of this One; and God has fulfilled His word, not in a shadow, not in a type, but right up to the hilt in this greater Son of David. David's greater Son is on the throne of thrones, and out of God's securing of His King in glory and exaltation, the history of the Church begins, and the supreme note by which the Church is built is the note of absolute assurance which comes from what God has secured in glory in His Son.

God's Rest in His Son

Assurance comes from heart rest. Here again let us mark—and how full of truth, exactitude, the Scriptures are everywhere—that it was no accident or chance or hap that Solomon, the man who was chosen for this position, had the name of Solomon. Solomon means "rest". Now you notice Stephen, referring to Solomon, says a rather interesting thing in Acts vii. 47-49.

"But Solomon built him a house. Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in houses made with hands; as saith the prophet,

The heaven is my throne,

And the earth the footstool of my feet:

What manner of house will ye build me?

saith the Lord:

Or what is the place of my rest?"

Then Solomon had another name—Jedidiah, “Beloved of God”. That is what we read in Ephesians—“hath made us accepted in the Beloved”. You see, the Lord Jesus takes up Solomon on both his names. He is God’s rest, “the place of my rest”; and He is the Beloved of God, the Beloved of the Father. So that, in the very first place, God gets all that His heart is set upon, with regard to what His house is to be, in the Person of His Son, and it is out of this that the house corporately, of which we are parts, takes its rise. It is built upon that heart rest which God has in His Son.

Now, you and I have to come to the same place as God has come to over the Lord Jesus before we can really be an expression of His house. We are His spiritual house: “Whose house are we.” But that does not mean that God just puts us together as bricks. He must have living stones, and that phrase “living stones” implies, as the context shows in I Peter ii. 5, that it is by a living relation with the chief Corner Stone that the house is built: “unto whom coming, a living stone...ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house”. The parts are one with the Corner Stone, all of a piece, so far as their nature is concerned, one with Him in what He is. As the building, we have to take our character from that chief Corner Stone which God has chosen. “I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious.” God works to Him and from Him. You and I work to Him and from Him. But what is this that gives the House its character? It is God’s full and perfect satisfaction in His Son which has brought Him to rest. God rested from all His works on the seventh day, and God beheld all things which He had made, and they were very good. Now, carry that right through in this spiritual connection with God’s house, and long, long after you hear this word: “that he might present it (the church) to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing”. That is only saying, It is very good! The thing which first of all satisfies God’s heart is that His Son has answered to all that He has ever required in a spiritual and a moral way. That is God’s rest, and the exaltation of the Lord Jesus is God’s seal to the fact. God is satisfied, God is at rest. Thus it is that, as the Lord Jesus is just about to step out on that last bit of the journey which is to see Him crucified. He says, “Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory

which I had with thee before the world was” (John xvii. 5). Glorify thou Me! Yes, that is coming almost at once by the darkest part of the road. It is the way to the glory. This last step, the Cross, is the final stage and the summing up of all that has been in the satisfaction of God’s heart.

The Value of the Blood of Jesus

What I am coming to in all that I have said is this, that it is by His precious Blood that God has come to His absolute rest in the Lord Jesus. Oh, beloved, you and I need ever more and more to apprehend the supreme value of the Blood of Jesus! The value of the Blood of Jesus is the great factor at the end time. It is the supreme factor in heart rest, and heart rest is the only ground of victory; and therefore Satan is always seeking to rob the children of God of heart rest on spiritual matters. I am going to make this appeal to you all at this time, although something more will have to be said at some other time about it; but I do want to make this appeal to you, that we ought to be at the place where the matter of our relationship with God in acceptance, in peace, in rest, in fellowship, is an absolute thing now. We must not allow the other side of our spiritual experience to cross that dividing line and come into the realm of our assurance. I mean, there is that other side where the Lord is conforming us to the image of His Son. He has a great work on hand in us, and, as He takes it in hand, we discover as never before what a work it is. We discover ourselves, discover the depths of iniquity that are to be found in our fallen nature. It becomes a terrible thing to us. But never allow that which comes to light by God’s handling of us to cross over into that other place of our acceptance, our standing, our peace with God. So many people fail to keep that line clearly defined and they accept all kinds of accusations from the enemy because the Lord is dealing with them in this way. They feel so bad, so worthless, so useless, so utterly impotent and evil, and suppose therefore that their relationship with the Lord is interrupted, and the Lord is not pleased with them, and all that sort of thing, and they lose their rest. I believe that is why a lot of people have turned strongly against the subjective side of God’s working, because they have seen many Christians altogether breakdown in their assurance under it. You come to a place where you know

the Lord has accepted you and that you have peace with God; your sins are forgiven, and you are blessedly at peace, enjoying the Lord. Well, you are there for a time, and then you come into touch with something that has to do with spiritual progress and fuller life in Christ, and all that is bound up with that. Now many, as soon as they begin to touch that, lose their old basic assurance and joy, and because of that, there are those who have turned, not only against simple salvation and rejoicing in the Lord as Saviour, but all that is beyond besides. They will not have any more. They will not have what is subjective. That does not justify their position, but it does say that we have to be very careful about this matter: and we have to stand up to this thing. We have to take this position, and no doubt some of you have taken this position—Well, I know I am beginning to know something of the depths of evil in my own nature; I am coming to see what I never would have believed to be true of myself. I have never had worse times about myself, the hopelessness of myself, than I am having now. I am seeing more and more that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing! and so on, but...but that is the Lord's matter. That is for the Lord to deal with. I am not going to allow that to encroach upon my absolute acceptance with God, my basic standing before God. I am not going to allow all the problems of sanctification to come over and destroy the great assurance of justification! You must be very careful to keep that line clearly defined, because, if I am not mistaken, that is just the work of the devil to destroy the power of the Church and I believe that that is the heart of Rev. xii—"They overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb"—and who is it they are overcoming? The accuser of the brethren. He is seeking to cast them down by accusation, and their answer to his accusation is the Blood of the Lamb. What is that? God satisfied, God at rest, and I at rest on the basis of the Blood. They overcame him and he is cast down. They are not cast down when they maintain their position there. The Blood is not something just for initial salvation; it is something for final triumph: it is the final thing. The value of the Blood is a tremendous thing to keep the Lord's people strong and assured, confident, and with the ringing note of authority; God's basis of satisfaction, the Blood of His Son making possible His exaltation.

Well, this is all to do with that necessary, indispensable element of assurance by which the Church is built. The spiritual house goes forward on that line. I believe that that is the secret of the remarkable progress at the beginning. "The Lord added to them daily those who were being saved." The Church grew in a way in which it has never grown since, and the great factor in the building of the house then, in the growth of the Church, was that there was this note of absolute assurance and confidence. They were a people who had heart rest, and who knew that Jesus Christ was enthroned. For them that settled matters in their hearts between themselves and God. That is all going back to our previous meditation, but it leads us right on to this further thing which the passages we have read bring specially before us. It is that the spiritual house has its existence for the very purpose of answering to God's own desire, ministering to God's own pleasure and glory. There are these phrases in Ephesians: "That we should be to the glory of his grace"; "to the praise of his glory", should exist to satisfy God's heart, to minister to His glory, to His pleasure. In this way, the spiritual house is to be God's answer to all that has happened in history.

God's New Creation

In the first creation gathered up into the first Adam, we have seen God surveying His working and saying, It is very good! Then followed breakdown, chaos, ruin in the creation. Out of a ruined creation, God lifted a nation, and the greatest thing that was ever said of Israel, I think, is in that little phrase, "Israel my glory". What a thing to say! Israel My glory! And in the early days of Solomon, Israel was God's glory. Again come breakdown, failure, ruin. Finally we see God coming back again, coming back on Israel, coming back on creation with a new creation in Christ Jesus. Firstly, as to Christ Himself personally, and being able to say, as we have seen, "My beloved, in whom I am well pleased", I am fully satisfied. In other words, it is the new creation seen in Christ, and God saying, It is very good, I am well pleased.

But then there comes in the Church, the Church which is His Body, which is an extension of the new creation from Christ personal to Christ corporate, and the last thing in view about this Church is its coming down from heaven having the glory of God, or, to use the other

words, "presented unto him a glorious church", or again, "when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at in all them that believed" (II Thess. i. 10). That is the end. So that this is God's final answer. There is not going to be another chaos and ruin in the creation. This is God's last answer to all that has gone before of ruin and breakdown. It is the Church, this spiritual house, a new creation.

What the Church Is

What, then, is this spiritual house? What is this Church? Let us not have an objective mentality about this, thinking of it as something somewhere outside of and apart from ourselves. What is it? The answer is a very simple one. The spiritual house of God is Christ Himself. Yes, but not Christ personally alone, but Christ in you, in me, the hope of glory. Oh, it is just here that all the mistakes have been made about the Church, with such disastrous results. The Church, the House of God, is simply Christ Himself in undivided oneness found in all those in whom He really dwells. That is all. That is the Church. Seek to root out of your mentality any and every other idea of the Church. It is not Christ divided into a thousand or a million fragments amongst so many believers. It is still one Christ. You and I are not the Church. It is Christ in you and in me that is the Church. We still remain what we are outside of the Church still on our natural ground, but it is the measure of Christ in us that constitutes the Church, a spiritual Church, a spiritual house, the one Christ by the one Spirit in all those in whom He dwells. That is the Church. God has never seen in that Church, in that Temple, anything but His Son. He is the Temple of God and you and I can never belong to the Church save as Christ is in us. I know that is a simple thing to say, but if we would just fasten on that and see what that means; it is one of the great factors of unspeakably great power against the enemy, if only we would live on that basis, if only we would abide there.

There are two ways of approaching the matter, and I see again the great success of Satanic propaganda in this matter. I do not know what you older Christians think about it. We can only speak of what we have recognized in our lifetime, but we have lived long enough to recognise the course of things, and to me it does seem, and it more than seems, that, in the last

few years, the last few decades, there has been a far greater development and growth of suspicion amongst Christians than there used to be, so that today it is almost impossible to speak anywhere without people wondering if you are quite sound. It is in the atmosphere. It seems to me that there is a constant alertness to scent something that is not quite sound, and anything that is of God is prejudiced by that attitude, that state of things. The real truth of God is not getting a chance because this suspicion has spread over all the world, among all Christians. Is this quite right? Is this quite sound? Is this quite true? What is the snag here? What is the error in this? It is like that. That is the positive line, that has become the positive line, and, beloved, I believe that this is one of the marks of this Satanic propaganda to bring about collapse from the inside, because it means that there is internal disintegration, there is no cohesion, the people of God are broken up into thousands of fragments by this very spirit and atmosphere of suspicion bringing about prejudice, and the Church cannot move together as a solid whole. There are very few Christians indeed who can move a hundred per cent. together, as one, simply because of this. Satan brings it into the most intimate circles of Christian life and fellowship, all the time bringing up this horrible element of uncertainty, question. Yes, he has got into the inside, and he is bringing about internal disintegration and collapse in a very quiet way, but subtly working through the years, and he can win many bloodless battles along that line. He can take territory very easily along that line and hold it and gain his end of dominion.

Take another earthly expression of this spiritual background of things. Do you not see, beloved, that over there there is no room whatever for a second thought or a second mind? Anybody through the last seven years who has had another thought, another mind, a second idea, has been eliminated. You may not there have two minds. You have got to subjugate your mind to this other mind, this dominating mind. You must not have an opinion, you must not reason, you must not speak in any way that cuts across the prevailing mind, the mind of the dictator. There is no room for anything that is second. It is one. Satan knows the almost infinite value of oneness, and that is a secret of progress, of success: a ruthless, murderous elimination of every second voice, to have only

one voice, one mind, one will, dominating all others. Dare you think otherwise? Dare you have a mind of your own? Well, have it, but make very sure that you never let it be known. That is the regime, and what power there is for the object in view!

Well now, that is an earthly expression of a spiritual system. Bring that into the realm of the Church. Why is the Church paralysed, weakened, held up? Why can it not go forward terrible as an army with banners? Because there has been this disintegrating work secretly going on within its borders, so that suspicion is the order of the day. I suggest to you that, for the sake of the overthrow of the Satanic kingdom which is to be brought about by and through the Church in union with its Head, its Lord, in glory, for the sake of that and unto that end, you and I should make the opposite our positive course. Let us not be for ever suspiciously asking, What is wrong? What is doubtful? What is unsafe here? but positively, What is there of Christ in this? On that I fasten! What do I see or sense of the Lord Jesus in this matter? With that I engage, I co-operate. Oh, if we would only take that as our positive course, Satan would soon be losing ground, the Church would soon be coming up a glorious Church. One thing which characterised the Church at its beginning was oneness. They spoke the same things, they were all of one mind and one heart, and what ground the enemy lost! But, as soon as the enemy began his secret 'fifth column' work of propagating internal doubts, suspicions, prejudices, he very soon brought the Church down out of that realm of reigning life and scattered its power. Oh, we must pray the Lord that the one Christ, the one Spirit, shall be in the ascendant in us! We shall not be living either upon the ground of what we are naturally—for we shall always be affected by what we are naturally, but upon the ground of what there is of Christ in one another; neither let us be dwelling upon the ground of possible error, possible false teaching, the possibility of it being there all the time and almost looking for that more than anything else. Oh, we must trust the Lord about this matter! I do believe, beloved, that the safest way, the way of our protection from error, is to go on with the Lord. Our position must be—I am going on with the Lord where I find the Lord, and I am going to trust the Lord in the matter of error, and, as we walk with the Lord, we shall sense,

without looking for it, where the error is, and we shall be warned by the Spirit, we shall know. We must move on the positive basis, that of the Lord Himself, and that is glory in the Church, when it is the Lord. "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

We know quite well, in simple ways, that this is true. We meet one another, we have never met before. We discover very quickly by our spiritual sense that we belong to the Lord, and then we have a very blessed time simply on that ground. We flow together because we are the Lord's, and, if only we stood there, we would go on having a blessed time, but presently we begin to discuss some doctrine and find we do not agree. All the glory goes out, the fellowship breaks down. Oh, the Lord hold us into Himself!

Now, I am saying this spiritual house is Christ, and all that is not Christ has got to be kept in its own place, and we have got to seek to remain on the basis of Christ as in us and as in one another, and this is the glory of God, that we should be to the glory of His grace. That is where it begins—His grace. It seems to me, it has seemed to me through the years, (I do not know whether I am right in doctrine now or not, it is a forgivable mistake if it is error), but it has seemed to me through the years very often, that the Lord Himself has taken pains to keep me on the basis of grace, and by that I mean He has so often let me know in experience that, but for His grace, I am a lost man—in experience, not a doctrine, not as truth. Oh, today, it would be a bad thing for me if it were not for the grace of God! Yes, to appeal even today to the Blood, to the grace of God, because of that precious Blood, today, after so many years of knowing the Lord! Yes, it is grace today, and it is that that brings glory to God, allowing us to know how base, how foul, we are, and letting us know that that makes no difference to Him because of the Blood. That is glory to God. I do not know what the deepest note in your heart is today, but that is the deepest note in my own heart after these years. Ah, it is the grace of God that is the glory of my heart, the glory of His grace. He is glorified by our recognition of His grace and our abiding on the basis of His grace. The glory is soon taken away from the Lord when we get on to any other ground: what we are and can do and what we are doing. The Lord will very soon put a stake in our flesh when we begin to get exalted like that. He is being robbed of glory.

He is glorified by our transfiguration, our conformity to the image of His Son. Paul says, "We... beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image" (II Cor. iii. 18). The glory is connected with the change, transformed into the same image. He is glorified as we are changed into the image of His Son. He is glorified when our lives are becoming fruitful. "Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit" (John xv. 8). And the fruit, in the first place, is the fruit of the nature of the Lord Jesus, the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. "Herein is my Father glorified." Fruit in service, of course, but fruit in life, and He is glorified by the endurance of the saints.

Ah, yes, let us lay this to heart as our final word. If only we recognised it, there is a great deal of glory brought to the Lord simply along the line of endurance. At times we can do no

more. The only thing to do is to give up or to hold on; to let go, or to endure. Peter has a lot to say about that. "This is grace, if a man endure", and just to endure brings glory to God. It will be a great story, it will be one of the large and glorious volumes in the library of heaven, the story of the endurance of the saints. How much glory it brought to God. Oh, the story will be a romance! How many people were influenced by it, how many unbelievers came to believe because of the endurance of some saint in the time of suffering! How many other saints were mightily supported as they saw the steadfast endurance of another under fiercest trial! How much the Lord got out of just sheer endurance! Yes, this is to the glory of God, if we endure. The Lord get glory in the Church by Christ Jesus unto all ages for ever and ever, and may we indeed be a house for His glory in these various ways.

T. A-S.

The Coming of the Lord

No. 1.

The Lord's Need of an Elijah Instrument

READING: Malachi iii. 6-18; iv. 1-6; Matt. xi. 10-14; xvii. 10-13.

In a company like this, there is no need to draw attention to the miracle of the Word of God and of the fact that, though written through the hands of various men at different times, it makes such a harmonious whole. But it is strikingly wonderful to realise that, though the Old Testament Canon closes and something like four hundred years elapse, and then the New Testament times begin, we take up our Bibles and we read as it might be straight on from the end of Malachi to the beginning of Matthew. It is a very wonderful thing. In Malachi God's last words were of an intervention in mercy. The whole order of things here on earth was unacceptable to Him, and that which had been raised up by Him to represent Him had itself proved to be a most tragic failure. So the book of Malachi expresses God's final disapproval and rejection even of the very religious order that had come into being by Divine revelation. Thus for this earth, even for the chosen people in the earth, the inevitable

result of all that was the curse of God; and yet the passage which we read from Malachi is not the blackness of the darkness of despair, but it rather speaks of a new day dawning, the sun of righteousness arising with healing in its beams. God's last word is a word of promise that He would send Elijah, lest the earth should be smitten with a curse.

We open our New Testament and we read of God's moving to fulfil His promise to send His salvation and of His honouring His word and sending the messenger before the face of the One Who was to come, and so, after all that long time, God did in mercy send Elijah, and God did intervene to save the earth and the people on it, even His own people, from the curse. And so John the Baptist was born, and it was said of him that he should go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah, and in these passages which we have read from the Gospel by Matthew, the Lord unhesitatingly identifies John the Baptist with that Scripture of promise in Malachi. If the people would receive it, this was Elijah. So that undoubtedly in the person of John the Baptist we have a fulfilment of that promise.

But you notice, even while the Lord says, This is Elijah, He says, "Elijah indeed shall come", so that John the Baptist is not the full fulfilment of that promise.

When we open the Gospels to read about him, we find one of those striking means of drawing our attention to an important point, that a Scripture concerning him is quoted in all four Gospels. Now, that is always of importance, for the number of events that are mentioned in all the four Gospels is very few, and when that four-fold repetition is found, it is always because it treats of something of peculiar importance. Isaiah, opening a new period, a new passage, bringing in an altogether new note in his ministry, commenced his fortieth chapter with that great word of hope and comfort, and with the prophecy concerning the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God", and that reference is quoted, as I say, in all four Gospels, identifying John the Baptist with this Scripture, and yet, when we take the book of Isaiah and work up to Chapter xxxix, or, should I say, work down, because that chapter ends at zero—"everything shall be taken away, nothing shall be left"—that is the end, the full end, Chapter xl opens an altogether new phase of things, a new day, God's own day, just as in Malachi we have the sun arising for a new day, a day of glory, and that is ushered in by the message of the voice of the one crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord!'

Well, we read the fortieth and those further chapters of Isaiah, the whole of the rest of the book, and though some of it was undoubtedly fulfilled when our Lord came, it is perfectly clear that very much remains yet to be fulfilled, and so that messenger, that Elijah, John the Baptist, though a true fulfilment of Scripture, was not the full fulfilment nor the final one. Our Lord came according to the voice of this one crying in the wilderness because Elijah had first come to prepare His way. Our Lord came, but our Lord is coming again. This age, like the other, has been marked by failure. We are now in the book of Malachi again, or, if you like, approaching Isaiah xxxix again, and there is only one hope for the Church and for the world, and only one means of averting God's curse, only one means, and that is by the dawning of a new day, by a new era, a new dispensation, a

new coming of the Lord, and so the Lord said, "Elijah indeed cometh", and I believe that it is no wresting of Scripture and no exaggeration to say that, as actually and historically John the Baptist fulfilled the Divine promise and prepared the way for Christ to come that first time, so God's promise will again be fulfilled and He will provide Himself with another Elijah to prepare the way again, not for a new Lord, but for a new coming of the Lord.

Now, I ask you to think about that and pray about it. It carries such tremendous implications. What ought to be the object of our hopes, the goal to which all our energies are bent? What is the answer to that, if you apply it to John the Baptist? It was to bring Christ in, and, though it does not appear in the New Testament, in the Old Testament it says plainly, to bring Christ in to save the earth from the curse. Thank God, holy and glorious as He is, He is not going to send a curse in that way. He is going to send the One who shall deliver the earth from the curse. Well, that was John's sole mission, desire and purpose. What an ambition, something to live for, something to die for! Not to establish some new order of things here on earth. No. It was past that, according to Malachi. It was past that, God had finished with that. There was only one hope left now, a blessed hope, but only one hope, God's Christ must come or the earth must be cursed. I believe that is true today; with all my heart, I believe it is true. It is not the new order of things politically that our leaders and other good men, Christian men many of them, hope and pray for. It is not that, we know it is not that. And I do not believe it is a new order of things even in terms of that which is religious and spiritual, shall I say, a new order of things in the Church. I do not believe it is that. I believe the only solution to the world's need and to the Church's need, the next item of God's programme, is the dawning of the new day, the appearing of the sun of righteousness with healing in His beams.

Now, if that is true, then there is a call for Elijah to be here, preparing the way, and, if that is true, there is a goal, there is an ambition, for our lives, that Christ should come back in glory and in power.

Now, if you look at John the Baptist, you see something of what is in this instrumentality which is God's link between the old and new,

for that is what John was. "The prophets and the law prophesied until John." What happened then? Well, John was a link between the old order and the bringing in of Christ, and the Lord said, I will send Elijah to be a link, to be a forerunner, to prepare the way for Him Whose coming shall not be a curse, but a blessing, and, more than that, shall save the earth from the curse. Now, this link, this human link, this instrumentality of God, what is he noted for, what are his characteristics, for surely we may be helped by considering them?

A Voice Crying in the Wilderness

Well, he is a voice of one crying in the wilderness, for it is an interesting thing that, though our Lord says most definitely that John fulfilled the Divine prophecy concerning Elijah, and though his father said of him that he should go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah, we read that, when the Pharisees and rulers sent messengers to John, saying, Who are you? Art thou Elias?—he said, No! What does that mean? The Lord says that this was Elijah. Men say, Are you Elijah, and he says, No! I think it means this, that John the Baptist was not the kind of Elijah that they were looking for. He rejected being called Elijah by them. He did not call himself Elijah. It was not that he was accepting for himself any name, any position, any official place, that would immediately, in a sense, have prejudiced the simplicity of that voice in the wilderness, for he himself had accepted the position that he was an Elijah. So, when we talk of an instrumentality, we are not thinking of that which is noted and marked among men as something especially and essentially peculiar in itself, nor even of that which takes a name and position for itself. John's own attitude, and the attitude of those who in this day would prepare for that greater coming of the Lord, surely is this, I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, not a name, but a voice, not an official position or person at all, but an instrumentality by which some link is brought about between God and man, for that is what a voice is for. My voice is only a channel for conveying to you what is in my mind. John says, I am a channel for the Lord to reach His people.

A Divine Gift

And yet, though that was true, and he

accepted no place in his own estimation or in that of others, how true it was also that John the Baptist represented a Divine gift to this earth and to God's people on the earth. God says, "I will send you Elijah", and when we open the New Testament, we read, "There was a man sent from God" (John i. 6), and when our Lord spoke of him, He said, A prophet?—greater than a prophet! How greater than a prophet? Because he was himself the subject of prophecy, not merely one who spoke the Lord's word, but one about whom the Lord's word had been spoken, Divinely chosen, Divinely commissioned; from the centuries away back in Isaiah's time he was marked out for this God-chosen and God-appointed instrumentality. That is a very solemn thing, a very wonderful thing. I wonder whether it conveys anything to our hearts? God had many servants on this earth in Malachi's day, and right through there were those who feared the Lord and thought upon His Name. They were there, yes, right in the midst of the temple worship, in the temple at Jerusalem, there were those who were looking for the redemption of Israel. There were Zacharias and Elisabeth, and Simeon, and Anna, and there were others, a multitude of lesser people with perhaps less love, but they were the Lord's and they loved the Lord. There was John the Baptist. God had chosen him for something special. He did not offer himself; he did not get some idea, some theory, reading that there ought to be one who would correspond to certain features and so fitting himself into those features and offering himself to the Lord to be an Elijah. That is the way in which we have so often approached things, is it not? That is the trouble sometimes in the children of God. In their very zeal for the Lord, they have seen an idea, a true one, and have tried to offer themselves and said, I will be that! That is the danger of reading biographies of Christian people. They read of George Muller and they say, I will be like George Muller; and sometimes it is said to them—Who will be a Hudson Taylor? I do not find actually any of those men responded to another model they tried to imitate, but I do find in every case that God laid His hand on them to do something with them. That is the secret. God gave them to His Church and to the world.

I believe it is God's purpose to give to the world and to the Church a new Elijah, not a

man, I am not thinking of that, but of a spiritual instrumentality to bring back the King.

A Divinely-Given Knowledge of Christ

And then, you see, when John the Baptist was preaching and was in the wilderness, Christ came. I cannot but think that he had often met the Lord in the flesh and knew of Him, being so closely related, and yet there were those remarkable words, "I knew him not" (John i. 33). John the Baptist never knew Christ by studying his Bible. I cannot but believe that such a man had a rich knowledge of the Scriptures, he must have had. But that is not how he knew Christ. He did not know Christ because his mother or his father or anyone else had told him. You do not know Christ like that. It was not in his mind, nor in the realm of his affections, of his own activities, that he had this knowledge of Christ. He had to face the fact, that with it all, he must confess 'I knew him not'. But there came a day when he knew Christ, knew Him in a very wonderful way, knew Him as the Lamb of God. That is a very big knowledge; to know Him as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. He knew Him as the One Who baptises in the Holy Ghost. That is a very big knowledge, and how did he thus know Him? By Divine illumination in his heart. That is the way of spiritual knowledge. I think that is the reason why some of us have had so little of it—not the lack of Bible study or the reading or the hearing of other men's expositions and understanding of Christ, it is not that way, it may be through those, but the light of God shone into the spirit of this man and what he could not know with his mind and could not know with his own faculties he knew by the revelation and the inshining of God into his heart. That is essential.

Of course, I know that is essential for salvation. No sinner is saved merely by being told about Christ or even thinking about Him. It is true that Divine light must shine into the heart before there can be eternal life. I am thinking of more than that. This was a full knowledge of Christ that John the Baptist had, and that full knowledge of Christ was Divinely given to his heart.

"The Word of God Came unto John"

If you want to see what God thinks of human history you have to read the Bible. In the

Gospel by Luke, chapter iii, the Lord makes use of historical figures just to fix the events that He is concerned with, and He gives two or three words to one of the world's greatest rulers, and a word or two to historical figures who were big men in their day and are still found in history, talked about. He passes over in a phrase that combination of two men who were at the head of the Jewish religion, but He spent two whole chapters on telling of a few humble homes that nobody knew about. Zacharias and Elisabeth and their boy, Mary and this Son of hers—what did the world care for them? They were very small people. You find two long chapters, the first and second chapters of Luke, full of them. God is interested in them; God's concerns are bound up with them. And then in chapter iii. 1, He condenses into one little phrase the biggest men of their day, and that is all He cares about them.

"Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberias Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judah, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituræa and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came unto John."

I love that—the word of God came to John. Yet, do I love it? I wonder, for where did it come to John? You see, many people could not be Tiberias Caesar, but they would rather have liked to have been in a palace. And perhaps they could not be Annas and Caiaphas, high-priests, but it would be nice to be seen with them, at least. We are all like that. We like public recognition. We do not expect to be historical figures, but would rather like it if we could be. But you see, the Word of God does not come to people like that. They are carving their way in this world, seeking their place, their position, their name: so the Word of God does not come to them. There are a great many little rulers, you know, as well as big ones; but the word of God does not come to little ones any more than to big ones. It comes to John the Baptist in the wilderness. Has the Word of God come to you?

Well, you see, John the Baptist had only one desire, and that was the increase of the glory of Christ. He had no cause to further, no idea to propagate. It is true that, when he was asked, John the Baptist was able to set people on the

way, to show them how they ought to order their lives; and it was true that, because of special circumstances, when certain people came to him, he had to speak very strong words, but that did not make up his life. He was not in this world, and he was not in the wilderness to put people right and tell them what to do. He was not even there to groan and to point at that corruption of the Divine revelation as found in the Jewish religion, though it must have wounded his heart sorely. He was not here for that. He was only here for one purpose, for the glory of Christ. That is a very necessary characteristic of the one who is the link to save the earth from the curse. Mark you, just as social reform will never save the earth, religious reform will never save the earth, and even the ideal outward form of the Christian community will never save the earth from the curse. Only one thing will ever save the world from the curse—that Christ should come in in glory, and so John says, "He must increase, I must decrease", and that was his passion and his desire.

The Joy of the Bridegroom's Friend

This is a heart matter. In John iii, he speaks of the Bridegroom coming, and there associates the whole matter with affairs of the heart and joy and rejoicing. He is not the Bridegroom, but he is the Bridegroom's friend, and oh, how glad he will be to see the marriage! Now, it does look as if historically John the Baptist stands apart, for after all, we have that word of the Lord's that "he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he". And so I say historically there may be a sense in which Christ is the Bridegroom and the bride has yet to be gathered and presented to Him, and John the Baptist stands apart as the Bridegroom's friend. Historically it may be true, but I am sure of this that spiritually there is a place for the children of God as the Bridegroom's friend, without prejudicing their place as the Bridegroom's bride. And I am not sure that that is not a seemly and a right position for us to be found in, that from one aspect, at any rate, as the Bridegroom's friend, we are longing for the consummation of the Bridegroom's joy. As soon as you come into the realm of the bride—I know the Lord's people constitute His bride—but there it is your own joy and your own position that is involved. Praise God, it is, but I believe there is a place and a ministry which

corresponds to the Bridegroom's friend in his heart desiring to see the Bridegroom enter into possession of His heart's desire. Certainly, that is where John the Baptist stood.

The Way of the Cross

There is one more thing we must mention about him. You notice what the Lord said—"They have done unto him whatsoever they listed". Elijah was delivered over to death. Well, of course, that corresponds all right with the Elijah of history, but certainly it is true of this spiritual Elijah. For the fulfilment of his mission, he is delivered over to death. They have done with him what they listed. It rather takes the glory out of being a messenger to go before the Lord's face to prepare His way. It is rather different from that idea we have often had of the Lord's coming, that perhaps in a minute or two it will be all wonderful glory, perhaps there will be a wonderful revival, and then glory. This link served the Lord's purpose by being delivered over to death. You know the story of how, when the blind were receiving their sight, the lame were walking, the lepers were being cleansed, the dead were being raised up, and everybody was getting blessing from the Lord whether they loved Him or not—the undeserving, the unbelievers, the multitude, the crowd, they were all getting such blessing from the Lord, and, just as in Malachi's day, the man who was true to God got nothing, except the promise of the blessing of the unoffended. The Lord said to him by means of those two disciples, 'Well, John, you are there. I am not taking any notice of you, I am not exerting My powers toward you, I am not doing anything for you now. You must go the way of the Cross, and it must look as if I do not care anything about you. John, seek the grace, even under such a strain, of not being offended in Me.' That is the Elijah instrument.

There are other things we could say about John. He was a burning and shining light. It is a significant fact that he never did a miracle, he was just a voice, but, according to the Divine word of prophecy, he was the link that saved the earth from the curse, and he was given the unspeakable privilege of preparing the way of the Lord.

Now, the Lord says to me, and I feel He says to us all, That is what I need in this earth! But do not begin to put yourself in the place of

Elijah. Remember that John the Baptist said, No! But let us make this the first, the chief burden, desire of our prayer, amid the many other things that occupy us; shall we accept this, that God needs here on this earth a voice to be heard, even though rejected, a voice that proclaims the coming of the Lord; something far more than a voice, a link between this old order, which is unacceptable, it is finished so far as God is concerned, and yet He will not bring the curse, He will bring a new order. Shall we before the Lord seek grace to have this first as the ambition and goal and object of prayer and desire, that, for His own glory and

His own purposes here in this earth, the Lord may have His spiritual Elijah after the pattern of that which we have seen in John the Baptist. I think that Elisabeth and Zacharias prayed for something like that in their simple way, and in the end they found that that for which they prayed was born in their own family. We may find as we pray, I think we shall, that that will be born in us. Shall we first of all realise God's promise and God's need and the awful condition of this world over which the curse hangs, and shall we pray that God's Elijah may prepare the way and the Lord Whom we seek may suddenly come. Amen!
H.F.

The Lamb in the Midst of the Throne

No. 4.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

“And Jehovah spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you” (Exodus xii. 1-2).

We started out in our previous meditation by indicating the connection between the Passover of the Jews and the Lord's Supper of the Church as brought about by the Lord Jesus Himself in the night in which He was betrayed, and what we set out to see was that the Passover or the Lord's Supper, and what they represent of the death of Christ, is the beginning of the history of the Lord's people. All history, from God's standpoint, begins there, and, although Christendom may have created its Calendar and we talk about 1941 A.D., you have to take thirty-three years of that away before you start history from God's standpoint. The Cross of the Lord Jesus was the zero hour of this universe from God's standpoint. The Cross of the Lord Jesus is the zero hour of the history of every child of God, and nothing is taken account of by God before that, and from that and what that represents as a basic thing in history, in spiritual history, from that everything is taken account of as being of God. Now, if we can understand

that, we shall have the key to everything and find a very great deal of help.

One of the outstanding features of the Passover was the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Chapter xiii. of Exodus deals especially with that. In Chapter xii. verse 8 it is mentioned.

“And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; with bitter herbs they shall eat it.”

Then that little clause “and unleavened bread” is taken up in Chapter xiii, and we have a quite extensive paragraph on the matter.

“Seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, and in the seventh day shall be a feast to Jehovah. Unleavened bread shall be eaten throughout the seven days; and there shall no leavened bread be seen with thee, neither shall there be leaven seen with thee, in all thy borders.” (verses 6 and 7.)

Now you notice that Luke makes much of that—Chapter xxii, 7.

“And the day of unleavened bread came, on which the passover must be sacrificed.”

It is already mentioned in verse 1.

“Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover.”

That introduces the Passover and the Lord's

Supper, as you will see, and that feast of unleavened bread carried on for seven days—that is a perfect spiritual period, gives a special significance to spiritual history. Until you and I have learned the meaning of unleavened bread we have not begun real spiritual history, for such history begins by a very definite, positive establishing, as a memorial, of the meaning of unleavened bread.

I think we know what leaven stands for. To say that it is sin is far too general; it is not specific and definite enough. Of course, it is sin; but leaven is the old nature; it is the natural or the carnal man; it is that energy of the old creation; it is that ferment of the flesh; it is that seething that is in us that is ever trying to work its way out, to express itself, to enlarge itself, to inflate itself, to make its presence and influence felt, to get, possess, to get hold—all that sort of thing which is the flesh, an active element in the old carnal nature. Now that history has to have a definite crisis and be brought to an end in that crisis, has to be smitten in the death of the Lord Jesus, and not until the seven days of the feast of unleavened bread have been completed can we begin our history in living union with God's Son. That is fundamental to spiritual history.

An End and a Beginning

We have said that God takes account of nothing until the Passover is fulfilled, and everything that is of God begins and takes its rise at the point where the feast of unleavened bread is completed. That is a tremendous thing to say, beloved, but because that has not been recognized, there is the tragic history of very much done for the Lord of which he takes no account, it did not originate with Him. Failure to recognize this, and failure to have this thing really established has been and is the ground of a very great deal of Christian deception. It is an assumption, an assumption that we are the Lord's and that all is well, and Satan loves an assumption, loves people to assume, for assumption is that ground which is most fruitful for his deceptive work. What I mean is this. If with us, with you, with me, there is a coming into the things of God with an unbroken natural will, with an unsubdued natural mind, with an uncrucified natural ambition, that is fertile land for deception. Satan can get a great deal where things are like that. Somewhere, secretly, deeper than our recog-

niton and perhaps consciousness, there is an ambition, ambition for service, for ministry. to do something, to be something, to see something; the ferment of the leaven of the old nature still at work is brought over to the things of God. The result? Oh, if not entirely, a very large proportion of what follows is not out from God; it is a history of something which is energized by us in the Name of the Lord; a life which has its spring in ourselves although for the Lord. It has leaven in it, it has the natural energy, the natural mind, the natural judgment, the natural reason, the natural will, the natural ambition, the natural emotion. God says that everything of Himself begins at zero where we can produce nothing.

That lamb slain in its representative capacity said that on that side everything was finished. It was made sin, made a curse and smitten—The Cross is God's zero hour for the old creation. From that time, only that which comes directly, immediately out from God Himself is spiritual history, is Divine history, in us. It is only that which counts, it is only that which knows the Lord, it is only that which gets back to the Lord, it is only that which accomplishes the Lord's purpose. Nothing takes its rise in us.

The feast of unleavened bread is a very serious business to be carried on throughout seven days. It says—No place with God for this natural life! It is corrupt, it has in it that seething ferment of pride. Somewhere behind everything there is pride. That is the poison which came into the race from the serpent who said, *I will. I will exalt my throne. I will be equal to the Most High. I! I!*—that is leaven. The leaven is the 'I' in some form or other. I am not saying, beloved, that you and I can track it out in all its forms, but what we have to recognize is that it is there, and not one of us dare for an instant say, *It is not so with me!* You and I have to come to God's position about ourselves, and not one of us must seek to justify ourself in God's presence. What we have to do is to say that God's verdict is a true verdict, and, by nature there is in me the deep, active poison of an 'I' life. It is there whether I am alive to it all the time or not. It is there whether I feel most devoted to the Lord or not. It is there. As truly as we have this blood coursing in our veins, the blood of this humanity, we have in that blood the seed of a fallen nature, and that fallen nature in its principle is 'I', and that 'I' is ever aim-

ing at getting hold of the things of God. Let us not forget that. The very heart of that "I" is to get hold of the things of God. Satan said, "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God :...I will be like the Most High". I will get hold of what is God's!

That was Jacob's terrible, terrible mistake. Yes, the birthright was for Jacob, but, mark you, it was God's. Jacob had a perception of the value of Divine things. Jacob had a sense of the importance of the things of God which his brother had not, but Jacob was not content to believe, to trust that God would secure in him those Divine things, and for him and to him. Jacob, recognizing the value of Divine things, in the ferment of the leaven of the self-life must act to get his hands upon those things. You and I may be quite right in our perception of the value of Divine things, but to get them into our own hands is quite another matter; to have blessing for self, to have power to use, to have position for influence, all of which may subtly be the bringing of us somewhere—that is leaven. God cannot go on with Jacob. Twenty years of deepest discipline must lie between that first act of putting his hand upon Divine things and his being brought into the good of them; deep, deep history. That is the history of most of us. History begins there, with a feast of unleavened bread. It begins with a repudiation unto death of the self-life, the "I" principle.

In Israel it had to be very thorough. They had to search their houses with candles for any hidden leaven, and even then in their ritual afterward, before they dare offer their sacrifice, having searched, they had to make a declaration to the effect—We have searched our houses for leaven, we have done that which is commanded us in the law, but if there yet be something hidden which we have not discovered, we forswear it! It had to be very thorough.

The Feast of Remembrance

And the Lord said, This shall be a memorial throughout your generations for ever! And whenever the feast of the Passover came, year by year, the feast of unleavened bread led up to it, was bound up with it. What then was its significance? It was a remembrance of a great act of separation, separation from evil. As they sat down to the feast, the story was told year by year of what the Lord did to the Egyptians, and how the Lord brought them out of Egypt, and

the Lord says. This must be throughout your generations for ever.

Now beloved, if the Lord's Supper corresponds to the Passover in spiritual principle, do you not see that every time we come to the Lord's Table we are telling the story. That is exactly the meaning of Paul's words in 1 Cor. xi, "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim... ", declare, set forth, narrate. We tell the story in act, we act the story.

The Lord marked the beginning of our spiritual history with a feast of unleavened bread. He brought us out of Egypt. What is Egypt? Well, Egypt typifies the strength and glory of the flesh: and how God had to get Egypt out of the very bones of Moses! He was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and for forty long years in the wilderness Egypt was being smitten in Moses. He started out in the energy of Egypt, he started out in the wisdom of Egypt, he attempted the things of God with Egyptian resources, his position, his abilities—and God said, No! The feast of unleavened bread for forty years, and we start at zero! The man who is going to be used as an instrument for bringing people out on to heavenly ground must go through discipline. He must find heavenly ground and be emptied of all earthly ground, all natural ground. The Lord makes this divide very clear.

I know perhaps some of you are thinking, Well, where are we? We have been Christians for years; in some cases, many years. Where are we? What is our position? Well, beloved, we have to face God's facts. I am not saying that we are not Christians, that we do not belong to the Lord, but I am saying that you and I have to face God's position squarely and it is never too late to do that. God is working with us all the way along to bring us back. Oh, that we had seen it all at the beginning, but even if we had, I wonder if we could have accepted it. I wonder if it is not necessary for us to go through things in order to accept new light. We are never really brought into light by a presentation of truth. We really only come livingly into things when something has happened in us, and it takes time. However, here we are, and whatever may be said about this, here is God's position, and I ask you faithfully and solemnly, have you had a feast of unleavened bread, do you really know the consummation of that feast in the Passover in your history? If not, you

have reason to question a great many things. Some of us know the divide which that makes. There have been years of very energetic, active, enthusiastic, exhausting Christian work, preaching and what not; but oh! how we look back on those years with regret and shame, that, with all the zeal and all the energy, how little, how very little comparatively of a real coming out from the Lord, and we have to ask many questions about those years. The one thing that is quite patent to us is that we were the energizers, we were the fountain of the activity, we were doing it, we were in it, and much more than that. Then God brought to us the feast of unleavened bread. It was a dry time. Unleavened bread is not palatable—a good many bitter herbs are associated with unleavened bread. The flesh does not delight in that diet. But it was and it is a real thing; it is coming to God's zero, and, whatever may have been the sense then of weakness and failure and imperfection, we do know one thing, that that feast of unleavened bread marked a new beginning where the Lord was concerned, marked a new coming in of the Lord, and marked a new realm of life and work. From that time we know one thing if we know nothing else, namely, that from that time onward it is the Lord and not ourselves, and the Lord has kept us on that principle Himself, smiting, continually smiting, any deviation from the point where it was the Lord; and that has been a memorial throughout our generation. The Lord brings us back to that again and again. I ask you, do you know that real crisis?

Life through Death

It is this to which the Apostle refers as being the very secret of life, the secret of Divine life. It is here that Divine life takes its rise. The river of Divine life springs out of the Cross, and he says, "Always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body" (II Cor. iv. 10). "Always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus"—strange language! "The putting to death of Jesus". That is one aspect of the death of Christ, only one aspect. There are others, but that is a very important aspect. The putting to death of Jesus. Why was He put to death? He was put to death because He stood by choice, voluntarily, of His own will, in the place of the old creation; in your place, in my place. He was put to death as representing

the natural life of the old creation which He took upon Him, not His but ours. And you and I are always to be bearing about in the body that putting to death. If that is so—the putting to death of the old nature, the 'I', the self, the flesh, the carnal principle, the leaven of this nature—then the life also of Jesus is manifested in our mortal flesh. You see, there is no life save by way of that death. All life comes by the way of that death. What is the value and working of this life?

Well, we are to reckon ourselves as alive unto God. What is it to be alive unto God? Beloved, this being alive unto God means a new kind of living knowledge, intelligence, which is not the knowledge and the intelligence of the old man. That old reason has been put to death, and now it is a new knowledge. I ask you again, is it true in your case that, because of a definite crisis in the feast of unleavened bread, that knowledge which you have is a living knowledge which has come after that crisis, or have you carried over the old man, the old reasoning, the old judgment, into the things of God. If so, you see, you are dead while you live, and I believe that is the reason why so many Christians are without living revelation. Beloved, believe me, it is the birthright of every child of God to have living revelation of God, to know the Lord by revelation of the Holy Spirit. It is your birthright. Oh, if every Christian was there, had that, what a different situation there would be! If every child of God really was living in the light of direct revelation of the Lord in the heart! It may be through the Word, but it is ours, we have our own personal blessed enjoyment of the Lord revealing Himself to us. If that is not true, then I do not understand my Bible. I have to close a great deal of the Word of God and say, Well, that does not mean what it says! What is the meaning of the anointing that abideth in us and teacheth us all things, as John says? What is the meaning of this that the Lord has been saying about "when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth: for he shall not speak from himself; but what things soever he shall hear, these shall he speak: and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come. He shall glorify me..."? What is the meaning of it if it does not mean that every child of God should have, perhaps in small beginnings, but in ever-growing and enlarging measure, a direct and personal inward knowledge of the Lord, so that

the Lord speaks to that child of God in an inward way regarding His will, His mind, His thoughts, and teaches them all the time. It is true, beloved, this is life, It is the life that does it. The Spirit of life will touch you on every point where the Lord has something to say. If you are alive to God, the Spirit of God will touch you as to the Lord's mind on everything where there is a need for Him to say something.

He will touch you on the matter of dress. He will touch you on the matter of your conversation. He will touch you upon some inconsistency in your life, some unrighteousness in your transactions. He will touch you upon the question of trustworthiness. He will even touch you on the matter of punctuality in keeping your engagements. He will touch you on anything where He has something to say on a matter of rectitude, conscientiousness. Oh, there is nothing more character-forming than a life in the Holy Spirit. This is life, and it is revelation, it is knowing the Lord. Do not think of knowing the Lord and revelation of the Lord merely as a beautiful unveiling of a wonderful God in glory. No, the revelation of the Lord is this, on these practical matters. Oh yes, we have been through it. I know it is true and you know it is true. To walk with God is to be checked up, and being checked up by the Holy Spirit is knowing the Lord.

Well now, being alive unto God as from the dead it cannot be until the feast of unleavened bread has been established. It does mean that our own will and mind and desire and everything that is of ourselves must have been smitten. There must have been a crisis. It is not done once for all, completely and finally, in an act, although something is done. Something has been broken, and from that time God has a way in, and as you and I respond to what God is putting through that way which He has secured, the thing grows and grows, and things which to us at one time were perfectly harmless we cannot do now. The Lord is gracious in these matters. He does not bring it on us all at once, but it is wonderful how, when we go on with the Lord, we change. We drop certain things, we change, and how does it come about? Well, if we put it into words, we would say, I came to feel the Lord did not want that or did want it. I believe that that ought to be the expanding experience of every child of God. It should be. Now, don't turn in and begin to go over your spiritual wardrobe, and see whether you can do with-

out this or that. That would not be true spirituality. Walk with the Lord and you will find the wardrobe changes. Oh, trust the Holy Spirit and He will put you right on everything. But, mark you, basic to everything, there has to be a feast of unleavened bread, that is, the whole life of nature must have been smitten at its root; the putting to death of Jesus must have had a radical start in us. But if the whole history of believers, of the Church, takes its rise from that, if that is where everything begins, then, from God's standpoint, there is no Church except on the basis of a feast of unleavened bread; and there is no history, nothing exists, until that has been done. That is why He stressed this matter so much, because there could be nothing, there would be nothing, and God was after something, but all of Himself, all out from Himself.

The Lamb Newly Slain

So the little clause "with unleavened bread" is taken up and expanded in a certain connection, the separation of the firstborn. The letter to the Hebrews tells us what that is. "Ye are come...to the church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven", and when you come to see what that enrolment means, turning to the book of the Revelation, it has to do with the Lamb's book of life. The *Lamb's* book of life, and you look to see the Lamb and it is ever as though it had been slain, in the throne. When the Lamb has reached the final position in glory and exaltation and power, He is still presented as though He had been slain. There is an element in the statement there which suggests, 'as though it had just been slain, newly slain'. God keeps that thing fresh right to the end and the throne, and the Church of the firstborn ones whose names are enrolled in heaven in the Lamb's book of life are those whose history is based on the Passover, on the slaying of the Lamb, at the end of the feast of unleavened bread. That is not just typology. It is tremendously searching truth.

If every celebration of the Communion Service had that behind it, what a different state there would be in the world today. What a tragedy that God's thought about this matter has been lost. It has become a rite, a ceremony. Surely those of us who gather around the Lord's Table will have to take this thing very much more seriously.

All Israel is found together in this lamb. There may have been thousands of lambs in

Israel, but in heaven there is only one Lamb. Carrying this over to the Lord's Supper, there is only one Lamb, and there ever was only one Lamb in God's eye. All feasted upon one Lamb, all united in one Lamb, all united by reason of sharing one Lamb, so that this was a fellowship, a feast of fellowship, a fellowship in feasting. What is the basis of real fellowship? We all agree that the Lord's Table ought to be the central thing in our fellowship, it ought to be that in which our fellowship is expressed more than in anything else. What is the basis of fellowship? Oh, what Paul says is so true to principle. Look again at the situation at Corinth—the Lord's Table was there, but there was anything but fellowship. All were divided, one against another in the church, and yet they were coming to the Lord's Table and contradicting its central thought. Paul says, "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body". Our coming to the Table must be on the basis of fellowship which is without condemnation; it is unleavened bread. You know as well as I know that there can be no fellowship amongst the Lord's people until the 'I' has been smitten. It is the 'I', it is the self, it is the personal, that breaks fellowship; it is our reason, our desire, our wish, our conviction. Oh, the tragedy of endless divisions and splittings up of the Lord's people! They are going on and ever going on. Well, it is simply

man's mind coming into play about a certain Christian truth—splitting hairs, we call it. It is man's mind. It is because there is really no basic unleavened bread. The natural man has not been set aside. Well, we cannot have fellowship unless that is done. Unleavened bread is essential to a feast of fellowship, but, blessed be God, if it is true that basically that thing obtains, well, there may be all sorts of things about us naturally that would cause breaking up, scattering, but that basic thing has happened and we go on. We are all very different naturally and there is much about us all which would make it quite impossible for other people to get on with us, but I venture to say that in us some basic thing has been done. The Cross has done something somewhere, and that is the security of our fellowship. I believe that the thing that has been done, in measure at least, is that personal interest has been smitten, and it is just the Lord Himself Who reigns; for Him all that is personal can be let go.

We really must ask the Lord about this matter of unleavened bread, because, as I have said, our glorious history of life and all that that life means in its working out, springs out of this. Where there is leaven there is death because there is corruption; where there is no leaven there is life because the root of corruption, the seed of corruption, has been smitten. The Lord teach us the importance of this!

T.A-S.

The Normal Christian Life

No. 3.

The Divide of the Cross

READING: Romans vi. 1-5.

The kingdom of this world is not the kingdom of God. The first creation has become "the old creation", and God is out for a second and "new creation". He is bringing in a new creation, a new kingdom, and a new world, and nothing of the old creation, the old kingdom, or the old world, can be transferred to the new.

In order to bring us into this new sphere God must make us new creatures. Unless we are made anew we can never fit into the new realm. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John

iii. 6). However educated, however cultivated, however improved, it is still flesh. Our fitness for the new kingdom is determined by the creation to which we belong. Do we belong to the old creation or the new? Are we born of the flesh or of the Spirit? Our ultimate fitness for the new realm hinges on the question of origin. The question is not "good or bad", but "flesh or Spirit"; "that which is born of the flesh is flesh", and it will never be anything else. That which is of the old creation can never enter the new kingdom.

Once we really see what God is after—something altogether new for Himself—then we

shall see clearly that we can never bring anything from the old realm into the new. God wanted to have us for Himself, but He could not bring us as we were into that which He had purposed; so He first did away with us by the Cross of Christ and then by the Resurrection provided a new life for us. Being now a new creation with a new nature, we can enter the new kingdom and the new world. The Cross was the means God used to set us aside altogether, and the Resurrection the means He used to impart to us all that was necessary for our life in the new sphere. The greatest negative in the universe is the Cross, for with it God wiped out everything that was not of Himself; the greatest positive in the universe is the Resurrection, for through it God brought into being all He wants for the new creation. The Resurrection stands at the beginning of the new creation. It is a blessed thing to see that the Cross ends all that pertains to the first regime, and the Resurrection introduces all that pertains to the second. Everything that had its beginning before resurrection must be wiped out. Resurrection is God's new starting point.

We have now two worlds before us, the new and the old. In the old Satan has absolute dominion. You may be a good man in the old creation, but as long as you belong to the old you are doomed to the Cross; because nothing of the old can be transferred to the new. The Cross is God's declaration that all of the old creation must die. Nothing of the old Adam can pass beyond the Cross; it all ends there. The sooner we see that everything we derive from Adam has gone to the Cross, the better. By the Cross, God has made a way of escape for us from the old creation. God gathered up in His Son all that was of Adam and crucified him; so in Him all that was of Adam was done away. God made a proclamation throughout the universe—Through the Cross I have crucified all that was not of Me. You who belong to the old creation have all been crucified with Christ.

"Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried, therefore with him through baptism into his death" (Rom. vi. 3-4). What is the meaning of baptism? It is not just a question of a cup of water, nor even of a baptistry of water. Baptism is a tremendous thing, for it relates both to the Cross and to the Resurrection of our Lord. Peter in his first

epistle refers to baptism as the answer of a good conscience toward God (1 Peter iii. 21). Now we cannot answer without being spoken to. If God had said nothing, we should have nothing to answer. But He has spoken: He has spoken to us by the Cross. By the Cross He has told of His judgment of us, of the world, of the old creation and of the old kingdom. The Cross of Christ is not just an individual Cross, but a corporate Cross, an all-inclusive Cross. God has put us all into His Son and crucified us in Him. In the last Adam, He has wiped out all that was of the first Adam. Now, what is my answer to God's verdict on the old creation? I answer by asking for baptism. Why? In Romans vi. 4 Paul explains that baptism means burial. Baptism is connected both with death and resurrection; but in itself it is neither death nor resurrection, it is burial. But who are qualified for burial? Only the dead. So if I ask for baptism I proclaim myself dead and only fit for the grave. My request for baptism means that I say "Yes" to the death to which God has committed me. I say, "Lord, I believe you have done the crucifying, now I ask for the burying." He has consigned me to death, I ask to be consigned to the grave.

In China a woman lost her husband, but she flatly refused to have him buried. Day after day for a fortnight he lay in the house. She said, "He is not dead; I talk with him every night". She was unwilling to have him buried, because she did not believe him dead. When are we willing to bury our dear ones? Only when we are absolutely sure that they have passed away. While you have the tiniest hope that they are alive you will never bury them. When will I ask for baptism? When I see that God's way is perfect, when I recognise that I deserve to die, and when I truly believe that God has already crucified me. Once I am fully persuaded that, before God, I am quite dead then I apply for baptism. I say in effect, "Praise the Lord, I am dead. Lord, you have slain me, now I desire to be put in the grave". In China we have a "Red Cross", and a "Blue Cross"; the first deals with those who are still alive, and the second with those who are already dead—those who have died in famine, flood, or war. The Lord has given us a "Red Cross" and a "Blue Cross", and we must accept both. God has done the work of crucifying, but we must seal that death by burial.

There is an old world and a new world, and between the two there is a tomb. God has already crucified me, but I must consent to be consigned to that tomb. My burial confirms God's sentence passed upon me in the Cross of His Son. It cuts me off from the old world and prepares me for the new. So baptism is no small thing. Paul, in effect, says, "If you could continue in the old world, why be baptized? You should never have been baptized if you meant to live in the old realm". Baptism makes the ground clear for the new creation by seeing to the burial of the old creation. Paul still referring to those who have been baptized, speaks of being "united with him in the likeness of his death" (Rom. vi. 5). By baptism we acknowledge union with Christ in His death.

One day I was talking with a brother on this subject, but he could not see the truth. We happened to be drinking tea together, so I took a lump of sugar and stirred it into the tea. A couple of minutes later I asked, "Can you tell where the sugar is now and where the tea?" "No", he said, "they are both become one". So the real meaning of baptism is that we are baptized into the death of Christ, so that His death becomes ours and ours His. Our death and His are so closely identified that it is impossible to distinguish between them. My baptism is my admission that the death of Christ is a mighty all-inclusive death, mighty enough and inclusive enough to destroy everything that is not of God.

Resurrection unto Newness of Life

Now resurrection is quite different. I enter into His death, but I do not enter into His Resurrection. Praise the Lord! His resurrection enters into me, and so I get new life. The death of the Lord is "I in Christ"; the resurrection is "Christ in me". How is it possible for Christ to communicate His resurrection-life to me? How do I receive this new life? In verse five Paul answers our question with a very good illustration. The word "united" in the Greek is "grafted", and we have a very beautiful picture here of the life of Christ which is imparted to us through His resurrection. In Fukien I once visited a man who owned an orchard. He had three or four acres of land, and about three hundred fruit trees. I enquired if his trees had been grafted, or if they were just the original stock. "Do you think", he replied, "that I

would waste my land growing ungrafted trees?" I asked him to explain the process of grafting, which he gladly did. "When a tree has grown to a certain height I lop off the top and then graft it", he said. Pointing to a special tree, he asked, "Do you see that tree? I call it the father tree, because all the other trees are grafted from that one. If the other trees were just left to follow the course of nature, their fruit would be about the size of a raspberry, and it would consist mostly of thick skin and seeds. This tree from which they are grafted bears a luscious fruit, the size of a plum, with very thin skin and tiny seeds". "How does it happen?", I asked. "I simply take a little of the nature of the one tree and transfer it to the other", he explained. "I make a cleavage in the poor tree and insert a slip from the good one, then bind it up and leave it to grow". "But how can it grow?" I asked. "I don't know", he said, "But it does grow". Then he showed me a tree bearing miserably poor fruit below the graft and rich juicy fruit above. How can one tree bear the fruit of another? How can an old tree bear new fruit? How can a poor tree bear good fruit? By grafting. Then if a man can graft a branch of one tree into another, cannot God graft the life of His Son into us?

A Chinese woman burned her arm badly and was taken to hospital. It was found necessary to graft some new skin over the injured area, but the doctor attempted in vain to graft a piece of her own skin on to the arm; it was too poor. A foreign nurse offered a piece of skin, and the operation was thoroughly successful. The new skin knit to the old, and the woman left hospital with her arm perfectly healed; but there remained a patch of white skin on her yellow arm to tell the tale of the past. You ask how the skin of another grew on that woman's arm? I do not know how it grew, but I know that it did grow. If an earthly surgeon can graft a piece of skin from one human body on to another, cannot the Divine Surgeon graft the life of His Son into me? I do not know *how* it is done, but it *is* done. We can do nothing, and we need do nothing, for God has already done everything.

God has done everything. There is only one fruitful life in the world and that has been grafted into millions of other lives. We call this the new birth. New birth is the reception of a life which I did not possess before. It is not

that my life has been changed at all; it is another life, a life altogether new and altogether Divine, which has become my life. God has cut off the old creation by the Cross of His Son, and my baptism is my recognition of that fact.

The Reckoning of Faith

The normal Christian life, initially and progressively, is by faith in the Cross of Christ. But what is faith? Faith is my acceptance of God's fact. Faith always relates to the past; anything that relates to the future is not faith, it is hope.

Mark xi. 24 explains the nature of faith. "All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye *have* received them, and ye shall have them". If you believe you already "have received" your requests, then you "shall have them". To believe that you may get something, or that you can get it, or even that you shall

get it, is not faith. This is faith—to believe that you have already got it. Only that which relates to the past is true faith. Those who say, "God can", or "God may", or "God must", or "God shall", do not necessarily believe at all. Faith always says, "God has done it".

Then when have I faith in regard to my crucifixion? Not when I say God *can* crucify me, or *will* crucify me, but when with joy I say, praise God, in Christ *I am crucified*. Temptation may come and Satan may try to prove I am not dead, but once I see that I am crucified with Christ I can laugh in the face of temptation. The trouble with many is that as soon as temptation comes they begin to ask; "Have I really died?" They believe Satan's lies and deny God's truth. God has said that when Christ died I died, and I bank everything on His word. It is *done*, therefore there is nothing for me to do, but merely to see this as an eternal fact. W.N.

"Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory"

No. 2.

Ministering to the Glory of God

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil... Again, the devil taketh him unto an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and he said unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him... Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. iv. 1, 8-10). "Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever" (Matt. vi. 13).

"For not unto angels did he subject the world to come, whereof we speak. But one hath somewhere testified, saying,

What is man, that thou art mindful of him?
Or the son of man, that thou visitest him?
Thou madest him a little lower than the
angels;

Thou crownedst him with glory and honour,
And didst set him over the works of thy
hands:

Thou didst put all things in subjection under
his feet.

For in that he subjected all things unto him, he left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we see not yet all things subjected to him. But we behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that by the grace of God he should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings" (Heb. ii. 5-10).

This passage in the letter to the Hebrews fits very truly into the other passages read from Matthew. In chapter iv. of Matthew, we see the last Adam, the second Man, entering upon the field of trial at the hands of the Evil One, and being tempted on the same principle as the first Adam, namely, that of having things in Himself and for Himself, and of Himself, instead of having them in relation to God on a basis of faith and dependence. In this record, the last Adam, the second Man, triumphed where the first failed; holding everything into God and having nothing save as in God. His declaration "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy

God, and him only shalt thou serve" reveals Him as recognizing and standing for the rights of God.

Now, when we pass on to chapter vi. of Matthew, the Lord has His own near Him, and He instructs them in the matter of prayer. At the end of that which is not a form of prayer to be repeated continually, but a gathering up of principles of prayer, He introduces exactly the same factors as are found in chapter iv. There is the Evil One, there is the testing or trying at the hands of the Evil One, and there is the acknowledgment of all things as being in God—"Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory." As we said in our previous meditation, by such words and spiritual principles there enunciated, the Lord Jesus puts His own people, His Church, into the position of standing against the Evil One, against his kingdom, his power, his glory and of repudiating all that, and, on the other hand, holding to the Father, His kingdom, His power, His glory, and testifying thereto. The point of our message is that this is what the Church is called for—to stand in that gap on the one hand, all the time repudiating certain claims which, with ostentation and demonstration, are constantly being asserted by the Evil One, and, on the other hand, declaring and holding to what is God's rightful position and what belongs to Him—the kingdom, the power, the glory. This position, as we have said, is constantly raising issues in our own lives and they become the one big cumulative issue of the Church's vocation. We want to get a little nearer to this now.

The Position of a Church Governed by the Holy Spirit

There are two or three things that should help us as we recognize that. The first is this—the position in which the Church will be found when it is governed by the Holy Spirit. There are a good many ideas as to what such a life or church will be. Many of them are right, many of them are doubtful, but this one is perfectly clear.

I. Standing in the Gap

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."

A life or church which is governed and directed by the Holy Spirit, will be led into the breach where the testimony of God's rights, God's

honour, God's glory, is the main issue in view. That is most certainly a mark of the Holy Spirit's government. Under the Holy Spirit's direction, such a position is inevitable. That may comfort us in all our affliction. Satan would like very often to make of our affliction, of our suffering, a ground of accusation: to insinuate that, because of all this having come upon us, we must be wrong; the Lord must be against us, or at least have reservations about us—things cannot be as they ought to be, whereas the truth is just the opposite. Look at God's own Son in the wilderness and see Him alone and in need and pressed by the enemy, and doubtless suffering in soul and weak in body, and know that this is a situation created by the Holy Ghost for a testimony, for the glory of God, for the kingdom of God, for the power of God. So it is a great thing, and a glorious thing, if we did but recognize it, to be put into the position where that testimony hangs, as it were, upon us, in a day of fierce and terrible assaults from the enemy. Such is a Holy Spirit-led church.

II. Maintaining the Spirituality of the Kingdom

The next thing, which runs closely in accord with it, is this: a life or people governed and directed by the Holy Spirit will come to the place where the kingdom, the power and the glory are essentially spiritual. That is a challenge. The Church has lost its real, powerful, effective testimony because it has sought a temporal, seen, tangible kingdom, power, and glory, and Satan has triumphed along that line. As he sought to triumph with Christ, so he has sought to triumph with the Church, and, in a great degree, has triumphed by bringing the Church into the realm where present kingdom, present power, present glory, is the thing sought after, reached unto, accepted, whereas the true kingdom, power and glory is spiritual, not temporal; is heavenly not earthly; is manifested not amongst men as Divine demonstrations, but manifested in the spiritual realm back of men and can only really be appraised, appreciated, recognized there.

See the example in the Lord Jesus in the wilderness. These chapters in Matthew all have to do with the kingdom. The kingdom was with Him; the power was with Him; the glory was with Him. "We beheld his glory", said another

writer, "glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John i. 14), and that is not the kind of glory that men appreciate as on this earth as we see to-day. The glory that they are flaunting before the eyes of the world has nothing of grace and truth about it. It is another kind of glory that belongs to the Lord Jesus, just the opposite of this world's glory; it is full of grace and truth, and cannot be appreciated as amongst men of fleshly mind, worldly mentality. The Church must come into that place where, like its Head in the wilderness, it is stripped of everything that man calls a kingdom and power and glory, yet nevertheless demonstrates a kingdom and power and glory which is superior, though not capable of being appreciated by the natural mind. The kingdom of God is not meat and drink. Satan said, "Command that these stones become bread". The word is, "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink" (Rom. xiv. 17). The power is not that by which you demonstrate fleshly might over man. It is that by which the spiritual forces are dethroned and upset, and so the glory is also spiritual. The kingdom, the power and the glory were with Him, but it was not in manifestation, it was hidden. All the issues were with Him, but in such a realm and in such a way as to give no gratification to the natural life at all. Satan was out to get Him to gratify His soul, His natural life, His humanity as such, and He was refusing to move on that plane, in that realm, and maintained His heavenly relationship with His Father, and it was there that the kingdom came, and the power and the glory were felt.

Now you see the principles. The Church will come into the same position and state as the Lord Jesus came into because of the essentially corporate nature of this thing. That is one reason why we have read Hebrews ii. There you have the uniting.

For it became him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one."

That leads you back to this—

What is man, that thou are mindful of him ?

Or the son of man, that thou makest mention of him ?

In relation to what ?—the subjecting of " the

world to come, whereof we speak ". We are speaking not unto angels but to man, but we see not man collectively in that Divinely appointed and designed position yet. But we see the Man in Whom all the others will be found, we see Him there, and so He goes before and they follow on. They come into the same position as He was led into, to the same end—the kingdom, the power and the glory, with Him and in Him.

III. Attesting the Accomplished Triumph of Christ

There is, however, a third thing which has to qualify that somewhat. It is this—that we are not doing what He did. There is a difference between Matthew iv. and Matthew vi. In Matthew iv. He fought the fight through and, so far as the foundation of the kingdom, the power, and the glory were concerned, it was a settled matter when He emerged from the wilderness. The victory was in His possession. Of course, the fulness of it was carried forward to the Cross and all accomplished there; but here as an initial, basic encounter with the enemy, He emerged in the power of the Spirit as Victor, and the thing was done. It was a settled issue, perhaps we should say potentially, for on the same things there were to be many more battles in His life; nevertheless, potentially the thing was settled.

When you come to Chapter vi., where we are brought in, it is not our being put into the position to fight that battle to a victory, and we must be very careful lest the enemy should gain a tremendous advantage by our having a mentality that the thing is not settled. You have to be careful here, because the enemy is always trying to get us into a position where the issue is not a settled one. If he can get any weakness in this matter, you may take it that he is going to win that battle. In Chapter vi. the Church is put into the place to stand not into something that is now being fought out as an issue, but into something that is very positive. "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory", not—Thine is going to be, will be, when the battle is over. You see, this is a Book of spiritual laws. All this is opened fully in the later parts of the New Testament. So here the Church is put into a position as on its knees in battle in the presence of the assailing Evil One, and its position is that of attestation, declara-

tion, repudiation. In effect it is a repudiation—'His is not the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. Thine is...' and before ever you can win in the assault of the enemy, you have to be settled upon the fact that already that issue has been won, and that position established.

The Church's Vocation

That forms the ground of a good deal of valuable consideration. What is the Church here for? The Church's primary object and purpose in being here is to minister to the glory of God. That is the first thing, whatever that means, however that is made effective, that is the thing above everything else. The Lord's people are here before and above everything else to minister to the glory of God. You know how much there is in that letter which has more to do with the Church than any other letter in the New Testament—the letter to the Ephesians—bearing upon this very thing. You are so familiar with the words.

"...to the end that we should be unto the praise of his glory" (i. 12).

"...the Holy Spirit of promise, which is an earnest of our inheritance, unto the redemption of God's own possession, unto the praise of his glory" (i. 14).

"unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever" (iii. 21).

"...that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (v. 27).

"A glorious church"; "unto the praise of his glory". Let me repeat. The primary object for which the Lord's people are here and will be wherever they are through the eternity to be, unto all ages for ever and ever, is to minister to the glory of God. That means that we are here to maintain a testimony to the glory of God.

There are many ways, I should say countless ways, in which that is effected, in which glory is brought to the Lord by us, in which we minister to His glory, and it would be quite impossible for me to get anywhere in trying to set down how the glory of God is ministered to by the Church. But it is the fact that we need to recognize, for it must govern our minds and our attitude in all considerations. It has to resolve itself into this. All things in our lives—in our conduct, in our demeanour, in our manner, in our speech, in our relationships, in our position,

the position that we take, our attitudes, our home life, our business life—the thing which has to govern us is, Does this minister to the glory of God? for that is the thing for which I am here. If only we could settle this matter finally, it would make a great deal of difference.

Let us ask ourselves, beloved, one question, one all-embracing question. For what am I on the earth? Why am I here? What interests have I, what are my purposes, and what, above everything else, is *the* thing which will have marked my course through this life? Now, if I said quite simply that our response to such a question would be, 'Lord, I am here for You', you would all say Amen to that. 'I am here on the earth for God.' But what do you mean by that? It is the practical application of that that matters. What do you mean by that? 'I am here for God.' You will probably begin to work in your mind along the line of various activities in which you would engage yourself, all kinds of things that you would do for the Lord. Beloved, in the course of our lives here as we really come under the government of the Holy Spirit, where there is real subjection to the Lord, we do arrive at a point where it becomes quite clear to us that the primary thing with the Lord is not what we do for Him, not the number of things or the amount that we do for the Lord. It is not a matter of things for the Lord at all. It is just how much the Lord is being glorified in us and by us. That is the thing that matters, and very often the Lord thinks that a greater amount of ministry to His glory can be fulfilled by our being laid aside from doing anything than by any amount of activity. We discover that.

The question arises at such a time. 'Oh, why this? Why am I not allowed to do this? Why am I shut up, cut off? If only I could be working for the Lord!' The Lord has taken it all away. He closes us down and in, and then, if we wait long enough and if we are true of heart and listen for the Lord, it comes to us by the Spirit that what the Lord is after is not so many things that we might do for Him, but to get more glory to Himself in us. And who of us will dare to say that God has not got as much, if not more, glory through some who were never able to do very much for the Lord outwardly, but glorified Him in affliction? It is true, is it not? We have to recognize that to be here for the Lord means not what we think will serve the

Lord, but what the Lord decides will be most for His glory; and our attitude must be always that, if a thing really is for the glory of God, although we may not be able to see it, we are content, we accept it. It is very important. The Church is here for that—to His glory. That must be the all-governing consideration in everything.

That must also determine for us the meaning of the Lord's dealings with us. His dealings with us are sometimes very strange to us, and, to our flesh, very hard. The way by which He leads us is a painful way and a sorrowful way to our flesh, but we have to judge of all the Lord's dealings with us in the light of the amount of glory that He is getting in the unseen realm where true spiritual values can really be appraised. We can settle it, and let us do so, that His dealings with us are positively in order that we should be to the praise of His glory, we who first trusted in God.

Now, that very attitude, that 'mindedness', that devotion, settles for ever the question of value to the Lord in us, in His Body, and I believe, beloved, that that goes to the root of what we have come to call 'the overcomer'. Look at the Church at Ephesus in Revelation ii. 1-7 and the same church addressed in the letter to the Ephesians, and listen to what the Lord has to say to that church. "I know thy works, and thy toil and patience" (I know the *things* about you, all the things that are true of you)... but...thou didst leave thy first love...To him that overcometh..." so that the overcomer there is directly and immediately related to first love. What is first love? We are not going to discuss that very fully, but first love surely is gathered up into this, that there is no other person in all the universe who can compare with the one loved. No one else may see all that magnificence, all that splendour, all that is so wonderful to the lover, but he sees that and sees very little else, and there is not another to compare with that one. That one is everything, everything that is good, everything that is right, everything that is proper, everything that is splendid, and no one dare say a word against that one. The heart, the life, is wrapped up with that one entirely. The world, the horizon, is bounded by that one. That is first love. "Thou hast left thy first love". Oh, yes, you are doing things! Ah, but that essential, central, basic thing is no longer there. It is no longer the

case with you that you have nothing else in all the universe and in all life as your object of heart devotion but Myself. "Thou hast left thy first love".

That, I think, is why the words in the Ephesian letter, Chapter v, are brought in in relation to Christ and the Church—"...that he might present the church to himself a glorious church", and what is that?—"not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing". Of course, a spot means defilement—"not having defilement". What is it to be without defilement? "Unspotted from the world"—that is John's way of putting it. In the Old Testament, when Israel had any kind of voluntary fellowship with another nation, with a heathen nation, that was called fornication. That was the virgin daughter of Israel falling from her chastity. That is the great cry of the prophets about Israel. They had committed fornication, they had fallen from their purity. How? Simply by indulging themselves in relation to the other nations and the gods of the other nations. In the New Testament, the whole thing is gathered up in one word—the world. The world has brought in interests. There is a reaching out to the world in some matter. The Lord does not satisfy, fully and finally. The Lord is not everything. We must have something to make up. We must look over the hedge and satisfy some whim outside of the Lord. That is being spotted by the world, and those that follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth are the ones who are not defiled. Do you remember that? It is just a matter of the Lord being everything. That is being unspotted, without spot, not having spot.

"Or wrinkle." The Greek word is 'contraction'. Of course it is the same thing, and what is it? A mark of time! It is the mark of age. Even a little child can have wrinkles, and we say 'a little old woman'. That is not the eternal, the ever-fresh life of the Lord. That is something of time; something that is here, has left its mark. The Church has come into the realm where it is touched by the changing, the passing, the transient. It has come down to earth and become part of that which is perishing and decaying. "Not having...wrinkle." A Church whose countenance, whose complexion, is as fresh as the morning; to present a Church like that. For such a Church to be presented, a glorious Church, there must be this living only on the Lord, out from the Lord, by the Lord's

life, the Lord satisfying us. It is a high level. But I do believe that the more the Lord becomes our satisfaction and we come to rest in the Lord, the fewer wrinkles we shall have. We know in our hearts that as the Lord becomes more to us, the less we worry and fret and are anxious, the more we rest ourselves, and that is a good remedy for wrinkles! The Lord help us to learn that lesson!

Now, the glorious Church is that which is satisfied with the Lord, and therefore is not tainted, spotted, by contamination with the world, and is not marked by that which is perishing and decaying, belonging to time. Well, that is first love. When first love is gone, the wrinkles come and other considerations come. You know it is true in human life. You begin to look elsewhere when first love is gone. Interests are divided. The overcomer, then, is one who has no divided interest, has no look elsewhere, to whom the Lord is everything, full satisfaction to the heart. "Thou hast left thy first love. Consider from whence thou art fallen." That goes to the heart of the overcomer question. It means simply that the church or the overcomer has come back to the place for which it was designed, to minister to the glory of God, and we can never minister to the glory of God unless we are wholly taken up with Him. That is what made the Lord Jesus the chief Overcomer.

The Practical Outworking of Ministering to the Glory of God

In practical outworking, that ministering to the glory of God, to *His* satisfaction, means, as I see it, two things. It means the maintaining and preserving of a full revelation of God here for His people. I think of the Apostle Paul. Here is an overcomer indeed. Here is one whose devotion to the Lord is without reservation. Here is one who can say truly, on the ground of what he really has practised, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. iii. 8). Here is a representation of the glorious Church without spot or wrinkle. Here is the overcomer. But then, what was it that so characterised the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul? Was it not that he kept, maintained, a full revelation of the Lord for the Lord's people? He was never content with half truth or partial light and revelation. He would never have said, 'Let us be

content with the simplicities and leave all the other things alone'. It is a wrong way of putting it, of course, but what is meant by that is a very mistaken apprehension of God's pleasure. What the Lord wants is that His people should have a full revelation of Himself, and we minister to the Lord's glory and satisfaction when we are standing truly for all that the Lord wants for His people. That is very practical, and we will accept nothing less for ourselves than all that the Lord wants, and we can accept nothing less for the Lord's people than that. That is one thing which marks ministering to the glory of God.

The other thing is a standing for the full life of God's people, and being deeply and terribly affected by the fact that so many of them do not really know life in any fulness. This is true, I am sure, of a great number of you. The thing that affects you, distresses you, the thing that constitutes the greatest problem for you and makes you groan more than anything else is to see people who belong to the Lord who are only half alive, or in whom there are very few marks of life at all. Their Christian life, their Christianity, is very largely one of forms, one of tradition; that loving, throbbing going on with the Lord where *the* mark is life and you can say, they are alive unto God, is absent, and the absence of it constitutes the greatest difficulties. You cannot get anything across to them, you cannot help them. They have no life basis upon which to build. It becomes a great and terrible concern, and you know that an enemy hath done this thing. This is the one who had the hold of death who is affecting them evilly, and bringing their life into bondage, and nullifying it as far as possible. To minister to God's satisfaction is to have that concern for the life of God's people and to be tremendously exercised. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly", said the Lord Jesus. Then the Church must be the vessel and channel of that life, and must take up this question, this interest of the Lord, that they might have it abundantly. That will minister to the satisfaction of God.

Now one last word. For the Church to minister to the glory of God and for the Church to be a glorious Church, the Church must have a deep—I was going to say, a terrible—sense of what the glory of God is. The glory of God, beloved, is the holiness of God, the moral excellence and per-

fection of God, the truth that God is, the purity that God is. It is God's nature that is the glory of God, and to minister to God's glory means that we must have a very acute sense of God's holiness, so much so that anything arising which is unholy in our midst immediately becomes an agony to us, a real distress to us. It is like an evil germ that has got into the body system, and is working havoc and bringing about disorder and pain, and when a germ like that, an evil germ, gets into anything like a healthy human body, all the organism begins to work to eject it, to overcome it. That is health. Health is the power, the vitality, the energy in a body to overcome the invasion of disease, of disease germs. What is true in the physical must be true in the spiritual in the Body of Christ. The mark of our health is that, when an evil thing comes in amongst us and invades us, we in the Spirit feel it, react to it, and will not have it, strive to eject

it, and make it a matter of real concern before the Lord.

The church at Corinth was in a bad state of spiritual health because it did not take seriously the evils in its midst until the Apostle wrote a severe letter, a very severe letter, about things. They did not spontaneously react to the things until they got this stirring up and energising and stimulus from the Apostle. But a healthy church, like a healthy body, will at once sense there is something wrong, and recognise that something as being against the glory of God, and will rise and say, 'This must not be! This will destroy the very thing for which we exist. Our vocation goes if this remains, for we are here to minister to the glory of God, and that means satisfying Him as to what He is in His essential nature'.

The Lord just speak His word into our hearts!
T.A-S.

“The Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus”

No. 8.

Joseph and the Law of Life

READING: Romans viii. 2, 17. Philippians iii. 10.

We now come to the last of the seven out-workings of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. We have followed the stages of that operation as illustrated for us in men in the book of Genesis, from Adam to Jacob; and now we come to Joseph, the seventh and the last. Joseph gathers up into himself all the preceding six and carries them in himself to the final fulness of life.

Let us ask whether in Joseph's case there was the first thing, namely, everything as unto the Father. You see, it is just on that matter that Joseph is introduced to us. The beginning of the narrative about Joseph is that Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons. Why was this? Because, as you will see manifested very soon after, Joseph had a special concern for the father's interests. He took up that first thing—all as unto the Father.

Did Joseph further take up the matter of spiritual discernment and understanding in respect of what would please the Father? Was not that the cause of the trouble between him and his brethren? His brethren were doing things very contrary to the mind of the father, and Joseph saw and felt how dishonouring this was to the father. He discerned what was wrong with his brethren. There was trouble about it, and he himself sought not to walk thus, but to walk well-pleasing unto the father, in the spirit and not in the flesh.

Then you can clearly see how the resurrection principle was operative in Joseph's case. His life was largely based upon that principle. Did he go into death? Yes, but he knew resurrection. It is a great factor in Joseph's history, is the resurrection principle.

As for faith, if ever a man had his faith tested, Joseph did. All through those years in Potiphar's house, in the prison, in the dungeon—oh, how great was the test of faith! The Psalmist says

that his soul entered into iron, the word of the Lord tried him. Yes, faith was both called for and tried, and it is wonderful how he trusted God. We see no trace of bitterness, resentment, rebellion; faith triumphed in Joseph.

Yes, he is a true son. The spirit of sonship is there, in his giving of himself in service for the House of God, as represented by his brethren. He was concerned for his brethren's well-being. He went to see how they fared. He took them bread. The great goal of his life was service to his brethren.

Well, it is quite clear that Joseph embodied all these former things: and then what? Then he carries them through; through suffering to reigning, through rejection to exaltation, through humiliation to the throne. Oh, beloved, if the life of the Lord Jesus in us has a free way, it will produce all those things. That life will take the way which is all unto the Lord spontaneously. It will take the way of growing spiritual discernment as to what is of the Lord and what is not, and you will never have to say, You must give up this, and not do that. The law of the Spirit of life will teach what is not the mind of the Lord. It will separate us from the world, and we shall find that we are separate. It will not be a case of our having to give up the world, but of the world giving us up: we are out of it, we are strangers in this world. The law of the Spirit of life produces that. Test yourself by this law. If you can be happy, comfortable and satisfied in this world and in your own natural life, then you have serious cause to question whether the life of the Lord Jesus is in you at all. You will find that, as that life works in you, you will more and more be a stranger here. You will find yourself more and more, in spirit, outside of things and sometimes you will be subject to the most terrible shocks.

Yes, you realize how far you have moved from that world by going on with God. What a far-removed world it is! That is the working of life. It is going to be like that. It is going to make for difficulties, but that is how it is going to be. The law of the Spirit of life will ever more and more widen the gap between you and the world and this life here on this earth. It is bound to do that. It will inevitably put you outside. Then, of course, when you are in that position, what have you to count upon, what support is there for you but God? He has become your life, your resource. The world's

pleasures have receded and He has become your pleasure. For everything you have to look to Him; and that is a life of faith. No longer is your satisfaction here. But life brings it all about, brings you to the place where you discover God as your exceeding great reward, as Abraham did; God, El Shaddai, the mighty pourer-forth of fulness.

The Throne and True Destiny

I must come to Joseph very closely. All this working of life along these various stages, bringing spontaneously these various things to be the realities of the child of God, is all moving toward one destiny, one end. This law of life, given free course in us, is going to bring us to the throne. It is going to issue in the throne, in reigning with Him. But how? Through suffering, through humiliation, through rejection. That is the way of this life to the throne. This is what Joseph sets forth.

The Unique Relation of the Chosen Vessel to God

But notice that Joseph had a very special place in the father's affections. It is as well to establish that before you begin to take up the trials of Joseph. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth", and Satan always contends against that. When we are in difficulties, in sufferings, in humiliations, in rejections, there is always a voice at our ear to tell us that the Lord does not love us. So it is as well to notice that Joseph had a very special place in the affections of the father. Why? Well, for the reasons that we have already seen. First of all, he was the result of that double labour. The father had laboured twice over for him. It had been a very costly thing to bring Joseph in: and the Church, which is Christ's Body, is the fruit of the deepest anguish of the Father's heart. God was in the agony of securing the Church. It is the Church of God. What a wonderful statement! So often it is termed the Church or Body of Christ, but here the designation is "the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts xx. 28). That is why the Church is dear to Him in a special way. But not only because the Church is the result of His double service or agony or labour is this so, but also because it is the fruit of His Spirit, that which comes out of the travail of His Spirit, that which answers most deeply to His innermost being. It is a wonderful thing. That is how God views the

Church. He does not view us as we are in ourselves, but He views us as we are in Christ and will be in eternity. A marvellous thing!

One most astonishing illustration or foreshadowing of that is in the case of the compelled utterance of Balaam over Israel, where Balaam was not allowed to speak his own words, but compelled to speak God's words; when under compulsion which he could not resist, as he looked from the mountain across the valley where Jacob was spread abroad, he said, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob". Look at Jacob, look at the life in the wilderness, look at the rebellion, the murmuring, the turning back in heart to Egypt, the unfaithfulness, and, in face of all that, this astonishing statement right from the very heart of God forced through the reluctant lips of a false prophet: "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob". What grace!

So the Lord looks upon His Church as the fruit of grace, as the fruit of His travail, and the Church somehow answers to His heart in a way that is difficult for us to express. "Christ loved the church." He loved, and loves the Church, because, in some mysterious way, in the Church He gets what His heart desires. May we be inspired more deeply with the desire that He should have it in us. There, you see, is the placing of Joseph with the father.

The Outworking of True Vision

Then what follows? Suffering, rejection, humiliation! But this is not a contradiction of what we have just said, not a denial of the father's love. That the Lord Jesus went the way of the Cross was no argument against the love of God for Him. Not at all! Why did Joseph suffer? How did Joseph suffer? Well, he was hated of his brethren to begin with. He suffered their hatred. Why? Well, there are two sides to that. On the one hand, he suffered because they were carnal; on the other hand, because he stood against that which he perceived to be the way of grief and dishonour to his father. This is a difficult thing to say without incurring misunderstanding: nevertheless it is a true position. That which really goes on according to the law of the Spirit of life, and in which that law is operating, will have spiritual discernment in respect of carnality in even the Lord's children, the Father's family, and, because it has such discernment, will inevitably come to a place where it cannot accept that, but has to repudiate it, has to stand

against carnality in the people of God; and immediately you do that, you are ostracized, you are regarded as thinking yourself superior. You are cut off and put out; you are rejected; you are made the object of sneer and reproach; you come into suffering. Carnality hates to be exposed. Well, that is why Joseph suffered, and that is the way of suffering. It is standing for God's best, which ever means standing against that which is less than God's best.

Then, you see, there was this further thing with Joseph. His aspirations were too high. His heart was set upon a throne. He dreamed dreams about a reigning life. These principles are wrapped up in a very human story. The Lord is not one to give Himself to painting artificial pictures. Were we writing this for the sake of bringing out spiritual principles, we should write it very differently. The Lord, for His part, tells the story in very human terms, and He just lets us have all the details of the unfortunate way in which Joseph went to work with his brethren. But, nevertheless, hidden behind this very human story, in which all the defects of this one are seen even while he is standing for the highest thing; hidden behind the human story are principles. Behind those dreams and the telling thereof, there is a principle. The throne is in view as God's intention and purpose for those who will go all the way for Him. The throne is God's destiny for that life which has come out from Himself. It must, if it has its way, come back to its source; it must return to the One from whom it came. The only thing that can come back to God is His own life, that which is of Himself, nothing else. That life has been given to bring us through the sanctifying process of suffering to the throne. That is the destiny of that life, and it was that principle that got Joseph into trouble. Oh, this reigning life, this throne life, this overcoming life, what hostility it provokes—You evidently think you are going to be something special, something better and higher than everyone else! In such terms will men rail at you.

The Animosity of Satan to the Chosen Vessel

I think there is something deeper than that about it. If Joseph was a type of Christ, and there is no doubt that he was, he was destined, like Christ, to come to the throne. But there is someone else who has aspired to that throne, someone else who will make things impossible

for the aspirant to that throne, someone else who will stand at nothing to make the life of those called to that throne a life of suffering and agony. I think, lurking in the shadows behind this whole scene, there was ever one who saw what this was illustrating, what this was prefiguring. I think Satan can always discern Christ anywhere, even in a shadow, in a figure; and this was, in a figure and a shadow, God intimating that there was One who was coming to the throne most surely. Satan is against that and he will use all carnal means to make that impossible and to frustrate that: and here were carnal brethren giving Satan just the ground that he required to turn upon this one whose eyes were toward the throne. His aspirations were too high for Satan. If the Church has aspirations like that, according to God's intended purpose, the Church will have a bad time at the hand of Satan, not only directly but through carnal Christians. The greatest obstacle and hindrance and cause of suffering to those who are going right on with God will be carnal Christians. You will suffer more at the hands of the professing Church than you will at the hands of the world, if you mean to go right on with God. This is a suffering way, the way to the throne.

The Spiritual Preparation Wrought by Suffering

But then, you see, God was in the sufferings of Joseph. We see the necessity of the suffering under the sovereign hand of God, as being that which was to prepare him for the throne. We reign if we suffer; but not because of the mere fact of suffering, but because of what the sufferings accomplish in us. The sufferings of Joseph were effecting great things in preparing him for the throne.

He had to learn how to serve, because service is the mark of the throne. When at length he came to the throne, it was to serve his brethren. Let us not think of our eternal destiny as being just a life of idle leisure. The glory of it will be service. "His servants shall serve him." He had to learn service and he learned it in a hard school. Potiphar's house was the school in which Joseph learned to be a servant. His was a very hard and difficult school—a servant down there in the house of an Egyptian; a child of a prince with God, the son of Israel's heart, learning subjection in service in Potiphar's house: emptied of everything in order that he might learn how to reign and how to have fulness without pride.

Emptied to be filled; humiliated to be exalted; serving in humiliation in order to serve in exaltation. The sufferings were effecting something. I cannot go over all the sufferings of Joseph, but there they are as the way to the throne.

Joseph represents, then, the true spiritual Church and its destiny, which is, to reign with Christ: and in the meantime its pathway to the reigning position is the pathway of rejection, of suffering, of denial, of humiliation, and that largely at the hands of the carnal elements amongst the people of God, the unspiritual.

Well now, what more can we say? We have reached the end when we have reached the throne. We see the way of life, we see the working out of life.

A True Foundation and its Issue

I think the last thing that I would say by way of repetition and re-emphasis is just this, that, in the first place, we have to make sure that we have received Christ as the life and as our life. "The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." To have received the gift and then, as we go on, to remind ourselves of the exhortation "Lay hold on eternal life"; for the whole thing is so grimly and terribly withstood that at times it would be easy to accept death. I mean that literally. There are times in the life of the Lord's people when Satan offers them death and makes them want to quit this scene, to accept an end of everything, to say, It is all finished! and to begin to ask the Lord to take them out of things altogether because they have come to a place of despair. Sometimes you get there. I do not know whether you understand what I am saying: Satan stands at nothing. He gets them under depression and wants them to accept death. Thus, again and again we have to lay hold on life by an act of faith, and as our attitude is one toward life, one which lays hold on life, one which responds to the law of life, one which goes on with that which is bound up with that life, that life will bring us through all its successive stages of development. That very life in us, which is Christ in us, will prove not only the hope of glory, but the realization of glory in the throne. There is that in you and me which is destined to bring us to the throne if we will let it.

May the Lord teach us how to comply with the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

T.A-S.

The Editor's Letter

BELOVED OF THE LORD,

Once again we send you a few lines of remembrance and fellowship. Firstly, let us say how grateful we are for all the expressions of appreciation and assurance of prayer which have been coming from so many, near and far. We know that the "Witness and Testimony" goes to a fairly large number of folk all over the world, but it is good to have an answering voice sometimes, so that we know that the contact is a living one. Let us say at once that our mailing list is not just a bit of office equipment or business, but a list of fellow-members of the One Body who are a definite spiritual concern. We note on the map just where you are; some parts are fairly thickly studded; other parts show a wider distribution. Many of our friends in England who used to gather with us are now scattered over the country. Time was when we used to travel to and fro by road and pass through many of the places where these friends are now staying. Were it not for the restrictions on fuel through war conditions, how many living points we should have on such journeys now! This, with the large number of such points of contact in other countries, U.S.A., Canada, India, China, etc., etc., more and more strengthens in us the desire to set forth on an extended ministry of fellowship and building up. May that day not be far ahead. In the meantime, let it be known that, as Paul said, we have you in our hearts, and would fain come to you to impart some spiritual gift.

The Lord has been greatly stressing in our hearts His thought as to the Church being a family, and the churches being local families. Or perhaps it would be better to say that His family is the Church, and local families are the churches. This gets us at once away from church technique as a first consideration, and brings us back to the basic thing—*organic life*.

The Divine thought is surely not to have companies of Christians constituted by a New Testament technique, or system of doctrine and practice, any more than it is to have congregations, preaching-places, or just meetings. Primarily it is to have spiritual families; and a Divinely governed and ordered family will express its life according to what is true doctrine and right practice. Thus, when it is time for His people to take spiritual responsibility, if the Holy Spirit had things on His right basis, He would distribute them so that new spiritual families are brought into being. This is organic growth as differing from organised expansion which is so unsatisfactory in its resultant spiritual measure. How much safer and purer is this Divine method. For one thing, it starts from the inside and not from without. Its bond is mutual love, not doctrine. It grows by spiritual birth or organic oneness, not by adherence or "joining". Its success is not determined by its size or numbers, but by its *spiritual* life and inward measure of Christ. There is nothing professional about a true family; neither is there anything artificial or formal. What a true natural family would be in every respect, as to its own inner corporate and family life, and as to its growth, testimony, work, and multiplication of itself in new families in due course, so the local companies of the Lord's people ought to be; for God intended His visible institutions to embody His invisible, spiritual, and heavenly thoughts and principles. But it is all spontaneous and vital, not organised and technical. We cannot go further here with this Divine thought, but we ask; May this not be the Lord's object in allowing or causing that ever present sense of inadequacy, limitation, and dissatisfaction in "organised Christianity"; and may this not lie behind His permitting of so much destruction in the realm of the traditional framework which has really come to take the place of the true spiritual family? There is nothing like an emergency and suffering to bring down to the bedrock things; and the bedrock of true Christian experience is that, beneath all else, the Lord's true people are a family—"The Church of the firstborn ones".

The first thing that the Lord Jesus said on His resurrection was "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father". When the meaning of His resurrection was made good in the coming of the Holy Spirit, we find that the believers in Jerusalem were spontaneously constituted a spiritual family, "breaking bread from house to house". Later, reference was made to one local company as "the Church in thy house". Let us remember that only *two* spiritually responsible ones are essential to be the starting-point of a family. May this not be the principle behind the sending forth at the beginning "two by two"?

But let us ever remember that the Lord has a governing object in mind in the family, and that the family is not an end in itself. Spiritual fulness is His end, not only spiritual fellowship. Much loss has been suffered by the Lord and His people by other forms taking the place of the spiritual fulness. Beware of substitutes. Beware of letting go something of the measure for which you have been apprehended. This is one of the perils of isolation and scattering from the family where your home has been. The one powerful bond of a true family is that the desire and will of its head governs all its members. If the Lord's desire for spiritual fulness governs us all, it will be a safeguard or guiding principle, and motive-power which delivers from many personal and lesser interests or considerations which would eventuate in limitation and disappointment. We are quite certain that spiritual fulness is only possible by emancipation from the artificial and man-made system of procedure which obtains to-day, and a return to the simple but powerful basis of organic life kept pure by the *direct* government of the Holy Spirit, as it was at the first. Well, beloved, the Lord open your hearts to all that is of Himself, and our prayer is, in the words of an Apostle, that "none of you should be deemed to have come short".

Our love and greetings in Him.

Yours—for all your fellow-members here,

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.

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The Editor's Letter

BELOVED OF GOD,

I have recently been going over writings which expressed the feelings of spiritual people of God at various times during many years. The thing which is characteristic of them all is that the time of writing—although long periods lay between—was felt to be the most critical, ominous, and spiritually difficult or almost unbearable time that ever was. In most cases the conclusion was that the Lord must have been on the very verge of coming. Undoubtedly this has been the feeling of at least some in every part of time since Apostolic times. This might give us pause in saying that the present time—difficult as it is for so many—is more of this nature and portent than ever. It might just be because now it is *our* turn. And yet there are certain factors which may well give a deeper shade to the darkness, and a more intense severity to this time. There is the general fact that, the nearer we get to the end of the age, the more terribly will the powers of darkness fight to make good all the possibilities of their shortening time. The Scripture is ". . . great wrath, knowing that his time is short". Then, the world has grown so much as the years have passed, and it is a much bigger place now than in Roman times or the Middle Ages. Satan has so much more ground in humanity to use. Further—and this is a special point to remember—the challenge to Satan's kingdom is become so much more extended, so that, in a new sense, the issue of "inhabited world" dominion is in view. It is this question of world dominion that lies behind everything, and it is this that determines the degree of spiritual pressure and conflict. Listen to me a moment on this matter, for it is most crucial at this time.

There have been many bids made for the domination of this whole world, and, like the ebb and flow of the tides, sometimes at the Neaps, and sometimes at the Spring, the later ones have been a considerable advance upon the earlier, extending to new territories. Thus was the Roman a great advance upon the Babylonian, for instance.

So the reign of Antichrist, which is the direct succession and consummation of *all* such bids and movements, will be more far-reaching than all that have been. We are actually living in an emphatic stage of this purpose which is more ambitious than anything yet. Upon the natural side we do not dwell, but we see by analogy some things which should head us straight to the present implication and demand for the Church.

There is the strategical factor. One of the outstanding features of the present campaign is the infiltration into the nations of agents, representatives, missionaries, and colonists. These communities are not only propagandists, but their very presence has been made the occasion of

'rights' to be 'protected'. In every way they give the aggressor-power something of its own to which to come, and a "moral" right and claim is the (professed) strength of the invasion or possession. This has been the case in many instances, at least. For the rest, it is war because such claims and rights are disputed. Now passing from the earthly to the heavenly, this, on the higher level, is exactly the Lord's own strategy, and therefore the occasion of the bitter warfare waged by and with the powers of darkness.

Look again at those words of His in Matthew xxiv. 14.

"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come." (R.V.)

Let us examine this statement word by word.

"Gospel" = "Glad tidings".

"Kingdom" = (a) The *fact* of royal reign or dominion.

(b) The sphere of such.

(c) The immediate and ultimate consequences of such.

All these are inherent in the word "Kingdom".

"Preached" = Proclaimed, heralded.

There are five Greek words translated "preach". The one used here means to *announce that someone has taken the power, or ascended the throne.*

"World" = Inhabited earth.

"Testimony" = "Marturion" (Gk) means both a testimony, the one who testifies, and a proof. "To set the evidence" (Weymouth).

What then is the meaning of this statement? It has been used, of course, in general as the great incentive to missionary work and world-evangelisation, and rightly so. But for want of a recognition of the inner significance, something of real consequence has been lost. What the Lord is really meaning here is that He must have in every nation that which proclaims and gives evidence of His having taken the Throne and become Lord. "The earth is the Lords'." "God hath given him the name which is above every name." "Being at the right hand of God exalted." "Sit thou on my right hand till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet," etc.

Before Christ can come into His own place as the rightful ruler of this world, taking the dominion thereof, He must have a testimony to His sovereign Lordship. When David was driven out of his kingdom by the usurping Absalom, he left the loyal Abiathar and his company in Jerusalem so as to have that which was of himself to which to return; and while Abiathar and his priestly company were there, the reign of Absalom could never be universal, but would always be virtually disputed. The presence of the true Church in the nations is meant to act in exactly this same way in relation to the rejected Lord.

But note; and this is our special point; the "Testimony" is not something merely or only stated as a truth: it is "to set the evidence", as Weymouth puts it. Yes, to set the evidence. In the Old Testament the Tabernacle was called the Tabernacle of Testimony, or Witness (Num. xvii. 7; Acts vii. 44). It was a tangible expression of a spiritual truth. The Lord said that His apostles should *be* witnesses unto Him. Satan and his powers are not very interested in doctrine or truth as such, but they are seriously concerned where there is representation and evidence. They will do all in their power to swamp, kill, drive out, break up, paralyse a vessel which really represents the Lordship of Christ as in the power of the Holy Spirit. If only the Lord's people will *always* keep immediately in mind the fact that it is not with flesh and blood that they are wrestling, but with principalities and powers, etc. and that the sole object of the enemy's assaults is to destroy or spoil the evidence of Christ's Lordship, then there would be an adequate motive for "standing and withstanding," and for dealing with everything that gives Satan ground to spoil the testimony.

Now then, let us note the first implication of our being here. The work of Apostles and their present counterpart was and is to bring into being those—twos and threes at least—in every nation who shall be there as a living evidence that Jesus is Lord. *We* are where *we* are in the will of God for this purpose, and no less than this. Satan will try to move us, to drive us, to overwhelm us; but this only gives the opportunity for proving by the power of the Blood that Jesus *has* overcome him, and really *is* Lord. We hold the ground for the coming Lord, and although He will call us

out for a time, we shall come with Him to reign, if we now suffer together with him.

But ; and this is a sad but ; is the Church setting the evidence ? Is this really what the Church represents in the nations now ? Alas for the testimony—the evidence ! Truly the spiritual state of Christians in the light of the Lord's revealed mind as to His Body compels us to one of two positions. Either the Body of Christ is something distinct from the general multitude of those who have confessed Christ and received eternal life ; or else it is wholly a matter of the Church in general and " Overcomers " in particular as those who " press on toward the goal unto the prize of the on-high calling ". Whichever it is, the issue is the same. The Lord *must* have His testimony here in fulness. The Church as a whole is far from " setting the evidence ". The appeal therefore is for " Overcomers " and their testimony. This is *the* point of this letter.

The conviction deepens and grows that, since the loss of the Church's spiritual position in late Apostolic times, the Lord's chief concern has been with " Overcomers " ; that is, with those who preserved or would recover the original position and testimony as to the absolute Lordship of Christ in every realm of life, and pre-eminently in the realm of the spiritual evil powers. The issue becomes clearer and stronger as the Antichrist forces show their hand more boldly and presumptuously toward the end. This is a time when this testimony needs to be brought out in strength and clearness as never before. If we were asked what we most truly believe to be *the* paramount need of our time we should say with considerable emphasis : A vessel represented in all the nations which serves the Lord in exactly the same way—only in the spiritual, not temporal, realm—as Esther served Him and His people, coming to the Kingdom " *for such a time as this* ". It is that the Lord should have a people placed over the earth who know " Throne union " with Him now in intercession and testimony, with a background of deep chastening and travail : an instrument through the warring prayer of which He can bring evil counsels to nought and save the life of His people. Is it not clear that Christians to-day (to say nothing of the unsaved) are not going to get to know God's full thought for them, let alone enter into it, unless there is firstly a ministry released to them by prevailing prayer, and then an overcoming of the blinding, binding, deadening spiritual forces which are working in a thousand different ways to keep the children of God from apprehending that for which they have been apprehended by Christ Jesus ? The fact is that God's people do not see.

The present vocational purpose of " Overcomers " is a tremendous one, for it relates to the need of the whole Church. But their testimony is pre-eminently for the Lord Himself. He *must* have satisfaction in His Church ! The " Cherubim " company of " Living Ones " in identification with " The Living One " are something very near to God for governmental purposes; spiritually now, and literally presently. What will such a vessel be ? What is its nature ? To put it simply and plainly, as the whole Bible shows, the Lord must have a company in the earth who, in every respect, are a heavenly people. Their spiritual resources of life, power, wisdom, knowledge, purpose must be heavenly and by mediation of the Holy Spirit alone. Their means and methods must be Divinely supplied and dictated. Their energy must be directly Divine energy ; which means that they must have been separated from their own.

The spiritual relationships and associations must be heavenly. It was the resolving into an earthly institution and system which cost the Church its Throne power at the beginning, and there can be no recovery without a clear position as to traditional relationships. There will need to be a purely heavenly position as to the really heavenly nature of the Body of Christ—the Church, without any contradictions in earthly orders. We have heard it said that at a certain gathering of servants of the Lord " it was like a touch of heaven ; everyone dropped—for the time being—their differences of denomination and earthly divisions ". This speaks for itself. But why go back to them ?

It will be fatal to essay to engage in heavenly warfare with anything but a heavenly position. We have seen terrible scattering, confusion, and havoc made by the enemy in directions where assaults were made upon the powers of darkness by companies which had mixture, earthly religious contradictory orders, and conflicting acceptances as to vital Scriptural matters.

It may be wondered how ever such a vessel or instrument can be brought into being. Well, it was once, at the beginning ; and the secret then is the same now. The Cross did two things. It brought Christ into the place of absolute sovereignty, and made the establishment of that sovereignty possible and actual in the lives of a great company by ruling out all personal, natural, earthly

traditional, and temporal interests and influences. The Holy Spirit made Calvary and the Exalted Christ a reality in each heart. "They were of one mind and one soul."

We can never arrange this, or decide to do this heavenly business to any consequence (except failure) unless each one concerned is in it by revelation of the Holy Spirit, and is *born* into it through spiritual travail. We shall be wasting our time if we expect, try, or even pray for anything really effective apart from this essentially heavenly and therefore anointed ground. There is no royal road or short cut to the Throne or to Throne power; it will cost us everything here. We have known more than one to be faced with this issue, and—in trying to keep something here—miss the Lord's highest and best, and later in life to know that it was so.

Will you go to the Lord and ask Him to do that deep work by His Cross in the hands of the Holy Spirit which will result in your being brought into the place where His authority is exercised through you, and His rule is registered in the realm where things matter most, through your heavenly union with Him? Will you pray for the securing of the prepared instrument to "come to the kingdom for such a time as this"? Will you seek grace to count all gains but refuse in the light of the prize of that "on high" calling? Finally, will you seek the Lord that there may be just where you are in the nations a vessel of this testimony and of this heavenly nature, which really does "set the evidence"? It will be a battle to secure it, as it was in every case with the Apostles. It will be a battle to preserve it. But, given the co-operation, the Lord can do it, and He will.

From time to time God has sovereignly raised up a ministry or an instrument to serve Him in a special need which then existed. We have, as the result, the heart-warming stories of these mighty times and ministries. But they are now of the past, and while they inspire us, they only make us grieve that there is nothing like them now. Surely everyone is aware of the need of "a new thing" from above. Let us not bind ourselves to the same form which God has taken before, but realise that He may be moving *on*, and the need may be of something quite in advance of anything that has been, although its essential spiritual features will be in accord with the original pattern; that is—the Lordship of Christ will be the transcendent issue. If we are coming at the end *back* to that original issue, it will certainly mean more in *every way* than it has ever meant in the intervening centuries, because the consummation of that testimony is in view.

The Lord Himself give you the light and lead you into the prayer-travail for the bringing forth of His testimony in fulness.

Yours in the fellowship of His Son,

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.

God's Spiritual House

No. 3

Ministering to the Deliverance and Life of the
Elect

"...unto whom coming, a living stone, rejected indeed of men, but with God elect, precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (I Pet. ii. 4-5).

But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from

me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me; and they shall stand before me to offer unto me the fat and the blood, saith the Lord Jehovah: they shall enter into my sanctuary, and they shall come near to my table, to minister unto me, and they shall keep my charge. And it shall be that, when they enter in at the gates of the inner court, they shall be clothed with linen garments;

and no wool shall come upon them, while they minister in the gates of the inner court, and within. They shall have linen tires upon their heads, and shall have linen breeches upon their loins; they shall not gird themselves with anything that causeth sweat." (Ezekiel xliv. 15-18).

We have been seeking to see some of the major features of this spiritual house, remembering the words of the Apostle, "Christ as a son, over God's house; whose house are we" (Heb. iii. 6). Those features which we have already contemplated are that this spiritual house has as its object, in the first place, the setting forth of the exaltation of the Lord Jesus; in the second place, to be the vehicle through which the glory and pleasure of God are ministered to.

The Presence of a Spiritual House the Signal for Satanic Antagonism

Now for a little while we will dwell upon the third of those major features, which is that, in the purpose of God, this spiritual house is here to minister for the deliverance and life of the elect. We shall not dwell very much upon that last word, "the elect". We need not be particularly taken up with it. It is the people of God who are in view; the Church which is foreknown, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, chosen in Christ before the world was, and the spiritual house exists to minister for the deliverance, and to the life, of that people. This is the great vocation of the people of God, or a part of that great vocation. So great, so vital is it, that immediately upon the bringing in of the Church, all hell was moved from beneath against it. The very bringing in of the Church was the signal and the occasion for a mighty move on the part of the enemy, a move along many lines and by many means, two of which can be clearly discerned, and indeed are being forced upon our attention in these days, if we recognize the fact that behind all that is taking place on the earth at this time there is a spiritual system of things. That twofold move on the part of the enemy from the beginning has been, firstly, by subtle working on the inside to bring the Church to a collapse inwardly; and secondly to overwhelm it by sheer force. I think we need say no more by way of indicating the nature of things. That is indeed Satanic and a Satanic method.

The first indication in the Church's history that Satan was at work was by that secret, in-

ward, subtle movement of the enemy through Ananias and Sapphira, and it was pronounced immediately to be Satanic. "Why hath Satan filled thy heart..." It was something right from the inside and a subtle movement of Satan to bring about internal collapse. But for the swift judgment of God upon that thing, it would have spread like a canker. It would have worked subtly until the Church was seething with that sort of thing. Then, not long after, the other form of Satanic activity became manifest, namely open, direct, aggressive force to try by direct means to crush and trample under foot this instrument of God which had been brought into being; and all that which has been pursued relentlessly and on an ever-growing scale down the ages is itself significant as to the greatness of the vocation of the Church. It is indicative that Satan recognizes the issue to be himself or the Church: these two cannot proceed together.

Let me say again that we are not without ample evidence that the present world happenings are not merely political and temporal, but are spiritual in their nature and essence, and, as even men of the world recognize and pronounce, they are Satanic in their background. If that is true, we may come to one conclusion, namely, that it is not just the suppression of certain peoples on the earth which is in view with Satan. It is to get at something within or among the peoples which is a menace to that world domination of Satan through his Antichrist. If that really came home to our hearts as it ought to and as it may yet be brought home more forcibly by sheer force of circumstances, we should recognize that not only is our existence as the Church at stake, but that we are up against the great test, perhaps the final test, of whether we are fulfilling our heavenly calling.

The Assault of Satan Against Christ in His House

You see, the whole effort of Satan from the beginning has been to destroy the life of God's people here on the earth. Christ's life in the Church is the objective of Satan in this dispensation, and, inasmuch as the Church is called into relationship with the working out of God's eternal purpose—for the Church is not only called according to that purpose, but is the elect instrument for the working out of that purpose—that very fact must involve the manifestation of the most terrible power that this universe con-

tains against God's purpose.

The Greatness of God's Christ

What is God's purpose? Well, it has to do with the first thing with which we were occupied in relation to this House of God, namely, the exaltation of God's Son to the throne of the universe. That is God's purpose comprehensively, inclusively, and the Church is called in, not only to share that exaltation, but to be instrumental in the working out of that purpose. If that be true, then, we repeat, that involves the manifestation of this terrible power of Satan; because the exaltation of the Lord Jesus to the supreme place is not a mechanical nor automatic thing. It is a spiritual thing, and it is accomplished by spiritual power. That is why we are designated "living stones". We are not just bricks being put together: we are part and parcel of the very life of Christ and of God's purpose concerning Christ, and it is that life of His in a final, full manifestation in the Church which will be the display of the glory of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus cannot be manifested in glory as supreme Lord in God's universe until the elect come through to that place of absolute triumph over all the power of death, and thus it is by the Church's triumph that the glory of Christ is displayed. It becomes therefore a living matter, a spiritual matter, and not just a cold, lifeless, mechanical thing. We are in something very real. We are going to know that, to reach God's end, the instrument by which that purpose, is worked out to its completion has to come up against the last fragment and ounce of Satanic power. It involves the drawing out of Satan's power to the full in order that God may display how great His Christ is.

That is the principle which has run right through the Word of God. You can see it standing out again and again in conspicuous instances, one of which is contained in the word addressed to Pharaoh: "For this purpose have I raised thee up that I might display in thee my power". Pharaoh therefore was allowed very much liberty. When Pharaoh in the very first test refused God, God could have come in and crushed him and destroyed him out of hand, and that would have been the end of Pharaoh. But God drew him on, drew him out, once, twice, thrice, on to ten times, the full measure of Pharaoh's resource: drew him out and all that was instigating him, in order that, showing how

much power there was against God, God could come in at last and show how much greater He was than the greatest that was against Him. It is only a foreshadowing, a type. But, you see, it is not with mere Pharaohs or dictators that we have to do. We are up against the full power of Satan himself. I say the Church is up against that, and the Church, as being the instrument of reaching God's end and fulfilling or working out God's purpose, has therefore to be proved absolutely superior to Satan. Where the Lord gets His life into His people, the one certain thing which will happen to that people is that they will be instrumental in drawing out death against themselves. It is true. It is remarkable, is it not? You wonder why it is that, the more closely you walk with the Lord and the more you are set upon God's full thought, the more you seem to be drawing death upon yourself. One thing with which you are always in conflict is this death-working activity of Satan. That is a part of our vocation. We do not like the idea, we inwardly shrink, and all that is natural about us feels very bad at the thought; but we just have to put all that on one side and trust the Lord in facing facts. We have to face spiritual facts. Therefore we take note of this that, if it is true that this spiritual House, this Church, this Body of Christ is in existence as the instrument by which God is going to fulfil His purpose concerning His Son, then that can only be as all Satan's power is drawn out and exhausted, to the end that, in that Church, the life whereby Jesus conquered death should be manifested as greater than all the power of death itself.

You see, then the steps. The first is that the presence of a spiritual House here is the signal for Satanic action. The second is that the whole effort of Satan is set against Christ's life in that House, that Church, that Body. The third is that the very working out of God's purpose through the Church, the House, necessitates the drawing out of Satan's power and the Church's experience of something very terrible, in respect of what Satan's power is, all to one end, namely, the bringing out, not of the greatness of Satan's power, but the greatness of God's Christ. That is the goal.

The Course of the Conflict

It is quite clear that, through history, Satan has had a Satanic succession of instruments on the earth. He started with Cain. "Cain was of

the evil one", the Scripture says, "and slew his brother". Right down through history as disclosed in the Old Testament; you have Satan's unholy succession of instruments. Again and again you come upon them. There they are lying in wait right to his hand for death purposes. There is Doeg the Edomite to hand, subtly to hand, watching for his advantage, with his eye upon God's king. There is Haman, the Agagite, scheming and planning for the death of all the Jews. So Satan has had his succession of instruments for the death of God's people right up to to-day. They are at work to-day and we know their names. But God has had His line of succession all the way through from Abel onward. Now these, every one of them, drew out the power of the adversary. Abel drew out the power of death through Cain. It seems as though he went down under it, but it is not so. In the long run we know otherwise, and he, being dead, yet speaketh. His testimony remains. Thus everyone of these links in the chain of God's successors has drawn out the adversary to display his power, and then eventually, although in their lives here on the earth they may have gone down under that power, the triumph is with that life which was in them, with the Lord whom they served. That is how it is now.

We must be very careful of our deductions, and in one connection especially, namely, with regard to the fact that the Lord gives the enemy a good deal of rope, and the enemy gains many advantages and has a large measure of success. But, remember, Satan's power and Satan's success are not in spite of God but because of God. If you can draw that distinction, you will be greatly helped. Satan's power is not in spite of God, but because of God. God is allowing it. It is under the sovereignty of God. God is simply drawing it out, expanding it, and when the cup of iniquity is full, then God will come in and show how overwhelming He is. That is the end. Beware of your deductions when you see evil having a great measure of success. Understand what God is doing. He is not going to show His power against the thing in its infancy. What power of God would that be? No, God displays His power when a thing is full-grown.

Now, while I must not diverge and get on to another very important aspect of what we are considering, I would here point out a very startling fact with reference to the matter of sonship. While sonship, which is full-grown man-

hood, is a Divine end, and with sonship comes the manifestation of glory, (that is, when things have become full, then glory is manifested—"waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God"), sonship is also a principle operating on the side of Satan. The Lord Jesus said to those Jewish rulers, "You compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is become so, ye make him twofold more a son of hell than yourselves" (Matt. xxiii. 15). He chooses His word—full-grown expression of hell. A terrible thing! But, you see, all that happens on that side under the sovereignty of God is bringing things to maturity before judgement comes in. The sovereignty of God requires that iniquity must come to the full, and its coming to the full is not because God is impotent or unable to cope with the thing. It is not in spite of God but because of God; and God is going to answer the sum of Satan's power through the Church. Thus, in the end, it will be "unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all ages for ever and ever".

The Church's Vocation

Now then, what is this vocation of the Church in relation to all this? We are here, as we said at the outset, for the purpose of ministering to the deliverance and life of the elect. The real ministry arises in a day like this. It is the ministry of intercession, priestly intercession: "a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices". We are being launched into our vocation now perhaps as never before as we see the enemy coming out more fiercely and terribly against the life of Christ in the Church. We are here to stand in God for that life, and we have to be very careful in this matter that we are not put off our ministry by any subtle secret working of the enemy. We cannot say too much about this secret internal activity, this propaganda of the spiritual powers to put the people of God out of action by breakdown and collapse from within, and it is in this very connection that we have those assurances and exhortations with regard to our access unto God. Let us remember that these comforting words about access, of being allowed even boldness to draw nigh, are not just for our own comfort and satisfaction. It is this vocation that is in view, and I believe that is proved again by the action of the enemy. Is he not continually trying to get the people off their ministry of prayer

by throwing some doubt upon their acceptance, their access, bringing them under accusation and raising up the sense of some kind of spiritual barrier between them and the Lord so that the very heart is taken out of prayer. "What is the good of praying? There is that and there is that and the other thing about me; my very state keeps me from prayer". Ah yes, and if we act upon that accusation, on the one hand it is a sheer denial of the value of the Blood, setting it aside, which is what Satan wants, and on the other hand it is playing into his hands and giving him the advantage over the people of God. Remember, all interference with our prayer life is a strategic movement on the enemy's part to destroy our vocation and to gain the advantage over the people of God. We are here for the deliverance and life of God's people. That is the very purpose of the Church's existence.

Now, will you take that as more than something just said? Will you listen to that from within? If you truly are a child of God, will you pray at this time that you may both see and accept all the meaning of the fact that you are a part of Christ's Body, a living stone in the spiritual house, and that your very existence as such is in relation to the life and deliverance of God's people everywhere. You are not an individual, you are a part of a house, and that house is God's means of deliverance and life for His people everywhere in this intensifying conflict with the power of death and darkness. We exist for that, and if we are not ministering to that, we are denying the very object of our existence. Do take that to heart, because there is no option about this. It is not an optional matter whether we fulfil an intercessory ministry or not, and pray for all saints at all seasons. You are not invited to come and do that if you like. That is not the House of God. We have to see that the House of God is not some inanimate lifeless thing. It is living, and the very marks of its life are that it is active, energetic, in a spiritual way; and it is characterized by the spirit of intercession. The position is not that you have prayer meetings at different times and people pray or do not pray according as they feel like it. The House is characterized by intercession, and it is that which determines whether we are corresponding to the very nature of our life as God's children. If we were really living up to what we are in Christ, whenever there is an opportunity to pray, we would be on the mark. At the least

we should be alive to it, and, whether we prayed audibly or not, we would be in it; it would be spontaneous. Life is spontaneous: and so intercession is a part of life, which is spontaneous. If the Spirit of the Lord really has His way in us, we will be people of intercession. We cannot help it, it will be so.

But unto that, we have to watch these points where our intercession is assailed, and the points at which intercession or prayer is assailed are numerous. Remember, a basic point is this matter of access. We have to be sure of our access unto God, and to be sure about it, we have to know the infinite value of that precious Blood, and we must not to be deterred by anything, for the Blood forbids us to be deterred. That Blood exists to deal with anything that would deter us. Yes, we may fail, we may blunder, we may breakdown; there may be those things which grieve us and grieve the Lord, but oh, let us recognize that the precious Blood makes possible the keeping of the shortest accounts with those things, so that instantly, right now, and not waiting until we have got over the violent reaction and sting of our mistake and feel a bit better, that precious Blood must be appropriated to deal with that. Let us remember that all this persistence of the enemy to lay us low has something more in view than just laying us low. It is to destroy our spiritual vocation in prayer and thereby to give him opportunity for assaulting and oppressing the saints. We are responsible for the life and deliverance of the Lord's people. That is what we are here for.

The Church and the Power of the Throne

Seeing that is so, it is necessary for us always to bear in mind that, while for ourselves as sinners God's throne is a throne of grace, it is also a throne of judgment for the enemy. What to us is the throne of grace is the throne of destruction to Satan. We have not only to come in boldness to the throne of grace for ourselves and for the Lord's people needing grace, we have with equal boldness to come to that same throne as the throne which spells the undoing of Satan. Always remember there are two sides to that throne. There is the grace side and the judgment side; the grace side for us because of the precious blood, and the judgment side for the Adversary.

This latter aspect of the throne is that which comes so prominently into view with Esther. It

had to do with the undoing of Haman's devices. We have to recognize that the throne has not only to be in the midst of the Church as the throne of grace, but in all its meaning as the throne of Divine power for undoing the work of Satan. It is a different aspect of prayer, a very important one. You and I should know the touch with the throne against the enemy on behalf of the Lord's people. That throne must be in the Church.

A Final Word on the Trust Committed to the Church

Well now, we must close, and we do so by just gathering it up in this way. This whole trust of the life of the people of God is given to the Church. That is tremendous thing to say, and an equally tremendous thing to contemplate. I know that, in a very true sense, all is secured in Christ in glory, but it is equally true, according to Divine revelation, that there has to be an outworking, and this latter is committed to the Church. We are workers together with God. We were created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God foreordained that we should walk in them. The Lord has put this tremendous trust upon His people, the working out of His purpose, which is the deliverance and life of His people unto that glorious consummation—the display of the greatness of Christ in His people, through His people.

You see, when Christ comes, He is not just coming to be seen in glory, to be manifested as the glorified, glorious Christ; not just that. He is coming to be glorified *in* His saints and to be marvelled at *in* all them that believe. Christ's glorification is to be something in the Church at last. Unto that, you and I and all the Lord's

people are given the trust of working it out. The Lord gives us light. Then, while He is not out of touch with us, in a sense He stands back and says, Now then, that is your business; I have given you light, now get on with it! We are all the time appealing back to the Lord to do it. Lord, come in and do this! Lord, come in and do that! The Lord's attitude is, Get on with it! I am here, I give you the supply of the Spirit, but I have made known to you what your business is: do your business! Oh, that the Lord's people would rise up and recognize that He has committed to them this great trust of working out His purpose, of ministering to the life of His people unto that glorious consummation, when the very greatness of Christ shall be displayed in that people. That is our business: and so it is not for us continually to appeal to the Lord for Him to do it as apart from us, but for us to get to the business of prayer and intercession, and in this way minister His life to His people, bring about the deliverance of His people by prayer, standing in touch with His throne for their deliverance from the Evil One and the power of death.

Now, if the very deliverance and life of God's people is at our door by God's appointment, that is no small thing. I believe that the Word clearly reveals that the Church exists for the purpose of taking up this question of the Lord's glory, the Lord's triumph, the Lord's greatness, as that which is to be ultimately displayed in the triumph of His people. It is our responsibility. The Lord give us grace to accept it and to commit ourselves to it, and may we be very much before Him that we shall be found, not as those coerced to pray, but marked by the Spirit of intercession as the very evidence of our life.

T.A-S.

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(continued on p. 49)

The Coming of the Lord

No. 2.

The Key to Everything Christ Crucified

READING: Isa. xl. 1-5; lii. 13-15; liii. 10-12.

We said yesterday afternoon that at chapter xl. in Isaiah there opens up an altogether new phase of things. A new day is there dawning as God's answer to all the failure and sin, tragic misery and hopelessness of everything human. When the last word has been said in chapter xxxix—revealing that everything is to be taken away to Babylon and that "nothing shall be left"—though it was an end, praise God, it was not the final end. So a new day dawns and the word goes forth, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people", and we have in that latter part of the book of Isaiah, so different in form from the former part that it has often been considered to have been written by another man, though I do not think that to be the case for a moment; we have in that latter part, from the fortieth to the sixty-sixth chapter of this book, a most gracious and a very full setting forth of God's gracious new thing as a new creation in Christ Jesus. Thus the word to our hearts and to the hearts of all who are troubled is a word of comfort: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people"; and almost at the very end in the sixty-sixth chapter, there is that most gracious word from the Lord, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you". "Comfort ye." Why? Because everything is provided for in the most full and gracious way.

Christ, God's All-sufficient Gift

(a) For Personal Need

Now when you, in a time of personal need, seek some word of cheer, of consolation, of encouragement from the Lord, where do you turn to very often if not to those chapters in Isaiah, from xl to xlv? How full they are of the gracious words of promise of the Lord! Is it the question of our sinfulness? "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy sins" (xlv. 22). Is it a question of our fearfulness? "Fear thou not, for I am with thee" (xli. 10). Is it a question of

being held under the grip and bondage of the enemy? How full these chapters are of the Lord's promises of deliverance, of gathering the scattered, and of breaking the yoke. Is it the dry and needy heart that seeks Divine fulness? "I will pour water on him that is thirsty" (xlv. 3). The individual heart, in any and every kind of need, finds comfort. But in what way does it find comfort? Is it in the promises of God? Yes; but more than that, in the very presence of God; for the key to this whole portion, as to the opening section in the word of comfort, is the coming of the Lord, the glory of the Lord revealed. "Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold, your God!" (xl. 9). Now, the Lord God Almighty comes to us, has come to us, in the person of His Son, and so as we go through these twenty-seven chapters, the outstanding impression of them is of a very full and very glorious and very wonderful revelation of Jesus Christ. That is how God comforts His people. That is how God meets your need and mine, even by the presence of Jesus Christ.

(b) The Need of God's People

But not only is this the case with the individual; for while some are torn with concerns and fears about themselves, others in very real measure have found rest about themselves, but are greatly distressed about things as they are among the people of God. Well, read these chapters over again, not now from a personal point of view, but to seek out God's word concerning His people. You will mark all that is said about Zion and Jerusalem; and while we have no need and no desire to deny a very real and literal fulfilment of those promises to the earthly people, the Jews, nevertheless we have no need and no desire to limit them to that. The earthly fulfilment is glorious, but surpassing in glory is the heavenly fulfilment in God's heavenly people; and here we find promises of gathering and building, of establishing and perfecting, and of the Lord's own presence and glory. His people no longer outcast, but gathered in, adorned with

jewels, precious to his heart. That shall be! "Comfort ye, comfort ye", concerning the Church of Jesus Christ and the purposes of God for His people. "Comfort ye my people." They are secured. How? In exactly the same way as your personal needs are met, in the person of Jesus Christ the Lord.

(c) The Kingdom Age

It goes far beyond that, as I have mentioned. The Kingdom age is brought into view; the glories of that day when Israel as a nation shall be a glory and praise to God. That will be a wonderful day for Israel.

And our comfort concerning the distressed and torn and distracted nations of this earth, what is it? Some kind of era, a sort of Victorian era of prosperity and relative peace and calm? No, something far more wonderful than that—the Kingdom of God on earth in the presence and by means of the presence of God's Son.

(d) The New Heaven and the New Earth

But that is not perfection by any means. Though they are to be very wonderful and blessed days, altogether transcending anything that this earth has known so far, I still read of sin: "the sinner being a hundred years old..." I still read of death: "The child shall die an hundred years old" (lxxv. 20). Must these things be for ever? No, praise God! for this section of Isaiah in its glorious scope of the Divine purposes passes beyond even that glorious Millennial age, beyond the glory of the earthly Israel and the blessings of the nations of those days, and the Lord speaks of creating a new heaven and a new earth "wherein", as Peter tells us, "dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. iii. 13). There is to be an eternal glorious universe in which everything shall speak of righteousness and wherein, with nothing to mar it, shall be seen the glory of God. And what is to be the explanation of that? Well, Christ will be all in all. It is the presence of Christ, the key to everything.

The Slain Lamb

But then when I read this section and look at the twenty-seven chapters and seek out the central one, this is found to be chapter liii, and you well know the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. There is none like it in the whole of Scripture, setting forth the passion, the suffering, the Cross of the Lord Jesus. The central, basic explana-

tion of all this, the source, as it were, from whence all the Divine energy flows for this, what is it? We say, The presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, but how? The presence of the Christ who died upon the Cross. God's solution for every need, and for our comfort concerning every problem and every care, is in the Cross of His dear Son, Jesus Christ.

Now, when John the Baptist appeared, speaking of beholding the glory of the Lord, fitting himself into this prophecy of Isa. xl. and proclaiming himself to be that voice crying in the wilderness, what was the outstanding revelation that he had of the Lord, what was his proclamation concerning Jesus Christ? "Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!" (John i. 29). The Lamb slain is God's key to the whole situation. Personally and spiritually for His people, for the nations, for the ages of the ages, there is one great personal fact out of which everything flows, and that fact is that God's Son died upon the Cross an offering for sin. There is tremendous comfort in that knowledge: there is life in that knowledge. Later, John the Baptist was able to go on to speak of a further aspect of this glorious Person and to say that God had taught him that this is "He that baptizeth in the Holy Ghost". But He baptizes in the Holy Ghost because as the Lamb of God He took away the sin of the world. The one follows from the other. As the Lamb of God, He gave Himself for us; as the Baptizer in the Holy Ghost, He loves to give Himself to us.

Thus this morning we are gathered round that which speaks symbolically of the slain Lamb. We have not yet begun in any real way to appreciate the tremendous, the glorious, the world-wide, the eternal comprehensiveness of that one offering. One death died upon the Cross has changed the whole face of things for you and me. Let us take comfort from that. It has done it for you and for me. "Comfort ye my people." Christ died. Whatever your need, whatever your problem, here is the comfort for your heart: Christ died upon the Cross. Thus, for all the wonderful and glorious and heavenly purposes of God in His people, and, as I have said, for a poor, sin-torn, despairing humanity, for the whole range of time and eternity, God has solved every problem in one act when His Son died upon the Cross. What a wealth of meaning, then, what a depth of meaning in the dying of Jesus Christ, in the Lamb of God who was slain. Oh, let us

worship Him! Here is the secret of all, here is the hope, here is the ground of assurance as we look for the redemption of Israel, for the perfection of the Church, for the coming of the Lord and for the new heaven and the new earth. They look for that and they overcome every obstacle to that who learn the power of the

Blood of the Lamb. So we are at the Cross, not because that is a happy or a seemly thing to remember from time to time, but because here is the root and the fountain head of all our hopes and of all hope, of that which we blessedly call *the hope*. It is here in the fact that Jesus Christ died on the Cross. Oh, let us worship Him!

H.F.

The Lamb in the Midst of the Throne

No. 5.

The Blood of an Eternal Covenant

"And Jehovah spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for an household... Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it from the sheep, or from the goats: and ye shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at even. And they shall take of the blood, and put it on the two sideposts and on the lintel, upon the houses wherein they shall eat it... For I will go through the land of Egypt in that night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments; I am Jehovah. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and there shall no plague be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. And *this day shall be unto you for a memorial...*" (Ex. xii, 1-3, 5-7, 12-14).

"And the cup in like manner after supper, saying, *This cup is the new covenant in my blood*, even that which is poured out for you" (Luke xxii. 20).

"In like manner also the cup, after supper, saying, *This cup is the new covenant in my*

blood: this do, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me" (I Cor. xi. 25).

"Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep with *the blood of an eternal covenant*, even our Lord Jesus, make you perfect in every good thing to do his will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Heb. xiii. 20-21).

The Significance of the Numbers in the Passover Account

It is around those words in Hebrews xiii. 20 we shall meditate for a little while, trying to draw light from the great type in Exodus. In that account of the first Passover, there are some very simple means of helping us to understand this profound and wonderful truth of the eternal covenant, and I think they are very largely represented for us by the various numbers used in that account. You, of course, will have noticed how God lights upon certain numbers and connects the various phases of the Passover with those numbers.

(a) Seven—The Seventh Day, the Seventh Month

In the first place, there is the seventh day which becomes the first. The seventh month of the civil year of Israel is made the first month of their religious year. "This (seventh) month shall be unto you the beginning of months."

Seven has a very definite and clear place in this whole matter of the Passover. As we saw in our previous meditation, there were the seven days of unleavened bread, setting forth the completeness, the finality of the setting aside of all the life of nature; that is, of the old nature, the energy of the fallen creation. Seven is the number of spiritual perfection, completeness. It is three and four. Three is the number which stands for God and four for creation, and, so far as God is concerned with the old creation, it is finished. Seven days of unleavened bread tell us quite definitely that before we can come to the ground of the eternal covenant, before we can come to the life side of things, before all that God purposes can be entered into by us, there has to be a nullifying, a putting away, a complete separation from all that is represented by leaven, which typifies the seething disturbance of the old creation, the self-element in human nature, the "I" principle. Thus the very first number here leading to the covenant is that which tells us quite positively that the ground of the eternal covenant which God makes demands that there shall have been a death to the old creation.

It is interesting to notice two deaths which took place in Egypt, the death of the firstborn of all the Egyptians, and the death of a lamb; which latter meant that, although the firstborn in Israel did not actually die as the firstborn in Egypt died, in the thought of God they died. It was a death *as* them as well as *for* them. It was by the death of the lamb that they lived, and that lamb was slain between the evenings which concluded the feast of unleavened bread. There was a completeness of attitude toward something God could not accept. Israel, day after day feeding upon this tasteless, unleavened bread, was in the position of denying themselves, taking up their cross; denying, rejecting, repudiating, the cravings of the natural life. They were called upon to make that attitude complete and final throughout seven days, and this was followed by the command to kill it, in respect of the lamb.

You see the meaning; that everyone who is going to come into the eternal covenant, and all that God has bound up with that eternal covenant, is called upon to take a death attitude toward the whole life and order of the old creation, called to take God's attitude, and that is sealed in a representative death. That is what the Lord Jesus meant in His figurative language when He

said, except a man were to deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Him, he could not be His disciple. Denying self is repudiating the old creation life and bringing it to the Cross. Well, you see, the first seven in relation to unleavened bread tells us what is necessary to clear the way for God, to clear the way for all that is represented in the eternal covenant.

The Thought of a Covenant Embodied in the Root-meaning of the Word

The word "seven", of course, is the Hebrew word "sheba". It is a noun. But it is derived from another word "shaba" which means to swear. This is very helpfully illustrated for us in Abraham's covenant with Abimelech recorded in Gen. xxi. 28-31.

"And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What mean these seven ewe lambs which thou hast set by themselves? And he said, These seven ewe lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that it may be a witness unto me, that I have digged this well. Wherefore he called that place Beersheba; because there they swear both of them."

Beersheba—the well of the oath of seven. Thus we have seven ewe lambs, an oath and a covenant.

Seven, then, sets forth the idea of a covenant, and if you look, you will find that is brought out in the Word in various connections. The covenant sign given to Abraham was circumcision which had to take place at the completion of seven days. Later, the covenant sign given to Israel through Moses was the seventh or Sabbath day, the sign of the Mosaic covenant. The sign of the covenant given to Noah was the rainbow with its seven colours. But the interesting thing is that, after the seven, you repeat the first, you go back to one in the rainbow. The sign of a covenant—seven, resolving itself again into the first. When you come to the New Testament and to the Church, the Sabbath day gives place to the first day, the seven is handed over to the one, and we read in Acts xx, "Upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread..." You have the Lord's Table on the first day, which marks the completion of the circle of "seven". "This is my blood of the eternal covenant". The covenant idea is carried on, then, for the Church in seven which becomes one, the seventh which becomes the first. What

is the sign of the covenant for the Church ? It is the Lord's Table.

The Full Thought Underlying "Seven"

But what is this seventh, what does it mean ? Well, we know quite well that the first mention of anything in the Word of God is always the key to that thing throughout. God rested on the seventh day: wherefore God hallowed the seventh day. On that day God entered into His rest in respect of the creation. All things were created, and the creation being to God's satisfaction as He viewed it and said, "It is very good", God entered into His rest on the seventh day and hallowed it because He was satisfied. Carrying that over to the New Testament, you find that, for the Church, God's seven or Sabbath day is the Passover: and what is this Passover ? Is it not that God has perfected a new creation in Christ Jesus and is satisfied with His Son ? All His works are perfect in Christ, who says, in our language, "It is finished !" as He hands back His spirit to the Father. But oh, that English language of ours always lacks something! When the Lord Jesus cried that great cry on the Cross, translated in our versions "It is finished !" He cried this word, "Tetelestai !" which was the formula used by the examining priest of the lamb for the Passover. When he found no fault in it, he said, "Tetelestai !" It is perfect ! What the Lord Jesus did was to hand back to the Father a life unblemished, unspotted. He was presented to God as a Lamb without spot and without blemish after all the testing. "It is perfect", He said, not finished. Yes, finished in a certain sense, but the true meaning is, "It is perfect". The work is perfect and flawless, the life is perfect and flawless. The whole is rounded off in perfection. The Father is satisfied. That is His new creation in Christ Jesus. The Lord Jesus is the embodiment of the new creation which satisfies God when the old creation has gone wrong, and God enters into His rest.

Man's Blessing and Acceptance Founded in God's Satisfaction in Christ

Now note : Adam's first day on this earth was a Sabbath day. God created man on the sixth day, and the first complete day that man had was the Sabbath, and that Sabbath day becomes the first day for man. Carried over to the New Testament, where God finishes and per-

fects His work as in the Lord Jesus, and enters into His rest, that is God's Sabbath, and we begin. That is our first day—God's rest. I am not going to stop to apply that now. It always carries such a message for our hearts if we will listen to it, that we begin in something that is already perfect. This is the ground of the everlasting covenant. To grasp the significance of that is to see what the eternal covenant is, to come right in on a perfect ground and beginning. That is not how we regard ourselves or how we feel about it, but that is God's place for us. The fact is, beloved, that in Jesus Christ you and I will never be more perfect than we are now or in the day when we believed. Those perfections may be wrought into us progressively, but, so far as the ground of our acceptance is concerned, we are "accepted in the Beloved," and He wholly satisfies the Father; the Father has come to rest in Him. The work is perfect. Our acceptance is always on the ground of God's end reached. Till that is settled, we have no steady thing when God begins to work in us. Let me stay with that a moment.

If, when God begins to deal with us in discipline and chastening, in training and moulding and formation, we begin at any moment to say, This is all because I am so bad, and the Lord has to do something with me in order that I may be acceptable, you have given your ground away. You will never be more acceptable, however much the Lord does in you. You have been accepted, not on the ground of what you are, however bad or good that may be, but on the ground of the Beloved: accepted in the beloved One. We sing—and I wish we would lay it to heart more and more—that His perfections are the measure of our own by faith. That is where we start. Blessed be God, that is the ground of confidence, and when the Lord begins to take us in hand and we begin to feel what wretched creatures we are, that never implies for a single moment that we are not accepted. The import of the eternal covenant is here in the first place, that we are accepted on the ground of God's satisfaction with His Son. If we were accepted on our own ground, where we stand in ourselves, there would be no eternal covenant, no ground of security at all. It would be a matter of how we might be to-morrow. But no, it is not a matter of how we are or shall be; the ground is settled in Christ. Thereafter God is only getting to work to make good in us what is true in His Son, but it does

not change the ground. Do not let us give our ground away. The basis of the eternal covenant is seven. God has finished His work for us : so God begins in us where He finished in Christ. Seven—the covenant : and the seventh month becomes the first, and likewise the seventh day.

(b) Ten—The Tenth Day

Then the Lord takes another number, and He says, "In the tenth day of the month...every man a lamb". That is a very interesting number. It comes up quite frequently in Scripture and always in one connection. You have the ten commandments. In Matthew xxv. you have the ten virgins. In Luke xix. you have the ten pounds, and wherever you find this number coming up, you will find it connected with the fulness of human responsibility. Ten commandments—the fulness of man's responsibility to God. Ten virgins—they are all responsible, that is the point. That is so often missed when men are dealing with the parable of the ten virgins. The point is responsibility. It is the number that gives the character to the parable. These are responsible people. The ten pounds—it is a question of responsibility, trust.

Now here, the point of the tenth day is this, that man has been tested up to the hilt under every condition and has broken down. He has been faced with responsibility to God and has been found wanting. So again there are ten plagues in Egypt, typifying the fulness of human responsibility, and the end of a people proved and found wanting is marked with judgment.

The old dispensation up to Christ covered some four thousand years, which is forty centuries. It is ten times four, typifying the creation under a dispensation of responsibility, and the whole creation is seen broken down and unable to face up to its responsibilities : and so the Lamb comes in. That is why there is judgment here. The ten commandments may be summed up in two words, "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not". Connected with them always are the features of responsibility, failure, judgment.

Well, what is the hope ? Man has been tried under every condition. He was tried in Eden under the most favourable conditions. He broke down. God has tested man under all kinds of conditions through the ages, and in every one man has failed. What hope is there ? What hope for God if man is like that ? Man is incorrigible !

There is the hope of God's eternal covenant, hope of a glorious destiny for man, who through many, many centuries has proved there is no hope in himself. A Lamb is brought in and that Lamb takes responsibility ; the responsibility for what ? Ah, that Lamb takes responsibility for God's righteousness. Under every condition God must have righteousness. He is requiring righteousness in man, and unless God can find righteousness in man, then man is a judged and doomed creature. Man has proved all the way along that he cannot satisfy God in the matter of righteousness, and yet he is held responsible, he is a responsible creature. That is why we have a conscience. That is why the whole creation has a conscience, uninstructed in many realms it is true, and darkened and twisted, but a conscience. Back of the most degraded, there is ever this sense, though it be but dim, of standing in relation to a supreme Object which demands his worship. That is conscience in its faintest form : and what is this thing that makes him act so strangely ? from the poor, darkened heathen in all his ignorance to the enlightened and mature man of the old army in the last war who I heard brokenly ejaculating something that came back to him from the dim past, after his transport had been torpedoed and while he was floundering in the water awaiting rescue. Somewhere he had heard and in that moment brokenly said, "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, look upon a little child"! What brought that back in that moment ? It is this sense of responsibility to God that must somehow be met, or man is lost, this sense of an awaiting doom unless in some way he can get through to God. He may not know anything about God but he senses in himself that God is.

Man is responsible, and he knows it. That is the whole argument of the early chapters of the letter to the Romans that, although man may not know anything about the nature of God. in his conscience he knows that there is such a being as God, and the invisible things of God are shown in the things that are seen. God has His testimony within and without.

Well now, man is responsible, that is the point, and responsible for righteousness, and that sense of responsibility for righteousness makes him do all sorts of strange things under given circumstances. But how can man satisfy God ? Oh, it is an awful thing to think that there has come

into being a system of religion which is based on the thought of man being able to satisfy God's righteousness by works, by payments, by tithes and dues and penances. It is a fearful thing to substitute the works of a fallen creation for the righteousness of God in Christ! No, man cannot! he cannot.

But this Lamb without spot and without blemish takes the responsibility for the whole matter of righteousness, and when John sees Him he cries, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world". On the brink of the Jordan, where John would have restrained Him from going down into the waters, that Lamb of God turns to him and says, "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness". Then John suffered Him. His baptism was a type of His death to satisfy God in the matter of righteousness. How? The offering to God of an unblemished and incorruptible life. God is satisfied. If God can find a Man who can be the representative of all men, and that Man is sinless, then God has His ground of hope and assurance for the realization of His purpose: and that is the Man, Christ Jesus.

There is the other side. This Lamb of God takes responsibility for man's unrighteousness, man's sin, and bears it away. Man has to answer to God for his sin and here is One who says, I will answer for him: "Who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree" (I Pet. ii. 24). He "was delivered up for our trespasses" (Rom. iv. 25). Well, that is simple but beautiful Gospel. Never are we tired of listening to that Gospel.

Ten, you see, is the number of responsibility, full responsibility, and the Lamb comes in on the tenth day to take responsibility for man in his failure and for God in His requirements. We put faith in the Lamb and our sins are remitted. This is the Blood of the new covenant which is shed for the remission of sins, and the Lamb answers for us to God in His demand for perfect righteousness.

(c) Fourteen—The Fourteenth Day

The Lamb comes in on the tenth day, but it was not slain on the tenth day. It was kept up to the fourteenth day. A new factor is introduced and we have already mentioned it. It is examined by the expert, it is passed and sealed, but who knows but what it might yet develop

some fault. It must be kept under strict observation for these next four days. That brings God's Lamb into view from the day in which He was proclaimed by John, the Lamb of God, to the day in which He was offered, slain. It was a period in which He was being observed. Do you realize, beloved, that during those three and a half years the whole universe had its eyes focussed upon that Lamb. He was the centre of universal interest and attention. Heaven was looking down. Hell was looking on, and hell was intensely interested and intensely active. Men were looking on, and He was put to the utmost test, under the severest scrutiny. Hell was active to produce some blemish upon Him and men were trying to trip Him up and find some occasion of fault in Him: and all heaven was watching the issue of every trial. At the end of that period of observation, He could say, "Which of you accuseth me of sin?" He could challenge hell and He could say of His life to heaven, "It is perfect". On the fourteenth day, He is slain: but that is after He has been sealed of God, marked off as His Lamb; tested by hell, watched by men, He offers Himself without spot to God. That is the testimony of God's Word: "offered himself without spot unto God." That is the ground of the eternal covenant. Now we are getting to the point.

The Gift of God in the Eternal Covenant

What is the great factor of the eternal covenant? You see, a covenant is an undertaking, a committal. A covenant means that the one who makes that covenant is saying, I am prepared to do something! I am going to do something! I make this covenant-deed, and in it I give, I bequeath, I promise...! What is this great thing that God is covenanting to do? What is it that God is giving in the eternal covenant in the Blood of His Son? It is life, eternal life, given in the Blood of His Son, secured unto us in that Blood, and that is why the Apostle puts it in this way, "The God of peace, who brought again from the dead...through (or in) the blood of an eternal covenant..." That Blood speaks of the destruction of death and the bringing of life and incorruptibility to light. That Blood speaks of an incorruptible and deathless life over which death has no power; and therefore, because peace has been made by the Blood of His Cross, God must bring back the great Shepherd from the dead. It was not possible that He should be

holden of the pangs of death. That which is incorruptible cannot see corruption. That which is deathless, because incorruptible, cannot be holden of death. The Blood of the eternal covenant speaks of an incorruptible, deathless and death-nullifying life : and God has put that into the covenant, and said, This is what I will to you ! This is what I bequeath to you through the death of My Son ! This is your inheritance, this is your birthright, this is the great gift of God, because of the Blood of His Son ! Life, incorruptible life, deathless life : and therefore it is an *eternal* covenant.

You and I, beloved, if we have taken our place on the ground of the covenant in His Blood by faith, if we have recognized and received what God has done by the death of His Son, we have received this eternal life, and that is the guarantee of everything. Thus the Apostle goes on, " Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even our Lord Jesus, make you perfect in every good thing to do his will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight ". You see, here are all the elements of His Son. Is His Son made perfect ? then over against that we have " make you perfect ". Has His Son fully done the will of God, satisfied the Father and given Him all His good pleasure ? then by the life of His Son in us will God cause us also " to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight ". This life has brought us on the ground of the Lord Jesus and it has secured the work of God in us to conform us to His Son. It is on the basis of that life, and that life is the principle, the power, the basis upon which God does His work in us. The operation of that life in us by the Holy Spirit is going to bring us to the very place where the Lamb is now.

That is why the whole of spiritual progress,

spiritual history, is one of a life and death conflict. It always resolves itself into that, whatever may be the form of the trial, the nature of the experience. The enemy's object is to touch us with death, spiritual death ; to wrap us around with death and bring us down under the weight and power of spiritual death. The Lord's object in allowing it all is to teach us how to live by His life, to overcome by His life. It all resolves itself into a matter of the battle for life. But, blessed be God, we have the life which has already overcome. The very life of the Lamb who overcame is in us, the potentiality of His victory is in our hearts now. All that we have to do is to learn how to live by the power that worketh in us, the power of His resurrection life. So the covenant is the covenant which is life for evermore. It is the ground of every hope, every prospect, every possibility for God and for ourselves, and these are the things which go to make the covenant. The Lamb has taken the responsibility for us and for God. The Lamb has been tested and proved, tried in all points and has been victorious. The Lamb, as proved and perfected through suffering, is in the throne, and He has given His very life in terms of precious Blood to those who believe, and that life coming into us, if we will but live by it, learn to live and to overcome by it, that life will bring us back to its own source in Him, that we also shall sit with Him in His throne as He has overcome and is set down with His Father in His throne.

" Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep with the blood of an eternal covenant, even our Lord Jesus, make you perfect in every good thing to do his will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ ; to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen."

T A-S

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The Normal Christian Life

No. 4.

The True Nature of Consecration

READING : Romans vi. 12-23.

The revelation of our death in the Lord is a definite thing. Many of us could give the date when we clearly saw that Christ died for us, and we should be equally clear as to the time when we saw that we died in Christ. It should be nothing hazy, but very definite. It is not sufficient to acknowledge the truth, we must see it. The fundamental thing is a revelation of our position in Christ in His death, and a definite reception of His resurrection life. Then we shall spontaneously reckon ourselves dead in Christ and alive in Him. Revelation is fundamental to reckoning. With many Christians dying looms very large on their horizon; they are always occupied with the thought of their death. But our death with Christ is not future, it is past, it is an accomplished fact. Whether we experience it or not, the fact is settled and settled for ever. George Muller said, "One day George Muller died"; and we must be able to speak of our death as definitely as he did of his. This reckoning is one of the steps that leads us into the normal Christian life. The first step is revelation and the second is reckoning. We must never reverse the order. Reckoning must always have revelation as its basis.

The Point at which Consecration Arises

"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey the lusts thereof: neither present your members as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves unto God as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Rom. vi. 12-13). We are dead and are risen: now, on the basis of death and resurrection we must yield (present). From verse 12 to verse 23 the most important word is "yield". Many have taken this word to mean consecration, and rightly so; but it is not consecration as we usually understand it. It is not consecration in the sense of offering talents, gifts, strength, etc.,

to the Lord for Him to use. Note this clause in verse 13, "as alive from the dead". The consecration here referred to is not the consecration of anything belonging to the old creation, but of that which has passed through death into resurrection. The yielding here spoken of is the outcome of knowing my old man crucified and reckoning him to be so. Knowing, reckoning, yielding, that is the Divine order. When I really *know* I am already crucified, then I spontaneously *reckon* myself dead, and when I truly reckon myself one with the Lord in death and resurrection, it follows that I will *yield* to Him. He is the source of my life, He *is* my life: so I cannot but yield everything to Him, for all is His, not mine. *Without passing through death I have nothing to consecrate, and there is nothing God can accept. for He has condemned all that is of the old creation to the Cross.* Death has cut off all that cannot be consecrated to Him, and resurrection has made consecration possible. Yielding merely means that I consider my whole life as belonging to the Lord.

The Presenting of the Body an All-inclusive Offering

Let us observe that this yielding is in relation to the members of the body. I regard all my members as belonging wholly to the Lord. It is a great thing to discover I am no longer my own: I am the Lord's. If the fifteen kroner in my pocket belong to me, then I have full authority over them. But if they belong to another who has committed them to me in trust, then I cannot buy what I please with them; and I dare not lose them. Real Christian life begins with knowing. That results spontaneously in reckoning, and that again leads to yielding. How many of us dare not use our own time or money or talents as we would, because we realise they are the Lord's, not ours? How many of us have such a strong sense that we belong to Another that we dare not squander a kroner of our

money, or an hour of our time, or any of our mental and physical powers? No one can really live the normal Christian life without yielding everything to the Lord.

On a certain occasion a Chinese brother was travelling by train and found himself together with three non-Christians who wished to play cards to while away the time. Lacking a fourth to complete the game, they invited this brother to join them. I am sorry to disappoint you, he said, but I cannot join your game, for I have not brought my hands with me. Whatever do you mean? they asked in blank astonishment. This pair of hands does not belong to me, he said: and then followed the explanation of the transfer of ownership that had taken place in his life. That brother regarded the members of his body as belonging entirely to the Lord: and that is true holiness.

Separated unto the Lord—The Lord's Right Over His Own

Many people think we become holy by the eradication of something evil within. No, anything can become holy by being separated unto God. In Old Testament times, if a man wished to be altogether the Lord's, then he was anointed with oil and the Lord sanctified him. Thereafter he was regarded as set apart to the Lord. In the same manner a lamb, or the gold in the temple, could be sanctified to the Lord. "Holiness" in the original means something set apart, and all true holiness is "holiness unto the Lord". I give myself over to Christ; that is holiness. Yielding means, I recognise I am altogether the Lord's. This yielding is a definite thing just as definite as reckoning. There must be a day in my life when I pass out of my own hands into His hands, and from that day forward I belong to Him and no longer to myself. That does not mean I consecrate myself to be a preacher or a missionary. Many people are missionaries, not because they have consecrated themselves to God, but because they have not consecrated themselves to Him. Then to what are we consecrated? Not to Christian work, but to the will of God; to be and to do whatever He wants.

David had many mighty men, of whom some were generals and others were gatekeepers. We must be willing to be either generals or gatekeepers just as God wills, not as we choose. If you are a Christian, then God has marked out a pathway for you, a "course", as Paul calls it.

Not only Paul's path, but the path of every Christian has been clearly marked out by God, and it is of supreme importance that each one should know and walk in the God-appointed course. "Lord, I give myself to Thee with this desire alone, to know and walk in the path you have ordained". That is true yielding. If at the close of a life we can say with Paul, "I have finished my course", then we are blessed indeed. There is nothing more tragic than to come to the end of life and find we have been on the wrong course. We have only one life to live down here, and we can do as we please with it. But if we seek our own pleasure our life will never glorify God. A devoted Christian once said, "I want nothing for myself, I want everything for God". Do *you* want anything apart from God, or does all your desire centre in His will?

Servant or Slave?

If we yield unreservedly unto God, many adjustments may require to be made; in family, business, or church relationships, or in the matter of our personal views. God will not let anything of ourselves remain. His finger will touch, point by point, everything that is not of Him, saying, This must go. Are you willing? It is foolish to resist God, and always wise to yield to Him. We admit that many of us still have controversies with God. He wants something, while we want something else. Many things we dare not look into, dare not pray about, dare not even think about, lest we lose our peace. We can evade the issue, but to do so will bring us out of the will of God. It is always an easy matter to get out of His will, but it is a blessed thing just to hand ourselves over to Him, and let Him have His way with us. How good it is to have the consciousness that we belong to the Lord, and we are not our own. There is nothing more precious in all the world. It is that which brings the consciousness of His continual presence, and the reason is obvious. I must first have the sense of God's possession of me before I can have the sense of His presence with me. When this relationship with the Lord is established, then we dare do nothing on our own initiative, for we are His exclusive property. "Know ye not, that to whom ye present yourselves as servants unto obedience, his servants ye are whom ye obey?" (Rom. vi. 16). The word here rendered "servant" really signifies a "bondservant", a slave. This word

used several times in the second half of Romans vi. What is the difference between servant and slave? A servant may serve another, but the ownership of himself does not pass to that other. If he likes his master he can serve him; but if he does not like him he can refuse to serve him. Not so is it with a slave. He is not only the servant of another, he is the possession of another. How did I become the slave of the Lord? On His part He bought me, and on my part I yielded myself to Him. By right of redemption we are God's property, but if we would be His slaves we must willingly yield ourselves to Him, for He will never coerce us.

The Reality of the Issue

The tragic thing about Christians to-day is that they have no idea what God is asking of them. How glibly they say, Lord, I am willing for anything. Do you know that God is asking of you your very life? There are cherished ideals, strong wills, precious relationships, much loved work that will have to go: so do not give yourself to God unless you mean it. God will take you seriously, even if you do not mean it seriously. When the Galilean boy brought his bread to the Lord, what did the Lord do with it? He broke it. God will always break what is offered to Him. He breaks what He takes, but after He breaks it He blesses and uses it to meet the needs of others. After you give yourself to the Lord, He begins to break what was offered to Him. Everything seems to go wrong, and

you protest and find fault with the ways of God. But to stay there is to be no more than just a broken vessel; no good for the world, because you have gone too far for the world to use you, and no good for God because you have not gone far enough for Him to use you. You are out of gear with the world, and you have a controversy with God. This is the tragedy of many a Christian.

Our yielding to the Lord must be a fundamental act. Then day by day we must go on yielding to Him, not finding fault with His ways, but accepting with praise even what the flesh revolts against. When you stand on that ground, then you are truly yielded. A sister once prayed, "Lord, this is very hard, I don't like it, but I am willing to break my heart to get Thy heart". One day I prayed with a brother who could not get through in prayer. At length he said, "Lord, I don't like it, but don't give in to me, just wait a moment; I will give in to You".

The normal Christian life begins with a crisis, when I see I am the Lord's and thereafter no longer reckon myself to be my own, but in everything recognise His ownership and authority. I do not consecrate myself to be a missionary, I consecrate myself to do God's will; to do His will in school, office or kitchen, counting whatever He ordains for me to be the very best, for nothing but good can come to those who are wholly His.

May we always be possessed by the consciousness that we are not our own.

W.N.

"Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory"

No. 3.

Life in the Spirit

"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway from the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him; and lo, a voice out of the heavens saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be

tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he afterward hungered. And the tempter came and said unto him, If thou art the Son of God... Again, the devil taketh him unto an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and he said unto him, All these things will I give thee,

if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan : for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." (Matt. iii. 16-iv. 3, 8-10).

"And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." (Matt. vi. 13).

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God these are the sons of God" (Rom. viii. 14).

"And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire ; and it sat upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance...Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified" (Acts ii. 2-4, 36).

In the first of these passages we see the link between the Holy Spirit and sonship: the Spirit is seen lighting upon the Lord Jesus and a voice out of the heavens is heard saying, "This is My beloved Son". That truth is taken up again in the passage in the letter to the Romans, chapter viii. 14: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God". In the second passage, Matthew iv., the Son, under the government of the Spirit, is led into the wilderness, and the issue of that particular leading of the Spirit was a mighty victory for the rights of God. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him for a season." That is the end of that battle and it is victory in the hands of the Son under the government of the Spirit.

What I feel the Lord wants us to recognize at this time is what a life or church that is led and governed by the Holy Spirit does, what it means to be led and governed by the Holy Spirit so far as we personally and collectively are concerned: in other words, what are the marks of sonship. You see, beloved, we have to begin here, that sonship is proved by our being led by the Spirit. How do we know that we are sons, what is it that evidences sonship, in what way does sonship manifest itself and work itself out? The clear precise statement of the Word of God is by being "led of the Spirit". It was so in the case of the Lord Jesus. The marks of His Sonship were in His being led of the Spirit. The state-

ment moreover is quite positive in Romans viii. 14. How tremendously important it is, therefore, that we both have the Spirit and are governed by the Spirit. That is fundamental to everything. I venture to say that, if that which I feel the Lord wants to bring to us could be truly got over to us now, it would be a matter of tremendous value to every one of us. Let me repeat: the basis, the foundation of everything, so far as our relationship with God and God's purpose is concerned, is the presence and government of the Holy Spirit, and that government, of course, means and presupposes the absolute Lordship of the Holy Spirit; because the Holy Spirit does not come save on the ground of the death, the burial and the resurrection. It was when Jesus was baptized and came up out of the water that the Holy Spirit came upon Him, and baptism, as we all well know, sets forth in testimony the fact that, so far as any other government is concerned, be it the government of Satan, or that of the world, or be it the government of the self-life, that government is broken and we are out of it; and our resurrection, typified in our coming up out of the baptism, means that we are alive and alive unto God only. Thus the ground is provided for the Spirit to come in as Lord, and so become the basis of everything in our relationship with God and God's purpose. The thing that I feel we want to recognize is what that really means.

A Principle of Spiritual Guidance

There are a great many questions which arise, questions we are often asked. They sometimes seem to be theoretical questions, technical questions about the Christian life. Now, we may seek to help one another by giving what we might call a technical answer, an answer, for example, from the Scriptures on some passage or some interpretation. But I am always doubtful as to the real helpfulness of that kind of answer. I think, beloved, there is an answer which goes deeper and which is much more satisfactory.

I have recently been asked a question, and I will answer this question publicly so that what help there may be in the answer will be afforded others. The question turned upon the difficulty over the difference between soul and spirit, and the place which the soul is going to have in the future life. Is it going to have any place at all or is it going to cease? Now you know I might

answer a question like that with passages of Scripture, but I do not think that would be the most helpful way, because it would probably only raise more questions. But I am going to answer it in this way, because, although we are not dealing now with the matter of soul and spirit, I am seeking to get at a principle of guidance, a principle of spiritual guidance, the law of sonship.

I would ask you, What is your experience as a child of God in the matter of soul and spirit? Perhaps those words are too technical. Let me put it more simply. What is your experience with regard to that side of your life which is directly in touch with the Lord, in the measure in which you have a conscious life in the Lord (I think every child of God ought to have some little measure of a conscious life with the Lord), and that other side of your life which you know to be yourself, not the Lord, but yourself, your natural life; your spiritual life on the one side and your natural life on the other. Now when, as a child of God, you take just a little excursion into that region which is your natural life, what is the result? It may happen through a slip, a momentary breakdown, an indulgence—"overtaken in a fault" is how the Apostle expresses it—anything which means that, just at that moment, you drop down into the natural life, or the natural life rises up and gets the advantage for the moment, asserts itself and becomes the dominating thing. What is the effect of that upon you? If you are a true child of God and are really seeking to live with the Lord, you have a terribly bad time, and it is not just a matter of your conscience in the same way as any man might have a twinge of conscience. You know that there are other factors in this, that of the Lord being grieved, of something between yourself and the Lord having been damaged. It is something much more than just conscience. You have a bad time and you react, you rebound, you are stung by that, and you make haste to get back on to the other side. You seek to recover your spiritual ground as soon as you can with considerable regret and remorse and repentance. What has happened? Well, you have come out of your spirit in its union with God into your soul. You have learned a lesson. You take account of this thing and you say, "How was it that I slipped up there? Why was it, what accounts for that? I will prayerfully watch that in the future. I

know now what that means." Now, it does not follow that you never do slip in the same way again, but as you go on you do spiritually grow out of that particular thing, and what is happening is that in spirit you are taking the mastery of your soul. You are not annihilating your soul, but you are bringing it under government and making it your servant; for mark, that frequently the occasion of stumbling is only the evil form of an expression which is necessary. Take anger, for example. You became angry; but you became angry in your nature, your natural life, and it was because there was a self-interest or some self-element in your anger that you had such a bad time. Anger is not evil. "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Psa. vii. 11). "Be ye angry and sin not" (Eph. iv. 26). Anger is not evil. You are not therefore going to annihilate your soul and make anger non-existent. I instance anger, but you can take any other feature that you like in the same way and you will find that the soul itself is not essentially evil. The evil lies in the evil principle that has got hold of it.

What are you going to do then? In spirit you are going to destroy the evil principle and get the mastery of your soul, so that anger is going to serve you. Love may have personal elements in it; but you are not going to annihilate love because you find love trips you up sometimes on a personal line and leads you astray. You are going to destroy the evil principle by the power of the death of Christ and master your soul and bring it under, so that by your spirit you use love, you govern the matter of love. Now then, the point that I am after is not so much the difference between the soul and spirit, but rather something related to the Holy Spirit Himself.

The Holy Spirit an Earnest

The Holy Spirit is a basic necessity, but mark that the Word puts it in this way. "...hath given us the Spirit as *an earnest* of our inheritance" (Eph. i. 14). What does that mean? Well, if the Holy Spirit is the energy, the power, the intelligence, by whom we are doing this very thing of which I have been speaking, He is pointing on to something. What is it that He is pointing on to as an earnest of something that is to be? Why, He is pointing on to a time when you and I will, in spirit, have our souls utterly and perfectly under our government; not

annihilated but perfectly under our government, and I do not believe that in the resurrection life, the life hereafter, we are just going to be naked spirits. We shall be men, we shall have souls, but without the evil principle and without the soul being in the place of mastery. Through the organ of the spirit we shall govern all the rest of our being and enjoy a perfectly adjusted manhood. Manhood is not a temporary thing. It is an idea of God which is to go on.

Well now, you see the principle. But the question is answered when you get the law. All questions are answered. The question is this in general: What does the Holy Spirit do in us? How does the Holy Spirit lead us? What does it mean to us in a practical way day by day to be led of the Spirit? Oh, do not just narrow that down to the question of, Lord, shall I go here or there, shall I do this or that? That is only a mere fragment of being led of the Spirit. Without any such questions arising, the Spirit is in us to lead us, and to lead us to moral issues in the way I have just been speaking; that is, to show us the way and to say to us, No, that is not the way, this is the way; and we know, not by His pointing it out but by His effective working in us. Our reactions, as true children of God, are the work of the Spirit. That jumping back from the ground that we have touched to our hurt, that is the energy of the Spirit in us leading us, and it is a terrible thing for any child of God ever to come to the place where he can indulge without a reaction. The enemy would like us, because of our failures, to say, Oh, well, it is no good, we give it up! If you and I have a bad time when we touch the natural realm, that is a glorious evidence of sonship. Do not try to rule out all your bad times and make light of them, but beware that the enemy does not turn them to such effect as to make you introspective and morbid. But remember the Spirit will keep alive in you a very active sense of what is, and what is not, in accord with the mind of God. These are the sons of God who are thus led by the Spirit of God.

You see how we answer all our questions. I answer all my technical questions by looking to see what it means to me that the Holy Spirit is in me. What is the Spirit pointing to? What is the significance of to-day's touch of the Spirit upon my spirit? That is an earnest of something. If that is followed out, followed through, it will grow and develop and it will lead me somewhere.

That is going to answer all my questions if I have got that principle. Have I been too difficult for you? Oh, listen to the Spirit, come under the government of the Spirit, and then, when the Spirit checks you, urges you, moves in you, gives you a bad time or gives you joy in your heart, note what that means, what it is leading to. Oh, there is something bound up with that, there is something at the end of that. I interpret everything in life by that touch of the Spirit and that answers all my questions. If the Spirit touches my mortal body to-day with His living finger and quickens it, I do not at once conclude that I have become immortal, that death for ever has gone and incorruption has settled down in my mortal frame. But I can say, "My resurrection body will be like that in fulness. It will simply be the consummation of that touch I have known to-day. I have a wonderful accession of life to-day, but the time is coming when that very thing will have been developed to its fullest extent and it will be nothing but Divine life. I have the Spirit as an earnest". I am trying to illustrate this thing. The Spirit touching us in any way, dealing with us in any way as sons of God, is pointing on to what it will be when sonship is manifested (the day of the manifestation of the sons) and the creation is delivered from the bondage of corruption.

Now all that is detail. You can drop the detail and get back to the foundation. What is it? The Holy Spirit is basic to everything. We will never get anywhere without the Holy Spirit; we will never know anything without the Holy Spirit; we shall never reach anything in the purpose of God without the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit has to be a conscious life with us; growingly so, as in the case of a baby. The baby has very little self-conscious life to begin with. As a baby, most things are done for it. But it is not long before the very first and remote signs of conscious life are there. Whereas up to a point there seems to be no consciousness of anything in particular, suddenly you will see a baby get its eyes fixed upon something, suddenly it sees something. From that time, the baby is taking account of something. It does not understand, but is aware of some object and it cannot take its eyes from it. It comes back to it, and as the days go by seems to look for it. Self-conscious life has started, and from that time onward that grows. In the spiritual life

it is just like that. At the beginnings, most things are done for us as from the outside, although there is a remote sense of a new self-conscious spiritual life. But, as we grow, the Spirit's presence in us has to become a more and more conscious life of government; and these who are led by the Spirit of God are sons. That is the foundation. It is the foundation of growth, it is the foundation of understanding, it is the foundation of God's purpose, it is the foundation of all that is wrapped up in our relationship with God.

Forgive me for being so elementary, but if we can only get this, it is the key to everything. We do not want to have certain questions answered in a technical way to the satisfaction of our minds, but we get at the answer spiritually. We are never really satisfied by having a question answered so that our minds can grasp it. Presently we shall come up against new features of the thing and want new explanations. But if we can have the answer conveyed to our spirit—ah, then we are satisfied; and I say the answer is found in the presence of the Spirit and what the Spirit is indicating by His present dealings with us. What do His dealings with us indicate? What is the end of it all? If the Spirit to-day touches us upon a question of wrong, of evil, of something doubtful, what is the end of that? The end is holiness, perfect holiness. It will take some time because there are many things to be dealt with. But the end, when reached, is a holy being. So with everything else. In this the Spirit is therefore the foundation.

Adjustableness a Mark of a Life Governed by the Holy Spirit

There are some other things that come up in that connection. One of them is this, that a mark of sonship or a Spirit governed life is adjustableness. Now, I want you to grasp this. You see, it means that nothing is final with us, so far as our attainment is concerned or our light, and that we can never, if we are under the Holy Spirit's government, come to a fixed place. We can never come to the place where we just accept everything and go on with it as it is. Oh no, a Spirit-governed life can never do that, can never become stagnant, can never become fixed. There can never be any sense of finality about the position or state in such a life. I am not talking now about those great truths which

are settled, to which nothing is added or need be added. We are settled, of course, in the matter of what Christ has done and what Christ is, those great objective truths of our faith. I am not talking about that, but of our understanding, our apprehension, our knowledge, our growth, our relationship to these things, our position. These are all things which must remain open to enlargement, to expansion, and it may be, to drastic changes. You see, in traditional Christianity we have come into something that is more or less fixed. It is fixed in different ways. If you are a Baptist, then your position is a fixed position. If you are a Presbyterian or a Methodist, it is the same. These are things which are rounded off. I am only illustrating, not judging. What is within these things is something to which you have conformed, of which you are a member. That is your bound, your world: and I have only cited one or two examples; I could take any number more.

Now then, where are we? How did we get in? Perhaps we were born, brought up, in those things, or perhaps we came into them later. But they are something, and they represent a fixed position and we, if in them, are fixed and governed by that position. That is to say, within them, certain things are interpreted in this way, certain things are practised in this way. The method there is this method: and how often, when you have been speaking of things, have you had this reaction from people, "Oh yes, but I was never brought up to that way of thinking. In the church to which I belong" (really referring to the denomination) "it is taught and practised like this". That is a fixed position. Let me say it, without judging of these things, that any fixed position is a contradiction of the Holy Ghost and of sonship. It does not matter what the position is, and it may be (I am only going to say it may be, I could put it more strongly than that) that if you really come under the government of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of sonship, you may have to make very drastic changes and cease to be that and that, and go on with God. Adjustableness is a mark of sonship, and, as the Holy Spirit has never brought any of us yet to a final position, there is more light and understanding yet to be received. The ways of God are not all known to us yet.

We must remember there is all the difference between the permissive will of God, for such instruction in us as can never be gained in any

other way, and the whole will of God, which is another thing. We all have to look back on our lives and believe that certain steps which were taken and courses followed were in the will of God for us. Yet, in later life, we have had to repudiate the position into which we then came, entirely change and adjust. But, beloved, I am going to say this: it does not mean that it was not the will of God for us that we took that step. The Lord may at one time, in His permissive will, lead us in a certain way, because of its being the only way we can learn certain things we have to learn. But that does not mean that God intends us to stay there for ever; that He has settled us in that, and that, because He led us in that way and into that, we dare not ever contemplate moving out of it. That is bondage. You and I as sons have to know liberty from bondage of every kind, and that means that we are to be adjustable, free for adjustments, not bound by any kind of conception that would prevent us from making changes as we are led by the Spirit: and it is true of every life that is Spirit-governed that tremendous changes take place. The things which at one time would never have been considered nor contemplated, have become actualities now. The basis of the life is the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit producing sonship means that you and I have to be adjustable, and if we are not adjustable, there is arrest at once. We are in bondage, we are in limitation. The Lord Jesus was adjustable under

the government of the Holy Spirit. He was not playing a trick on His brethren when one day they came to Him and said, 'We are going up to the feast. Are you going up with us? If you do not go, people will wonder: you will prejudice your interest'. He said, 'No, you go up, I am not going up'. Yet when they were gone up, then Jesus went up to the feast. Is He playing a trick on them? Was He simply saying, Well, I would rather go alone, I would like to get rid of you? He had not the witness of the Spirit at that moment that He was to go, and therefore He had to stand His ground and take the risk of being misunderstood. But when they had gone up, He evidently got the Spirit's witness that He should go up, and He did not say, I have told them I was not going up; they will think I have played a trick on them, that I did not want them. No, He did not argue like that, but moved in the Spirit and left it all with the Father. He was not bound by those considerations, of what people would think and say either way. If they should talk because He was not there—all right, let them talk. As for Him, He must be true to the Lord. Adjusting, even if it is at an hour's notice, that is life in the Spirit, that is sonship.

This is the basis of victory over the Devil. There is no defeating Satan save on this ground of walking in the Spirit, of being governed by Him. May the Lord give us understanding in these basic things about our life with Him.

T.A.S.

A Priestly Ministry

READING: Rev. viii. 1-6; Matt. xviii. 15-20;
John xiv. 12-14; Rev. xx. 4-6.

The Lord has been speaking, I believe, in many of our hearts of late of the great need of there being a people in the earth in whom there is found a real measure of spiritual responsibility. Now, we are very conscious that we are living in days when things are very tense and very critical, and not only in an outward way. We are moving on toward the end that is God's end, and when we come to that phase of things that marks the culmination of the dispensation, what a tremendous need there is of a people who are one with the Lord in what He is doing: and

the thought that has been in one's own heart again and again in these days is that of a priestly ministry, those who are, in the spiritual meaning of that word, "priests unto God," those who are brought by Him to a place of effective fellowship with Himself.

The Nature of Effectual Prayer

This word in Rev. viii is a very remarkable one. The effect of the prayers of all the saints is said to be the releasing of things in the earth: the power of God let loose, and the purposes of God accelerated. The first feature of that is that we get thunders and lightnings and voices and a great earthquake. The immediate effect of this

touch with God is that His power operates. God comes in. Things begin to take place that are not natural but supernatural. How often we have cried that God would come—"Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down" (Isa. lxiv. 1)—that there might be a real breaking in of God into things; not merely His sovereign overruling as always, but an extra factor, God breaking in, saying, This shall be no more, I come in here!—the hand of God at work intervening as well as overruling, the judgments of God let loose in the earth and things accelerated. I believe that is a very real factor in prayer, that there is such a thing as hastening the coming of the day of God; not sitting and waiting and knowing that one day it will be because it must be, but actually bringing it in, an active moving of heaven and earth that it shall happen. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John xiv. 13). "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. xviii. 18). I do not think that merely means that in a very blessed way in the presence of God our prayers are registered and that the Lord in His faithfulness will one day do something about it, but that situations actually needing a loosing will then and there, in the realm of spiritual things, be set free; because we need to remember that the heavens so often relate to the realm of the unseen, to that which is behind things on the earth. Heaven is not merely just the place where God dwells and earth where man dwells. No, it is the heavenly realm that governs everything on the earth, the spiritual realities behind what is happening, and the prayer of the Church has its impact there, if it is the true prayer of the Church. What is happening here becomes undone by what is happening behind. The enemy is checked, he cannot do the thing he would because there is a power at work beyond him. Praise the Lord for a power utterly beyond him that leaves him baffled! And here is the word of God, the word of the Lord Jesus that whatsoever we loose on earth shall be loosed in the heavenlies, and whatsoever we bind on earth shall be bound in the heavenlies.

Coming then to this passage in the book of the Revelation, we are told quite definitely that prayer of a certain character accelerates every-

thing. There were thunders, lightning, voices and a great earthquake. It is all related to the censer which that angel had. It is all involved in a people praying on the earth. We cannot lightly regard anything in the Word of God, beloved. It does not speak of the altar and the fire and the censer, and make no mention of the saints. No, there are the prayers of the saints. We have been finding prayer not easy of late, and the argument might be, Well, where are we getting? Our feeble praying may not do very much, especially if we are not very clear about what we have prayed for, or if our prayer is not very concerted. But "men ought always to pray and not to faint" is the Lord's word to us. I believe there is a real deliberate attempt to quench even the desire to pray and the faith to pray, a test of faith as to whether we will go on praying. Well, after all, are we getting anywhere? Now, the word of the Lord Jesus comes, "Men ought always to pray and not to faint", because He knows what the other end of things is. He knows the background and He knows what effect even the feeble praying of the saints sometimes has. Why? Because unto the angel was given much incense.

The All-important Factor of the Incense

Now, I think we need to get clear here. The incense speaks of the merit, the worthiness, the characteristics of Him who is everything to the Father, the One whose person is the only acceptable one; all those features that make up His glory broken up, as it were, and released as a savour. You remember in the Old Testament the details given for the components of that incense, every detail specifically stated; and then those components were to be beaten very small and all was to be put on the altar of incense, and the fire and the smoke of that offering going up was a sweet savour to God. He smelled a sweet savour, and with it came that warning that there should be none made like unto it. Nothing else will do in heaven but that savour. It is Christ; all that He is. Now here is an angel in the background continually adding in the incense. He is always bringing in the value of that sweet savour to make up all the hopeless deficiency of anything we can do. It is what Christ is continually brought in that brings prayer up to God, that gets it through. We must be careful that we do not take that as a cloak for feeble praying. There is a sense in which it is

deepest comfort that our feeblest praying has a blessed addition of His merit that gives it a value beyond anything we know. But, beloved, the "effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man" is something more than that. Righteousness as an active power, the righteousness of Christ as an effectual weapon, is what our brother has already been speaking of. It is actually a people one with Him who is in His Name all-prevailing. "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it" (John xiv. 14).

Priestly Ministry Requires a Practical Knowledge of

(a) The Blood

This brings us to the second point concerning the incense. What is the Lord doing with us all? He is, as it were, adding incense in. There is a transforming, there is a process, in which that which is not Christ is being found out and what is Christ is being fully formed, and the priesthood represents those who are intimate, first of all, with God's ground of acceptance. The priesthood has always to do with access to God and the way of life in relation to God Himself, and therefore the priesthood involves knowledge of the ground of acceptance with God. Priesthood always begins with the knowledge of the Blood, the meaning of the Blood, and the meaning of the Cross, the altar. What does the Blood do? The Blood is the only ground upon which sin and guilt can be accounted for and set aside, and to be in the priesthood, to be effectually in the realm of this ministry, requires a people who know the power of the Blood in their own experience. There will be a first hand knowledge, not of the doctrine of the Blood, but of the power of the Blood. The Lord must bring each one of us to a discovery of our own utter sinfulness and our own utter guilt, that we may have no hope except in the Blood. Oh, how the Lord was emphasizing it last week-end and again this week-end, that there increasingly has to be a discovery by everyone of us of our own utter "undone-ness"; that by nature we cannot live in the presence of God, far less serve God. "There shall no man see God and live" (Ex. xxxiii. 20), and the moment there comes a true meeting with Him and His true meeting with us we find that we have no hope whatever except in the Blood. The Blood alone is our ground of confidence, because of the fact of sin and the fact of guilt.

Well now, a true discovery of the Lord makes a discovery of the precious Blood an absolute necessity. We must know the power of the Blood. I wonder how much we really do know of our need of the Blood? I believe that, more than ever, the desire of our hearts to-day is that we should be those who know things in a living way and less those who merely have doctrine that we hold. Well, the Lord is just bringing us all into situations where we either know the thing itself or we perish. If we would know the thing itself we cannot just get it out of books. You find out the thing itself by getting into such an awful condition of things that you are at an end of yourself, and, in desperation as you cry to the Lord one day, it dawns upon you that "it is the Blood that maketh an atonement for the soul," and you come to rest in the Blood of the Lamb. Then you know the Blood, and you have a word to sinners that is a living word. Oh, not just doctrine which we try and make people believe, but a revelation that breaks upon them as it has broken upon us. We can say, Here is what God has done! If it does not break on them at once, let us not try to make them see it mentally.

(b) The Altar

Then the Lord speaks not only of the sprinkled Blood which is the life, but there is the whole burnt offering. There is that which is offered and consumed on the altar, which marks an end of itself, a consumption, and the priest is the one who has to do with the altar, the place of absolute utter yieldedness to God unto death. The Blood deals with sin and guilt, but the Cross is something more. The Cross deals with a nature, the Cross is the ruling out of a whole person, a whole man, a whole kind of being who goes on sinning and therefore would continually need the Blood. The Cross deals with the cause of sin. We know that only progressively do we enter into all its meaning, but the fact is that the Cross of the Lord Jesus also needs to be a settled thing in our life, that we are to be as those who once for all have taken our place in death with Him and have ceased from that life which is our life. The Cross has ruled out what we are, and we find that the altar is central in this matter of the prayers of the saints. "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service" (Rom. xii. 1).

Have we settled the question of the Blood, do

we know it? Do we know the settlement of the issue of the utter yieldedness unto death, even the death of the Cross with Him? That is the altar.

The Fire—The Attestation of the Spirit

Then further the passage speaks of the fire. We know that it is upon the basis of that death and resurrection union with the Lord that the Spirit is released. "Upon man's flesh it shall not be poured" (Ex. xxx. 32). But even in the case of the Lord Jesus, it was after He took His place typically in death, burial and resurrection that the Spirit came and rested upon Him. We need the Spirit to be the life of all that we do. Well, it is when the foundation question of our utterness with God is settled that we can trust the anointing. The Spirit Himself will come increasingly. We shall know life in the Spirit because we have repudiated another kind of life.

Now, there simply in outline are the familiar facts, but I believe we have to come back to these familiar facts. Unless our foundation is sure in these matters, we shall never in reality go on into anything further. That is the foundation of everything. The priesthood represents that as the very foundation of life; living at the altar and serving there day by day, all day long, serving in relation to the altar.

All of Christ

Now when we come on to Revelation xx. what do we find? That there are some who were not involved in the things that came on the earth. They did not receive the mark of the beast, and it says of them that they lived and they reigned. How did they come to live? Because they loved not their own lives even unto death. The living of whom mention is made there constitute the first resurrection. But of these it can be said that they are such as already beforehand have gone down by faith into death and come up in the power of resurrection, a people on resurrection ground. Of such are they who are priests unto God. What has that to do with the incense? It has everything to do with it. Our life is in Christ, and life in Him is newness of life, it is risen life. It is the life of the risen Lord, it is nothing to do with our life. We are in Christ, Christ is our life. The whole of the epistles may be summed up in just that—"in Christ"; a people in Him, not a people on the ground of what we are. No, the Blood and the altar get

rid of that. A people on the ground of what Christ is. There is our position and God is dealing with everyone of us to make that position a living reality. It is confounding us. By nature we are like those disciples of old. Hear them exclaim, Shall we call down fire from heaven? We all have our own reaction at first. We run ourselves against the impossibility of serving God, and the end of it all is utter defeat in what we are. If we hold on, the Lord brings us to defeat as to any ability in ourselves, any expectation from ourselves, and sometimes it has to be through terrible disaster. Yet is it a disaster? It is just there that the Lord begins. He says, My life is in Christ, it is not in you. What, again, is the Sermon on the Mount? It is just that. "It was said by them"—"but I say unto you". Did the Lord Jesus mean that His code of law was more intense than the other one? No, He brought the challenge of what He was over against the law. It is what He is in Himself that is now the standard. "Be ye therefore perfect..." Yes, and all that was quite impossible and all was beside the point until the Lord Jesus had died and risen again. Now He is the perfection, He is all that the Father requires. When He says, Be perfect! what does He mean? He means, Come into Christ and abide there. There is perfection, and as we abide in Him the wonderful thing is that God is actually conforming us to the image of His Son. Some of us are conscious of the time it is taking and how slow we are: but He is not giving us up; He is going on. He has set His hand to a thing. What wonderful faith Paul had, and what encouragement it must have been to the saints at Philippi, when he said, "...being confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will perfect it unto the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. i. 6).

We close with this. Our prayer is effectual in the realm of the unseen, and the Lord is working to have a people now through whom everything is governed, a people through whom this whole world situation is going to be locked up or loosed. To many here this is already something that is far more than just an idea. I believe it is in our hearts. Some at least are conscious that what is happening at the moment is due to prayer. But how much more might happen! Angles got ready to sound after that prayer, and, as those angles sounded, we find terrible judgments beginning to come one after another. Why? Because the saints, with much incense added in

to their prayers, began to touch God and everything began to move. Everything began to happen because of that despised company in the earth. That is our ministry, surely, and our ministry becomes increasingly powerful according to the measure of Christ. Yes, I am sure it is that. As Christ begins to be fully formed, things happen much more. When we go out, our preaching and all that we say needs to be much more the expression of Christ. There may be a little of Christ in it at first, but how blessed when there is more of the Lord and less of our effort; and how glorious when it is really a full stream of Christ coming through and it is not us at all. "To me to live is Christ", said the Apostle. "Thanks be to God which always causeth us to triumph in Christ." He is a man very full in Christ. We are conscious of being very small in

Christ, but the Lord is after the fulness. He is after His Son being fully formed in us, and as the prayer of the saints goes up, we shall find that there is much more incense in it, and those thunders and lightnings and voices will be let loose and the end will come. I do not know how others feel, but to some of us the constraint is to pray that the end shall come quickly; not a false end, but that our praying may let loose judgments in the earth. There may not yet be the rending of the heavens or there may be, but whatever the Lord is after will happen as the saints, on that basis of the altar, the precious Blood and the incense are found before Him.

May the Lord make us of that kind that prayer is effectual, that whatever we ask in His Name, He does it, and that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

C.J.B.H.

The Easter Conference

A Brief Impression

It was with a very particular sense of inquiry and dependence on the Lord that we sought His face this year in view of the prevailing conditions and possibilities, and equally definite was the encouragement given to set the days apart as a further opportunity for His people to gather together unto Him: and truly His working has been wonderful. Not only did He gather a large company together, but both by night as well as by day He commanded for us a space of complete quiet from alarms and perils that were upon us almost to the last moment—and which have been renewed with no little savagery almost immediately since. This provided a very practical and living background to the ministry of His Word that was given during the four days we were together. Indeed, taken together, the outward tokens of His power and the more inward sense of His presence and depth of His working combined to give an outstanding expression of the greatness and might of our God, while on the other hand the familiar facts of His grace, mercy, faithfulness and great goodness, and of His wonderful love to us-ward, have for very many become filled with altogether new meaning. The conviction grows that the more the whole sense of things is pondered, and the cumulative and far-reaching nature of His word to us reflected upon, the more we shall come to speak of these Easter gatherings as amongst the most significant in all the years of our history, though the message was occupied more with foundations than with superstructure and treated of matters which in terms were very familiar among us.

Though the Lord was pleased to use more than one of His servants, the message was clearly one, and from the one Lord. Comprehensively, the Lord sought once again to set before us His finished work in the Cross, and to reiterate again and again that the Saints must be occupied with that, rather than with their own experience or feelings—an elementary emphasis, but vitally needed right to the end of the course, as Rev. xii. 11 makes very clear. One feature which cannot fail to have impressed many, with particular reference to the later ministry, was the great simplicity with which the Lord's servant was enabled to speak both of the initial and more advanced matters of our salvation and the equally profound sense of the living depths that lay hid in the things said, along with that deep consciousness of the Lord's presence and active working that was with us from the outset. From the first the speaking was very direct and there was much that was greatly humbling

and of a nature that is "hard to be received." But if the Lord was bent upon giving the pre-eminence to His Son alone and staining the pride of all other glory, it was evident that even the hard-to-be-received word was intended of Him to be unto life and not unto death, to lead on into the fulness of His Christ. And now the prayer of our hearts is up to Him that we may be found submitting ourselves under His hand, that His word may be wrought out in each life in that way that shall foremost glorify His name.

Before turning to the briefest outline of the messages, we would remark that at least four countries besides our own were represented among us—Bulgaria, France, Germany and Rumania—while some from Scotland and a number from various other parts were able to be with us despite the difficulties of the times. To God be the glory for all.

* * * * *

The Lords message at the two opening gatherings was brought to us by our brother Mr. Harrison and centered in the following scriptures: Pslam ii; Isaiah ix. 6-7; Matt. vi. 9-10; Heb. ii. 7-9; Rev. xii. 10-11; Eph. 1. 19—ii. 6. Gods answer to the sum of things seen and outward was, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." An emphasis contrasted the prayer of Matt. vi., "Thy kingdom come," with the "Now is come...the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ" of Rev. xii. The Lord's position as set at the Father's right hand was shown to be the glory of an infinite accomplishment. This for Him had meant all that we know as the Cross; for the prayer "Thy kingdom come" leads on to "Thy will be done." So of the believer's position as already seated with Him in His exaltation, there has to be a seeing and an appropriation by the heart, which in turn is followed by a process; for all that we know as the Cross has to be opened as inner history in the lives of His own, if the goal is to be reached. This process would be prominently marked by the three features of Rev. xii. 11, and called for the complete submission of the will in glad yieldedness to Christ as Lord. In the later gathering Exodus xvii. was added and here Amalek was shown to be the particular type of that very thing that but a moment before had sprung to light out from the hidden depths of the heart of the people in their murmuring and complaining at the way. The Cross was God's means of deliverance from the whole way, mind and will of nature ("self") that we might serve Him in the newness of the life this is ours in His Son.

At the evening gathering Mr. Faunch brought us the Lords word, in which the all-important place of the Holy Spirit in the work and outworking of the Cross was dwelt upon. The contrast between the world's ignorance and inability to know the Spirit and the believer's knowledge and experience of Him through His indwelling was set in clear light from John xiv. 15-17, and as various practical features were examined the question "Do you know the Holy Spirit?" was pressed home. Without such knowledge no fruit of abiding value could be borne.

From this point onward, through our brother Mr. Austin Sparks, who was now able to join us, the Lord led us to a consideration of the Cross in the first five letters of the Apostle Paul, in the order we have them in our Bible; and it was pointed out how great a matter of Divine overruling this order is. Comprehensively, Romans dealt with the Cross and the whole body of the sinful flesh, but the great emphasis of Romans is upon the fact that every department and feature of man's need and condition is seen as dealt with in the Cross, that work of so great salvation, before ever man on his part has so much as turned to God, or even become aware of his need, and equally before the subjective work of the Cross is begun in such as believe. God would first lay a sure foundation for our hearts—that He is *for* us, and hence Romans comes first in Divine order.

In 1 Corinthians the issue was seen to be that of the Cross and the "natural man", a term which many relegate to the unregenerate, but which has vitally to do with the believer in respect of his deliverance from all confidence in the resources and abilities of his natural life as being of any profit for living a life unto God. The natural life is wholly under the power of sin and must be let go to the Cross, and it was shown how drastically God must deal with any natural strength that is allowed to persist. But if the cost and submission demanded was great, the Cross was no mere negative thing but an effectual way out into a true life of satisfaction in Christ that is greatly to God's glory. In this connection the meaning of true spirituality was dwelt upon.

The Lord's Day morning was devoted almost wholly to a time of precious worship and then later in 2 Corinthians we were occupied with the question of the Cross and spiritual ministry, and

here it was shown that the glory that, formerly had been outward was now to be known in an inward way, by an inshining into and in the believer's heart, with a consequent outshining of His glory from within. Spiritual ministry was seen to consist in the imparting to others of what was known and enjoyed of Christ in a living way in the heart, and we must learn to confine ourselves to this and not go beyond our measure.

Then a solemn message was devoted to 2 Cor. vi. 14-18. The principle of utterness for God was what was emphasized here and the Cross as God's means of dealing with all mixture. It was shown how that in his ceaseless effort to set something in place of supreme devotedness to Christ, Satan will lay hold of even lawful things and give them an unlawful prominence in the life to the cost of true testimony. An undivided heart through the Cross was the true safeguard against mixture and the encroachment of Satan under any guise upon Divine interests in a life or people.

With Galatians we reached the issue of the Cross and spiritual liberty. One constant device of Satan was to take the very things of God and out of what is essentially spiritual to forge a legal system of truth by which to lead again into grievous bondage. Bondage of any kind was foreign to God's thought and the express object of Christ's work in the Cross was that we might receive the promise of the Spirit," and by Him we must learn to "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free". In the course of things it was emphasized that the nature of the gathering together of the Lord's people is on the one ground of life and not of likemindedness or agreement with certain teachings or practice at this place or that. Any dealings that forced that issue upon us and delivered us from meeting together upon any false or mistaken ground were to be welcomed.

One further message dealt wholly with the vital matter of faith, based upon Gal. ii. 20—"The life that I now live, I live in faith, which is in the Son of God". That expectation whereby many look for a day or time in Christian experience when there is a kind of break through and the life becomes one long unbroken consciousness of the Lord's presence and directing was seen to be false and it was shown that not only at our beginnings but throughout the course our life was one of faith. Few will ever forget the illustration of the three men walking on the high wall—Fact, Faith and Experience. All went well so long as Faith kept his eyes on Fact, and Experience his upon Faith. But at a point Faith thought he would look round to see how it fared with Experience, and doing so lost his footing and fell headlong, dragging Experience with him in his fall. Christ was God's Fact and our eyes must ever be upon Him.

The closing gathering was a memorable message on the Cross and heavenly position and power. The meaning of being "in the heavenlies" had been strikingly illustrated by God's own dealings with us with regard to the gatherings themselves and then through His word to us. As soon as Israel crossed the Jordan they were in the land. Jordan spiritually is represented by the foundation that is laid in Romans, Corinthians and Galatians, and where this foundation is laid an "Ephesian position" is the spontaneous result in experience. It would be seen that it was these foundation features that constituted the believer's armour in Eph. vi. This was the position that was essential if we were to engage the enemy in victorious warfare, as the outcome and intention of God in the Cross of His Son. With this emphasis on our heavenly calling, the gatherings were then brought to a close with an earnest committal of all that the Lord had spoken, and of ourselves, into His hands.

So we conclude an all too brief summary, but we are indeed thankful to find that, at the time of our going to print, we have this much available space in which to make mention of the great goodness of the Lord and to put the many who will have been with us in heart over these days in touch with what the Lord has been doing among us. Again, to the Lord alone be the glory for ever.

K. P. O

A Faithful Saying

"If we suffer (with Him), we shall also reign with Him."—(2 Tim. ii. 12.)

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The Editor's Letter

BELOVED OF GOD,

With gratitude to the Lord we are able to send out this further issue of the WITNESS AND TESTIMONY, and we count on your prayers that this ministry may be maintained as long as it is needed. Letters from so many parts give us reason to believe that it is meeting a need, and therein we rejoice.

It is much on my heart that—in this letter—I should say a little to you regarding this ministry, for if it were understood, and the mists of suspicion and prejudice were dispelled, many more might derive the same spiritual help which is confessed to by friends in many places and all sorts of connections.

First of all, let me say that we have one all-inclusive purpose, and this is our one dominating objective, namely—THE FULNESS OF CHRIST AS THE GOAL OF ALL GOD'S CONCERN FOR HIS PEOPLE. Not a "teaching" as such; not a "movement"; and, *positively*, not a new sect or exclusive body of Christians! Our purpose (we believe God-given) is to keep this Divine objective before *all* of His children; to minister the measure of that fulness as He imparts and enables; to indicate what is shown to us as the ways thereto, and the principles which govern attainment; but *never* to seek to impose a system of truth or practice upon anyone. If the Lord has so dealt with us as to involve us in certain practical steps, we would never lay such steps as an obligation upon others and tell them that they must do likewise. We know only too well what a false position this would mean for all who would take such a course on such a ground. No; our business is to present God's fullest thought in Christ, to exhort and encourage to "go on to full growth", but never to coerce or impose. Such practical steps as may arise must come livingly out of a walk with God and spiritual crises in that walk on the part of everyone concerned, and *never* because any person or persons urge them. Let us be quite clear as to our position, for herein is all the difference between life and death, liberty and freedom. The relationship and fellowship between the Lord's people must ever and always rest upon the basis that they *are* children of one Father and that they share a common life. Life, not light, is the uniting factor; the one indivisible life of God in us all by new birth. Make anything else the basis and you at once divide and move apart. The only hope of any progress toward fulness is in that we steadfastly and resolutely preserve this simple basis. We must deliberately put back any being affected or influenced by earthly connections of Christians. It is not for us to be affected toward them by their connection with this or that denomination, sect, society, etc. Do they belong to the Lord? Have they received His life in the Holy Spirit? Do they truly love

our Lord Jesus ! Is He to them the very Son of God ? This is where our fellowship begins, and so long as they will not try to involve us in anything extra to Christ, but will allow a going on purely on that ground, we must continue in love and fellowship. We shall find that—apart from all such artificial grounds of difference—the matter of spiritual fellowship will be a stern battle and call for steadfastness, because of the forces of evil which are set against this mutual life in God. Let me beseech you to seek ever to be free of the very mentality which points in the direction of exclusiveness as among the children of God ; or that *inwardly* implies division because they have not seen what you have seen, and therefore do not stand where you stand.

This does not mean that the different associations make no difference in the matter of spiritual progress toward fulness. They do, and those associations are very often the grave-clothes which remain even after life in resurrection has come. But my point is that there is all the difference between our telling people that they must do this and that in the matter of their connections, and the thing coming up as a living issue resultant from a work in them of the Holy Spirit. The latter is the only way of *life*, and the only safe way for the future. Anything else is just a coming down on to earthly ground, and earthly Christianity, and that means division, limitation, and deadly bondage ! No one ought ever to have any fault to find if the course taken is the result of an inward work of God, and results in spiritual increase, wealth, life, rather than just having *adopted* a new position. We are suffering very much in our testimony because quite a few people have taken such steps outwardly without the real revelation of God's thought inwardly, and a mighty work of His Spirit. But this has always been the case when God has put His hand upon an instrumentality in relation to fuller purpose. Lot will follow Abraham ; a secondhand walk with what is of God ; and Lot will be a burden, if not a menace. Well, beloved friends, let us seek to keep on heavenly ground.

We are in a time of a great shaking and overturning of much of the shell of Christianity. If this should lead to dividing walls disappearing, and the people of God drawing together on the common ground of Christ, who would shed a tear for the passing of the material ? Just at present God is *doing* things. We are often distressed that there is no *voice* of authority for God either to the world or to His people. The ear of men is not in any measure captured by a voice of true interpretation. Yes, just now the world and the Church is without a distinctive voice which is unmistakably God's "Prophet" for the time. The reasons for this may be various, but God is *doing* things, and it may be He is preparing both an instrument and a way for the message of such. It is quite a question as to whether the situation has as yet reached the point when—if the Lord *did* have the vessel and word—the sense of need is so deep that prejudice and party interests (even among Christians) would go down as nothing if only the need could be met. Oh that the enforced suspending of much of long-standing movements and institutions will be the occasion for a consideration of their real measure of *spiritual* value in the light of God's thought as to the fulness of Christ, so that—if a space is yet given—it will not just be a going on again as before. This is an hour of great opportunity and demand for reconsiderations and stock-taking. Let us ask the Lord to make us all alive to the significance of this present hour, and not to be losing its meaning by living in an uncertain future.

Beloved, we greet you again in this "little while between", and assure you of continual prayer. Pray for us !

Yours in the Hope of the Gospel.

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.

The Whitsun Conference at Honor Oak

It was a testimony to the Lord's mercy and a token of the faith in Himself that He had wrought in our hearts that we were able to move toward the Whitsun Conference without any great sense of apprehension concerning the possibility of holding the gatherings. We now look back upon a season marked by the unflinching goodness and faithfulness of God, throughout the whole course of which we have met under day conditions as peaceful as in normal times and with nights almost entirely free from disturbance. Herein do we find further encouragement to press on with this Conference ministry, redeeming the time because the days are evil. That such a ministry is meeting a felt need was again evidenced by the goodly numbers of the Lord's children who gathered and by the presence of not a few for the first time. But it is not to any outward features that we look for the most conclusive evidence of the Lord's approval; it is the sense of His own presence as the Living One in the midst, and of His evident eagerness to reveal Himself to such as in lowliness of heart and mind are ready to wait upon Him. We can truly say we have known once again the joy and blessing of His presence and have heard again the voice of our Beloved.

The prayer with which one of the gatherings was concluded was that the impression of the hour, rather than the language used, might abide with us, to have the influence. This so truly indicates the character, not of one message but of all, that the attempt to reduce the Conference to writing presents real difficulty. It was to the hearts of His people that the Lord was speaking, calling us again to contemplate the fulness of His thought and desire for all His own and bidding us to press forward to a full realization thereof.

The Conference was rather strikingly in two parts, and while elements of each were in the other, it might be said that in the earlier part the Lord was appealing directly to our hearts, while in the later He was setting forth more expressly the doctrine that governed that appeal. But the emphasis was one—and lest in many words that emphasis should be overlaid and

missed we would here state it as follows—that the Lord's desire for all His people is the fulness of Christ, and that fulness is inescapably bound up with the true unity of spirit in the Church—a unity not in doctrine but in love. This unity is vital to the accomplishment of the Lord's purpose and therefore is the object of unceasing antagonism from the forces of evil. The "corporate" was the outstanding note, and this as a realizable end only by a deep work of the Cross in every member. We trust that all who read these notes will, before going further, seek the Lord for a quickened conscience that may be easily moved in any matter that may here be touched upon in which, for the sake of the Lord's testimony, adjustment is necessary.

The heart appeal to which we have referred came to us through the words written long ago by a fellow pilgrim—the letter to the Philippians. Most of the other letters of the Apostle Paul which have been given to us were written with the express object of setting forth some great doctrinal argument or revelation, of assailing false teaching, etc.; but the letter to the Philippians was written as the heart testimony of one Christian to other Christians, as on a common level with them—not from the standpoint of apostolic authority so much as the experience and aspiration of one who confesses that he has not yet attained his goal nor is already made perfect, but who is pressing on if by any means he may attain. 'This is what I seek after,' he says, 'and I call you to seek the same things.' And his theme is 'Christ our ALL, by the way of the Cross'.

Opportunity was lacking for an exhaustive consideration of the epistle, but emphasis was laid principally upon the following matters:

(a) Paul's complete emancipation from concern because of seeming disappointment of results, or the miscarrying of the course in things, or the evil speaking of others (even fellow believers) against himself; his confidence in the Lord; his rest of heart; his unquenchable joy; his ability to face calmly any situation in the will of God; his satisfaction with that will, whatever its expression.

(b) The solicitude of himself and his fellow-labourers for the welfare of all other saints.

The reasons for so great a measure of attainment as he records in these matters were examined and may be summed up as follows:

- (1) The entire absence of all self-interest.
- (2) His utter yieldedness to the Holy Spirit.
- (3) His knowing of Christ as his mind and

his goal, and this as seen particularly in relation to other believers.

(1) and (2) were introduced with the words of Phil. i. 21, "For to me to live is Christ". Christ is seen as the very motive of his being, the only reason and cause of all that he was and did, the sum total of his hopes and ambitions and objectives—how completely Paul was emancipated from all concern for himself and his own things is manifest throughout the epistle. It is easy to have the heart set upon something, even for the Lord—our ministry, the work in which we are engaged, some project we hope the Lord will bless—and to find that all this fails, or seems to fail to have His blessing upon it; and in such a situation how easy is disappointment and even offendedness against the Lord, and all because of some perhaps unrecognized personal element in our desire. Could we face the tests of bonds, and of affliction from other brethren, spoken of in Phil. i. 12-17, as Paul did and conclude with the rejoicing words of verse 18? On his first visit to Philippi (Acts xvi) how great had been the apparent contradictions to all that he might have expected from the Lord, but with what triumph of spirit did he and his companions face that situation. Why? Because the Cross had done so deep a work in them as to rule out all personal interests, thereby giving the Holy Spirit a clear way to bring up their spirits in triumph in spite of everything. "The supply of the Spirit" (i. 19) is ever along this line—He follows the way of the Cross, and the work of the Cross cuts a way for the Spirit. The sting is taken out of disappointment when we know, and the Lord knows, that we have no other concern but for Him. Behind such an attitude of heart lies all the sovereignty of God, and the one concerned is set free from all care as to human judgments about him or anxiety as to the issue of events, and he alone can truly say "I rejoice—do ye also rejoice with me" (ii. 17-18). The secret of joy is occupation with the Lord and detachment from self.

A brief message on the Lord's Day morning

based upon the words of Psalm 47. 4, "He shall choose our inheritance for us", and bringing into contrast the two-and-a-half tribes who chose their own portion with the plea "bring us not over Jordan" (Num. 32. 5) and the remainder of Israel for whom the inheritance was indicated by lot—the Lord's choice—(Num. 26. 55), re-emphasized the necessity for complete submission to the way of the Spirit in the whole pathway of the child of God. Only by such an attitude can the responsibility for all details and results be laid upon Him, and if He bears it the entire sovereignty of His Throne is behind the course of things; and what need remains for anxiety or distress, however many apparent contradictions may arise? This was Paul's attitude, and he had nothing of his own to lose, for he had already counted his own things loss for Christ (Phil. iii. 7). Self interest in any form is the enemy of the fulness to which Paul bids us press forward.

Two messages were devoted to the matter of (3) above, taken particularly from Phil. ii. 5—the mind of Christ—and iii. 14—Christ as our goal. We were reminded of the final picture of the Church in the Word, namely, the City with its single street of gold, having the glory of God. That City is now being built, and the saints that compose it are being drawn together into that one way by the drawing power of the love of God. That love in the heart can be imparted only as the result of a deep work of the Cross. It was pointed out that at Corinth there were several streets in which the saints moved—"I am of Paul, I of Apollos", etc.—with much breakdown of testimony and loss of glory to the Lord. Paul's remedy there was "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (I Cor. ii. 2), and in the Philippian letter his vision is of the exalted Christ in whose name every knee shall bow, to the glory of God the Father. As the way to this latter condition, Paul exhorts, "Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus". What is this mind? Amongst much else it is "the same mind" (Phil. ii. 2, 20: iv. 2)—a oneness in love, with no self in it. At Corinth the dividedness evidently arose from preferences as between men and ministries—a pursuit of a line of teaching, and a false conception of a truly heavenly position ("I am of Christ")—which separated the Lord's people. The Cross must slay everything like preferences for persons or teachings *as things*, and Christ Himself must be the centre.

At this point, as again and again during the Conference, a most pressing appeal was made for a spirit of true fellowship towards all saints. It was frankly recognized that many practical difficulties arise in such matters as relationships with brethren who may be parts of organizations, denominations or pieces of work from which things, *as such*, others feel they must stand aside; but the way through must ever be to recognize the difference between the things themselves and the children of God whom they include. That gap must ever be kept as wide as possible. Here is the ground of the sternest conflict and of the Devil's unrelenting assault. How easily the saints fall victims to his attack in this matter, and what a vigorous spirit of watchfulness is demanded of all—of those in the things equally of those outside—if the love of God is to triumph and the principle of one street is to be maintained. We must walk in love with any saint as he walks with the Lord, even though we cannot recognize or approve that with which he is associated. It would seem as if this was the very point upon which the church at Ephesus fell from its heavenly position and testimony (Rev. ii 4) inasmuch as love even for the Lord Himself cannot be truly professed if it does not find expression towards the brethren, or any one of them (I John iv. 20).

But how to meet the practical difficulties that arise? How to be set on God's full thought and at the same time keep an open heart to all God's people—even to those who seem to us to be involved in ways which are opposed to that fulness? The answer is simple in words, but only attainable by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let Christ be your mind, and the things in which there is difference need not destroy fellowship. Paul dealt with the matter along two lines: negatively—let there be no personal feelings and interests; positively—be concerned for the things of others. How prominent a place solicitude for others has in the Philippian epistle (i. 9, 24, ii. 4, 20, 26, etc.). The law of mutuality as among the members of Christ is brought into view. Where Christ is the goal and the prize set before us we cannot but be concerned for the prosperity of all His members, and the "on high" calling is seen at once to be not an individualistic matter but one which concerns the Body as a whole—"making increase...unto the building up of itself in love". The nearer we approach to the consummation of the age,

the greater will become the value of spiritual relatedness and the need of all the Lord's people for one another, and therefore the greater will be the demand for love of the brethren. To offset this there will certainly be an intensified antagonism of the Devil against all relatedness. The saving factor will be solicitude for all saints, a concern for the spiritual life of one another. This is true oneness of mind, the mind set upon Christ, the mind that makes Christ the goal and the prize.

The Cross will be called deeply into exercise for such an attitude to be maintained. Paul points us to one of the principal perils and necessities when he reminds us in Phil. iii. 20 that "our way of life 'abides' (not merely 'is') in heaven". He knew full well the strain and division brought about by those who allowed earthly things to influence them—even things associated with the Lord which were made to serve an earthly purpose, as with the Judaisers (iii. 2)—and that no true oneness of mind can abide on such ground. The peril is a common one for us all and not less in the light of things now taking place on the earth. We cannot "mind earthly things" and preserve the mind of Christ which is concerned for all saints.

The responsibility which the foregoing truth throws upon every child of God is a solemn one. All the high teaching of the Body of Christ and every profession of following a heavenly calling is negated by two members at variance with one another (Phil. iv. 2). The whole testimony of Jesus becomes a matter between persons, and the Lord looks to see an adequate concern for it on the part of every one of us. True unity lies not in doctrine but in love. A fundamentalism which is purely a matter of doctrine can be a cause of great loss to the Lord. Love can do a great deal more than argument.

Where do we stand in the face of this challenge? How is it with us in our attitude to our fellow believers, and particularly to those who are associated with things with which we feel we cannot be associated? What is our mind towards them—is it of Christ? Upon our response to the challenge, and our maintained attitude of love for all saints, hang eternal issues.

A message midway through the Conference based on Joshua iii and Heb. I. 1-3 summarized in a general way the points covered up to this stage and focussed our hearts upon the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as the embodi-

ment of all fulness and the way thereto. The theme was "Behold the ark...go after it" (Joshua iii. 11 & 3). The necessity for the new birth and for the enabling of the indwelling Spirit for all following of the ark—the Lord Jesus—was emphasized, and the principle of all conformity to His image was brought before us—"We beholding...the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image...as by the Spirit of the Lord". (II Cor. iii. 18)

With this background we came to the final day of the Conference. Our hearts had been stirred with a deep sense of challenge, and the re-emphasis of the message during the last day but drove it deeper. The Epistle to the Colossians and the book of Joshua were mainly before us, with Col. i. 9 as the summary of what had preceded and the starting point for what was to follow. "That ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will"—the whole comprehensive will of God; that is, Divine fulness as gathered up and represented in Christ—that was the Apostle's desire for the Colossians and for us.

It was pointed out that just as Israel of old had a literal history of which the record is given to us in the Word, so the Church is writing a second history of the Israel of God, similar to the former in all its spiritual principles and its all-governing purpose, and enacted under exactly the same will of God but in larger dimensions—a people brought out of bondage into Divine fulness. Everyone of us as the Lord's people is spiritually at one or other of the stages at which Israel was—some just outside Egypt, some painfully moving through the wilderness—some, alas, turned back through unbelief—some on the borders of the land, some over Jordan, but none able to say they have attained to the ultimate fulness of the inheritance. Was the Lord ever content with getting Israel merely out of Egypt? Yet multitudes to-day are content to be saved in the elementary sense of the term and to get others so saved. Was He ever content to have a people as His own in the wilderness, even if they had behaved themselves there? Yet many to-day seem satisfied with a life of uprightness and of sincere acknowledgement of the Lord, as if that represented the utterness of salvation. Was God's end reached when He had His people positionally over Jordan and in the land? It is one thing to be where the resources are and another to be

in possession of them. From every inquiry as to God's attitude towards Israel of old we are forced to the conclusion that He can never be satisfied with His people until they have come into actual possession of all that is "in the land" for them. A pertinent enquiry to our own hearts is this: Have we settled down at any point, content with that to which we have attained? If we have, let us be reminded that God has not abandoned His thought of fulness for us and is ready to lead us on into the good of the land if we are ready to move with Him.

The New Testament deals with all the phases of the pilgrimage, from Egypt to the fulness of Canaan. Each epistle is intended to set forth that fulness and to point the way thereto. A brief summary of Paul's letters, taken in the order in which, in Divine sovereignty, they have been arranged in the New Testament, was given as follows:

Romans. Sets forth the whole range of God's will, and shows that God is *for* us in relation to it all (xii. 2). The ground of the possibility of our attaining to it is the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

I Corinthians. Even those who are the Lord's have to be transferred from the life of nature (flesh) to life in the Spirit by the operation of the Cross.

II Corinthians. The necessity for Christ to be an inward revelation and an inwroughtness of experience, in order to a manifesting of the Lord. The inwroughtness of Christ is made a reality by the disciplines of daily life. By trials God is transferring our outward doctrine into inward experience and reality, so that we shall speak of Christ not as from a book but as from our hearts. The path to fulness is the path of suffering.

Galatians. God's desire for us is life and liberty by reason of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, as opposed to bondage and death by the lordship of the law—deliverance from external, imposed systems of legal obligations. The Holy Spirit will always lead in accordance with the Word, but never into death and bondage.

Ephesians. Fulness is a Church, a Body, matter—not for individuals as such, but to be known only in relation to all other members. This raises new demands and responsibilities—our spiritual life must be corporate and related. There will always be limitation if the principle of the Body is lacking—we must move in the

way of fellowship. For this a heavenly position is demanded.

Philippians. Fulness lies in the direction of Christ Himself being ALL—not merely in a general sense the ALL of His people but of every separate heart. A heart captivated by Christ is the way for each one of us toward this end.

Colossians. This was dealt with in more detail, as given below.

I & II Thessalonians. The consummation of fulness in the coming of the Lord.

To return to *Colossians.* Fulness in Christ is clearly in view (i. 17; ii. 10, 19; iii. 11). The Lord seems to say, 'This is the thing for which I brought you out.' Here the Church is regarded as over Jordan, positionally in the land but not yet in possession of it in experience—i. 13-14, Out of Egypt: ii. 3, The land itself: ii. 9-10, The Church in the land. What is necessary that we may exploit the resources of the land? The answer is, The energies of the Holy Spirit (i. 11).

The Holy Spirit is not committed to men, but to a purpose—to secure God's end in the Church. He is in charge of all our experiences with one end in view, namely, our spiritual fulness. Darkness of circumstance is not necessarily desolation, if He is in charge—He will give the "treasures of darkness", bringing into new measures of that fulness.

It is not for us to crave for the Holy Spirit but to yield to Him, for having come committed to a purpose He will fulfil it as we capitulate to Him. 'Israel rebelled and grieved his holy Spirit'. (Is. lxiii. 10).

Attention was drawn to the prominent place given in 'Colossians' to the energies of the Spirit in relation to intercession (i. 28, 29; ii. 1-3; iv. 12). The motive and object of all prayer energized by the Holy Spirit is God's full end, "every man perfect in Christ".

The final message of the Conference concerned the laws which are governmental in the matter of fulness. They were stated as follows:—

1. *The recognition of the 'Corporate' principle.*

In *Colossians* the people of God are regarded as being on 'corporate' ground. The new man of Col. iii. 10 is the corporate man, not merely the man of a new nature as in *Romans*. There is something tremendous in a Holy Ghost oneness against the powers of darkness. The shout of Joshua vi. 20 was of this nature. Expressive of the utter oneness of all the

people. Does the word in I Thes. iv. 16 concerning a shout associated with the descent of the Lord from heaven, contain some such suggestion and implication? Whether it be so or not, the keeping of the unity of the Spirit is an end time necessity for the fulness of Christ in the Church and for the overthrow of Satan. No wonder the enemy is so relentlessly set to destroy it.

II. *The Cross and its implications must be faced in a new way.* Col. ii. 21 corresponds to Gilgal of Joshua v.—the starting place of every campaign in the land. The Cross must deal with all natural strength in believers so that they can go on as a corporate whole.

III. *The Headship of Christ must be acknowledged in a practical way* (Col. ii. 19). Headship means that all authority is vested in the head. The cause of every division amongst the Lord's people has been the setting aside of Christ's headship, e.g. :—

Rationalism—the authority of man's reason taking the place of the authority of the Holy Ghost.

Ecclesiasticism—men in places of authority religiously; headship assumed by an individual other than the Lord.

This setting aside leads also to deception along the line of asceticism, exaggeration, etc., as Col. ii. 18, 19 makes clear.

* * *

The time available for the Conference gatherings came to an end, making necessary a conclusion at this point of the setting forth of the content of an inexhaustible theme. Our hearts noted the Lord's emphasis, and we trust that emphasis comes clearly to those who have read to this point. If it has, and the heart has yielded itself to the Spirit who thus brings to us the call of the Lord, there will be found in all concerned a new zeal for the true unity of the people of God as an end to be striven for, against the never-ceasing antagonism that assails it along many diverse lines—a new watchfulness against all causes of division, a new determination to maintain the spirit of fellowship at all costs, a new readiness to lay down the life for the brethren, a new seeking for the heart to be filled with the love of God, and a new and sustained burden of intercession for all saints. Practice and prayer are both called for, that we may be one even as the Father and the Son are one. Unto this Divine end let us strive in the energies

of Him whose one concern it is, and press on in the joyful assurance that wherein the oneness may come short of perfection while we are

here in the flesh, it will be triumphantly consummated in the twinkling of an eye at His appearing. G. P.

God's Spiritual House

No. 4.

A Representation of Christ in Every Place

“ And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it ” (Matt. xvi. 16-18).

“ And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church: and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican ” (Matt. xviii. 17).

“ For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them ” (Matt. xviii. 20).

“ Now ye are the body of Christ, and members each in his part ” (I Cor. xii. 27. R. V. MARGIN).

“ ...being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone; in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit ” (Eph. ii. 20-22).

“ As he is, even so are we in this world ” (I John iv. 17).

In continuing our meditation in connection with the spiritual house, I have an emphasis now in my heart which I feel peculiarly to be of the Lord. For quite a few, it will be no new word or truth, but even for such the fresh emphasis may be of the Lord. In any case, they must seek to co-operate in the word of the Lord for those for whom He may specially mean it. Let us, nevertheless, all seek to enter into the word in a new way.

We are looking at some of the major features and purposes of God's spiritual house to which we belong, and the one which is to occupy us now is this, that this spiritual house is here as being a representation of Christ in every place. We have seen that the Church is Christ. He is the Church, He is God's temple, God's dwelling-place. It is in Him that we find God. He serves the purpose of all that the Church is intended to mean. The Church is Christ. But now, so far as this world is concerned, the Church is Christ as distributed, though not divided; that is, Christ as in all His members by His Spirit; yet not so many Christs, but remaining one Christ. The Apostle raised the question amongst the Corinthians, as you know—Is Christ divided?—and there is almost a tone of scandal at the very idea that Christ should be divided. He remains one, and He is one, though in so many, and in that oneness of Christ in all His members we have the Church. Men will only find the Lord, where we are concerned, so far as Christ is in us. That is the purpose of the Church.

The Vital Character of the Local Assembly

But now we come to consider the special importance of local corporate expressions of Christ, Christ as represented corporately in every place. It is a well-known and understood thing among us that what the Lord Jesus said as recorded in the Gospels was but the truth in germ form. Because the Spirit was not yet given, He could only speak as in an objective way, putting things in a figurative form or in a very imperfect definition. All that is in the Gospels is like that, awaiting the day of the Spirit's dwelling within believers so that the much larger meaning contained in His utterances might be imparted. And, amongst all the rest, there is this fragment which we have read in Matt. xviii. 20—“ For

where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." We shall lose a very great deal if we take that simply as it stands in the Gospel. It was never intended to be taken just in that form. In the later revelation of the Holy Spirit, that passage, with all others, is taken up and its earlier meaning is made clear, and what we have as the fuller revelation is this, that Christ is peculiarly present when two or three are gathered together, because He has committed Himself to His Body. To put that round the other way, it is the Body of Christ which is necessary for the bringing in of the fulness of Christ. "The body," says the Apostle, "is not one member, but many" (1 Cor. xii. 14) But then the same Apostle says, "Ye are the body of Christ" (1 Cor. xii. 27); and he is speaking of a local company. Christ is peculiarly present when it is in a corporate expression. The Lord has bound Himself up with His Church for manifestation. It may be true that the Lord is in us individually: it is true; and it may equally be true that the Lord as in us individually will express Himself in us and through us as individuals, but the Lord is limited and very severely limited when it is only an individual matter. His thought is otherwise, and so He makes this statement. He might have left a thing like this unsaid. It would seem to have been quite unnecessary, quite beside the mark. But no, He said it, and when He has said a thing, it means something. Indeed, it bears all the significance of such a One as He is having said it. That means it carries tremendous weight if He says it: and He has said this thing in these precise words—"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." He might have said, Wherever there is one in My Name, there am I! Well, that is true, but the Lord did not put it in that way; and you notice that He is dealing with practical matters. He has used the word "Church." Certain people have to be dealt with by the Church, and when the Church deals with them, it is the Lord. That is what He is saying.

You must bring these two things together. Here is someone guilty of remissness in spiritual life. Well, someone go and tell him, and if he does not hear, take one or two more, and if he refuse to hear them, tell it to the Church. "If he refuse to hear the Church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican. Verily I say unto you, What things soever ye

shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." The Lord is in the midst in an executive way in the Church's administration, where two or three are gathered together. Not that I am going to deal with that phase of Church functioning, but I use it to bring out this principle, that there is a specific value bound up with a corporate expression of Christ, and a value of very great importance.

Some Fatal Hindrances to God's Purpose (a) Individualism

Now, let me stop here for a parenthesis. There are some fatal mistakes into which Christians have fallen, and one of these is the principle of the individual line in the place of the corporate. I say that has been a fatal mistake. It has been fatal to spiritual growth, fatal to spiritual fulness, to spiritual power, to spiritual light and to spiritual life. There are many Christians who are only concerned with individuals. Concern for the individual is of course right, but the Lord only saves the individual with the Church in view, with the corporate Body in mind. We must settle it and be very clear that this dispensation, from the ascension and exaltation of Christ, and the giving of the Holy Spirit, to the taking away of the Church at the end, is marked out by God as the period in all the periods of this world's history for securing, not individuals as so many saved men and women, but a one Body--the Church. Individuals only figure before God in the light of the Church, the one Body, and, if you and I fail to recognize that as the governing law of God's dealings with men in this dispensation, we are going to forfeit a great measure of what the Lord intended for us, limit and straiten our spiritual lives and experiences, and cause weakness in the very work of God itself.

I hope you have understood that. It is of very great importance that we should settle this. You will notice that these two things usually go together. It is the salvation of the individual that engages and occupies so many, and when they have got the individual saved, brought to the Lord, they have no further con-

cern but to go and get more individuals and bring them into salvation. Those two things go together, individualism and salvation in its merely initial sense of souls being brought to the Lord. After that, there is no more. That has proved a fatal thing in the history of God's interests, and to-day we are finding it to be one of the things which is representing the greatest difficulty to Christians themselves and to any fuller work of God. I mean this, that you everywhere meet a large number of people who have just gone that far. All that they have is just their own personal salvation, in the sense of forgiveness of sins, peace with God, those rudiments of the Gospel, and they have been there ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years; and to-day as you meet them and speak with them, you come up against one of two things.

On the one hand, there is an utter inability now to apprehend anything more than the simple elements of salvation: they have not got ability to do it. All those spiritual senses and faculties which ought to have been developed so that they could receive much larger and fuller revelation from God have been stunted, have never been developed by exercise, and in spiritual faculties they remain simply infants after all these years. I am only giving you the Scripture in saying that. You know, Paul had to say that very thing to the Corinthians—"I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not with meat." To the Hebrews it was the same: "When by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that some one teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk...solid food is for fullgrown men, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil." Paul had to deplore in his own day that there had been this fatal arrest and he said, in effect, Here I am, just full of Divine light for you, and I have to keep back all this that God has given me for His Church because of that! I say that is fatal for the Church—that the Lord should give abundant revelation for His Church's growth and fulness and functioning, and that there should be, after years and years and years, such a state that people are totally incapable in themselves of receiving it, understanding it. You meet that condition to-day everywhere. They cannot, after so long a time.

On the other hand, of course, you find those who after a lifetime turn to you and say, Oh, that I had known this before! Oh that I had been told this before! Oh, that I had had this years ago! Why not? It has been here all the time. It is because of this fatal individualistic line. For the greater part, the work of God since the early days of the Church, with the exception of very small things here and there, has been just on this line of getting individuals saved and leaving them there. It is fatal in the long run to all that God intended: and then people come up against the fact that it is so. Oh, that I had known it long ago! Well then, while the individual is very important, and has to be dealt with in the light of the other as an individual, we must note that, if the individual is put in the place of the corporate, nothing but the most sorrowful consequences can follow. That is one fatal mistake.

(b) The Prevailing "Church System"

Another fatal thing is that which is represented by the present "Church system." The present system which obtains in the largest realm is almost entirely a matter of congregations and preaching places, places where people gather together or congregate in a religious way—yes, maybe an evangelical way, yet but congregations—and they come together to go through a certain rota and, in the main, to hear something preached, and they go away. Now, while there are variations and degrees in that system, that very largely is the position: and that is not a corporate expression of Christ. That is a congregation. That is not a body. That is not the Body locally expressed and functioning. It is something less. What is the result? The same result as in the other case, namely, very little spiritual growth. I am being very frank now. I want to talk out of my heart because I feel the Lord wants to get us somewhere in this hour on this matter, and I must run the risk of treading upon sensibilities in order to get there. The result spiritually in this second instance is very largely the same as in the other case of the merely individualistic, and we are everywhere finding people to-day in that present Church system who have not a glimmer of light on the Lord's fuller purpose and do not know what you are talking about: and multitudes of them have no interest in anything else. This thing, this going to church, this con-

gregation, this going through a rota, this place of the public worship line of things has come into the place of the true local expression of the Body of Christ, and has set that aside. To-day, speaking of the Church in that sense, it is the Church like that which is in a state of terrible spiritual infancy and immaturity and unenlightenment after all these centuries, and people born and brought up in it do not grow spiritually. I know there are some who do despite it, but I am speaking of the thing itself. It has become a fatal menace to the real purpose of God.

(c) **The Making of "The Gospel Mission" to be Everything**

Now, there is a third thing, and that is "The Gospel Mission," which also takes the place of the local church as spiritually formed. Now, this is no denunciation of Gospel Missions, and I am not saying that Gospel Missions ought not to be. I am far, very far from saying that. I am, of course, not speaking now of those evangelistic missions that are held among the churches from time to time, but of that which has assumed the character of a permanent institution in numerous places. If then you take the Gospel Mission and have that as though it were everything that there is, and you remain satisfied just to go to the Gospel Mission where the Gospel is preached to the unsaved, and keep on the Gospel Mission line of things; well, you are simply dwarfing your own spiritual life. It is a thing which has in multitudes of cases just become a substitute for the spiritually formed local expression of Christ. Christ is much more than that, and you note that the people who live all their lives in the Gospel Mission are the people who are most terribly immature, spiritually ignorant and unenlightened. Oh yes, rejoicing in Christ as their Saviour—I do not question that—glorying in personal salvation: but oh, where is vocation, where is the fulness of Christ, where is God's eternal purpose being worked out? Not there. That just goes one step, and one step is not the whole road to God's end. Let there be these things, but let them be as auxiliaries to the fuller thought of God, as instrumentalities of the Church, and let them not be the whole thing. If they are, they will fatally affect the life of God's people and spiritual progress.

You see, the difference is this. Take a bunch of flowers, a bunch of roses or any other particular kind of flower. They are of the same

species, and they have the same life in them. That is a congregation, not a body! The difference between a bunch of flowers which are all alike, all sharing the same life, and the root and the plant, is a very big one. Give me the rose, root and plant or bush, and what shall I have? Well, I shall have this difference that, whereas the bunch of flowers has the life, it just goes so far. That is all and there it ends. It will never go beyond that. Give me the plant or bush, and it will grow. It may pass through a paroxysm of death for a season, but next year it will come back again and there will be more; and then another experience of dying and resurrection, and again there will be more, all in the same plant. That is a body, that is an organism, not a bunch. And that is the difference between a congregation, so many Christians, units coming together as units, and a spiritual organism, a local expression of the Body of Christ: and it is the Body which is God's thought, not a congregation, not the bunch of flowers. But oh, the Lord's people are so much like the bunch of flowers! It is true they are all of the same species: they are Christians, they are children of God, they are all sharing the same life: but oh, they are not there as one organism in one place growing with the increase of God, passing through corporate convulsions of death and resurrection and making spiritual increase in that way. What I have said about the present system and the missions is just like a bunch of flowers. Yes, they belong to the Lord, and they have the same life, they are all the Lord's children; but they just come to a certain point and they never go beyond that. That is true. I have had enough experience to make me sure it is true. Alas, many of them do not want to go any further, and many of them resent the suggestion that it is necessary to go any further. However, that is not God's thought about it. God's thought is of the root and the plant as a whole, a living organism here and there as representing and expressing Christ Himself. The plant grows and makes increase. The bunch simply goes so far and then it stops.

Now, Satan is not adverse to meetings as such, but Satan is averse to local families, local expressions of the Body of Christ. Hence you have the great history of Satan's persistent effort to scatter the children of God and break up their corporate life, to bring an end to their practical functioning together.

The Purpose and Function of the Church, as also of its Local Expression

So we have to see exactly what the purpose and the function of a local expression of the Body or the Church or House of God really is, and we can see it if we look at the type that leads to the antitype. What the temple of old was in figure, the Church is in spiritual reality, and what the Church is in spiritual reality as a whole, the local company is to be. It is remarkable that local churches in the New Testament are always viewed in the light of the whole Body. Thus Paul will say to the local church at Corinth, "Ye are the body of Christ." Now, it would not do for Corinth to take hold of that and say, You see, *we* are the Body of Christ! That would be giving a wrong meaning to it. The point in the inspired declaration is this, that every local company is in representation what the whole Body is: what the whole Body is in God's thought is to be seen here and there and there.

(i) The Meeting Place Between God and Man

Now we continue by way of analogy from the temple. What was the temple? In the first place, the temple of old was the meeting place between God and man. That is the first function of the temple, of the House of God. Christ was that in the fullest sense, in a far greater sense than was ever temple of old. Here is Son of Man and Son of God blended in one Person. It is tremendously significant that in Matthew xvi that very fact comes to light. Christ, interrogating His disciples, uses one term, and, in getting the Divinely-inspired response through Peter, the other term is used. "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" Peter said, "Thou art the Son of the living God." "Son of man," "Son of God": and that is by revelation of God. Here is God and Man met together in one Person, in one place. And of Himself the Lord Jesus later said, Destroy this temple, this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up again. Carnally minded Jews thought He was speaking of that material temple, but He was speaking of Himself, His own body. This temple—transition of thought from the temple in Jerusalem to Christ personally, the meeting place of God and man—that is Christ.

Now Christ corporately expressed is the Church according to revelation in the New Testament, and therefore where Christ is cor-

porately found in representation, and livingly functioning, there God should be met with, there God and man should come into a peculiar touch and relationship. The testimony of all who come into such a realm where Christ is really corporately expressed ought to be, I find the Lord there! and that ought to be enough. That is the answer. Do you find the Lord there? Does the Lord meet with you there? Ah, that is the first governing thing, and not other questions associated with gathering together or congregations; no, the Lord Himself, and that not now as a personal thing between myself and the Lord, seeing that I personally can have touch with the Lord anywhere, but now as a matter of the Church. Do I meet the Lord in the midst of that people? If so, I have come into the realm where God's thought is having expression: and that is a realm of tremendous possibilities.

Have you read that little book by A. J. Gordon, "How Christ came to Church"? It might do you good to read it, though rather perhaps from an objective or outside point of view. But let me tell you as quickly as I can the content. Dr. Gordon one Saturday was sitting preparing his sermon for the following day in his study, when he fell asleep: and he dreamt that he was in his own church and in his pulpit on the Lord's day. His was a very fine church with its Gothic pillars and arches. The church was crowded, and he was in the pulpit about to commence the service, when the door opened at the back and a stranger entered and walked down the aisle looking from side to side for a seat. As He got nearer the front, someone stepped out and showed him a vacant seat. Dr. Gordon goes on to describe how he went on with the service, and how his eyes constantly turned to that stranger. If he looked in some other way, he found his eyes coming back to him. Dr. Gordon said, "I registered the resolve that I would go down to speak to the stranger after the service." After it was over, and without showing noticeable hurry, he just as quickly as he could made his way down and tried to intercept the stranger, but before he reached the door, the stranger was gone. With great disappointment, he said to the man at the door, Do you know who that stranger was you let in this morning? The man at the door said, Don't you know who that was? That was Jesus of Nazareth. Oh, said Dr. Gordon, why did you not detain Him? I would love to have spoken to Him. Oh, said the

man, do not worry: He was here to-day, He will come again. (Well, as an aside, that double reply bore fruit in two volumes from Dr. Gordon's pen; the one on "The Work of the Holy Spirit," and the other on "The Coming of the Lord.")

Dr. Gordon says he went away with these musings—Jesus of Nazareth has been in my church to-day. What was I saying? I was talking about Him. How did I talk about Him? Did He discern in anything that I was saying the faintest tinge of unreality? Did I speak of Him, not knowing He was present, as I would have if I had known? What did He think of my manner, my matter, my conducting of the service? What did He think about our choir, our singing. It was all about Him, but was it worthy of Him? I wonder what He thought about our Gothic building?

That is the story in brief. But what has come to me is this: Is that our conception of things? You see, in that the suggestion is that the Church is one thing and Christ another, and that the Church can be in all sorts of respects certain things, and Christ quite another. Oh no, that is not God's Church. God's Church is Christ, and where you find the Church according to God, there you find Christ, and no disparities, no inconsistencies, contradictions: it is the Lord. All the other is not Christ at all. The Church is Christ, and if it is Christ who is pre-eminent when the Lord's people come together, God is there Himself. It is on the ground of Christ and Christ's presence that men meet with God. You know as well as I do that men cannot meet with God in us as we are. We cannot of ourselves bring men into touch with God. No priesthood as such can bring men to God. But if the Lord Jesus is in us and we can bring men into touch with the Lord Jesus we have brought them into touch with God. But if He is not there in us either personally or collectively, we may talk about God till Doomsday, but men will not meet Him. That is what the Church is when truly constituted. It is the ground upon which men meet God and God meets men, and that ground is Christ Himself; and there is peculiar and special value and significance bound up with this corporate expression of Christ in the matter of men meeting God. I believe that a far greater impact of the Lord can be registered upon men by a company of Christ-indwelt men and women being together in the power of the Holy Spirit

than can be by any number of isolated Christian units. A meeting-place between God and man, the vehicle of Divine life.

You see Ezekiel's temple. The house is now finished according to God's mind, and it is out from the house, down the steps, the river flows, deepening and widening on its way, and where-soever the river cometh everything lives. Trees are seen on either bank and everything is living, until at length it empties itself into the Dead Sea; and even that death is swallowed up in the life that is out from the sanctuary. It is this corporate expression of Christ, the Church, from which there is the ministration of God's life to men, and that is why the enemy wants to break it up. That was our point in our previous meditation. The scattering or dividing of the Lord's people, the making of the Lord's people into so many individuals and units alone, without a real corporate life, is a strategical move on the part of the enemy against that life. We know in our own experience that, if the enemy can get in between even two of us to set us apart in spirit, our life is under arrest and the river is not released until we mend that bridge, heal that division. That is very significant. The enemy is after that sort of thing. He is against the life, because the Church is the vehicle of God's life.

(ii) The Embodiment and Expression of God's Thoughts

Then again, the temple was the embodiment and expression of God's thoughts. Every stone, everything used, all size, dimensions and measurements, materials, they all represented some thought of God. God's mind was expressed in all. It was a symbol of a spiritual attribute. Peter, following up that word which is before us—"a spiritual house" (I Peter ii. 5) says a little later that the object of the spiritual house is to "show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." The temple was to show forth the excellencies of the Lord, the embodiment of Divine thoughts, and the Lord's people in any place should be the embodiment and expression of Divine thoughts. There should be there a disclosing of God's thoughts in a very blessed way, a coming to know the mind of the Lord for His people, a rich unveiling of what is in the heart of God concerning His own. That is how it ought to be; not just addresses or sermons, but a ministry of revelation under the Holy Spirit through an

opened heaven. That is of value to the Lord and to His people. But it wants a living company for that: and oh, how we know it! Sometimes we are not all alive to the Lord for some reason or other when we come together. Perhaps we are tired, or have been bothered, something has come in to cast down, and although the Lord has prepared for us some rich feast, something He wants to make known, He cannot; He is held back, and there is just a state of lifelessness. But let us come together in the Spirit, alive unto the Lord, and the Lord's thoughts come out and they flow. The condition of the company of the Lord's people very largely determines what kind of time we have. It very largely depends upon us how much the Lord can give us. The company of the Lord's people is to be the expression and embodiment of God's thoughts. That is what it exists for.

(iii) The Sphere of Divine Government and Authority

Then the temple was the place of God's government. Things were brought there to be decided upon, to be judged: and Peter says, "Judgment must begin at the house of God": and that is Matt. xviii again. Tell it to the Church, let the Church decide on this. It is the place of Divine government. I cannot stay with that, but you see that the corporate company, livingly constituted according to Christ, is of very real and practical consequence to God in this world now: and oh, how important it is for life's sake, for light's sake, for power's sake. that we all be consciously and livingly a part of such a local expression of God.

I do want to say this to you from my heart, that it is necessary for you, dear friends, to be a part of, to be in the midst of, to have behind you, a living, functioning company of the Lord's people on this basis. I know the difference, and many of you know the difference, the difference it makes in depth, in strength. For many years, I was a minister, as we say, of different churches, congregations: but oh, I know the difference between that and what has obtained since. It is not a difference of the natural calibre of the people at all, but a difference in kind. The one was a part of a system largely organized and run by man for religious purposes: the other is

something formed of the Spirit: and that is an immense difference. I know the difference when I meet things. All you can say is that those who have a living local company of the Lord's people of whom they are a part, have something that other people have not. There is measure about them. There is something about them that is more than you will find in the other things of which I have spoken, where it is purely individualistic or formal. It is very important. The Church is intended to be this, and a thing can only know its Divinely appointed resources as it functions according to God's intention. If therefore we are called for this as the Church, then we must be the Church in order to fulfil our great purpose and know our great fulness. I do ask you to think about this very seriously. It is a thing of no little importance, is this matter of the local fellowship of the Lord's people.

I know it may raise problems for some of you. "There is nothing in our neighbourhood and I do not know how it is possible." But there is an answer, and the answer is a simple one, although it may test you. If this is God's mind, you go to the Lord about it. 'Lord, if this is your mind, either bring me into such a thing or bring about such a thing where I am.' Hold on to the Lord for that. Brother Nee, when he was here, speaking about this matter and talking with one and another about it, spoke of how in one place this very thing arose between someone and the Lord, and how that one held on to the Lord for several years over the matter; and then how that, after holding on for so long, gradually the formation commenced, a second being joined to the first, and then a third, and then another. But they were greatly exercised for a long time, standing themselves into the meaning and value of God's thought and holding on to Him for it to find expression and become a reality. You see, that is just it. That is our ministry; through prayer to bring into being what God intends. If we can be put off easily, well then, we have not seen the vision, the thing has not gone very deep. That is only said by way of helping with the problem that arises. Let us be exercised about the Church and let the Church be of greater importance to us than the problem, then I think we shall find a way through.

T.A.S.

The Coming of the Lord

No. 3.

The Mission of the Holy Spirit in this Dispensation

READING: Gen. xxiv. 1-4, 9-10, 33-36, 42-65.

My consciousness this afternoon is of the difficulty of saying something that we all know, so I do ask you to ask the Lord that He may teach us even the things that we know, that we may know them better.

Among the many types of the Holy Spirit in which the Scriptures abound, there are very few living human types, but there is one given in the chapter which we have read, a very beautiful and, in some sense, a very full picture of the present ministry and activities of the Spirit of God. You notice the undisputed position of authority which this man held. You notice the complete reliance of the father upon his faithfulness and his trustworthiness and his ability. You notice how he held the place of steward of all the father's possessions; how he steadily refers back to his master; how his life is marked—his walk on this occasion—by that continual reference to, and dependence upon, God, and that continual attitude of worship and adoration. You notice that, though he discharges such an important mission, he is nameless and has no thought for himself. You notice his urgency and devotion to the one thing. All these things speak to us, and I think speak very clearly, showing forth in typical form the—I almost said—mysterious Person of the Holy Spirit. You know what I mean. Just as this man was so self-effacing, so anxious to bring his master to the fore and himself to be hidden, so the Holy Spirit in His ministry is always drawing our eyes to the Father and to the Son. So that He is in many ways truly set forth by the self-effacement and the namelessness (for the Holy Spirit is a title and not a name), the namelessness of this servant of the master. Now, this is not just a matter of interpretation of Scripture. It is of supreme importance, for, if our reading of the Word is correct, we may find in this story and in this man's activities that which provides the key to the age in which we live, and surely there can be few things more important than that.

Isaac, a Type of the Lamb

We have been speaking and thinking of God's Lamb. Isaac is a beautiful type of the Lamb. Previous to this chapter, he has shown forth that spirit of glad and meek submission to the father's will in going to Mount Moriah and there, in the simplicity of his devotedness to his father, un murmuring and unresistingly, has been typically offered—the lamb upon the altar. In Isaac's case, we know that the death did not actually take place, but we are told that in a figure he did die, and in a figure also it was as though he rose from the dead. Thus in Isaac we have this one whose character has passed through the sternest test and who has been found faithful and pure in the devotedness of his heart to the father's will even unto death. Now to the father's unspeakable joy, and to the joy of the whole household, he has returned from the altar, as in a figure raised from the dead; and in triumph now and in a new way installed in his father's house as son and heir, he possesses all that the father has. Words were spoken to him which we shall note in a minute were also spoken to Rebekah, prophesying and speaking of the unspeakable, the infinite fulness and fruitfulness that was to be his. "I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore." Then further, of his absolute supremacy and triumph over every enemy: "Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies." In type, this speaks of the triumphant Lamb, enjoying the fulness of fruitfulness, the supreme place of exaltation. That is the Lamb.

But that does not happen at the end of this dispensation: it happened at the beginning. Christ went to the Cross and died, was raised from the dead, and is already exalted to the place of supreme glory: and what is it that yet lacks for the manifestation of the glories of the Lamb in His fulness? Well, what lacked in the case of Isaac? A bride. So the father pursues his concern for his beloved son. Having committed all things into his hand (you remember we read

that), he now embarks upon a new phase of activity which is to complete the happiness, the joy, the glory, the life of his son, by providing him with a suitable consort to share his position; and, as I say, you notice the words that were spoken to Rebekah when she left her home prophesied of her, too, abundant fruitfulness and complete ascendancy. "Be thou the mother of thousands of ten thousands, and let thy seed possess the gate of those that hate them." That prophecy was to be fulfilled in her union with Isaac, type of the Lamb.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

Now that is all very familiar to us, and yet we can never be too careful about having a God-given understanding of our days and of the ministry and mission of the Holy Spirit. I myself have preached many a Gospel sermon from this very chapter. It lends itself beautifully to that purpose. But the thought of the Holy Spirit being here to call sinners to put their trust in Christ is not all that is in the chapter. Nevertheless, even that is a very good and a very healthy and helpful approach to the matter of the salvation of sinners, though to look upon it from the human point of view is simply to be occupied with the men and women to whom Christ should be made known. Now, it is impossible to understand these hundreds and hundreds of years that have passed in the light of that thought. The Spirit truly is here because God is anxious to save sinners, but it is impossible to offer that as the explanation for the age, for sinners are being born far faster than they are being saved; and therein lies that which to us is a Divine mystery. Why has the age gone on? Why are millions born in the darkness of heathendom? Why these hundreds of years, so that even when missions have reached their highest peak and Christ has been made known in many lands, all is so pitifully small in comparison with the vast mass of humanity? Let us look at it from this other standpoint, from the heavenly point of view.

The Spirit's Quest is a Bride for the Lamb

(a) His Dealings with the Individual Life

The Spirit is here in this earth on a mission, gathering out a people for the Lord, and this age has been prolonged and will be prolonged, so long as that task remains unfinished. It includes, very definitely it includes, the seeking

out of those who know not Christ, that they too, called of the Spirit, may answer as Rebekah answered that great question, "I will go"; but the task of preparing a bride for Christ is a far larger one than that. But that is the aim and that is the purpose of the Spirit's presence here on this earth: that is His work, that is what He is here for. There is in the Father's home a Son glorified as a Son, given the inheritance, exalted to the place of power. But that Son must have His life completed by the bringing to Him of a bride. Now, that explains the Lord's dealings with you and me. That is why He laid hold of us in the first place, and that is why He has dealt with us as He has. For all the time, He has the one aim in view, namely, to present to Christ a bride at His appearing. Therein lies the explanation of all the way that the Lord takes with us in our disciplining and in our sanctification, and therein, from our side, lies the incentive to bear the discipline; for from Rebekah's side, what constituted her, what made her able finally to come to that blessed day when she met Isaac face to face? Was it not a readiness of obedience to the Spirit? The beginning of her life was marked by that, and that is the characteristic of the life of those who come to that blessed position of sharing with Christ His kingdom and glory. The Spirit's challenge is to the human will. It is altogether a work of the Spirit. This is His mission, not ours; but for us there is the responding to the Spirit. The challenge to Rebekah is also the challenge to you and me. It marked the first moment of our turning to Christ. It is often so, in ever so many things—Will you? Will you go? Will you go My way? For that is what Rebekah did typically. She began a life of walking in the Spirit, travelling with this servant away from her own father's house, away from the things that were naturally dear to her. She began, if you like, a pilgrimage, a journey with quite a definite goal in view, but a goal which she could never reach alone. You see her complete dependence upon the Spirit. Who is it that initiates the journey? Does she or does the Spirit? The Spirit! Hers it is to respond. Who is it that commands and controls the journey, that knows the way? The Spirit! Hers it is to obey Him. Who is it that, even at the last, makes known to her the identity of Isaac? It is the servant: and it is the Spirit who alone can make us to know Christ and to see Him.

You see, the challenge personally, individually, is to a life and walk with the Spirit with that in view; not just with your daily service for the Lord in view, though that is included. But, you see, there is so much of our life which does not seem to have any relation to the service of the Lord, but it has a very real relation to that day of our being glorified together with Him, to the preparation of the bride for the Lamb. This walk in the Spirit is a matter of heart, of character, of likeness and conformity to Him. So that the foremost activity of the Spirit of God in your life and mine is not to empower us to do this or that, but to prepare us and lead us to the bridal day. That is the chief activity of the Spirit. Do believe that. Do read this chapter again to get the atmosphere of it.

You notice how the man is absorbed, obsessed if you like, with one aim in view. They put food before him, but he will not eat it. He cannot stop till this matter is decided. They say, Delay a little, ten days. But no, he says, I must go to-day. That is always a mark of the Spirit. The Spirit always says, To-day! There are plenty of other voices that say, To-morrow, ten days. The Spirit says, To-day! "Now is the accepted time" (II Cor. vi. 2)—"To-day if you will hear his voice" (Heb. iv. 7). But you see the urgency; the whole being of this man is bent on the one mission and the one goal. I believe that is a true expression of the activities of the Spirit of God as He would work in the children of God. That explains a lot, and it ought to be, it can be to us, a great comfort, a corrective. For instance, as touching our ideas, principles: we get them from the Word of God, we say, our plans, our ways, but our maintenance of that way and our strength of purpose or idea is not bringing us one inch nearer the goal, is it? This coming to the bridal day is a matter of a walk in the Spirit, and many a one has found that it is that sensitiveness and tenderness to the Spirit, what He is trying to teach us, instead of our strong ideas, ways and thoughts, even about the things of God. The same is true of the things in the daily life. I am sure that so many have lost so much of that preparation work the Spirit is trying to do in us because we have not been alive to the fact that He is trying to do that. At every turn in our lives: in our homes, in our conduct, in our relation with others, at every turn and

phase of things, what the Spirit has been seeking to do is to bring us into His way, to develop in us a relatedness of heart and spirit, and His way always leads to His Master's house and His Master's Son and to the day of glory. That is His direction, that is His way. The tragedy is that so often the children of God spend a great part of their day and of the days trying to constrain the Spirit to go their way, instead of learning to go His way. It is a life's work to learn to go the way of the Spirit. It touches every detail of our life. That is why the Spirit has come. That is the chief purpose of the Spirit's coming.

The Corinthians did not know this, though they loved to talk about the Holy Spirit, loved the manifestations of the Holy Spirit, and were glorying in the wonderful things that were happening among them because the Holy Spirit was there. Well, nobody is going to say that it was not the Holy Spirit, but listen to what Paul wrote to the Corinthians.

"For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy: for I espoused you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve in his craftiness, your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ" (II Cor. xi. 2-3).

That is the supreme mark of the Holy Spirit, the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ.

(b) The Corporate Character of the Matter in Hand

I spoke of our corporate life, for, mark you, this is not just an individual matter. It is not my habit to criticise hymns, especially in public, but personally I never sing. "Jesus, my Shepherd, Husband, Friend." I may be wrong, but I sing "Saviour" in place of "Husband"; because, though that spirit is being wrought in me as an individual, I can never as an individual be the bride of Christ, and the bride of Christ is not just a number of individuals. The bride of Christ is a people fitted together, fitly framed together, and not only in their individual purity and simplicity toward Christ, but in the living relationship with one another in Christ, fitted and prepared for Him. Otherwise there is no need for the Church: but there is a need—no need for the local assembly: but there is a need:

and while we want to beware of failing in interest in providing even a local assembly that is perfect according to the Scriptural pattern and according to the principles that are found in the Word of God, we are not interested in that as that at all. The Spirit's purpose in producing that is to lead us to the day of the marriage of the Lamb. That is the only interest the Spirit has; shall I say, that is the consuming interest the Spirit has, in me as an individual and in the people of God. Why must we live a corporate life, why must we learn to pray with one another, to strengthen one another and to bear with one another? Why must we learn to fit together as a people, each to take his part, not to desire another's, but to fill the one that is his? Why all this? So that people should know what we belong to? God forbid! Why then? Because that is a part of the Spirit's preparing of us for the Lamb. The Lamb's wife is a corporate company of people, and it is in that corporate life—it is still a mystical thing, I know, for no one company is the bride of Christ—but in the company and in the life something is being done in you and me by the Spirit as we walk in the Spirit that could not be done if we were alone, and that something is necessary to Christ for His bride. Well, there is so much more that one could say along this line, but I am seeking to keep very closely to the thought the Lord has brought into our midst over this week-end, which is not merely that of our personal preparation for the Lord, but of our service, of the devotion of our energies toward that day.

Fellowship with the Spirit in His Quest

I was speaking of John the Baptist yesterday, and he said—he who, by the way, knew Christ as the Lamb of God—he said that he was not the Bridegroom, and therefore had not the bride. "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, that standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is made full" (John iii. 29). We said yesterday that, though it is true that the people of God are called to that unique place of being the bride of the Bridegroom, there is a sense in which the Lord needs a new John the Baptist instrumentality, needs here on the earth the same spirit that was found in him, which is the spirit of the Bridegroom's friend, who has bent all his energies and finds all his joy in the

Bridegroom's consummation of His hopes and desires.

You find that same thought inherent in Paul's speaking to the Corinthians. You might think to yourself, if you look at it superficially, The Corinthians, then, are the bride of Christ and Paul is not; he talks of them as something apart from himself! Well, because there is fellowship with the Spirit. There is a ministry in fellowship with Him which is producing this thing in others. That is the position with John the Baptist. That, too, was where Paul was.

This then speaks, not now of our own personal life and sanctification, but of our service for the Lord. If we are going to serve the Lord in the highest way, how are we going to do it? Well, a child in the faith will tell you—by the Spirit. We can bring no true service apart from the Spirit, and certainly we can do nothing which has lasting value apart from the Spirit. Well, that is perfectly true. What is the Spirit doing? We have said already that the Spirit is bending all His energies toward providing a bride for the Lamb. If we labour in the Spirit, then we shall be labouring with Him for that purpose. That is something to work for, something to make life worth while. There are many people of God who have little incentive in their lives. In many ways it would be just the same whether they died or lived. They have no growing family to bring up, no special goal toward which they reach forward. Their life is a monotony of a routine; no hope, no aim in view. Why, the men of the world have that! That is what keeps them going, most of them. Some incentive, such as money-making or fame, something as an incentive buoys them up in their disappointments, lifts them above trials and criticisms, makes them men as men go. The greater the incentive, the more manly they are. Well, here is the incentive for us. Some of us need it badly. Here it is, an incentive, that which dominated this servant's life. He only lived for one thing at that particular time, namely, to find this bride, to win her, and to bring her safely to the bridegroom. This is the ministry of the Spirit and we may share in it.

You see it exemplified in the case of the Apostle Paul. This is the ministry of the Spirit. Oh, unspeakable privilege! You say you do not know what to pray about? Do you find life often disappointing? Here is the true urge and the true impulse and the true incentive, I

believe, of a life in the Spirit. It is the day of Christ's appearing and His glory, nothing less than that. It is not just so that I shall be there. I shall be there, by His grace; but the end is that His joy shall be fulfilled in possessing His bride for Himself. That is the ministry of the Spirit. If we can do nothing more, we can pray for the Lord to raise up those holy ministries to that end. There is a beginning. Without putting ourselves into any very high or prominent position in this matter, we can make this a real concern of heart in prayer, that such ministry as is necessary for the Lord to produce, to prepare and perfect His people for Himself, shall be raised up and shall function in the power of the Spirit. That is something to get hold of. Now, there is a prayer to pray. There is a beginning to make. Can we, as the result of this week-end, be quite definite with the Lord and with ourselves and make this deliberately a purpose of our lives, quite apart from how much we can serve the Lord in that matter in the public ministry itself. It may be very little, it may be not at all. Never mind about that for the moment. Can we begin here, that this shall be a constant matter of desire, and prayer and purpose of heart, that the Lord will raise up and sustain and open the mouths of those who are His chosen servants for that end. We said yesterday that the Elijah which is to come should be here and should be uttering his prophetic voice. That is something quite definite to pray for. It is the work of the Spirit, it is the preoccupation of the Spirit.

It is a beautiful picture of the Spirit that is seen in the chapter before us. The servant brings some of his master's good, the jewels—and you know how the Lord said of the Spirit, "He shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you" (John xvi. 14). The servant brings them and shows them to the girl. They are a token, a symbol, of what his master possesses: and all the time he is doing that to win her for his master. That is the Spirit's work, the taking of the things of Christ and revealing them unto us. What for? To win us for His Master.

A Condition for the Spirit's Presence and Resource

There is an important point that arises out of this. Did you notice what was said about the servant when he took those things, the jewels and the rings? It says he took them because all

the goods of his master were in his hand. The Spirit has the dispensing of all the Divinefulness. You never get anything from the Lord apart from the Spirit. Through Him there is ministered all the Divine resource in its fulness. What for? Well, we come back again to the same point. For what purpose did this servant command and control all the father's property? Well, at any rate, at this period, what he had them for and what he held them for was to bring the bride back to the master's son. The Spirit has all the fulness of Divine resource at His disposal. Yes, but for what purpose? To bring the bride to Christ. Now, do you see that? You are conscious of a need, you have seen lives rich in the power of the Spirit, and you have longed to know, by the Spirit, the resources that are in Christ, and so have I, and often have not known them. Why? Because we have wanted them for other purposes, and they are not at our disposal for that. We perhaps have not realized it, but we have wanted power to have power. We have wanted some blessing, perhaps not in that outward sense of power, but some inward grace and gift of the Spirit, maybe patience, or some gracious manifestation of the character of Christ. We have wanted it and we have not had it. What have we wanted it for? So that others would look upon us and know who we were, be pleased with us, proud of us.

Now, you see, the motive behind so much expectation and prayer and desire for the Spirit is really a wrong motive. We do not mean it, but it is so. Now, supposing we have but one motive for our lives. That was the case with John the Baptist, and John the Baptist was a man full of the Holy Ghost. But his only motive was the increase of the glory of Jesus Christ. You say, Yes, that is a result of the Spirit's presence. Well, it may be, but I think also it is a condition of the Spirit's presence. In the measure in which our heart becomes attracted toward this desire of the fulfilling of Christ's glory in His people, in that measure I believe we shall find Divine resource available to us. Paul found it so. It did not make much of a man of him, rather the contrary; it brought him into all sorts of difficulties and contempt of men. "He must increase," said John the Baptist, "I must decrease". That is the way; but inasmuch as Divine resource was needed for the purpose, Paul always found it was available,

and so shall we. It may not be available for a lot of things for which we would like it, but in the measure in which our hearts are set upon the Lord's goal, that day of His glory with His people and the preparing of His people for that day, in that measure the Spirit dispenses of all the Divine fulness to achieve that end. There is no parsimony, no holding back then. God does not give the Spirit by measure, grudgingly, niggardly, when the glory of His Son is in view. So that is the ministry of the Spirit.

That is the explanation, the hidden explanation of this age, and the close of this age depends upon the fulfilment of that. Some of us have thought that it depended on the preaching of the Gospel in every land. Well, the preaching of the Gospel is included, quite definitely included in this gathering out of a people, but it is not that. Other people have thought that

the end of this age would depend upon some event among the nations or among Israel, or some year or same date. There is no doubt that, when it comes, everything will fit in perfectly, but I believe the heart of the matter is found in this very chapter which we read together. The Son, the Lamb, has been slain, raised again, and all that the Father has has been committed to Him: He is exalted. But there lacks one thing for the full manifestation of that glory, and that is a people who have learned to respond to the Spirit and to walk in the Spirit, whom He can bring to that glad day of meeting face to face with the Bridegroom, never again to be separated. The Spirit will have plenty to do after that, as He had plenty to do before that, but that is what He is doing now. So may we walk in the Spirit, day by day with Him, for His Name's sake.

H. F.

The Lamb in the Midst of the Throne

No. 6.

The Cross

READING: Rev. v. 1-14, vii. 9-17.

In these chapters in the book of the Revelation we have the final summing up of all things. The universe is represented as gathered and as concerned, and in this final great summing up of everything we find right at the centre that which speaks of the Cross, the Cross central and universal in its significance. It is not only found there at the end, for here we see things according to God's mind as from the beginning; and wherever we look in the Word of God we shall find that the Cross occupies that place.

The Cross Basic to Everything

If we look back to that wonderful symbolical system in the tabernacle, we shall find the Cross there at the centre and at the circumference. The Cross is everywhere. At the heart of things there is the mercy seat, blood sprinkled; all vessels, all curtains, everything, from the inner sanctuary to the outer gate, all coming under the power of the Cross, sprinkled with blood. The same is still true

when we pass on to the temple, and then when we move from that to the antitype Himself. If what we were saying in a previous meditation is true, that the birth of the Lord Jesus took place about the time of the feast of the Passover, then we find that His very birth is the introduction of the Lamb, and He is the centre of all interest. The shepherds caring for Paschal lambs leave the flocks and come to *the* Lamb. Kings or wise men, whatever they were, from far off come to Him. Earth is interested, heaven is interested, the angels are looking on; and hell too is interested, as is very clearly seen by Herod's reaction. We pass to the day when John proclaimed Him to the Passover multitudes as "the Lamb of God who beareth away the sin of the world", and again the Lamb is central to the universe. Heaven is opened and takes account of Him, and it is not long again before hell lets it be known that it too is concerned; for immediately there was the encounter with Satan himself in the wilderness. Then we move on through His life on earth and we have to

realize that He is the focal point of the universe until he reaches the Cross : and it is quite clear that He is the centre of things there. Jews and Gentiles are there, heaven and the angels ; and hell and the Devil are there, for it is the hour of the power of darkness. And here at the end in the Revelation, all that is in heaven, in earth and under the earth is gathered ; arch-angels and angels, men out of every tribe and tongue and nation, all gathered here, and, at the centre, the Lamb in the midst of the throne. So then, the Cross is the centre of everything and it is concerning that centrality and that universality that I have felt very exercised that the Lord wants a fresh consideration.

When we speak much about the Cross, it must never be thought that the Cross is some specific line of truth or teaching, so that we compare it with other lines of truth and say, There is this line and there is that line, there is this particular doctrine and that particular doctrine ; some emphasize the Cross, some emphasize sanctification, some emphasize the Holy Spirit, and so on. If we did that, we should miss our way altogether. The Cross is not a "line of truth" : it is the very hub of all revelation. All other things issue from the Cross and lead back to the Cross. It is the heart of things. Of course, when we speak of the Cross we could use other terms. We could speak of Christ crucified ; and that indeed is what we mean. We could speak of the death of Christ : that is involved and implied. When we speak of the Cross, we mean every aspect of the work of the Lord Jesus in His redemptive activity. It all centres in and issues from the Cross.

The Two Sides of the Cross

A word about the two sides of the Cross, the objective and the subjective. These two sides must be maintained in perfect balance. We must not give a greater importance to either over the other. It is possible to give an undue weight to either. In the main, evangelical Christianity has to-day and through the centuries placed the emphasis upon the objective side of the Cross. The reaction to that, by reason of the recognition of the tremendous importance of the other side, may carry with it the danger of an over-emphasis there, and I do want, very earnestly and faithfully, to stress the importance of the balance of these two things. I believe that, so far as we are concerned, the Lord has given us the ministry

of recovering the lost or very largely lost message of the subjective side of the Cross, but I recognize that can be mischievous if it is taken out of its right relation to the objective side and can do a great deal of harm.

(a) The Objective Aspect

The objective side of the Cross is the very anchorage of faith. There we have the whole ground of our position, and there is no value whatever on the subjective side for us until the objective has been thoroughly established. In the first place, position is a matter solely and simply of faith in what has been done for us, and everything has been done for us in the Cross of the Lord Jesus. Altogether without our being able to contribute one iota to that work, it has been carried through in perfection for us. I am not going to stay with the objective side, but I do want to get that settled. As I have said, it settles the whole question of our position through faith. It would be a fatal thing for me to pass on to deal with the subjective side of the Cross until you are absolutely established on this matter of position. It is a most dangerous thing for anybody to be brought to the other side and faced with it until their faith is established and their anchorage of faith is fastened in the objective work of Christ in His Cross. We can never move from that—nor must we. That will be the ground upon which we shall be challenged right up to the end. Really our battleground is not that of the subjective work of the Cross, but of the objective. The whole purpose of the enemy's assault is to rob us of that initial and fundamental assurance as to our standing, as to our position, as to our acceptance, as to our relationship with the Lord. I think we know that, but I do with all my heart lay emphasis upon the necessity for every child of God being perfectly settled and certain concerning what the Lord has done for us as an all-sufficient work, carrying right through to the point where we are, despite our condition, through faith reckoned righteous, and to have such assurance about it that, with every fresh assault of the enemy, we are able to say that he cannot lay a charge at the door of God's elect. He cannot ; not because we are perfect ; but because of a perfect One who satisfies God for us.

(b) The Subjective Aspect

But then there is the other side. You might

think that the objective side is enough. But it is not enough. It is enough for acceptance, it is sufficient for standing, for position, but it is afterward the ground upon which God proceeds to deal with us, and the subjective side of the Cross has to do, not with our position, but with our condition. The objective side is related to our being in Christ, encircled by Christ, Christ encompassed, our being seen only in Him through faith: the subjective side of the Cross has to do with Christ in us, and with the making good in us of what has already been made good in Him. The objective side has to do with what Christ is in Himself—and never let us cease to contemplate Him in what He is in Himself for us to God, from God to us—the subjective side has to do with what we are and what we are to be.

The Cross is a fact perfectly established. It is an established fact, an accomplished fact, an achieved fact, an end reached, a work perfected, something which is settled for ever in heaven. In that Cross, God has reached His end. The Lamb will never be more in the midst of the throne than he is now. "Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet" is something which has been said, and obtains at this moment. But the Cross is not only a fact perfectly established, the Cross is an experience, with a crisis and a process, a crisis out of which a process rises. The Cross is a basis of operations, and it is also the instrument by which those operations are carried on. The Cross represents something that God has done, but it also represents what God is going to do. He proceeds and takes up His progressive work in us on the basis of His perfected work in His Son. That is simple: but remember these things, bear them in mind. So then, the Cross, as we have seen in our previous meditations, is the zero mark of the creation, an end with a new beginning.

Now, beloved, what we have in our hearts as we speak is not to give the technique, the doctrine, the teaching about the Cross merely. We have very practical things in mind. The whole question of our spiritual life, growth, development, measure, is bound up with this matter. We are constantly distressed by the slowness of our spiritual progress, the smallness of our spiritual capacity. We are troubled about ourselves in these matters, and those of us who have responsibility for others are very much troubled at times because of their spiritual

poverty and smallness. On the one hand, there is a largeness which is not spiritual largeness, and it is always getting in the way. It may take the form of activity, of doing, or it may be that of assumption, knowing everything and being unteachable, a strength of position: but we know that it is not spiritual measure, not real spiritual measure and value, and it is something which holds the ground in the place of the Lord Jesus Himself. On the other hand, there is the foolishness, the numerous unwise things, the doing of silly things in the Lord's matters, and there is that side of things in what is so small and limited, and it causes a lot of trouble and a lot of heart exercise and heart burning. The whole matter is one of retarded spiritual growth, and the limited measure of real knowledge of the Lord. One thing which marks that whole realm, whatever aspect may be presented, is a failure in real inward knowledge of, and walk with, the Lord. Well, this is a very practical question. It is a good subject for a workers' conference, and we want to know what is the cause of this state. Why are so few people really spiritually trustworthy so that you can count on them, to whom you can go and be sure that you will get some spiritual judgment and understanding? Why? Well, countless questions like that could be asked. We are dealing with the whole range of spiritual defectiveness. We are not speaking about that quite legitimate spiritual infancy where you have no right to expect very much that is mature. But we must rule out the time factor, even in that. Do not let us think of spiritual maturity in terms of time, of years. It is marvellous how one almost a babe in his, or her, relationship with the Lord, in the matter of time, can begin to teach others so early in a really spiritual way. They have leapt into things while others who, so far as time is concerned, have been long, long on the road, are still unable to give a real quota of spiritual value. We want to know why this is. We are all concerned with the matter of spiritual growth, coming to fulness and being of real value to the Lord.

Now that lies behind our present meditation, and I believe, beloved, that spiritual growth hinges upon the question of the subjective side of the Cross. Of course, if the problem be one of continuous breakdown in regard to position, there is something wrong with the acceptance of the objective side of the Cross. If you can never be sure as to whether people are going to be

found in faith, then it is time that the matter of position was dealt with and settled once for all ; but when it comes to a matter of growth and really positive value to the Lord, then it is a question of the subjective side of the Cross.

The Cross the Zero Mark of the Old Creation

There are some things that have to be settled, and the very first thing that has to be settled for everyone of us, as rooted in the Cross of the Lord Jesus, is man's complete incapacitation. The sooner we come to recognize that in our hearts, the better it will be for us. It is written in that Cross with letters for all to see, that man by nature, so far as the things of God are concerned, is utterly incapacitated ; that is, he has lost his capacity for the things of God, he has not that in him which makes it possible for him to enter livingly into the realm of the things of God. That may seem to you to be a simple or elementary thing to say, but I tell you that is a very, very serious and great matter. There has taken place a universal injury in man's being ; throughout his whole being from centre to circumference he is injured, and by that injury is completely ruled out of any place in the things of God.

In the matter of knowing, man not only does not, but cannot know the things of the Spirit of God. Beloved, in you and in me, until the Cross has become an experience, there is no faculty, no capacity, no ability for knowing anything about the things of God. Of course, that at once raises the question of the nature of spiritual knowledge. Oh, of course, we can know the Bible and all that the Bible contains. We can become familiar with the whole range of Biblical truth and doctrine and interpretation and know it all in that kind of way. But when we have exhausted it throughout a long life of application like that, we may still be without the very first glimmer of spiritual knowledge. That is a tremendous thing to say, but it is a fact, or the Word of God is not true. " Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God : . . he cannot know them " (I Cor. ii. 14). That is the word. Man is utterly incapacitated by nature so far as spiritual knowledge is concerned ; and what is true in the matter of knowledge is true in every other connection. If he cannot know, he certainly cannot do the things of God. He cannot work the works of God. No, in every way and connection man is incapacitated. So that, for the smallest frag-

ment of really living spiritual knowledge in any direction whatever, there has to be a miracle.

What is a miracle ? A miracle is that which transcends the ordinary operation of nature. A miracle is something supernatural, and there has to be a miracle for the first glimmer of real spiritual knowledge. It was that which drew out that spontaneous exclamation of the Lord when Peter said, " Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." That, as you know, stood over against His interrogation, " Who do men say that the Son of man is ? " And men were guessing, men were giving their opinions, their judgment, their reasoned conclusions, the result of their observations. The Lord says, ' Blessed art thou, Simon : flesh and blood is not the medium of that revelation, but My Father which is in heaven'.

Now, beloved, it is a very important thing for us to get down to this matter of the nature of our knowledge. I am going to ask you, How do you know what you think you know about the things of the Lord ? How do you know ? Were you brought up to believe that, were you taught that in childhood ? Have you come by that by going to meetings, by reading your Bible, by the general system of Christian instruction, information, impartation, education. How do you know ? If you were challenged on any one point, how would you account for your belief or knowledge ? It is not an unimportant thing to sit down with this inquiry, because there are multitudes of people whose heads are full of things, and who are not counting one little bit with their knowledge. Their knowledge does not mean anything. You see, when you have got it all, that whole universe of information, the fact still remains that by nature you are incapacitated, you " cannot." Yes, the very first glimmer of spiritual knowledge comes by revelation and only that which comes by revelation is living, is potent, is fruitful and effectual. That is true. Oh, I would appeal to you to be careful what you take on in the way of teaching. I would not ask you to adopt an attitude of questioning everything, and much less of suspecting everything, projecting your head into everything, but I would appeal to you to take everything before the Lord and say, ' Lord, that may be true ; as far as I can see, it is true. I am ready to believe that it is true, but that has to come into my heart with the quickening power of the Holy Spirit and become a living thing in me as

revealed, and not merely as something said or taught, proclaimed or believed by others; that has to become my own personal revelation. Oh, if everybody had all they have got on that basis, what a difference there would be!

Well now, our present point is this, that the zero mark of this creation seen in the Cross of the Lord Jesus declares that we have no capacity whatever by nature. The sooner we recognize that, the better. Really, beloved, in the realm of God's things, we are fools all of us, utter fools. If we go on long enough with the Lord, we shall know it, and we shall abominate our own foolish talk about the things of God. We are fools. Now, we can get down and use these natural abilities of ours, whether they be very small or seemingly of some consequence, and we can give out the results of our study, investigation and research on Divine things, on the Word of God, and accumulate a great deal; but I want to say to you that our brains are worthless in this matter. The brain will only be a vehicle, a channel, never a means of discovery. Remember that! The very best human brain is never an instrument or means of discovery of anything Divine. It cannot. Its use will simply be as a channel through which revelation will pass for our intelligence as human beings and as intelligent presentation to others. The brain is not the seat of revelation at all; the brain is not the seat of spiritual knowledge. So we can use the little brains that we have until they have exploded and we have got nowhere!

The Test of the Cross

The Cross is, in every matter, a new beginning. As it is the end and says that the old creation at its very best cannot get through, cannot get on in the things of the Spirit of God, it also says, A new beginning is here! You see, the Cross becomes the test. It is the test of all authority. It is the test of all experience; the test of all authority and experience is as to whether the Cross has been a crisis inward thing. When something is given authoritatively, that is, given out as from one who claims to have authority, I want to know the basis of that authority. By what authority do you speak? When anyone speaks to me about an experience they have had, that is not enough for me. Oh, do not be caught by people's experiences. The most dangerous thing is

for you to take on other people's experiences and say you would like to have their experience. Multitudes of people have been swept away by experiences of others. I know people who have been all their lives praying, praying, praying for someone else's experience. Now, when an experience is spoken of and set forth, that is not enough. We want to know what is the basis of that experience. We want to test that experience as we want to test that authority, and the test of all authority or experience is here, namely, whether the Cross has in this or that case been a definite crisis experience and become a living power. You can have experiences, tremendous experiences, an almost perfect counterfeit of Divine things rising out of your own soul life: and we are fearfully and wonderfully made. I lay special stress upon that fearfulness. The more we know about ourselves, the more terrible we realize we are. It is not too strong to say that. We are terrible beings, in the sense that the capacities of these human souls, of this psychic nature, carry us out into realms of experience, of phenomena, of practice, of influence and even achievement—oh, it is a terrible thing. And we can have experiences that we might call—it is not meant as a judgment or a criticism—"Pentecostal experiences," and I want to know whether that has sprung out of the work of the Cross planted deeply in that strong psychic life, and if not, I repudiate the experience. The only safe ground of experience is that you are crucified to your own soul, that the Cross has been planted in the centre of all your psychic capabilities. Romans vi. is essential to Romans viii. Experience and authority must be tested by the same instrument, by the same means. You speak with authority, you make a declaration, you affirm this: now I want to know whether that is the strength of your conviction or whether it springs out of experience which is the fruit of your being a crucified man. The strength of affirmation, the claim to know something, must be tested, and I want to look behind the authority and behind the experience, and say, Am I dealing with a really crucified man or woman? Does that man, that woman, know the Cross really and truly over against the natural life, the soul life: strength of mind, strength of will, strength of emotion. The test of everything is the Cross. That is the negative side, I know, but it is important that

we should recognize once for all that in the Cross we have been cut off from that realm.

Now the subjective side means that God is going to work back to His zero point, so far as all we are by nature is concerned. The objective side is that we have accepted that once for all. Objectively we have said, Christ is my only hope! Christ is my only righteousness! Christ and Christ only is my salvation! There is none in myself! Well, objectively, we are accepted on that ground of what He is for us unto God by his Cross. But then the Holy Spirit begins on that ground to deal with us and to work backward to God's zero point in the Cross, and the experience of every believer who is truly governed of the Holy Spirit is this, that the longer they go on and the further they go with the Lord, the further they go back. Their advance in one sense is balanced by retreat in another. That is to say, all the time they realize that they are being brought more and more to zero, that their own powers consciously count for less and less. To put that positively, they are more and more dependent upon the Lord for everything. But that is simply bringing us back to our starting point. The Holy Spirit has not come to undercut our position, our acceptance, but to make it good in our experience, that what is true in Christ shall be true in us, that the Lamb's wife, as we have put it, shall be conformed to the Lamb, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

We have been on the negative side almost entirely, but we shall not get anywhere until that is settled. It is an almost appalling thing to contemplate the situation to-day. In the light of that, if that is true, we might despair if we look out. Nevertheless, beloved, the test will come to every life sooner or later. It will come to the whole of Christendom sooner or later, and the test will come on this very ground. Questions will arise all around. After all, what has been the proportion of our spiritual effectiveness and fruitfulness? After all, what is going to stand through all the test? Questions will arise in all directions as to the genuineness and reality of the work of God, the knowledge which believers have. There must come, whether the Church goes into the great tribulation or not—we will not discuss that—but there must come in the very ordering of God a situation where the foundations of God's people are tested, the foundation of their knowledge of Him. Thus it

becomes a critical matter as to the nature of their knowledge of the Lord, whether really it is personal, experimental knowledge or whether it is information. The work in which they have been engaged, what has it been? Has it really been a case of God doing the work, or a thousand and one self-propagated things entered upon in the Name of the Lord? It is going to be tested. It must be tested. Every man's work shall be tried. That is the declaration of God's Word—"the fire... shall prove each man's work of what sort it is."

The Need for a Positive Attitude to our High Calling

Well now, if that is true, I think we can contemplate rather an appalling result over a very large area. And I would say this to you, that we must rule out all that sinister, evil, half-formed suggestion of the optional about these things. We must take positive ground. The Lord Jesus always sought to bring His disciples on to positive ground. "If any man love me, he will keep my commandments."—"If any man *love* me..." In saying that, He was only saying in other words, 'If a man really does not love, he will be looking round for second lines, for ways out. If a man really does not love Me, he will be saying, Is it really necessary? If a man love Me, he will not say, Is it necessary? He will say, Has the Lord said it? Is that the Lord's mind? Has the Lord given any indication that that is what He would desire?' The one who loves will always be found taking the positive line; not, Must I? Is it necessary? Cannot I get through without that?

Now, that is the test. And the point for us is this, Not to be like those who say, "Well, there are so many multitudes of good Christian people who do not accept it: they know the Lord: they are blessed, they are used"; and all the rest of it. Do not come on to that ground. That is not good enough, beloved. There were two-and-a-half tribes of Israel who refused to go over Jordan, who said, "Bring us not over this Jordan", although the Lord's mind had been made perfectly clear that all Israel should go over Jordan. Well, they got blessing; they had pastures at the other side of Jordan. Yes, they had a fair position. Do not be mistaken. Do not think that if you are not going right on with the revealed thought of God, He is going to be spiteful. That is not God. No, He will give you a good time. But the two-and-a-half tribes lost

in the end. They were the first to go into captivity. They were out of the full will of God; and that means something. We have to come on to positive ground. "If any man love me..." Is this God's full thought, then love for the Lord Himself means that I can accept nothing less. I will go all the way. My attitude for one dearly

loved is, How much can I do? How far has that one expressed a thought to which I can conform? That is the response of love, that is the positive ground. And I say to you that you can have something less than this if you like, and you can have blessing; but it is what ultimately ranks that matters, is it not? T.A.S.

The Normal Christian Life

No. 5

A Consideration of the Eternal Purpose

READING: Romans iii. 23; viii. 17-18, 21, 29-30; John i. 14-18; xii. 24; xx. 17; Genesis ii. 9, 16, 17; Hebrews ii. 9-11.

We have spoken of the need of revelation, the need of reckoning and the need of yielding, if we are to know the normal Christian life; but unless we see the objective God has in view we shall never clearly realize why these three steps are necessary to lead us into the fulness God has prepared for us. Before therefore we consider further the question of subjective experience, let us look first at the great Divine objective. What is God's purpose in creation, and what is His purpose in redemption? In Romans iii. 23 we read, "All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God". God's purpose was "glory", but sin thwarted His purpose by causing man to miss His glory. When we think of the question of sin we instinctively think of the judgment it brings: we invariably associate sin with condemnation and hell. The thought of man is always of the punishment that will come to him if he sins, but the thought of God is always of the glory he will miss if he sins. The result of sin is that we miss God's glory: the result of redemption is that we are qualified for glory. God's purpose in redemption is glory.

"Firstborn Among Many Brethren"

"For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren: and whom he foreordained, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified them he also glorified". What was God's objective? That His Son Jesus

Christ might be "the firstborn among many brethren". How did God realize His objective? "Whom he justified, them he also glorified." God's purpose, then, in creation and redemption was to make His Son "the firstborn among many brethren". That may convey very little to many Christians, but let us look into it more carefully. In John i. 14, we see that the Lord Jesus was God's only begotten Son: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father)". That He was God's only begotten Son implies that God had no other Son but this one. He was with the Father from all eternity. But God was not satisfied that Christ should remain the only begotten Son, He wanted also to make Him His first begotten. How could an only begotten become a first begotten Son? The answer is simple: By the Father having more children. If you have but one son, then he is the only begotten, but if thereafter you have other children then the former becomes the first begotten.

The Divine purpose in creation and redemption was that God should have many children: He wanted us, and could not be satisfied without us. Some time ago I called to see Mr. Cutting, the writer of the well-known tract "Safety, Certainty, and Enjoyment". When I was ushered into the presence of this old saint of ninety-three years, he took my hand in his, and in a quiet deliberate way he said, "Brother, do you know, I cannot do without Him? And, do you know, He cannot do without me?" Then there was silence for a few minutes, and again he said, as though he were returning from

another world, " Brother, do you know I cannot do without Him ? And do you know He cannot do without me ? " Again there was silence, and again the silence was broken by the self same words. I was with him for over an hour, but all I heard was the frequent repetition of these two questions : " Brother, do you know, I cannot do without Him ? And do you know He cannot do without me ? "

In reading the story of the Prodigal Son most people are impressed with all the troubles the prodigal meets : they are occupied in thinking what a very bad time he is having. But that is not the point of the parable. " My son which was lost is now found " : there is the heart of the story. It is not a question of what the son suffers, but what the Father loses. *He* is the sufferer, *He* is the loser. A sheep is lost. Who suffers the loss ? The shepherd. A coin is lost. Whose is the loss ? The woman's. A son is lost. Whose is the loss ? The Father's (Luke xv).

The Lord Jesus was the only begotten Son, and as the only begotten Son He could have no brothers. But God is going to do something whereby the only begotten may also be the first begotten, and then the Lord Jesus will have many brethren. Here is the purpose of God, namely, His " bringing many sons unto glory " (Heb. ii. 10). In Romans viii. 29 you have " many brethren " : in Heb. ii. 10 you have " many sons ". From the point of view of the Lord Jesus it is " brethren " : from the point of view of God, the Father, it is " sons ". Sonship is what God is after. But it does not stop there : God does not want His sons to live in a barn, or a garage, or a field, He wants them to share His glory. That is the explanation of Romans viii. 30 : " whom he justified, them he also glorified ". God wanted a first begotten Son with many brethren. How could He bring that about ? As to the sons or brethren, it is by justifying them and glorifying them. God wanted to have sons, and He wanted these sons in glory. He wanted to people the whole heaven with sons. That is His purpose in redemption.

The Corn of Wheat

But how could God's only begotten Son become His first begotten ? The method is explained in John xii. 24 : " Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone ; but if it die, it beareth much fruit ". Who was

that grain ? It was the Lord Jesus. In the whole universe God has only one grain of wheat ; He had no second grain. God put that one grain of wheat into the ground and it died, and in resurrection the only begotten grain became the first begotten grain, and from the one grain also there have sprung many grains.

The Lord Jesus was the only begotten Son of God, but from the resurrection to all eternity the only begotten is also the first begotten Son, and, in *one aspect*, His life from that time is found in many brethren. It was by means of the Cross that the only begotten became also the first begotten. Thus the Father-heart of God was satisfied, for He has secured many sons.

The first and the twentieth chapters of John are most precious. In the beginning of his Gospel, John tells us that Jesus was the only begotten Son. At the end of his Gospel he tells us how the Lord Jesus died and rose again, and how after His resurrection He said, " I ascend unto my Father and your Father " xx. 17). Hitherto the Lord had spoken of " My Father ", but now He has died and risen, so He says, " My Father *and* your Father ". Why ? Because He is now the eldest Son. By His death and resurrection many brethren have been brought into God's family.

The Choice that Confronted Adam

God planted a great number of trees in the Garden of Eden, but " in the midst of the garden ", that is, in a place of special prominence, He planted two trees, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Adam was created innocent ; he had no knowledge of good and evil. Think of a man twenty years old who has no sense of right and wrong ! Would you not say that man was undeveloped. Well, that is exactly what Adam was. What is the meaning of those two trees in the midst of the garden ? Adam, so to speak, was created morally neutral ; neither sinful, nor holy, but innocent. God put two trees in the garden so that Adam could exercise independent choice : He could choose the tree of life, or he could choose the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Now the knowledge of good and evil is not wrong. These two trees typify two deep principles. They represent two planes of life, the Divine and the human. The " tree of life " is God Himself, for God is life. He is the highest form of life, and He is also the source and goal

of life. If Adam should take the tree of life, he would partake of the life of God and thus become a son of God, in the sense of having the same life in him that God has. If Adam should take of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, then he would develop his own manhood merely along natural lines apart from God ; for he would have the knowledge of good and evil, and consequently be able to form *independent* judgment. So this was the choice that lay before him, either to become a son of God, depending upon God for his life, or to become a self-centred man, judging and acting apart from God.

Adam's Choice the Reason for the Cross

Adam chose the tree of knowledge of good and evil and thereby took up independent ground. The consequence was death, rather than life. There were two planes of life set before Adam, the Divine life in dependence upon God, or the human life with its independent resources. Adam's choice to develop his own manhood out of relation to God was sin, because he thereby thwarted the eternal purpose of God. He chose to be a man, perhaps a very good man, even a perfect man, but the end was death, because he had not the life of God in him as necessary to realize God's purpose in his being. Thus we all became sinners, subject to the law of sin and death.

Now we see the Divine reason for the Cross and the resurrection, and we see too the Divine reason for reckoning and for yielding. We must all go to the Cross, because what is in us by nature is a self-life. Adam chose a self-life rather than Divine life, so God had to gather up all that was in Adam and do away with it. Our "old man" has been crucified. God has put us all in Christ and crucified Him as the last Adam, and thus all that is of Adam has passed away. Then Christ arose in a new form ; with a body still, but in the Spirit, no longer in the flesh. He has a resurrected body, a spiritual body, glorious body. Since the Lord Jesus is no more in the flesh, He can now be received by all. The Jews revolted at the thought of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, but of course they could not receive Him then, because He was still in the flesh. Now that He is in the Spirit, every one of us can receive Him, and it is by partaking of His resurrection life that we are constituted children of God. God is not out to

change our old life. It is not His thought to bring it to a certain stage of perfection, for it is on a totally wrong plane. On that plane He cannot now bring man to glory ; He must have a *new* man.

What it Means to be "In Christ"

There are various planes of life. The human life lies between the life of the lower animals and the life of God. We cannot bridge the gulf that divides us from the plane above or the plane below, and the distance that separates us from the life of God is vastly greater than that which separates us from the life of the lower animals.

In China one day I called on a Mr. X. He was a very learned man, a doctor of philosophy, and a man esteemed throughout the whole of China for his high moral principles. But he did not believe in the need of regeneration, he only proclaimed a social gospel. When I called on him his pet dog was by his bedside. Pointing to the dog, I inquired his name. He told me he was called Fido. Is Fido his Christian name or his surname ? I asked. Oh, that is just his name, he said. Do you mean that is just his Christian name ? Can I call him Fido X ? I continued. Never, came the emphatic reply. But he lives in your family, I protested, Why don't you call him Fido X ? Then, turning to two of his daughters, I asked, Are your daughters not called Miss X ? Yes ! Well then, why cannot I call your dog Master X ? The Doctor laughed, and I went on : Your daughters were born into your family and they bear your name because you have communicated your life to them. Your dog may be an intelligent dog, a well-behaved dog, and altogether a most remarkable dog ; but the question is not, Is he a good dog or a bad dog ? It is merely, Is he a dog ? He does not need to be bad to be disqualified from being a member of your family, he only needs to be a dog. The same principle applies to you in your relationship to God. The question is not whether you are a bad man or a good man more or less, but just, Are you a man ? If your life is on the lower plane than that of the life of God, then you cannot belong to the Divine family. Throughout your life your one aim in preaching has been to turn bad men into good men ; but men, as such, whether good or bad, can have no vital relationship with God. Our only hope as men is to receive the Son of God, and His life in us will constitute us sons of God. The Doctor saw the

truth and that day he became a member of God's family by receiving the Son of God into his heart.

What we to-day possess in Christ is more than Adam lost. Adam was only a developed man, he never possessed the life of God ; but we who receive the Son of God not only receive forgiveness of sins, we receive the Divine life which was represented by the tree of life. So we have something Adam never had: we possess what he missed. God is bringing in a company of the redeemed who have nothing of Adam, and everything of Christ. The Divine necessity for the Cross is because nothing belonging to Adam is fit for glory ; nothing belonging to the old creation can enter into the new. The Cross must cut deeply, cutting off all that belongs to the old life, and resurrection must bring in all that is necessary for the new life. Everything must go till we can truly say, " I can of myself do nothing ".

God is bringing many sons to glory. That is what He is after. He wants sons, and He wants all His sons in glory. But how can He bring this about ? " It became him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

For both he that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one ; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren ". There are two parties mentioned here, namely, " Many sons " and " The Author of their salvation " : " He that sanctifieth " and " They that are sanctified ". But these two parties are " all of one ". The Lord Jesus derived His life from God, and we derive our life from God. He is from God and we are from God : so we are " all of one ". " Of " in the Greek means " out of ". The " First begotten Son " and the " Many sons " are all out of the one source. Do you realize that we have the same life to-day that God has ? That does not make us Divine, but it makes us sons of God. The life which God has in heaven is the same as the life we have here on earth : therefore we can live a life of perfect holiness, for it is not our own life which has been changed, but the life of God that has been imparted to us. Do you notice the whole question of sin has found no mention here ? Sin is connected with Adam, and even when the sin question is settled, we are only brought back to the point where Adam was. But redemption has given us far more than Adam ever had. It has made us partakers of the life of God.

W. N.

"Thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory"

No. 4

The First Adam and the Last

So also it is written, The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit... The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is of heaven. As is the earthly, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly (let us also bear the image of the heavenly—Margin) " I Cor. xv. 45, 47-49.

Here we have some distinctions and definitions which are of the greatest importance to our spiritual understanding and progress. There is one similarity, but for the rest all stands in contrast.

Adam a Figure of Christ as Representing Headship

The one similarity is in the same name—Adam, the first Adam, the last Adam, signifying, as we know, two heads of two races. That is a simple and well-known thing, that both Adam the first and Adam the last stand by Divine order and appointment as the heads of races. In them headship is gathered up by God. To that we shall probably come back presently, but now, with just that mention of the one similarity, we move at once into the differences: and the differences are immense.

The Radical Difference Between Christ and Adam
Of course, on the face of it, we agree and

assent to the fact that there is a great deal of difference between Adam and Christ. Without any thought we would agree to that, but it represents something more than we have perhaps recognized. The whole of this statement, this section of the letter, is tremendous in what it is signifying, especially in this matter of difference. What I mean is this: I think there are a lot of Christian people who have the idea that what God is seeking to do through the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus in atonement for sin, in the salvation and recovery of man from his lost state, is to get him back to the place where Adam was before he fell. Now, have you got that idea? Is that your idea of redemption, that you just undo everything that went wrong in and through Adam and restore things to that unfallen state in which Adam was before he fell? If that is so, you are entirely wrong. God is not seeking to do any such thing. He is not conforming to the first Adam at all, not even to an unfallen first Adam. He has gone immeasurably beyond an unfallen first Adam. He has left him behind altogether and has One who is an entirely different order of being from the unfallen Adam. The first Adam was a living soul; the last Adam is a life-giving Spirit. The first man was of the earth, earthy: the last is of heaven, heavenly. Therefore "as we have borne the image of the earthy, let us also bear the image of the heavenly." That marginal rendering I think, is a very good alternative, because it does not imply that all will bear the image of the heavenly. Let us make sure. However, we can leave the marginal suggestion for the moment and see what this says.

This heavenly Man, this last Adam, this life-giving Spirit, is of an entirely different order from unfallen Adam, of a higher order altogether. Now, that does not mean that the first Adam, had he not fallen but been obedient, would not have come to a time when he would have been transfigured and have taken on the heavenly order, been conformed to that order. But that is not our point. That might have been. I do not know whether we have very much to go on other than assumption or deduction in saying such a thing. Probably it would have been, but it was not. It did not happen, and therefore Adam remained of a certain order; and God's full order is not that, that is not God's full thought. That was not the goal to which God was working. God has something trans-

cendently greater than unfallen first Adam. His last Adam, His second Man, is of a heavenly order, a spiritual order, and, blessed be God, an order—and this is the whole point of I Cor. xv—which cannot know death. I Cor. xv is the chapter of resurrection and what the resurrection order of things is. It deals with what the resurrection body is, and what the risen man, unlike the first Adam, is not capable of, and what the risen man is beyond the possibility of knowing, namely, corruption. Therefore of the last Adam it is written, "Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption" (Psa. xvi. 10). You see the tremendous difference. So do not let us drop down on to that poor level of an unfallen first Adam. It might be a great deal better than our present natural condition, but it is not good enough for God, and it should not be good enough for us. Therefore "let us bear the image of the heavenly". There is your first basic and great distinction between the two, the first and the last.

Conformity to the Image of God's Son

That brings clearly into view what God's objective is. Having made the Lord Jesus the Head of His new creation, His new race, His objective is to conform the race to the likeness of its Head. Christ then becomes the one object in the eye of God concerning which and unto which He is doing all His works. Perhaps at some other time, we might look at that fully and see how all the works of God in the first creation were toward, and headed up into the bringing in of the man after His own likeness and image. And the Lord is now working in the new creation, in you and in me, to conform us to the image of His Son. We may take it that God has no other work on hand. God has only one work on hand, and that is His work. That is to be taken account of when we realize the Lord is trying to do something. The Lord is at work. We may not be able to see what He is doing at the time, but if we ask the one general, all-governing question, What is it that the Lord is seeking to do? the answer is one, and comprehends everything, every method of God, every means of God, every interest of God. It is reduced to one simple, comprehensive thing: He is seeking to reproduce His Son in us, to conform us to the image of His Son.

From eternity, God has been governed by a great desire to express Himself, and all creation

is God's way of seeking to express Himself. Now, when we look at the Lord Jesus, we see God realizing His desire, and then, when we look at His activity with us, we see God seeking in this yet more fully extended way, beyond the individual Person of the Lord Jesus, to reproduce Himself in the Church which is Christ's Body; that is, to make it Christ in expression. That is very simple and very elementary: but this heavenly order of which Christ is the Head is what God is seeking to bring about in a new race.

A Life-giving Spirit—Begetting in His Own Likeness

Then the next thing is this: the last Adam is a life-giving Spirit. Thank God for that! You see, Adam could only produce after His kind, and his kind was an earthly order, a soul order of man. He could not produce after the full, complete and final thought of God. It was not in him to reproduce himself in an order above his own level. Even as unfallen, he could not do that. The Lord Jesus is bound by the same law, but the difference is that as a life-giving Spirit, producing after His own kind, He has power to accomplish the Divine purpose, by bringing in this heavenly, this spiritual order.

You see, that brings us back to the simple presentation of these things in the Gospels, where we have all Divine principles in just germ form. There, in Matthew iii, the Lord Jesus emerges from the river, the type of the grave, in which one race has been representatively set aside and blotted out from the eye of God, and in His emergence, the new race is brought into view in its new Head—Jesus Christ. Immediately that Head and race are in view the Holy Spirit comes upon Him, and from that moment, every movement, every word, every time in His life, is by the energy and direction of the Spirit. The next step, as we have noticed was, "Then was Jesus led of the Spirit": and so it was to the end. You have, then, a new race in view set forth in its Head, and in union, as one with Him, not as two, the Spirit with the Son becoming the energy by which the end shall be reached—a life-giving Spirit. The Lord Jesus in us, the Holy Spirit in us, which means the same thing in effect, is the energy and power to produce or reproduce after His own kind. That makes a

heavenly order possible.

What Baptism Signifies

Now, that is a very simple word bringing you right back to the kindergarten, but it leads up to our testimony this afternoon. What are we doing? Having a baptismal service, baptizing people, following the steps of the Master? Is that all? No, we are testifying to this immense thing, that the creation of which we are a part by nature is no longer the creation in which we voluntarily live, but which for us is a closed realm because God closed it. It is shut down in burial, and now there is but One in view, our racial Head, the Lord Jesus. We are baptized into Him and as Head He governs all our concerns, interests, aspirations, and the one thing which is in view for us is conformity to His image; to be as He is, of the same order, heavenly and spiritual, in the inmost reality of our being. If you look more fully into the Word (but we will not do so now beyond this suggestion), you will find this, that everything to which God set His seal related to the making of the Lord Jesus Head. Pentecost was that. We have been asking in these messages what a life or church governed by the Holy Spirit will do. At Pentecost, the Spirit came upon the believers and they stood up, and began to speak: and what was it that they said as directed and governed and compelled by the Holy Spirit? "God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified" (Acts ii. 36). God hath made Him Lord, and, on the strength of that testimony, men in their thousands were brought under conviction. A new creation was ushered in and many were born that day. The last Adam abundantly saw His seed that day born from above, and God's attestation is always and only upon the ground of the established Headship and Lordship of Jesus Christ. You and I never come into the real living fulness of the Divine attestation until Jesus is Lord. We have blessing when we have Him as Saviour; but oh! the fulness is held up until He is established as Lord.

I trust that this is going to mean to us all a new acclamation of Jesus as Head, Sovereign Lord and Christ, and that will mean a move on in the heavenly order of things—conformity to His image.

T.A.S.

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August Conference at Honor Oak

A Synopsis

Principal Passages: Ezek. xl. 2-4; xliii. 10, 11; Matt. iii. 17; xi. 25-30; Eph. iv. 20, 21; John i. 4, 14, 51; Luke ix. 23.

Though it is a commonplace to remark upon the great difference in the spiritual experience of the Lord's disciples before and after Pentecost the theme is still eminently worthy of contemplation. The disciples had companied with Him for three years and had 'learned of Him'. But all this proved powerless to save them from the shame and breakdown that overtook them when He was seized and crucified, for all their learning, even of things related to Him, remained merely as truths apprehended or as impressions from without. But when, after His ascension, the Spirit came to them and took up His abode within them, Christ became an inward, vital presence imparting His own resources to them, and everything was changed. They had now not to learn of Him in an objective way, but to learn the very principles of His own life as within them: or, as the Apostle Paul later wrote, to "learn Christ". Their whole experience was a course of education which every born-again one must also undergo: the subject to be learned is Christ and the teacher is the Holy Spirit. Our August Conference was occupied with a consideration of some of the principles that operate in "The School of Christ".

We shall be able only briefly to indicate the

main lines in that consideration, but all of them may bring a challenge as well as a prospect of hope to every heart, and we plead for yieldedness to the Lord and for an attitude of faith as these words are pondered.

The ground of entrance into the School is that of yielding the complete lordship over the life into the hands of the Holy Spirit (II Cor. iii. 18). He must be accepted as alone the teacher. All other lordships must be deposed—those of our own or other people's thoughts, desires or interests—even as was true of the Lord Jesus Himself, who from the moment of His baptism in Jordan moved only and always under the government of the Anointing that rested upon Him. (And lest this thought of complete subjection to the Spirit be deemed harsh, let it be understood that the true significance of the word "subjection" in the New Testament is not that of unwelcome suppression, but of coming after and taking value from that which precedes: that is, of being brought into all the fulness of the One to whom we are subject. "Of His fulness have we all received.")

This condition being fulfilled, the Teacher will ever proceed with that work which is His delight—"He shall glorify me, for he shall take of mine and reveal it unto you". He will show us in a comprehensive way what—or rather Whom—we have to learn. This was His way in the days of Ezekiel, when the latter was

shown a vision of the House. All that he saw had its spiritual counterpart in the Person of the Lord Jesus (and later in the Church, His Body); for when the time was fully come, a voice out of heaven was heard, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him". In Him the comprehensive and the detailed thought of God finds full expression; and having set Him forth it becomes the Spirit's objective so to cause believers to learn Christ that the spontaneous result of their learning is their progressive conformity to His image. A presentation to us of the Perfect Object is, then, the Spirit's first work as teacher—to learn Christ we must first of all see Him; and a life governed by the Holy Spirit is one which is more and more occupied with Christ, with ever-growing wonder and glory in Him. The one who could say concerning the beginning of his Christian life, "it pleased God to reveal his Son in me", also expressed as his ambition at its close, after a life of tremendous fulness and ever-growing depth of understanding and revelation, "that I may know him". Is this our experience and ambition?

With the presentation of Christ to the heart, the Spirit's work of conforming us to His image commences, and we are brought to certain basic things in our education.

I. The fact that Christ is altogether other than ourselves.

In the Gospels we see the twelve under this discipline. How frequently they clashed with Him in thought and spirit—how utterly different He was from themselves. It would have been insufficient simply to tell them this. They had to learn it: and so must we. He in His perfection is other than we are at our very best, and our purest intentions are defiled and unclean before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. Our own righteousnesses are as filthy rags. We never can know what defilement lies at the base of our motives until the Holy Spirit cleaves into the depths of our being and shows us. We can produce nothing of ourselves which is acceptable to God. All righteousness, wisdom, goodness of every kind, is in Christ alone, and will ever remain so, even though He be in us. God never, under any circumstances whatever, uses, improves or restores our fallen nature. He accepts and works through Christ alone. Our education is with a view to our

choosing His way, with the never-ceasing denial of ourselves—the repudiation of everything in us by nature.

II. The utter impossibility of our ever being, of ourselves, what Christ alone is.

Peter and the other disciples came to despair about themselves: and so must we. But how long many are in coming there. Let it be accepted once for all that in us, that is in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing, and in one crisis settlement let us dispose for ever of all debate. The end of learning this lesson is "rest unto your souls" (Matt. xi. 29). Do we deem this lesson elementary? Rather is it one for want of which very many believers are still struggling in hopeless efforts to arrive at spiritual liberty and rest—"The rest of ceasing from myself to find my all in Thee"; while many men are still in death, deceived by the Devil's lie that there is by nature "a divine spark" in them which can secure for them acceptance with God, and be the basis for a life of self-improvement.

III. The Spirit's instrument of our education concerning that "otherness" of Christ is life in Christ.

"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. viii. 2). "The life was the light of men" (John i. 4). It will be first by the implanting of that life within us and then by its operation that we shall be instructed. Our own natural mind and will and desire will be all the time in conflict with the mind and will and desire of that One who livingly indwells us and we have to learn to refer everything to that Other One, the witness of whose approval is always registered in our spirit in life and peace (Rom. viii. 6). There is great need for us continually to lay hold of life by faith, for this life is potentially the sum of all Divine purpose, and by its operation alone can we come to His full end. No activity of our own can bring us there or make any contribution thereto.

To much emphasis cannot be placed upon the basic rules above mentioned. They are the foundation of everything and the continuing principles of all progress in the School of Christ. Whatever else may be said in these notes will be but a reiteration and an expansion of the above, having in every case these principles as the points of departure and arrival.

Let them then be well apprehended before we proceed further. In order not to lose important details we shall give a brief synopsis of several of the Conference messages as they were given, and such repetition as may occur will but serve to press home more forcefully the message conveyed.

The Necessity for Truth

We live in a false world: it is carried on by lies and the lie is in the very nature of man (John viii. 31-44). Man is trying to build a world on a false foundation. There is no truth in us, and our most zealous convictions and purposes may, like those of Saul of Tarsus, be utterly false (Acts xxvi. 9). Not one human mind or heart or will is incapable of a similar deception. And yet for the work which the Spirit of God would do in the saints the very foundation must be utterly according to truth, if the work is to abide. Nothing that is unreal and not wholly true must be allowed to remain. And what is the truth and where is it found? It is Christ Himself ("I am the truth") and is found only in Him, and not in us. Our need is to live wholly on the ground of what He is, not of what we are; and, in the School of Christ, the Spirit of Truth will undercut everything that is not genuine and expose all that is not truly according to Christ. We must be ready for the biggest consequences as the Spirit puts His finger on anything that needs adjustment. The alternative to yieldedness in this matter is that we shall sooner or later find ourselves in a false position, even if only on points. Are we prepared to hold even our strongest convictions and most settled conclusions before Him that He may bear witness whether they be of the Truth or not? Herein is a searching challenge that may involve immense consequences.

Until we learn to live on the basis of what Christ is, the Holy Spirit has not the ground on which to work to bring us into conformity to the Son. Here is the way of escape for us from that variable realm of our feelings—daily we may seem to vary there, but the truth is that the Lord in us abides unchanged, and faith must ever assert its reliance upon what He is. This attitude of faith will never cease to be needed. It is rather the great factor in everything, undercutting the work of the Devil who never ceases to seek to touch the spirit

through the realm of body or soul. Inward liberty is maintained by thus abiding in what Christ is, even when in more outward realms we are troubled. Knowing the Son is knowing the Truth that sets free.

The Necessity for Revelation of Christ

When the glory of God's thought, as set forth typically in Jerusalem and the Temple, had departed, Ezekiel was given, and caused to record, a vision of a new Temple which in every detail set forth the fulness of God's thought as in Christ. In New Testament times, when the Church had lost its true, heavenly character and its primal spiritual glory was departing, the Apostle John was caused to bring into view a new heavenly presentation of that which embodies God's full thought—the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. (It is of great importance to remember that John's Gospel and Epistles and the Revelation were the last writings of the New Testament.) The significance of these facts is very great, for it is nothing less than this: *that whenever there has been a loss of glory among His people, God's reaction is to bring His Son again into view, in the greatness of His spiritual and heavenly meaning.* As in Ezekiel's vision, everything is judged in the light of the heavenly man with the measuring reed in His hand. Everything for the Lord and for His people is bound up with a heart revelation of the Lord Jesus—not in the recovery of a technique or the reaffirmation of a doctrine; these may be a framework, but can never of themselves lead to a recovery of life and glory. Seeing the Son by God's act of opening the eyes leads to all else. With reference to this the following important observations may be made:

(a) God has shut up everything of Himself within His Son. It is not possible now to know or have anything of God outside of the Lord Jesus.

(b) It is not possible to have or know anything of all the fulness in the Son without a revelation thereof in an inward way. This demands a miracle by the Holy Ghost in the case of every man and woman, for, like the man in John ix., all are born blind and nothing whatever of that new world which Christ is can be known until the eyes are opened by Divine power.

(c) God always keeps the revelation of Him-

self in Christ bound up with practical situations.

It is not from the reading of the Bible merely that the revelation can be gained practically. The Book contains a technique, but we cannot just extract the technique and apply it. We must know the Person who is the Word and God will put us into practical situations where only a new vital discovery of Christ can save us. This is the way of our instruction in the School, and in this fact too lies our hope in a time of darkness—in the trial we may expect a new discovery of our Lord.

The Necessity for a Death

The words of the Lord Jesus to Nathanael in John i. 51 were evidently intended to bring to remembrance the experience of Jacob at Bethel. The inference plainly is that the Lord Himself is Bethel, the House of God—that which is not of earth only nor of heaven only, but an in-between place, the place where God speaks and is revealed. "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." The House of God as represented by the Tabernacle in the wilderness, the Temple or the Church, is Christ and not other than He. He, being God's House, fulfils every function and detail set forth in those other houses. He is the Holy of Holies where God dwells. He is the Oracle in and from which God speaks with the voice of final authority. He is the lamb: He is everything. Now what is the House of God in its fullest corporate sense? It is that which is "in Christ". We are only in the House of God because and if we are in Christ. This means a tremendous exclusion of all that is not in Christ, and in this exclusion is found all that we are by nature. The difference between us and Christ is the depth and fulness of a grave. The only way in for us is as by a resurrection—and that not *our* resurrection but His. There can be no passing over of anything of the old realm. Thus in baptism is set forth the truth of the utter end of us as in our natural life, and that in us as partakers of His resurrection it is He that lives, not we. In the School of Christ the Holy Spirit will ever be making real to and in us (God's settled fact—that we have died (not that we have to die)—and our education will henceforth be in refusing to listen to the dictates of our own nature and in living wholly under the government of God, even as the Lord Himself did from the moment of His typical death and

resurrection in Jordan. Do we know experimentally the power of His mighty death?

The Necessity for the Light of Life

God's purpose is that in due time there shall be a vessel "having the glory of God", through which His glory shall shine forth to the universe—a people full of light, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. Towards this end He begins to move immediately a child of His is born from above. But, as Saul of Tarsus learned on the Damascus road, the natural man cannot bear that glory, nor can he at all manifest it. He must be put away in the death of Christ, for glory belongs only to what is in Christ in resurrection. What is the way into Christ and how do we derive the light from Him? By receiving the life of which it is the product and the effect (John i. 4). And how does the fulness of that life become ours? By death to what we are in ourselves, even as a corn of wheat dies. There, buried with Him in His death, is the break-up of all that was formerly regarded as something of worth, the marring of beauty, the discovery of corruption, the cry as with the prophet "Woe is me, for I am undone"—and then as out from that grave there is an increased transmission of His life to us in resurrection. The process begins in us with the crisis of letting go our own life—not only as sinners but as men. It continues right through our time here on the basis of our taking up the cross daily (Luke ix. 23). In the School of Christ instruction in this matter comes by the trials of the common daily experiences, occasion being provided in them for making way more and more for the life of the Lord Jesus to be manifested. Shall we not seek for grace to bear fruit thus to His glory, rather than ask for the speedy removal of a trial which is not only an occasion of suffering but also an opportunity of glory?

The Way to an Opened Heaven

We err if we think of the Gospels as dealing with elementary matters and the Epistles with those more advanced. The Epistles are the explanation and interpretation of Christ, and though they set forth doctrines and lines of truth, we must never be occupied with the interpretation of the doctrines to the missing of the Person of Christ. For the knowledge of Him we must be constituted with an entirely

new set of faculties (John iii. 3)—those of nature can never be the channel of Divine communication. Nathanael (the man in whom there was no "Jacob") was promised opened heavens (John i. 47 & 51). To know an opened heaven is to abide where God is coming to you in communion and all the good of heaven is being communicated. But only a Nathanael, a guileless man, can know this: the Jacob element must be laid low, as was the case with him who first fled from Bethel and could only return there to abide after long discipline. Jabbok stands at the threshold of the School of Christ; but the Cross that slays the natural life also rends the heavens and parts the veil asunder and causes Christ to be known in the heart as God's consummate thought for man. It was not as King of Israel only but as Son of Man—the representative of every man—that the Lord spake to Nathanael. Nor was it to a specially privileged apostle that the words were addressed but to a man on the outer rim of those who followed Him. Herein is the promise secured to every one of us—an opened heaven is the birthright of all in Christ. Do we know in experience this priceless boon; or is there still a dome over our heads that seems to shut out the knowledge of heavenly things? The Cross inwrought is the way through.

The Governing Law—the Glory of God

In the early chapters of John's Gospel there are several incidents recorded which represent zero points in the experience of those concerned, and all find a focus in the story of Lazarus in Chapter xi. There was an end indeed: and, not for want of love, but for the glory of God the Lord tarried away from the scene, in order that death might be full and final. The purpose is clear: the glory of God lay, and ever does lie, not in the recovery of nature but in resurrection. His love is ever under the law of the glory of God, and that glory is bound up with resurrection. Love demands that all shall come to the place where only resurrection can meet the need. All that God can use is His Son. The measure of our ultimate glory will be the measure of Christ in us, and this in turn will be the measure in which we have by faith made Him the basis of our living. In the School of Christ we shall be taught this way of resurrection by a succession of zero experiences—continuing to the end of our course. Shall we murmur at this and say, Lord, if Thou hadst been here my brother had not died—or regard each fresh experience as the Lord Himself did and say, "Father, glorify thy Name"?

G.P.

God's Spiritual House

No. 5.

The Governing Law of the House of God

READING: Ezek. xlvi. 1-12; I Pet. ii. 4-5.

We are not going forward now with a further consideration of the major features of the spiritual house of God, but are leaving that for another time. We are going to bring those features already considered to the measuring line of their own governing law, which is that of life and spirituality. "Living", "spiritual", they are two great words in this passage—"a living stone", living stones", "a spiritual house", "spiritual sacrifices".

Lest anyone should be in difficulty about that second word, spirituality, let us stay for the briefest moment to say that spirituality just means government by the Holy Spirit: but a

government by the Holy Spirit in such a way as to make us one with the Holy Spirit in all His standards, in all His ways of looking at things, deciding about things, so that, being one with Him, we are not at all influenced or affected by natural judgments, natural standards, natural considerations, but ours are all the Holy Spirit's judgments and values and ways of viewing things. That in brief and comprehensively is what is meant by spirituality, a constituting of us according to the Holy Spirit, which means on the other hand, the ruling out of all that is merely and purely of our own natural life, mind, heart and will.

Well now, let us look at these four features of

the spiritual house of God, which house we are if we are the Lord's, and look at them in the light of life and spirituality.

The Exaltation of the Lord Jesus

The first with which we were concerned was that this spiritual house of God exists for the purpose of setting forth, proclaiming, manifesting the exaltation of the Lord Jesus as God's Son, the exaltation of the Lord Jesus to the throne of the Father. It is for that the Church exists, and it is for that we exist if we are of the house of God. But that is not just a truth, a doctrine to be proclaimed. That is not just a part of the Church's creed—"Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high." That is not just one of our convictions, as we say. That is something which has to constitute us spiritually and has to be expressed by means of life. The exaltation of the Lord Jesus is, before and above all other things, a matter of life. It was when He was exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high, it was when God made Him both Lord and Christ, it was when He was actually seated at God's right hand, far above all rule and authority, principalities and powers, that the Holy Spirit came out from His presence and made that which was in heaven a spiritual reality in the Church; and that reality was marked and demonstrated and proved and evidenced by the mighty power of His ascended life. We have to be spiritually constituted on the basis of Christ's exaltation. That is to say, within us something has to be done which brings about in us a living spiritual oneness with the exaltation, the Lordship, the supremacy of Jesus Christ. It is not to remain something outside of us, however true it is. We have to be that in fact; and, as we have pointed out, the impact of the early believers upon this world, upon those around them wherever they were, was the impact of the *fact*, not the doctrine, not the teaching, not merely the statement, but the *fact* that Jesus Christ was exalted. That came home upon the situation because that fact has its supreme significance in the spiritual realm, and we know quite well that all that is visible, all that is here on this sentient creation, has behind it a spiritual order.

Never has that been more clearly manifested and demonstrated than in the present world situation. There is a spiritual order of things

which is driving on, mastering, manipulating everything. It is, as many have been saying for the past months, Satanic in its background. The exaltation of the Lord Jesus finds its first registration there, and it is not until the registration is made there that the foreground is really affected. To arrest men, to arrest a course of things, to bring the yoke down upon situations, to harness developments in the seen, you have to get behind and register some superior reality against those forces which are creating these things.

Now, that is spirituality. The Apostle Paul said much about this sort of thing, and we have his language by which he expressed this reality. For example, "the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds" (II Cor. x. 4). He did not actually use the word, but it is quite clear that he meant that the weapons of our warfare are spiritual, getting behind the situation: and you know what he was dealing with at the moment when he used those words. Here were Corinthians who were seeking the advantages of natural wisdom, natural learning, the wisdom and the power of this world, in order to give them position, influence, standing. They were carnal in their quest for carnal weapons by which to gain ascendancy in this world. That led the Apostle to that great discourse on the foolishness and the weakness of this world's wisdom and this world's strength, and he said that, to overcome this world, you want something more than this world's weapons, this world's men. To overcome the carnal, you must have something more than carnal weapons, and the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God. In other words, they are spiritual. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood in the form of wisdom and worldly power, "but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies". Therefore our weapons must be spiritual, and spirituality means fundamentally the ability to get behind the seen, the tangible, to the unseen, the invisible, the intangible powers of evil, and to register your superiority there: and that superiority is the exaltation of the Lord Jesus far above all rule and authority and principality and power. That is a spiritual thing. The house of God is a spiritual house for that spiritual purpose, namely,

to bring home Christ's ascendancy in a spiritual way against spiritual forces. Then the instrumentalities of those evil spiritual forces will in turn come under arrest. It is no use going directly at things. You must strike at the cause of things, and then the things themselves will, according to God's purpose and intention, either be destroyed, or be brought under arrest or limitation, just as the Lord intends. It is not the Lord's thought to stop wars altogether just yet, nor much else that is going on in an evil way, but there is such a thing as limiting things to the purpose of God; and I do feel, and appeal to you as the Lord's children, that we ought to be engaged in this spiritual registration of the authority and supremacy of the Lord Jesus in the unseen, in the background of present world situations, with the object of limiting things to God's purpose. I believe it is possible for the Lord's people now to take hold of every air raid on this country and limit it, give it God's limitation, and I believe that that is what is happening. I only use it by way of illustrating my point. It is an amazing thing how things have been limited. We have seen again and again what might have been, and how much the onslaught has been penned in, even where great damage has been done. Oh, how much more might have been, could have been, and the amazement of every day is the limitation that is imposed. Surely that is an encouragement. I believe it is due to something in the unseen which is set in motion through the prayers of the people of God. That is encouraging. Let us be given to our ministry. That is what the Church is for.

Thus the very first thing is that Jesus is exalted above all principality and powers which lie behind this world darkness, and the Church is here, by prayer and testimony and spiritual life, to bring home upon those background forces this superiority of the Lord Jesus. It is a thing, not of words, not of doctrines, not of creeds, but of life, the impact of His ascended life.

Well, we begin there. The principle, you see, the law of the expression of Christ's exaltation, is life and spirituality.

The Ministry of the House to God

The second thing which we were noticing with regard to these features of the spiritual house of God was that it exists to minister to the pleasure

and glory of God. It is for God's glory, God's pleasure that the Church has been brought into being, for His satisfaction. And here we bring it right down to this rule: God is glorified and God receives that which is to His pleasure along the line of life and spirituality. You can judge of that by the effect. Wherever you have a real ministration of life, you always have the glory of God, God glorified.

That is, of course, true to the Scriptures. You remember that was the one point which the Lord Jesus made central and supreme in the raising of Lazarus. "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God"; and as He came through all the doubt and unbelief which stood between Him and Lazarus and approached the situation, at least He silently lifted His heart to the Father. "Father, glorify thy name!" Then He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth! The resurrection of Lazarus, the overpowering of death, was for the glory of God, and that was a spiritual thing, that was the triumph of life in Christ. Now, that is the glory of God. It says afterward that many believed on Him. The glory of God is largely seen through the outworking of this principle of life triumphant over death.

Now, that is a big subject. If you go back to the Old Testament, you will see that, in the case of every servant of God, after that servant of God was apprehended by Him, a process of death and resurrection commenced. You can take any one case that you like. Outstandingly, there is Abraham. How significant are the words that mark the apprehending of that servant of God. "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham" (Acts vii. 2). That sets the standard of God, and in effect says, Now then, it is according to what I am as the God of glory that I am going to deal with you, and the issue of all My dealings with you will be glory to Me! So, no sooner was Abraham apprehended by the God of glory, than this process of death and resurrection set in. It was a process with constant recurrence. Abraham went into a first stage and phase and measure of death, and then, in resurrection, the glory of God was seen. All the way along, there was this experience of death. I am not speaking now about physical death, but of a working of death in his life in a spiritual way: death to things, death to relationships, death to hopes, death to earthly expectations, death to possessions; and every

time death worked, there was a resurrection into something larger of the Lord, the Lord coming and making new covenants, giving him fresh revelations. I am El Shaddai! There were all these positive things when other things were going into death, right up to that last great triumph of resurrection in Isaac. Here is death; yes, death to all the promises, apparently, to all the hopes. If Isaac goes, then God in His faithfulness, God in His Word, God in His covenant, God in His promises, has gone too. It was a mighty death to face, and in spirit it was faced, but it was resurrection finally, full glorious resurrection: and what glory to God!

Well, you can take many other illustrations of the truth from the Old Testament and then carry them over in a spiritual way to the New Testament, and see that this is exactly what happened with Christ. God received the full quota of glory through the death and the resurrection of His Son, and the exaltation of the Lord Jesus is the testimony to the fact that death has been engulfed and overpowered. Christ being there sets forth that fact in fulness. But then the principle has to be passed on to the Church which is His Body, and the history of the Church since that time has been just a history of successive deaths and resurrections, and every resurrection has meant some fresh contribution to the glory of God, some fresh expression of God's glory; and what is true of the history of the Church is true in the history of many an individual member of the Church, and probably of some of you. We have known deaths oft, not in the way in which Paul meant, physical and temporal and natural, but in our own life with God we have known what it means to suffer the eclipse of all things, darkness unto death. But that has not been the end. The end has been the God of glory again and again, and it is along this line that God's glory is ministered to, by life, spirituality, and life triumphing over death. We are here for that very purpose. I hope that does not discourage you, but rather that it will help you to recognize that our very being here means that we have to know death again and again to know life. But we do not end with death; we end with resurrection and glory to God. Let us fasten upon that. Even though the deaths may be many, the end is the glory of God. Eventually His glory will be displayed in His Son, in His Church, in fulness, when death is finally vanquished, not only in Christ, but in

and through the Church.

But this is something for present experience. It is a great truth to contemplate, it is a blessed thing to consider; but let us bring it right home. What I feel to be the important thing now, the Lord's desire where this hour is concerned, is that we should come very close to these things in reality; that what we are saying shall not be truth only, but reality in our case. We are the house of God, we are this spiritual house, and we exist for this very purpose, to minister to the pleasure and glory of God, and that is done along the line of life, and that life is the life which overcomes death. So that, with every fresh uprising and experience of spiritual death, we shall write over it, This is not unto death, but for the glory of God! Oh, may He give us grace to do that. It is easier said than done, I know, but here it is. History sets the seal to this, that this is the way in which the Lord is ministered to in satisfaction and glory, by our being the very vessel in which the power of His resurrection is manifested, and that necessitates experiences of death

The Ministry of the House to the Elect

Then the third feature of this spiritual house is that it stands for the deliverance and life of others, the others being of course, God's elect, those who are bound up with God's eternal purpose. We are here to serve the Lord in standing over against the persistent and determined purpose of Satan to bring an end to Christ's life in His Church, and the test of the reality, the spiritual reality, of this spiritual house is just in this direction. How much are we ministering to the life of God's people to deliver them from these recurrent onslaughts of spiritual death? That is the test. We have to get right up close to that. It is all very well to talk about these things, but they have to be true really. It should become impossible to deal with these matters merely as the teaching that goes on in a certain place. The teaching may be all right, quite correct, but what of the practical issue, so far as we are concerned as the Lord's people? The test is not whether we have accepted right doctrine: the test is whether we are functioning according to what we are, whether we are really doing the thing which constitutes our very existence. You see, the Church, the people of God, are not one thing, and the truth another thing, and the Church accepts that truth. It is not that. It is

that the Church is that truth or it is nothing at all. I say I am a member of Christ's Body. Well then, I can take the attitude that certain truths are the truths which belong to members of Christ's Body, and therefore I accept those truths: I assent to those truths and henceforth I believe in those truths, and I begin to preach them. That is one thing. Another way is that certain truths are realities concerning the members of Christ's Body, and you cannot divide between the truths and the members, and the very existence of those members means that those truths are operating, and if those truths are not operating, you have serious reason to question the reality of the life of that member of the Body of Christ. Something has gone wrong; it is not normal, it is all wrong. I am not saying that if these truths are not fully manifested in us that has nullified our relationship to Christ as members of His Body, but I am saying that if it is the case that these truths are not being expressed, there is something seriously wrong with us as members of the Body and we are a contradiction to the true meaning of our existence. You and I exist for the life of others and if others are not receiving life through us, then there is something inconsistent in our very existence. That sounds very hard, very severe, but that has to come home to me as much as to you. I never talk to you without having myself very much in mind, and I have this understanding with the Lord, that He will make good all truth in my own case or save me from talking about it.

I challenge you, my dear friends, to face this law of your existence. Are you ministering to the Lord's people or are you merely sitting back, or, even worse, ministering death? What does your presence mean to the Lord's people? Does it mean life? If so, then the house of God is truly represented by us. If it does not, if it is only neutral or negative or antagonistic to life, then the house of God has broken down where such are concerned. All these things are a matter of life and spirituality, and there is a horrible thing from which we shall pray earnestly and fervently to be delivered, and that is, talking truth, holding truths, accepting truths, being associated with truths as truths, without having the life of those truths manifested in us. I often fear that is one of the great and distressing things where such revelation exists, that people begin to take up the truths, and they stand for the truths that "Honor Oak" stands for. God

deliver us from that way of speech and that mentality. That is not it. Either we are this thing, or, however much we may agree with it and talk about it, we are not it. It is life and spirituality that matters, and we must be much before God that all shall be real in our case; that our presence means that life is ministered, life is passed on. We are the vehicle of life to the Lord's people for their deliverance from the onslaught of death. It was for that Paul besought the believers to pray for him. Oh, this throttling work of the enemy in the matter of ministering life to the Lord's people!

An Expression of Christ

Then the fourth thing is that the Church in its corporate life exists to be a present expression of the Lord Jesus Himself wherever two or three are gathered together. I wonder if we have recognized what that word in Matt. xviii. really does mean? Here is someone who belongs to the Lord, who is guilty of, or responsible for, something wrong. "If thy brother sin against thee." The margin says that a good many authorities omit "against thee". Thus it would read, "If thy brother sin, go, show him his fault...if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he hear thee not, take with thee one or two more, that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established. And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church: and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican. Verily I say unto you, What things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven...For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

That little word "for" carries with it a tremendous weight of significance. If thy brother sin and after these successive and varied efforts have been made to get him to acknowledge his sin, there is still a withholding, bring it to the Church. Now then, if he refuse to hear the Church, put him out; let him be as a Gentile and a publican, that is, outside the Church; and in your doing that, it is the Lord doing it. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." It is not that the Church has acted as something in itself. The Lord regards that as Himself acting. He is there in the midst, and it is the Lord doing

this. The Church's verdict is the Lord's verdict ; the Church's decision is the Lord's decision, when the Church is gathered into His Name.

Now we can leave the specific connection of that and take up the principle. The Church exists to be a corporate expression of Christ wherever He is represented. The Church cannot be represented with less than two, because the Church is a Body, and one brick never made a temple yet. It is a corporate thing, and it is to be an expression of Christ there in its corporate life. That is the purpose of the Church, to be an expression of Christ. That cannot be just official, that cannot be formal. It is not that the Church has a session and in its session has an agenda and discusses certain propositions and comes to certain decisions. No, it is something much deeper than that.

In the first place, the Church is spiritual, that is, the Church has subjected itself to the Holy Spirit and has taken the Holy Spirit for its governance, for its direction. It has put its trust in the Spirit of God to register right courses and right decisions through much prayer. It has altogether submitted itself to the government of the Holy Spirit and in that way become spiritual, so that it livingly functions in a spiritual way ; not formally functions, but spiritually and livingly functions, that is, its function is on the witness of the Spirit along the line of life. Issues are raised, difficulties are brought up. How are these going to be met ? Well, someone makes a proposition and those who are spiritual feel, Oh, this is death if we take that line ! No, we have no liberty to take that line, that would be terrible ! It is registered inside. It is not that we have better judgment, but within the Spirit of life says, Do not take that line, that will be disaster ! Or someone else may say something and those who are spiritual feel, Yes, that is the Lord's way ! It is registered within ; the Spirit of life is governing ; and that is the basis of the Church's life altogether, and it becomes in that way an expression of Christ, an expression of the mind of the Lord there. The Lord is in evidence along the line, and on the basis, of life and spirituality. But it requires a corporate life for that—" In the mouth of two witnesses or three ". That is the corporate principle, you see, at work. I had no intention of going into so much technique about the Church, but it is all to indicate this great truth, that the Church, this spiritual house, exists to be an expression of Christ wher-

ever it is represented by two or three on a corporate basis.

You see, corporate life is spiritual and is life. It is a matter of life. Our union, our relationship with Christ, is on the principle of life. " Unto whom coming, a living stone...ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house." Again I say, God is not dealing with us as with bricks: God is dealing with us as with living stones. That means that He is treating us as those who have a common life with the Lord Jesus, and our relationship with the living stone is the relationship of one life. It is a spiritual relationship and it is that life which brings about the corporate expression. It is all the difference between this corporate expression on the basis of life, and a society, a club, an institution. You can join a club, you can come into a society, and you may agree on many things with regard to conviction and procedure, and yet not be bound together by a corporate life. But the Church is this latter thing. One life in all the members links all the members with the Head, and thus by that life it expresses Christ wherever it is. It does not just proclaim things about Christ. It brings Christ in and says that here, though it be but in two or three or more, here Christ has come in. It is not a claim made. You see, the Roman church will make the claim, that very claim, that where that church is, Christ is. Ah yes, but there is a difference. It is not just a claim, but a fact borne out, that where these spiritual and living stones are, the Lord is there in very truth and people know it, and there comes about that of which the Apostle wrote. When someone comes in from the outside and things are as they should be, when they are after this kind, the outsider comes in and falls down and says, " God is indeed among you ". Ah ! that is what we want. Whether people begin to fall literally or not, that is not the question. The point is that inwardly they go down ; prejudices, suspicions, fears, reservations go down. One thing rises supreme with them and brings down everything. I cannot get away from it, the Lord is there ! If only we would surrender to that and all that means it would be very much better for us. But that is the great matter, namely, bringing in the Lord. The Church exists to bring the Lord into every place, even where represented by but two or three. May this all be true in our case. I am sure our hearts respond to that. Well, let us get to the Lord about it, that so far as we individual-

ly are concerned as living stones, it may be true in our case ; that we are a ministration of life, a representation of Christ, that we are bringing

glory to God, that we are setting forth the exaltation of His Son.

T.A.S.

Go to Joseph

READING : Gen. xli. 14, 28-32, 38-41, 46-57.

“ My God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus ” (Phil. iv. 19).

“ And when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread : and Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go unto Joseph ;...and Joseph opened all the store-houses ” (Gen. xli. 55-6).

The verse in Philippians, so well known to us, seems to me to be beautifully illustrated by the story of Joseph's provision for the needs of the people. Of course, in the case of the letter to the Philippians, there was a peculiar meaning to what the Apostle wrote. He was speaking to those who had, in the Lord's name, ministered to him, and the whole letter is full of the atmosphere of that reciprocal mutuality of love which we call fellowship. The Apostle was assuring them that, as they ministered to him in the Lord's name, so did he minister to them in the Lord's name ; for you will see that he says, not ‘ Your God shall supply every need,’ but “ My God shall supply every need,” and the whole matter of the interrelatedness of God's people which the letter so strongly emphasizes is beautifully illustrated by this affection in the Apostle's heart ; that as they lived together in fellowship and from the one side ministration was made in the Lord's name to His servant, so in answer to the prayers and expectation of faith of that servant would the Lord meet their needs : and, let us notice, *all* their needs, every need fulfilled, fully met. That is a blessed truth, but it can be greatly expanded and we may say to one another, and indeed, given certain conditions, to all men, that this is the nature and character of our God, that He is desirous of meeting and fulfilling every need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

God's Acceptance of Responsibility to Meet Need

If we think for a little while of the Old Testament story, perhaps it becomes clearer. It is very noteworthy that the people's appeal under

their sense of need was to Pharaoh, who was to them virtually God, and it is very blessed, for its spiritual value, to notice how readily Pharaoh recognized and accepted his responsibility for them. That is the first thing I want to bring to you to-night in this matter of the meeting of all our needs, that it is a responsibility which God willingly accepts. I was brought up as a boy in a very strong evangelical and evangelistic atmosphere, but, like so many others, I have to confess that of all the Gospel ministries that I heard, the outstanding sense of things that came upon my young heart was of God as being One who needed to be propitiated, who was somehow against me, and that there was but one way of stopping Him, as it were, in His activities of hard, legal vengeance upon my poor little soul : and I think that often the Gospel is made to represent God in something of a grudging, hard, harsh attitude toward men. But I would say that, while it is emphatically true that God has to honour every righteous requirement of His nature, His attitude is the very reverse of harsh and He willingly accepts the responsibility for every one of His creatures. We may be responsible for our sins, but we are not responsible for our sinfulness. We are what we are not altogether by our own doing. At any rate, we are needy creatures, and the attitude of Pharaoh towards his needy subjects was not for one moment to enter into a discussion as to the measure of their culpability for their faults, but rather to accept responsibility for the fact that they were needy and that it was up to him to meet their need. And it is not a wrong thing to say concerning God that it is incumbent upon Him to provide for His creatures, sinful though they be, and we have ample reason for saying that God recognizes that responsibility and to the full is ready to discharge it. The whole history of His dealings with mankind as we find them written in His word is just this, as of a God who is desirous of meeting every need of ours.

It is a strange thing, and yet it is very true to human nature, that, while all this activity was

going on through the seven years of plenty—and it must have become noised abroad in a fairly widespread way in Egypt that there was a famine to follow—while Joseph was so busily engaged in his preparations, the bulk of the people apparently made none for themselves. The famine caught them as if they had had no warning of it, and in that they might well be blamed. Yet there are no qualifications of that kind in Pharaoh's response to his people, blameworthy though they might well have been. They ought to have done, they could have done, more than they did to meet their own need; but, praise God, He never quibbles about the measure of our responsibility, nor rejects us because in that realm where we could do something, we have not done what we could. He has graciously undertaken to meet every need of ours, whether those needs have come upon us without any fault of ours, or whether they may be the direct outcome of our own folly and blindness and wilfulness. Remember how, from the first, when Cain sinned that, while God reprov'd him for his sin, He reminded him that the sin-offering had all the while been at the door. There was provision made. You remember further how, though men were so terribly corrupt and wicked before the flood, the ark was opened freely and graciously even for those wicked ones if they would have accepted it. You remember how, again and again, God appeared to His people in the midst of their folly and wilfulness and sin, upbraiding them and pointing out to them through His prophets that they had come to the state in which they were by their own folly; by rejecting His word, by turning away from His prophets; but never do we find, in all the Scriptures, that the story ended there. There was indeed one messenger who was sent by God to the people when they were in bondage to the Midianites simply with a message charging them with being themselves responsible for the state in which they were. Though that was the sum total of his message, immediately afterwards we read how the Lord raised up Gideon to be a saviour for His people. Thus all the time, without mitigating or ignoring the culpability of men, God's attitude to mankind was always this: Needy you are, needy in many ways by your own foolishness and sinfulness, but I will supply every need of yours in spite of your neediness; I undertake the responsibility.

Then, of course, the most beautiful strength is given to that in the approach of the brothers of Joseph, who were not of the mass of ignorant, improvident people, but those who were directly guilty of the most terrible sin against Joseph himself. Nevertheless, there was food, there was abundance, there was love for them: and that is the Lord always. The Lord is like that.

Now, we have to pass on to the matter of our response to that willingness, and that is where there comes in the sad, sad fact that so many do not have their needs met, and that multitudes who might rejoice in life eternal, in life abundant, do not. But it is not because of their sins, not because they are unworthy, not because God has anything against them, but rather because, when the arms of love are open and provision is fully made and the call comes to them to receive it, they turn away and refuse it. There may have been, and possibly were, there in Egypt, those who would not go to Joseph, who never cried to Pharaoh, who never believed, or were not willing to accept the provision that was made. If there were such, they had only their own foolishness to blame; but it was never the case, so far as we read, that Pharaoh refused to accept responsibility for them, and certainly it never is that our God is not willing to fulfil every need of ours. Oh, remember that is God's attitude to mankind in general, desirous of meeting their need. We are not to feel that, because men have sinned, God will not answer them. He will; but they must come His way: and that is the whole crux of our story.

The Divine Resources

But let us, before we come to that, just think for a moment of the Divine resources. My God shall fulfil every need of yours—in what way, according to what measure? According to His riches in glory; and we have a picture of that in the story. For seven long years the perfect full provision was made, and all that time, under Joseph's care, men were setting aside that which should meet need, and we are told that Joseph gathered and laid up till the corn was as the sand of the sea and they left numbering.

And that is a true picture of the Divine resources. Praise God, His resource is infinite, the store-houses are full, and the resource is limitless. It is a blessed thing if our hearts can come to rest upon that fact that our personal individual need is provided for in all that fulness. Whatever it

be, it is not excluded. However great it may be, it will make, shall I say, hardly any difference to the Divine resources, they are so full and so wonderful. Thus the Lord has for you and for me, whoever we are, a fulness, an abundance without measure, specially provided in order that no need of ours should be unfulfilled, and amid all the greatness of His resources, there is that which is peculiarly for us.

The Nature of the Provision

You notice the nature of the provision ; it was bread, it was life. That is what the people needed and that is what was provided, and that is the nature of the Divine provision. You need something quite different from that which I need. We all have our own peculiar personal need, but there is one common factor about the Divine provision to meet our needs, namely, it is a living provision. It is for purposes of life, and always the Lord chooses His way of meeting our needs with that in view—life, abundant life. That is why we do not always get what we ask for and our prayers are not answered in the way that we expect them to be, and, to judge after our judgment which is so often wrong, our needs are not met. If they were met according to the way in which we desire them to be, it might well be that it would be for death and not for life, for a decrease of spiritual vigour, instead of an increase of it. God's provision is carefully chosen for us all at every point and stage of our lives with this in view always, even a greater abundance and fulness of spiritual life ; and we must approach the Lord with our requests, we must cry unto our great King with this recognition always, in submitting our requests to Him, that He will meet them out of the fulness and richness of His Divine resource in the way in which He sees will be life to our souls.

The Man of God's Right Hand—The Ministration of the Divine Resources

Well then, there arises this matter of the Divine medium for the ministry of His resource. When the people had come to Pharaoh, they had done all they could do, in a sense. They did the right thing, but Pharaoh did nothing for them himself except refer them to the one whom he had chosen. He said, Go to Joseph ! And God says, Go to My Son, Jesus Christ ! My God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory—how ? Directly ? No ! through

Jesus Christ : and that is why we are always seeking to cause people to be impressed by the fact that it is not enough to believe that there is a God in heaven, not enough to talk about God answering prayer ; and while from one point of view, we are thankful when nations and those in responsibility give God any kind of recognition, nevertheless there can be no ground of confident expectation of the Lord God meeting any need apart from Jesus Christ. For you, that means that you personally, no matter how young you are, no matter how old, must come to God through Jesus Christ for yourself. This is not a general sort of thing that, because you are in a Christian family or because of some atmosphere around you in your home, you get blessings like that. God does not deal with us in that general sort of way. It is particular, it is personal. He deals with us each one according as we come to Him through Jesus Christ.

Now, in the first place, in the Old Testament story the case was so because Pharaoh said so. The people went to Pharaoh and virtually demanded that Pharaoh should meet their needs, and therefore they had to accept Pharaoh's decision in this matter. He would be responsible for them and therefore it was for him to choose the one who should minister to them. And that is God's attitude. He will be responsible for them ; but He will meet them, and man must meet Him, through Jesus Christ. There is no other way.

While it is true that since God has chosen it, it is to be so, it is also true because of the very fitness of the One whom He has chosen. Look at Joseph. Who could better be appointed to meet the need of the people than the one and the only one who long before it arose had foreseen and knew all about it ? That is one of the reasons why the Lord Jesus Christ can meet your heart's need and mine. Before ever we were born into this world and before ever, long before ever, we became conscious of the fact that we personally were not right, but needed God's pardon and forgiveness, needed a Saviour ; long before we were conscious of that, the Lord Jesus knew our personal need. When we read the Gospel stories, we see in how remarkable a measure the Lord Jesus knew about people. You remember, for instance, the case of Zacchaeus who climbed up a tree just to get a glimpse of Him. The Lord seemed to know all about him ; He stopped under the tree and

called him by name. And so it was with many people that came to Him with differing kinds of need. Some of them seemed to be suffering as the result of wrongdoing. The Lord Jesus mentioned it, He seemed to know about it ; and how much more shall we believe that from heaven, looking down upon us. He knows before it arises the need, every need that arises, every circumstance of our day. Some of us, had we been told five or six months ago what would have been our experience, would never have believed it, and no amount of human foresight could have understood or expected it. All the magicians of Egypt never knew what was coming and all our understanding could never have known, let alone have provided for our need. But do you believe that the greater than Joseph whom God has appointed to be the One to supply every need of yours, do you believe that He knew all about the need before it arose ? I am sure He did. That is a great comfort. No wonder God appointed Him. Who better than the One who knew about the needs before they arose ?

Another thing : who more fitted to minister to the needs of the people than the one who had gone down into the pit in order to do it ; for, though Egypt knew nothing of it, and Joseph himself could not understand it, he was taken what to him was the way of the Cross, the pit, the dungeon, and the iron entered into his soul. Was this for his own sake, that he might learn ? Well yes, but far more that he might be provided as a saviour for the people. But it had to be that way. Joseph in his father's house, enjoying his father's love, could never have been the saviour of needy men : and Jesus Christ in the Father's home, enjoying the Father's love, could never have been your Saviour and mine. Thus just as Joseph—though in his case, not willingly and not understandingly—trod a bitter dark way, so our Lord Jesus, willingly and knowing all about it, left the Father's home and came down into a hostile world. When Joseph was cast into the pit, there was no water in his pit : when our Lord was cast into the pit, all the waves and billows went over Him. Who, then, more suited to meet your need and mine than the One who came to this earth and died for that very purpose ? Sometimes it is good for us to remember other people : sometimes it is good for us to forget other people : and there are occasions when it is very good for us to have our attitude

toward the Lord Jesus as though there was nobody else in this world and no other need than mine, and to know that even so He came down to this earth for me, died to meet my need. And that is why God said, Go to " Joseph ", this One who saw your need and died to meet it.

More than that, Joseph had been raised to the throne itself and glorified for this very purpose. His is a wonderful pre-figuring and picture of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, for he did not rise gradually and by steps into favour and little by little achieve a place of eminence. We have read the verse which reminds us of the fact that at one moment he was in the dungeon and the next on the throne. Even so and in a greater way, was our blessed Lord Jesus brought from the lowest depths and raised to the highest heights, and given the signet of God's own authority, every knee called upon to bow to Him, given first place. What for ? Well, because He deserves it, because He is God's Son, because He died on the Cross : yes, but He has been raised there purposely for this very thing, to meet your needs and mine. That is why God put Him on the throne, not to sit there idle and doing nothing. Joseph was given the place of eminence because that was the place from which he could minister to need, and the Lord Jesus in glory is not there remote from you, disconnected from your case or your need, nor merely waiting to receive you in glory one day. He has been exalted to the throne as to the place from which He is best able to minister to your need and mine. Sometimes we think, If only the Lord were here, how He could meet our need ! Well, if He is there, it is not as removed from us, but God has exalted Him in order to perfect His ability to meet the need of our hearts. It is a wonderful picture : Joseph on the throne, the people round about, and peoples from all countries gathering, moving toward this one centre, marvelling at his greatness, bowing the knee to him, and being fed, and life being ministered to them from that one central head.

What a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus exalted to the place of honour, not that men might merely bow, as it were, and recognize His greatness and tremble before it, but that, coming to Him, as did the people to Joseph, they might find in His exaltation the secret for the meeting of their need and go away refreshed with life, saved because Joseph is on the throne : and because Jesus Christ is on God's throne, we may

be sure there is a sufficiency to meet our need.

The question is, Shall we go to Joseph? It says he opened all the store-houses, and the Lord Jesus is the opened store-house of God's infinite wealth to succour your needs and mine.

The Buying of Divine Resources

There was one result with regard to this gracious way in which the people's need was met. We find as we read the story that it was met again and again; as often as they came, there was always a supply for them: and so it is with our Lord. But we find every time they came there was a transaction that took place. They bought: there was a buying and a selling; and the Bible speaks to us of our coming and buying, though it says without price. We must come and buy; and in one of the letters in the Revelation, it speaks of buying gold and eye-salve. What does it mean? Well, if you live in a primitive part of the world, you soon find out. Buying is not a matter of possessing money. It is a matter of exchange, and you render for that which you receive. In the case of the Egyptians, the final act was when they rendered not merely their possessions but themselves, and by re-

ceiving of Pharaoh's bounty through Joseph they became eternally Pharaoh's servants.

The Lord Jesus is very able to meet our every need, but the basis of His meeting that need is our yielding to Him, and the result of a true meeting of our need is that we become more bound to God through Jesus Christ. Remember how the Apostle said, 'I beseech you through the mercies of God—because your need has been met—present yourselves a living sacrifice.' While it is true that we have not to buy our salvation, nevertheless every experience of having our needs met through Jesus Christ is something in the nature of an exchange. We exchange our unrighteousness or our self-righteousness for His righteousness: we exchange our ownership of ourselves for His ownership of us. We exchange our thoughts, our ways, for His thoughts and His ways: and it is a very good exchange; it is life.

So that is the Lord's word, as much as I have been able to know it and speak it. "My God shall fulfil every need of yours" if you will come to Him through Jesus Christ in whom are all the riches of His resources.

H.F.

The Lamb in the Midst of the Throne

No. 7.

The Subjective Work of the Cross

READING: Revelation v. 1-14: vii. 9-17.

The Negative Aspect

We are concerned with the matter of spiritual life, spiritual growth, spiritual progress. We are deeply distressed because of the smallness, the limitation, the weakness of so many children of God after so long a time. We are troubled because converts do not move on and believers do not grow, and so few come to the place where they are able to take responsibility and you have no need to be keeping a "weather eye" on them all the time. Why do we have to write off so much of our life as being very full and yet so empty? The Lord has shown us why and the solution to the problem is found in the Cross. If spiritual growth is arrested or retarded, you can usually trace, in the case concerned some strength of natural life. It does not always

appear as strength, mark you. Its appearance is sometimes as of weakness. It is not always the aggressive one who is marked by strength. Sometimes our strength is in our passivity, in our unwillingness to take risks. We call that, of course, being very humble, being meek, docile. Oh, but sometimes that is the thing the Lord has to hammer at. That is the passive side. On the other side, there is the more active and aggressive kind. But usually you can find somewhere a strength of some sort which is the strength of nature, which is not yielding or letting go to the Lord. The Lord has to deal with us according to what we are. In those people who are all too ready to be aggressive and take responsibility and do things, the Lord has to deal with them along one line, in taking away all that in which their soul glories. On the other side,

He has to challenge to do, challenge to accept responsibility. He deals with us according to how He finds us. But the key to the matter is whether we, in what we are by nature whatever that may be, will really yield to the Cross ; for the Cross is many-sided, and as many-sided as there are temperaments amongst men.

The Cross is applied according to every man's make-up. What would be the Cross to me would never be the Cross to you, and the Cross may mean something different for everyone of us. But it is universal. That is the point—central and universal. It touches us all perhaps in a different way, and it raises questions and issues for each one of us peculiarly. That is *our* challenge of the Cross, and then it is a matter whether we, in what we are, will come and allow the Cross to deal with us. It is no use our saying, "What shall this man do?" The Lord will at once answer, "What is that to thee? Follow thou Me". There is a personal, individual, shall I say, private application of the Cross to every one of us, and our spiritual growth depends entirely upon the Cross doing its work in us, and our response to it personally.

There are a good many other matters which we could not cover if we tried to. For instance, we do not know God's purpose for each life. God's purpose touches each one in a different way. There is that sovereign choice of God which has a place for each one of us, a peculiar work for each of us to do. While it is related, a part of the whole, nevertheless it is a facet of that great jewel, the City of God, and God has to have us dealt with and responsive to Him in a particular way, in which someone else has no place, and we, in the Cross, have particular dealings with the Lord because of something which is peculiar to us in the Divine purpose.

So, you see, it is very necessary that we should recognize that this cannot be taken as a kind of a general thing. It has to become peculiar to each one of us. Oh, beloved, do believe that this is not just teaching, doctrine. It is of very great importance. But I would beg you not to accept it merely because I am saying it and emphasizing it, nor even because I tell you that so far as some of us are concerned, it is a proved thing. I would ask you for one thing only, namely, not to close your heart to it, not to say, That is a teaching ! but just to ask the Lord, Is this right ?, taking an attitude simply and honestly before the Lord, even should you feel it is not true, and so leaving

room for the possibility that the prejudice may, after all, spring from yourself, from something in your constitution or in your upbringing. Will you go to the Lord with this and say, "Lord I do not see, it is difficult for me to believe it ; but, if it is true, then, Lord, I am open to the truth, and I want you to take me definitely in hand on the ground of the truth". There is not one of us, I am sure, who wants to stand in the presence of the Lord later on, and for the Lord to say, "My child, I would have led you into something very much fuller if only you had given Me the chance". Will you take a very honest and open-hearted attitude toward the Lord in the matter ?

That is the negative side. Of course, the things included in that are legion. But it does mean this on all matters, that you and I have no prejudices, no pre-conceptions, that we have not reached a position on any point where we have come to finality. It means that we may yet have to change our entire position on some matters. Things about which we are most certainly convinced may have to go yet. We must recognize God's sovereign dealings with us. There are some of us who at one time in our lives believed with all our being that a certain thing was God's will, and God's directive will at that, and we have come at length by the deepest experience, and experience which has issued in the greatest values, to have to say, "That was only God's permissive will, and God never meant it as anything like His end." It was only a step towards something else, and the thing involved was to us tremendous. We would have staked our lives upon it. But we have had to change our entire attitude to that, and put it in a secondary place in the will of God, and see that God was dealing with us where He found us, and leading us step by step, and each step called for adjustment and a change. Oh, the purpose of God was the same all the way through, but His methods with us had to vary, and He has very graciously, in His sovereignty, used these imperfect stages and steps to teach us much. I think we should say to-day that our position now is so much the stronger because it represents such a change. Oh, beloved, we have to keep that Cross where it preserves an open way which makes it yet possible for new things to happen, without our so clinging to our position that God cannot do revolutionary things in us still. The Cross is fundamental to all that

God wants to do, and when the Lord is going to do a new thing, the Cross is going to deal with some fresh obstruction. Well now, that is on the negative side.

The positive side of this arises when you see the object of the Cross in God's mind. Why the Cross, you ask. Well, negatively the Cross is to get this incapacitated man out of the way; for, while he is so injured and incapacitated, he is yet a very active and very energetic and very positive factor. If only he were so crippled that he could do nothing, it would be an easy matter. But it is not so. He is the most active, energetic cripple, bothering everything and everybody. But he has to be got out of the way for God's positive object.

(b) The Positive Aspect

What is God's positive side of the Cross? It is that the Cross shall make room for a man who is capable, who has all the capacities, capabilities and faculties for Divine things: and it is just at that point that the whole meaning and value of the Holy Spirit comes in. It is not possible for us to know the Holy Spirit until the Cross has become a reality. You never, in type or in anti-type, reach the anointing until you have come to the slaying. Thus Paul says this strong word to the Galatians: Christ was made a curse for us. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. iii. 13-14). Made a curse for us that we might receive the promise of the Spirit. That is borne out in the New Testament in every instance of receiving the Spirit.

The Cross and the Spirit

Take one instance, Acts xix. 1-5. Paul, having passed through certain regions, came to Ephesus, and found there certain disciples and said unto them, "Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?" evidently perplexed because of an anomaly, because of something which was abnormal or sub-normal, something freakish. Here were people who were calling themselves Christians and disciples of the Lord Jesus, and he did not discern there the marks of their having received the Spirit. This, thought he, is strange, this is extraordinary, because if

they are Christians in the real, genuine, true sense, they cannot be without the Holy Spirit, they must have received the Holy Spirit. But here is a little group of people gathering together as Christians, and yet the tokens of their having received the Spirit are not there: and perplexed, he said, "Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?" You know their reply, "We did not so much as hear whether the Holy Spirit was given". Then in what Paul next says he goes right to the heart of things. "Into what then were ye baptized?" What has that to do with it? they might have answered: what is the relationship between receiving the Spirit and being baptized? If baptism is a testimony to our death and burial and resurrection in Christ, then that is the foundation of receiving the Spirit and Paul had put his finger upon the whole situation. In reply to his question, they had said they had been baptized into John's baptism. Ah! so that is it. Well, he explained to them the difference between John's baptism and being baptized into Christ and then they were baptized into the Name of the Lord Jesus, and when Paul had laid his hands upon them they received the Holy Spirit. The two things go together always—the Cross and the Spirit.

The Cross in its negative side is to get rid of that old cursed creation which can never receive the Spirit. Remember that! Anything which lies under a curse can never receive the Spirit of God, and you have to get it out of the way. What will you do with a cursed thing? You will put it to death and bury it. That which has no curse then comes into view and the Spirit comes upon that.

The Nature of the New Creation—The Joining of the Holy Spirit with the New-born Spirit of Man

The positive side of the Cross is the coming in of the Holy Spirit to what is born again, the new-born spirit of a believer, and the joining of the Spirit of God with the spirit of man sets forth a new type of being such as never has been in the creation before. Oh, yes, in the Old Testament there were comings upon and workings within by the Holy Spirit, but the joining of the Spirit of God with the spirit of man had never taken place before. That is what Adam missed and the race in Adam lost and could never recover because of the curse. There is a new creation in Christ Jesus and the new creation is the joining

of the Holy Spirit with the born anew spirit of man

Now you have the Holy Spirit in and upon the spirit of man as the Spirit of life, and that Spirit of life means that in the inward man we are alive unto God. We know what it means to be alive unto things, to be alive unto God. It is something very active; alive in consciousness, alive in every way unto God. It is something quite new, is this aliveness unto God. Oh, it is a blessed thing! I know this is very elementary; but it is a very blessed thing to be alive unto God, to know that you are alive unto God. You see, this is altogether different from a traditional relationship with God, a doctrinal relationship with God, the relationship of a system to God. This is our personal, inward, blessed possession, to be alive unto God. Well, I think it is unnecessary for me to labour that. I hope you know really what it is to be alive unto God within, through the Spirit of life.

The Holy Spirit Brings New Faculties

But that life, that Spirit of life, means that there has been brought by the Holy Spirit into our spirit a new spiritual capacity, new spiritual faculties; that whereas in our natural state we could not, because we were incapacitated, now we can know the things of the Spirit of God. We can receive the things of the Spirit of God: we can move, intelligently and understandingly, in a realm which was closed; and the difference is very great indeed. But it is a very—I was going to say—subtle difference. Let me illustrate. There was a time when we did great things with our Bibles. We read Romans, and no one in all the world could have known Romans vi., so far as the chapter and wording was concerned, better than we did. And we read Ephesians and knew it; and we could preach on Romans vi. and on Ephesians, and give the most splendid interpretation and the most wonderful Bible analysis on the blackboard. We could say that the Church is not an organization but an organism. We could use all that phraseology. Yet with regard to Romans vi, when we were baptized we had truly testified to the fact that we were being buried with Christ, and the day came, beloved, when in very truth we met our Passover, our feast of unleavened bread, our smiting by the Cross of this natural life. We came, under the hand of God, to a very real experience and crisis of the Cross, and went

through this, not just as sinners, but as Christians and preachers, ministers and workers, organizers. Something happened, a desperate and terrible thing happened. It was death indeed. But that was followed by a new knowing of the Lord, a new working of the Spirit, a release of the Spirit, a coming out into a life under the anointing, under an open heaven, and not only we, but everybody else, recognized that Romans vi. was something other than just teaching when we now spoke of it. What that "other" was it would be difficult to define. Ephesians too was different. Again, what the difference was, it would be very difficult to say. It was certainly not in the language, certainly not in the letter, certainly not in the doctrine; but there was meaning, there was power, something had happened. Before we could still preach Romans vi. and contradict it, and in the same way we could preach Ephesians and speak of the heavenly Church being an organism, and yet be in an earthly thing, limited and bound. Something happened, and not only were we in resurrection, but grave-clothes went.

I have only said that to reach this point. There is a difference. You may have difficulty in defining it, but it is the difference between death and life; it is the difference between our coming and taking up the Word of God with our natural powers of penetration and interpretation and analysis and presentation, and that revelation of the Holy Ghost in our hearts which lifts us into a new position and gives us an open heaven. It is a tremendous difference, and the Cross is the basis of that. The Holy Spirit brings new faculties, new capacities. They are different, altogether different. Before we were working in the things of God with our heads, now we are in them with our spirits. New faculties and a new power, spiritual power by the Holy Spirit. This is the positive side of the Cross.

So we have to challenge ourselves over this with regard to where we are. If this is not true, if this is only true in a very small degree, if ours is not this inward path which is growing brighter and brighter unto the noonday, why is it? Well, the responsibility cannot be placed at the Lord's door. There is some reason for it and God's answer to every such inquiry is the Cross. That Cross is intended to clear the ground for all that God has to give us, and into which He would lead us. If we are not coming into it, what is the reason? We can only say that somewhere

the Cross is not being suffered to do its work. There is a need somewhere for the Cross to do something more.

Now, when I have said all this about the subjective application of the Cross, the Cross as a power, the Cross as an instrument, the Cross as a working thing in our experience, I must remind you that this has nothing to do with our acceptance, with our standing, with our position. That is assured to faith when we receive Christ. This is simply the outworking of God's purpose in us. But it is an important side. You cannot divorce these two. The divorcing of these two has resulted in a most deplorable state in Christendom and the end of the story is going to be terribly tragic. For many, the history of Israel is going to be repeated. They are going to die in the wilderness ; that is, they are never

going to reach the land of fulness, because Jordan has not been crossed. That does not mean that they are lost eternally ; but they have missed all that God intended ; they have come short of the fulness of Christ. There is a great deal of work that is going to be burnt up when it is tried by fire, a great deal of Christian profession going to resolve itself into nothing. It is only what is really of the Spirit of the Lord, produced in us and produced through us, that is going to stand and go through ; and that is determined by how much scope the Holy Spirit has ; and the scope is determined by how thoroughly the work of the Cross is done in clearing the ground.

The Lord give us grace to receive His word and to be before Him very much that He will have His fullest way in us. T.A.S.

The Obedience of Faith and the Glory of the Lord

READING : Ex. xl. 1, 16-38.

I think there is an important point for us to notice in that fortieth chapter of Exodus. The glory of the Lord, as we have seen, filled the tabernacle. Now, that glory filled the tabernacle clearly in relation to something else. The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle because everything in the tabernacle was according to Christ.

The Seal of Obedience

But why was it according to Christ ? Well, the refrain that runs through that chapter tells us. It was because everything had been done "as the Lord commanded Moses". It was according to Christ because God had given the pattern, and the pattern had been completely and perfectly carried out : so the glory filled the house. The glory of the Lord was the Divine seal upon the obedience of Moses. Glory is the Divine seal to obedience. That is very simple. Obey the Lord exactly as He says, and His seal is glory. In this case, of course, it was a manifest, open, visible glory. That, however, is not necessarily the kind of glory with which the Lord seals our steps of obedience ; but if you want to know the glory of the Lord, you taste it whenever you obey the Lord.

When you come over to the New Testament,

there are a number of instances with which I have been struck that bear upon this matter. In John xi, 7, in connection with the story of Lazarus, we read,

"Then after that saith he to his disciples, Let us go into Judæa again. His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee ; and goest thou thither again ? "

Do you catch the tone of the disciples ? The Lord says, Let us go into Judæa. But, Lord, you have forgotten something ! say the disciples, in effect.

Later in the 39th verse we read,

"Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh : for he hath been dead four days."

Lord, you have forgotten something ! You have told us to do this, but you have forgotten something !

"And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias ; and to him the Lord said in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here. Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have

heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem " (Acts ix. 10-11, 13).

Lord, you have overlooked something! You have not allowed Lord, for the fact that this man is an injurious persecutor! But the Lord said, Go thy way!

" And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord " (Acts x. 13-14).

Lord, you are making a mistake! You have forgotten, Lord, your own decree that we should not eat unclean beasts!

The Issues of a Decision

Do you catch the import of those four cases? The Lord says so-and-so; and man says, But, Lord, you are not allowing for this! And the Lord said to Martha, when she took that attitude,

" Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe thou shouldest see the glory of God? "

Again in this connection mention is made of glory. We marked that the tabernacle was filled with glory because they did exactly as the Lord commanded. Martha, you shall see the glory if only you will believe! Believe, is the word used this time, not obey. But what a close link there is between those two words. So close is the link that we find the two English words are represented by one and the same word in the Greek; as, for example, in Heb. iii. 19 and iv. 6, where the Revised Version translates the word " unbelief " in the first instance and " disobedience " in the second.

" They could not enter in because of unbelief " (Heb. iii. 19. R.V.).

" They...failed to enter in because of disobedience " (Heb. iv. 6. R.V.).

Was it unbelief or disobedience that kept them out of the land? It was disobedience resultant from unbelief. Moses and Israel saw the glory because they obeyed. Martha might have missed seeing the glory. Fail to open that tomb, and all the glory of the manifested resurrection power of the Lord will be hidden: but open that tomb, and the glory of the revelation of Christ as the One that has power over death will be manifested forth.

Bring this right down to our own experience, and we find ourselves again and again, in the presence of some command of the Lord, some

pressure of His Spirit upon ours to take a certain course, saying, But, Lord you are not allowing for this! Beloved, there is a crisis in experience! What is the crisis? The crisis is this: we are going to see the glory of the Lord or we are going to miss revelation. Here is a juncture in our experience when we may come into a new knowledge of His glory, or we may refuse to have that stone rolled away because of our conclusion that the Lord is making a mistake. Ah, but that stone, if allowed to remain, will not only seal up dead Lazarus, but will seal up the glory of God!

The Call for a Full Faith

Now, of course, disobedience in these New Testament cases, was not the disobedience of unwilling people, but that of people whose stumbling block amounted to this, that they could not believe for some particular or given thing. Martha could not believe, in a sense, that you could open a tomb where a dead body had lain for four days, and the one in question could come forth alive. Ananias could not believe that an injurious persecutor could suddenly become a brother in Christ. Peter could not believe that those who, through all the prior dispensation, had been kept at a distance, were now to be brought nigh by the grace of God. And these disciples could not believe that the Lord could move in a scene where His life had been threatened and move there in perfect safety and calmness. It is a question of not being able to rise to a degree of believing for the thing in question, giving the Lord the credit for being able in that matter. But that unbelief threatens to cut off the glory. Imagine Paul just waiting for that gesture of fellowship from Ananias. Paul was to be the channel of the revelation of the Church, which is His Body, and at this juncture in his early experience, it needed that testimony borne. That coming in as an open testimony on top of the things the Lord was showing him in his heart, was part of the means God used to bring Paul in. Supposing Ananias had not gone, who can say what Paul and his ministry would not have suffered?

If the Lord is speaking, however impossible a thing, however absurd the thing, remember there is a crisis bound up with your seeing the glory of the Lord in that moment, and I want to suggest that we should be ready for the kind of thing the Lord did with Jeremiah when He said, Go and buy that field in Anathoth! But, Lord

you have forgotten that the Chaldeans are in possession ! But Jeremiah went and bought it. For that kind of thing, beloved, be ready. The glory of the Lord is bound up with experiences of that sort : and oh, to allow ourselves to be governed by our own carnal reason about things is to shut the door upon the glory, to rob ourselves, our brethren and our Lord, of the joy of His breaking in in some new way.

Of course, the Lord Jesus Himself is the consummate illustration of this thing. What seemingly strange, unaccountable things He did, always because He was held in by the will of His Father, or immediately responsive to it. But oh, the glory that burst forth on every such

occasion ! How important it is that we should watch at those crises when the pressure of the Spirit seems to call for something which is absurd in the circumstances or to which our flesh is tempted to say, But, Lord ! Oh, when you begin to say, But, Lord !, be watchful, be careful. It is an inability to believe that in these circumstances the Lord can really do a thing. But He can. There is nothing too hard for Him. So if He bids you go and buy a field at Anathoth when to do so would seem hopeless and stupid, be careful before you decline. Be sure, if the Lord has bidden you, you go right on. Count on His ability to do the impossible !

G.P.

The Normal Christian Life

No. 6

The Meaning and Value of Romans Seven

READING : Romans 7. We are apt to feel that Romans seven is in the wrong place. We would like to put it between the fifth and sixth chapters. After chapter six all is so perfect and then comes a complete breakdown in chapter seven. What is its teaching then ? Chapter six deals with freedom from sin : chapter seven deals with freedom from the law. In chapter six Paul has told us how we could be delivered from sin, and we concluded that this was all that was required. Chapter seven now teaches us that deliverance from sin is not enough, but that we also need deliverance from the law. If we are not fully emancipated from the law we can never know full emancipation from sin. But what is the difference between deliverance from sin and deliverance from law ? We all know the meaning of deliverance from sin, but we need to know the meaning of the law, if we are to appreciate our need of deliverance from it.

Romans Seven and Man's Total Incapacitation

Many a Christian is truly saved and yet bound by sin. Not that he is necessarily living under the power of sin all the time, but there are certain sins hampering him continually, so that he commits the same sins over and over again. One day he hears the full Gospel message, that the Lord Jesus not only died to cleanse away our

sins, but that when He died he included us in His death ; so that not only are our sins dealt with, but we ourselves are dealt with too. The man's eyes are opened, and he *knows* he has been crucified with Christ. Two things immediately follow that revelation. In the first place he *reckons* that he has died and risen with the Lord, and in the second place he *yields* to the claims of the Lord. He sees he has no more right over himself. This is the commencement of a beautiful Christian life full of praise to the Lord.

But then he begins to think like this : I have died with Christ and I am raised with Him, and I have given myself over to Him for ever : now I must do something for Him since He has done so much for me. I want to please Him and do His will. So after consecration he seeks to discover the will of God and sets out to obey Him. Then he makes a strange discovery. He thought he could do the will of God and he thought he loved it, but gradually he finds he does not always like it. At times he even finds a distinct reluctance to do it ; and often when he tries to do it, he finds he cannot. Then he begins to query his experience. He asks himself, Did I really *know* ? Yes ! Did I really *reckon* ? Yes ! Did I really *yield* ? Yes ! Have I taken back my consecration ? No ! Whatever is the matter now ? The more this man tries to do the will of

God the more he fails to do it. Ultimately he comes to the conclusion that he never really loved God's will at all: so he prays for the desire and the power to do it. He confesses his disobedience and promises never to disobey again. But he has barely got up from his knees when he has fallen once more; before he reaches the point of victory he is conscious of defeat. Then he says to himself, Perhaps my last decision was not definite enough. This time I will be absolutely definite. So he brings all his will-power to bear on the situation, only to find greater defeat than ever awaiting him after the first temptation. Then he echoes the words of Paul: "For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not. For the good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practise" (Romans vii. 18-19).

The Meaning and the Purpose of the Law

Many Christians are suddenly launched into the experience of Romans vii. and they do not know why. They fancy Romans vi. is quite enough. Having seen that clearly, they think there can be no more question of failure, and then to their utmost surprise they suddenly find themselves in Romans vii. What is the explanation? They do not know deliverance from law. What is the meaning of law? Grace means that God does something for me; law means that I do something for Him. God wants me to do something for Him, so He makes demands upon me. That is law. Now if law means that God demands something of me, then deliverance from law means that He demands nothing of me. Law implies that God requires me to do something for Him; deliverance from law implies that He exempts me from doing anything for Him. I need do nothing for God: that is deliverance from law. The trouble in Romans vii. is that the man here tried to do something for God. As soon as you try to please God, then you are under the law. When a man sees clearly that he is delivered from the law, then he proclaims, I will not try to do anything for God. What a doctrine! What awful heresy! But deliverance from the law means just this, that I cease trying to please God. God knows who I am. He knows that from head to foot I am full of sin, He knows I am weakness incarnate, He knows I can do nothing. The trouble is I do

not know it. I admit that all men are sinners, and that therefore I am a sinner; but I imagine that I am not such a hopeless sinner as some. God must bring us to the place where we see we are utterly weak and helpless. Whilst we say so, we do not wholly believe it, and God has to bring us to a point where we are fully convinced of the fact. Had it not been for the law we should never have known how weak we are. The more we try to keep the law the more our weakness is manifest, till it is clearly demonstrated, to our selves as well as to God, that we are hopelessly weak. God knew it before, but we did not, and so God had to bring us through painful experiences to a recognition of the fact. We need to have it proved to ourselves beyond dispute that we are hopelessly weak. That is why God gave us the law.

God never gave us the law to keep, He gave us the law to break! He knew we could not keep it. Nowhere in the New Testament does it say, The law was given to be kept; but it does say that the law was given so that there should be transgression. "The law came in...that the trespass might abound" (Rom. v. 20). The law was given to make us law breakers! Alas, we are so conceited, we think ourselves so strong, that God has to give us something to prove how weak we are. At last we see it and confess, I am a sinner through and through, and I can do nothing whatever to please God. The law was not given that we should keep it: it was given that we should break it; and when we have broken it so completely that we are convinced of our utter need, then the law has served its purpose. It has been our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that He may keep it in us.

The Fulfilment of the Law and Will of God by the Indwelling Christ

Deliverance from the law does not mean that we are free from doing the will of God, but that we are free from doing it as of ourselves. From henceforth Another does it in us. Once we are fully persuaded that we cannot do God's will, then we refuse to try. From henceforth, if anything is done the Lord must be the One to do it. Unfortunately, some of us, even knowing we cannot keep the law, still try to keep it, and God has to bring us to the point of utter despair in ourselves, so that we cease even to try. Deliverance from the law means, Henceforth I will never do anything to please God. That does not

mean that I am going to be lawless, but it does mean that if the law is going to be kept it will be kept by Another, not by me of myself.

Let me illustrate by what I have seen in my own country. In China, some bearers can carry a load of salt weighing 120 kilos, some even 250 kilos. Now along comes a man who can only carry 120 kilos, and here is a load of 250 kilos. He knows perfectly well he cannot carry it, and if he is wise he will say, I won't touch it! But the temptation to try is inbred in human nature, so although he cannot possibly carry it, he still tries. As a youngster I used to amuse myself watching ten or twenty of these fellows come along and try, though every one of them knew they could not possibly manage it. The sooner we give up trying the better, for if we occupy the ground, then there is no ground for the Holy Spirit. But if we say, I'll not do it, I'll trust Thee to do it in me, then we shall find ourselves carried through without the slightest effort on our part.

In 1923 I met a famous Canadian evangelist. I had said something along this line, and as we walked back to his home together he remarked, "The note of Romans vii. is seldom sounded nowadays; it is good to hear it again. The day I was delivered from the law was a day of heaven on earth. After being a Christian for years I was still trying my best to please God; but the more I tried, the more I failed. I regarded God as the greatest demander in the universe. but I found myself impotent to fulfil the least of His demands. Suddenly one day, as I read Romans vii., light dawned, and I saw that I had not only been delivered from sin, but from the law as well. In amazement I jumped up and said, Lord, are you really making no more demands on me? Then I need do nothing more for You". *God's requirements have not altered, but we are not the ones to meet them. Praise God, He is the Lawgiver on the Throne, and He is the Lawkeeper in my heart. He who gave the law, Himself keeps it. He makes the demands, but He also meets them. My friend could well jump up and shout when he discovered he had nothing to do, and all who make a like discovery could well do the same. As long as we try to do anything, He can do nothing. It is because of our trying that we fail, and fail, and fail. God wants to demonstrate to us that we can do nothing at all, and till that is fully recognized our disappointments and disillusionments will never cease.*

A brother who was trying to struggle into victory remarked to me, I do not know why I am so weak. The trouble with you, I said, is that you are weak enough not to do the will of God, but you are not weak enough to keep out of things altogether. You are still not weak enough; but when you are reduced to utter weakness and are persuaded you can do nothing whatever, then God will do everything. We all need to come to the point where we say, Lord, I am not going to do anything for Thee, but I trust Thee to do everything in me.

A Pointed Illustration

Once I was staying in a certain place with some twenty other brothers. There was inadequate provision for bathing in the home where we stayed, so we went for a daily plunge in the river. On one occasion a brother had cramp in one leg and was sinking fast: so I motioned to another brother, who was an expert swimmer, to hasten to his rescue. But he made no move. I grew desperate and called out, Don't you realize the man is drowning? And the other brothers, about as agitated as I, shouted vigorously too. But our good swimmer still made no move. Calm and collected, he remained just where he was. Meantime the voice of the poor drowning brother grew fainter and his efforts feebler. In my heart I said, I hate that man! Think of him letting a brother drown before his very eyes and not going to his rescue! But when the man was actually sinking, with a few swift strokes the swimmer was at his side, and both were soon safely ashore. When I got an opportunity I aired my views. I have never seen any Christian who loved his life quite as much as you do, I said. Think of the distress you would have saved that brother if you had considered yourself a little less and him a little more. But the swimmer knew his business better than I did. Had I gone earlier he would have clutched me so fast that both of us would have gone under, he said. A drowning man cannot be saved till he is utterly exhausted and ceases to make the slightest effort to save himself.

Do you see it? When *we* give up the case, then *God* will take it up. He is waiting till we are at an end of our resources and can do nothing more for ourselves. God has condemned all that is of the old creation and consigned it to the Cross. If we try to do anything ourselves we are

virtually repudiating the Cross of Christ. God has declared us to be fit only for death. When we truly believe that, then we confirm God's verdict by giving up all our own efforts to please Him. Our every effort to do His will is a denial of His declaration in the Cross of our utter worthlessness. Our continued efforts are a misunderstanding on the one hand of God's demands, and a misunderstanding on the other hand of the source of supply.

We see the law and we think we must meet its demands, but we need to remember that though the law in itself is all right, it will be all wrong if it is applied to the wrong person. The "wretched man" of Romans vii. tried to meet the demands of God's law himself, and that was the cause of his trouble. The repeated use of the little word "I" in Romans vii. gives the clue to the failure. "To will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not" (vii. 18). There was a fundamental misconception in this man's mind. He thought God was asking him to keep the law, so of course he was trying to keep it. But God was requiring no such thing of him. What was the result? Far from doing what pleased God, he found himself doing what dis-

pleased God. In his very efforts to do the will of God he did exactly the opposite of what he knew to be God's will.

A Summary of Necessary Experience

In chapters six and seven we see three different crises a Christian must pass through if he would live the life God purposed he should. Some pass through all three at once, others pass through two at once, but most only pass through one at a time. We need not have these experiences in the order mentioned, but some time or other we must have all three. (1) There must be a fundamental revelation. (2) There must be a believing which will spontaneously issue in reckoning. (3) There must come an hour when revelation and reckoning issue in yielding, and we say, "Lord I am Thine, utterly and for ever. All I am and have I hold henceforth only as a trust, from Thee". When we have passed through these three crises our greatest temptation will be to try to please God, and the more consecrated we are the greater will be the temptation. We must be fully convinced that we can do nothing whatever to please God, and that He is asking nothing whatever of us. W.N.

"Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory"

No. 5.

The Knowledge of the Glory of God

"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway from the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him; and lo, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. iii. 16-17).

"...it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. iv. 10).

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."—"Wherefore if any man is in Christ, there is a new creation: the old things are passed away: behold, they are become new. But all things are of God..." (Gen. i. 1.—II Cor. v. 17-18.).

"And God said, Let there be light: and there was light."—"Seeing it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who

shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (Gen. i. 3.—II Cor. iv. 6.).

"And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness."—"Who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love."

(Gen. i. 4.—Col. i. 13.).

"And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters."—"If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth. For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

(Gen. i. 6.—Col. iii. 1-3.).

The New Creation in Christ

We have read together in Matthew iii. of the baptism and descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Lord Jesus, because it is just there that we have the new creation in Christ introduced. I want you to take particular note of this quite simple thing, that the new creation is in Christ; or, in other words, Christ is God's new creation, and everything that is a part of God's creative activity and method is to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ. So that, when He emerges from that typical death in Jordan and the Spirit comes upon Him, it is God by His Spirit typically bringing a new order of things into being, as represented by Christ and as embodied in Christ, and from that moment, by the Spirit of God—Who was the executive of the Divine purposes at the beginning, brooding over the darkness and the chaos—from that moment by the Spirit governing the life of Jesus, everything will be a progressive development and unveiling of what the new creation is. Then, of course, comes the inclusive statement that it is when we are in Christ that there is a new creation; that is, the new creation has its rise, so far as we are concerned, by that experience of coming into Christ, being made one in union with Christ, having now our place and our life and everything in Christ. It is there that all the meaning of God's new universe in a spiritual way becomes a part of us. Those are just simple basic facts with which most of us are familiar.

Now, we just come to take up the matter in these corresponding words in the Old and the New Testaments.

“In the beginning God...”

I do not think there is any great mystery about that word “beginning”. A very great deal has been made of it. The simple fact is this, that right at the inception of something called “the creation” there was God. Everything took its rise from Him, sprang from Him. The beginning is the beginning of a new universe, and new order, and there it is with God. I am being exceedingly simple in the statement of truth in this meditation. It may not be all so simple as we go on, but I do want to get this thing quite clearly before you at the outset. It is God intervening in a state of things which is chaotic, and the key to everything, the secret of everything, is the Lord Himself in a living, personal, active way, coming into that scene.

What is true here in the material universe and

creation is just as true in the spiritual experience. It is that God comes into the scene, into the situation, that there is a living, personal, active God breaking in upon things as they are: and most of us know that is true from experience. What is the remedy for everything, what is the key to all the problems, the solution of every difficulty. It is the coming in of God Himself into experience in an active, personal way.

Now, in the New Testament where we are dealing with the new creation, the whole weight of revelation bears down upon this, that it is God in Christ intervening in the life and state of things in a living, personal way, coming right in in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in Him is that which will answer the situation at every point in all its forms, and the knowledge of Him coming in is the way to that perfect order, that glorious order, that universe which expresses at every point the glory of God.

You see, the statement in II Cor. iv. 6 is this—“...the light of the knowledge of the glory of God”: the *knowledge* of the glory of God. Break the statement up into its parts—The glory of God; the knowledge of the glory of God; the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. That is what is in view. It is God desiring to make Himself known in terms of glory—over against the situation as we find it typically in Gen. i. 2. “The earth was waste and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep”. This, as we know, was but typical of a yet deeper spiritual darkness that had overtaken the creation. So that this awful chaos and darkness and disorder, this state of things which we know to be true of the human heart, of the broken down creation of human nature, shall be resolved into, or give place to, a revelation of the glory of God: and we shall know the glory of God—how? By what He does. You never can know anyone really apart from what they do. It may be the most able, clever person in this world, but if that person should happen to be away in some remote place out of touch with the rest of the world, you would never know anything about their ability. It is only as they come into touch with the world and express their ability in their actions that you know what they are. And God desires that the glory which is true of Him, which He has, should be known, should be displayed, and that by what He does as over against the situation that exists.

In the beginning God—and now, in New

Testament terms. In the beginning God in Christ. You may think that does not get you very far, but I want you to be quite sure of my point, which is this, that the coming in of the Lord Jesus upon the scene is the full embodiment of everything that is going to end in a new universe for us expressive of the glory of God. Beloved, if the Lord Jesus is in us and if we are in Christ, there is the sum total of all Divine glory. Now it is a matter of progressive working out, discovering and knowing; but it is all there. God was no bigger on the sixth or seventh day than He was on the first. May I put it like that? It was all there in Him before He started, and the Lord Jesus, God in Christ, being on the scene, existing in the midst of a situation, means that all the fulness of Divine possibility is there present and the glorious end is already here. The Lord Jesus will be no greater when this whole universe is transfigured into His likeness than He is to-day, no bigger than He is in your heart. If He is there, you have a new universe and my desire at this point in emphasizing this is to point out that it is all a matter of having the Lord Himself and not things. We want this and that and something else which we think to be parts of the new creation. We are wanting sanctification, holiness and all sorts of things, and so we are reaching out for things which to us are things which make up the new creation, and there are any number of things after which people go. Let me say that if you have the Lord Jesus, you have all the things, and what is necessary now is to discover what Christ is, what is in Christ, and it is all a matter, not of making new discovery of things, but of making progressive discovery of the Lord.

You see, the first day represents a revelation of the Lord. The second day—why, it is some fuller revelation of the Lord, a discovery of the Lord in a fuller way: not things, but the Lord. It is all coming back to the Lord, and, as you make progress through the days right on to the end of the creation, what is happening is this—“Oh, what a wonderful Lord this is! On the first day, I thought He was wonderful, but on the second day, I thought he was more wonderful: and, as the days have gone on, I have found He is infinitely more wonderful than I knew He was.” That is the point, and that is all true in the case of the Lord Jesus: wherefore Peter says, “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (II Pet. iii. 18);

and Paul also says that we grow up thus unto God, and for us now that is God in Christ—“The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

“In the beginning God created...” —“If any man be in Christ there is a new creation.” God’s intention and thought and idea in creation was specifically and entirely with a view to having Himself in universal expression, that, by reason of what He brought into being, the result of His activity, He should be seen. “The invisible things of him”, says the Apostle, “are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made”, showing God’s idea that things which otherwise would be altogether hidden from His intelligent universe should be seen by His creative activity; God putting Himself out to be known along the line of creation. If that be the case in the material creation, how very much more is it so in the new creation. If the new creation is in Christ Jesus, then all that God is which cannot be known otherwise is to be known in Christ. God has brought the sum total of what He is in Himself within the range of our spiritual knowledge by breaking in upon the scene in the form of Jesus Christ. A new creation! “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father”. But how few have seen Him. Hence the importance of seeing Him, and with other than natural eyes. What a difference it makes!

Some Features of the New Creation

(i) Light

“God said, Let there be light: and there was light”—“God who said, Light shall shine out of darkness” (or God who said, Let there be light) “hath shined into our hearts”. It is the same creative activity. God said, Let there be light!—God hath shined. In the matter of light, the new creation is in Christ. “I am the light of the world”, said He: “he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life.” You see, God brings in light in order that what He is going to do may be done in the light, may be carried on and seen. There may be a sense in which God works in the dark. God often does work in secret, in a hidden way, but really all God’s works are in the light. He carries on His works, His purposes, in the light. Now, with regard to the new creation in Christ, the first feature in the movement forward is light. The Lord Jesus is the Light in which, or in whom, God proceeds with the unfolding of His

purposes. A knowledge of the Lord Jesus by revelation of the Holy Spirit is a knowledge in the light of which God is able to fulfil all that is in His mind. That is not very well put. I will try to put it more clearly.

God has a great, an extensive, a many-sided thing on hand, but God cannot realize all that is in His heart save as there is light in which to do it; and you and I, beloved, who are a part of His creation, need light, need illumination, need revelation, need the darkness to be dismissed, in order that God shall reach His full end in us. Therefore you have so much in the New Testament, both in the Gospels by way of illustration, and in the Epistles by way of direct teaching, which points out that, in order to reach God's full end, you have to have light, you have to have revelation. There must be a state of illumination, a state of enlightenment. We are not talking about specific illumination now, but there must be an enlightenment of the eyes. Now, what does this mean? It just means, beloved, that God will not go on with His work apart from illumination. God cannot. You cannot take it for granted that you are going to come into all that is in God's mind willy nilly, drift into it just automatically, or mechanically come to it. It is not done that way. The very first step in new creation is a matter of the eyes being opened, and every successive step has to be the outcome of illumination. God must work on the basis of illumination, and all true experience bears that out. You and I do make progress immediately we see something, and we do not make progress until we see. Is that not true? For a long time maybe we are held up about something and we are conscious that we are not moving, not making progress, and there is something we need to know; and then, under the Spirit's operation, there is illumination, and as soon as we get that illumination, we are free, we are released, we move on, we gain ground: and it must be like that, and it is always like that. It is a fresh revelation of the Lord Jesus which is the basis of progress towards God's full end.

Now, the Lord Jesus is the light, the full light, and it is only in Him, in His light, in the light of what He is, that you and I can come to know the glory of God. Oh, how true this is to the Word! "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" There is nothing more blinding than

unbelief, and there is nothing more illuminating than faith. Poor Tennyson was very wide of the mark when he said,

'We have but faith, we cannot know,
For knowledge is of things we see.'

We are outside of the New Testament when we begin to make poetry like that. No, there is nothing which is more the key to knowing than faith, and the Lord has established that quite definitely. Believest thou that I am able to do this thing? It is always the Lord's challenge before opening eyes, before doing a work which is to result in a new fulness of spiritual life. It is the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It is light in Christ you and I need for spiritual growth, for spiritual fulness, and so we must ask the Lord to maintain us in the way of continuous and progressive revelation; for immediately that ceases, our growth ceases. We do not mean we should seek revelation to come in a direct way apart from what He has given us in the Scriptures. We are not talking of extra-Biblical revelation, but the revelation of God's fulness which lies within what He has already given us in His Word. We know quite well, any fragment of the Word of God, under the Holy Spirit's illumining, can reveal things ever new and ever fresh and ever more wonderful. We to-day are using the Scriptures which have been in use for long centuries and still there is fresh light to break forth from them. To be kept in that way is new creation, and that is spiritual growth, that is moving on to fulness. That is how it should be in the new creation. Just for the moment, our point is this, that there is no progress in God's purposes where we are concerned apart from light, spiritual light by the Holy Spirit.

(ii) Discernment

"And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness."

God made a distinction, and said, This is darkness and this is light; and in the later covenant, you remember, it was said that, as long as the earth remained, there should be day and night, summer and winter, seedtime and harvest; these things should be divided up and put in their place under an irrevocable covenant or ordinance of God. These things stand apart: light and darkness stand apart: and that points on so much to the new creation. We quoted

Col. i. 13—"...hath translated us out of the kingdom of darkness (or the power of darkness) into the kingdom of the Son of his love": and, says the Apostle, "Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. The distinction is made."

Now, you see, God is not satisfied with the simple bringing in of light in order to go on with His great work and purpose. God makes an ordinance of this; that light is light and darkness is darkness. You have to discriminate between the two, and a feature of progress, whether in the progressive activity of God in the creation or in the new creation, is that there is a distinction which is to be observed, to be noted, to be taken account of, and that we are not to go on as though this thing did not exist. In nature, for instance, if you violate that distinction, you are going to suffer. The turning of day into night and night into day is costing the race a good deal. You have not, after a time, the same stored up energies. Your energies are not repaired in the same way as if you were working by day and resting by night; for night sees a suspension of certain vital forces in nature so that you should rest, whereas there are energies let loose in the day in order to enable you to work. While there are natural forces that are at work to vitalize unto labour during the day, you have, in contrast, that terrible zero hour in the very early hours before daybreak—sick people know it, sufferers know it—the zero hour, that desperately perilous hour for someone who is very low in vitality. You see, God has ordered His creation with principles and laws, and these obtain with even greater force in the spiritual and new creation; and God says, "You must not ignore a distinction that I have made. This is darkness and this is light, and you belong to the light and to the day. You do not belong to the night and the darkness. You have been translated, and you must have intelligence to discriminate between what belongs to the darkness and what belongs to the light, and to keep these things apart". It is a mark of spiritual growth to be able to do that; it is spiritual progress.

By reason of being now in the new creation, you have a faculty given to you for appreciating the differences, appreciating what is of the Lord and what is not of the Lord; what is of the light and what is of the darkness; what is of the

day and what is of the night. You have a power of discerning in the new creation, and you have to use it. This is exactly what the Apostle meant when, writing to the Hebrews, he said that strong meat was for fully grown men who, by reason of exercise, have their senses developed. That is maturity, that is growth, that is the attaining of a point of spiritual advancement, that you have your senses exercised to discern. It is a mark of growth when you can discern what belongs to this realm and what to that.

God fulfilled all these things in the creation at the beginning through the executive instrumentality of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit of God who is dividing and setting things in their place. In the new creation the Spirit of God becomes the intelligence within us, to make us know what belongs to light and what belongs to darkness and where the divide comes. That is what life in the Spirit means. It is very practical. Thus we are told about the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and we have experience of the Spirit of God through the Word, saying, in effect, Now this belongs to that realm and that belongs to that realm; and you must take account of the different realms and these two things must not be confused. A life in the Spirit means that we come to be able to discern what belongs to soul and what belongs to spirit, or that which is natural and that which is Spirit. It is a real creation, it is a living creation, it is an intelligent creation. God has not designed a creation of chairs and tables without sense, just things which He has made. He has made men and women to form His new creation, and they are to have sense and intelligently understand God. Mark that it is the knowledge of God that is spoken of, the knowledge of the glory of God, and the knowledge of the glory of God means knowing how to discern what is of God and what is not of God, and, as we know what is of God and keep to it, so we move on in the glory of God. But when you and I fail to discern what is of God and come into something that is not of God, the glory of God fades from our hearts. We know there is no glory. "God divided the light from the darkness".

(iii) Heavenliness

"And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the

waters from the waters." (More literally, the waters above from the waters beneath).

Let there be a firmament between the waters above and the waters below. In other words, Let there be that which determines what belongs above and what belongs below. This is only an extension of what we have just been saying, but it is a phase with a particular point because it brings in the whole matter of where rule and government are to be seated. The government, is to be above. There is a distinction and a gap, and the New Testament passage which we have used to correspond to this is Col. iii. 1-3.

"If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth. For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

To what did you die? You died to your old creation which, as we pointed out in our previous meditation, belonged to the first man who was of the earth, earthy, and you rose to the last Adam, the second Man, who is from heaven or of heaven.

"As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly" (I Cor. xv. 48). Two men, two orders. Now then, there is to be a space between, and we are to be governed entirely by what is above the firmament. That opens up a tremendous field. It carries us right into Ezekiel at once. We see that the whole of Ezekiel is the outworking of one statement, that above the firmament was the Throne and the likeness of a Man. All the rest that follows is the result of that—A Man in the Throne above the firmament. Is that not true in the new creation, exactly where the new creation commenced in the second chapter of the Book of the Acts? The mighty coming in of the new creation, so far as the Church is concerned, is because there is a Man above the firmament. All is governed out from heaven and by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven: all is of heaven now. God has made a divide, and here is another step forward, a big step forward, toward God's full end, and progress, development and fulness is a matter of our being heavenly in life and government and interest, and being separate from what is merely earthy. Here is

the principle of progress, God going on with His work.

But how does God go on with His work? What are the principles of His being able to go right through to make a full end in His new creation? It is that there are these differences, and that we who are of and in the new creation are governed by these differences; that is, that we are now in the place where there is a divide between what is earthy and what is heavenly as governing our lives. What is influencing you, what is governing you, controlling you, directing you? What is it that is affecting you in your life? Are earthly interests the controlling things or are heavenly things? Is there a distinction and definite space between these things where you are concerned, so that everything is not a jumble, earthly things all mixed up with heavenly things. That is a way of spiritual progress.

So, then, we have to know by the Holy Spirit in us that there is a firmament. Has the Holy Spirit definitely constituted a firmament within you? Can you say that in your heart, in your spirit, there is a firmament; that is, God has put a space between what is heavenly and what is earthy, and you know it, and that space is there as a real thing? It means that your interests, your resources, your well-springs are all above. Your life is hid with Christ in God. It is a way of spiritual fulness, moving unto God's end.

(iv) Fruitfulness

"And God said, Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so."

You see, up to this point, there was no distinguishing between the land and the sea. Waters were general, waters were all pervading: and when you look for the symbolic meaning of waters, you find that they are the lawless elements in the universe. Of course, if you have been to sea when the waters are stirring themselves up, you know that to be a very good simile; lawless elements indeed they are! Here is the thought of something that has got the law into its own hands and is all pervading. Now God says, we are going to break in upon that universal reign of lawlessness, that anarchy, and we are going to bring all that within a limit and bind it to a fixed compass, to a place and a space of its own, and, in so doing, we shall make

possible the bringing up and out from it of that upon which we are going to develop the revelation of the glory of God. Thus the next thing is the dry land, and then all that comes on the dry land ; the verdure, the beauty, the fruitfulness. But you can never have dry land, you can never have that beauty and fruitfulness which comes on the dry land, until you have broken the reign of lawlessness. There is no prospect of trees and shrubs and fruits, the earth bringing forth its splendour for us and for God, a revelation of the glory of God ; there is no prospect of that until lawlessness has been harnessed, its reign broken, and it has been brought within limits and bounds.

That is the new creation ; that is the work of the Spirit of God in the new creation. How much Scripture we could cite at once about that. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. v. 24). That is only one of a large number of passages which bear upon this thing, that spiritual progress under the government of the Holy Spirit toward God's end means that all that running riot of our fallen nature has been brought under arrest and put within limits. It may still make itself known ; but there is the check of the Spirit of God at a point which says, So far, and no further ! to the sea. You and I know there are still those wild, lawless elements in regions of our humanity. We know it, and those things do trouble us. It is part of the infirmity of our broken down creation. You have only to suffer from a nervous complaint to know the awful distress that comes to you through irritability. It is in our broken down humanity. But, blessed be God, that is not all, that is not universal.

What is it that makes you and me to some very real extent amazed at the way men are going on to-day ? Do you not often feel that you would like to get into touch with some of these men and reason with them and seek to persuade them along the line of sweet reasonableness, and really to put before them a higher, better way. What makes you feel like that ? You see, perhaps once you would have done the same thing. If you had been provoked or if you had been mastered by a great ambition, you would have stood at nothing, you would have gone fiercely on, riding rough-shod, to gain your end. That is our nature : but something has happened and there is another side of things

which brings forth the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. That is the dry land bringing forth. In Christ, we all have something of that. You may think it is too little, but in that realm this riotous thing does not hold the day. No, we know that in Christ God has broken in and put back into a certain place that old creation lawlessness of evil nature, and has brought up something else, and that something else makes us constantly react against the thing that is still there somewhere and that makes itself felt from time to time. Every reaction of ours, every bit of suffering when there is an uprising of that old thing, declares there is something else. If it were universal, we should have no reaction in sorrow, no pain over failure. Blessed be God, He has—we say it to His glory—He has made a difference in our natures and constitution, and He has drawn the line between the waters and the dry land ; the riotous elements of our old nature and the beautiful elements of His Divine creation. There is a difference. Well, you see, this is a mark of progress. God is getting on with His work, and to know that difference is something for which to thank God. We cannot boast and we cannot talk about our virtues and goodness, but we do secretly thank God that a change has come about. Whereas at one time we were far more governed by self-interest and passions than by Divine interests, it is becoming more and more the other way round. The new creation is growing apace. It is the increase of Christ and what is happening is that it is more of Christ now and less of the old Adam in lawlessness against God.

(v) Resurrection

"And God said, Let the earth put forth grass, herb yielding seed, and fruit-tree bearing fruit after its kind, wherein is the seed thereof, upon the earth : and it was so."

Now, in order to get the full value of that, you have to come over to verses 29 and 30, and 31.

"And God said, Behold I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed ; to you it shall be for food : and to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the heavens, and to everything that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every

green herb for food : and it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good."

Do you see the difference ? To man God has given that which has seed in it for food. To the beast, the birds, the living creatures, He has given the herbs without the seed. What is the meaning of that ? Well, I must go over to John xii, 24.

"Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone ; but if it die, it beareth much fruit. He that loveth his life loseth it ; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."

We are speaking about the knowledge of the glory of God. "Said I not unto thee that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God ?" Do you remember the connection of those words ? Lazarus has died and fallen into the ground, and the knowledge of the glory of God is going to come about by resurrection ; and you can only have resurrection when you have seed that falls into the ground and dies. You and I are controlled in our knowledge of God by this law. We only know the glory of God on the principle of resurrection. That is progress. You see, we are moving on. Yes, the way to know the Lord in ever growing fulness is on the principle of resurrection. You will remember that we are shown the supreme instance of this in the letter to the Ephesians.

"...that ye may know...the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe,

according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named."

There you have a very full knowledge, but it is by way of the power of His resurrection. Well then, you and I must know more and more on the one side of that dying to live, that going down to be released, that breaking up which means enlargement, that grave for what is not of heaven in order that what is of heaven may know emancipation into fulness. That is the law, the law of the seed.

Is not the Holy Spirit's way of keeping to spiritual principles wonderful ? The Lord marvellously indicated this very thing away back there in Genesis i. 11, 29-31— 'You are to come as the new creation to be a revelation of Myself in fulness. There shall be a knowledge of Me, My glory, and, in order that it might be so, you have to feed on resurrection. Your very sustenance and maintenance has to be by resurrection, and that is to be the law of your maintenance'. Resurrection ! The whole Bible gathers round that, does it not ?

There is much more. Ask the Lord to keep it alive and make it of value. These are not just theories, but very practical and important things. They are the real things of the new creation. The Lord teach us in our hearts what they mean.

T.A-S.



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NO. 6, VOL. 19

Editor's Letter

BELOVED OF GOD,

We are full of wonder and praise that, after two years of war, we are still able to send out this instrument of ministry to so many parts of the world. I write this letter just immediately after the first anniversary of the terrible assault on London, which was so vital a part of what has come to be known as the Battle of Britain. Twelve months ago fire and destruction rained from the skies all around us. We were ringed by it to within a few feet. For months this went on, and sometimes we have wondered whether there would be anything left. But here we are. We have never had to discontinue conferences, nor has the regular ministry been interrupted. There have been dark and strenuous times, and much scattering has taken place. If you could look over the "Acknowledgment" columns of the "Witness and Testimony" for the last one, or two, years, you would get some idea, *not a complete one*, of how the word has gone forth, remembering that in practically every case a letter of appreciation has accompanied the gift. We can truly say "Having received help from God, we continue until now".

But, oh! what a spiritual battle it is! Although our own all-dominating desire is that the absolute Lordship of Christ, which means the ground of His fulness in the saints, should be a realized thing by all of His own, we are bitterly hated and opposed by many children of God. They are praying hard against us. How strange it is that, while so many are thus beseeching the Lord to quench us, from so many parts of the world children and servants of God in various connections of missions and denominations are all the time sending written testimony to the enrichment of life and *ministry* through this instrumentality! And it is so often those who have been through, or who are in, the fires of trial, or who have passed from the elementary stages of Christian life and service, who so testify. I do not essay to give the solution to this enigma, but I do mention it in the hope that some might pause before jeopardizing the prospect of the fulness of Christ in their own case or in that of others, as did Israel of old, by taking up an "evil report". As for ourselves, we will seek to be faithful and commend ourselves to God's approval "through evil report and good report". If only the Lord's people universally would get away from things and be taken up solely with HIMSELF, how much of all this would cease; and what a way would be made for Him! I would appeal to you, beloved of the Lord, to give yourselves to preparing a way for the Lord. Let the question which governs every matter and relationship be, not, how far will or does it help or hinder such and such an enterprise, movement, society, or piece of work? but, how does this minister to an increase of Christ in the saints? We can take it that a true increase of Christ will have effects in

many directions, but the directions must never be separated and made the paramount concerns in themselves apart. I am ever more convinced that for all such troubles as afflict the saints, individually and collectively, the secret of victory, deliverance, and salvation, is a very simple one, so far as both the prescribing and the working are concerned: the one difficulty being—as with so many patients—the honest and wholehearted taking of it.

It is found in a short sentence used frequently by Paul:—

“According to Christ”

Romans xv. 5.—Colossians ii. 8.

It would be a wonderful thing if in the realm of medicine one remedy could be found whereby every conceivable malady could be most certainly cured. What a tremendous amount of complication and confusion would at once be removed. It is almost too big a thought or prospect for us to take in; there is so much of life taken up with the endless systems of healing, and the countless number of remedies. Not only are there the varieties and multitudes of propositions and advocacies, but there are the strong and, sometimes, fierce rivalries in medicine and surgery; the opposing schools.

Someone years ago gave to spiritual ministry the name of “the cure of souls”. That “cure” far outreaches the matter of individual salvation. The Apostle Paul, in particular, had all his time taken up with the “cure” of believers, and the “cure” of the churches. The maladies of individuals and churches were many; from sins of a very low level, through jealousies, factions, personal interests etc., to false doctrine, and all the complexity of church technique.

But this servant of God had and propounded one universal remedy, one panacea for all ills. You ask, “Is that possible?” Yes! In this realm of the spiritual disorders in the Lord’s people, whether personal or collective, as for the unsaved of every different constitution, temperament, inheritance, etc., there is

One Universal Remedy

That simplifies things very much. It sets aside a thousand questions and perplexities. The evil germs of suspicion, prejudice, fear, jealousy, and many other such like things will be killed by the radium-like power of this new Life. The dislocations between people will be quickly and effectively adjusted. The whole question of order and technique in the churches, in all its particulars, will spontaneously resolve and answer itself. The malady of spiritual inertia and lack of concern for the salvation and eternal good of others will yield to a new vitality and energy.

Yes, there is one all-inclusive cure; but to say this is of no more value than an advertisement, unless it is believed and obeyed.

What then is this one all-embracing Remedy? It will not help a great deal just to give the answer in a simple sentence, so we must illustrate or instance it. It is quite clear that every letter written by the Apostle Paul had some maladies as the occasion of it. That is to say, there were things that were wrong in every place to which the letters were written, and which needed to be put right. The outstanding case is Corinth. The disorders and diseases there, both individual and collective, were many and great. While the Apostle referred to these specifically, and rebuked, reproved, exhorted, and warned concerning them, he knew quite well that they could never be cleared up as things in themselves. It was of no use to try and get a solution by discussion, debate, logic, personal persuasion or threat. His one all-covering Remedy is announced or prescribed very early in the first letter to them:—

“I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”

In other words, Paul’s finally settled position was that a passion for Jesus Christ in terms of His Cross—that is, in terms of love; the letting go of all personal interest, the yielding of all natural mindedness—will solve every problem and cure every malady. Paul believed that if he could get those believers to become really captivated by a concern for Christ as the objective of an ever increasing devotion and self-surrender, all the evils and hurtful things would fade out. If something more than the initial and basic personal advantages of salvation were to fill the heart, so many of

the unhappy conditions in individual and corporate Christian life would disappear. That is to say, if the Lordship of Christ were to be given its place, and His *fulness* were to be the governing goal, life would be ever rising in ascendancy above the low level, and be enlarging beyond the small and petty measure which is characteristic of so many.

Oh, for the ability to show how the Lordship of Christ in a life, or in a church, and in all the churches, is the solution to *every* problem and difficulty! Will you ask the Lord to impress you, firstly with this *fact*, and then to lead you into its reality. To this ministry, by His grace, and as helped by your prayers, we give ourselves until we—with all saints—"attain unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ".

We greet you again, beloved, while we labour and stand with the trowel and the sword, spread out extensively upon *the one* wall, and bound together by the one trumpet of testimony and Headship of our exalted Lord.

Yours in His fellowship,

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.

God's Spiritual House

No. 6.

The School of Sonship unto Adoption

READING: Rom. viii. 14, 17, 19, 21, 23, 29; Gal. iv. 5-7; Eph. i. 5-6; Heb. i. 1-2; iii. 6-8, 14-15; v. 8-14; xii. 5-7, 9, 11.

Continuing our contemplation of the spiritual house, we are now to consider the matter of the School of sonship unto adoption. I hesitate to go over the ground of technical differences in terms because that has been done so often, but you will suffer just the briefest word in that connection, as it may be necessary for some.

The Divine Conception of "Adoption"

When we come to the things of God, we find that we have to change some of our human ideas, and amongst the many things in which that is so there is this matter of adoption. God's idea about adoption is altogether different from ours. Our idea is that of bringing someone into the family from outside, but that is not God's idea at all about adoption. The word "adoption" literally means "the placing of sons," and you will have recognized, if you were following closely, that adoption comes at the close of things in all those passages of Scripture. It is something which lies ahead. We, who have received the Spirit, wait, groaningly wait, for our adoption. We were foreordained unto adoption as sons. It is something for which we are waiting, according to the Word of God. Thus it is not just the matter of bringing into the

family, but it is something which is the result of what has transpired since we came into the family, the result of God's dealings with us as being in His family, and you know quite well that different words are used.

The Revised Version is of peculiar value in this connection. The distinction is made quite clear there that, as children of God, we are such on the ground of birth, whilst we are but sons potentially by that birth. We are actually sons, according to that Divine thought as represented in the word "adoption", after we have been in the family for a time and God has dealt with us. Sonship, in the Divine sense, is something which is being developed in us. To be a child is a question of generation; "child" is a generic term, but sonship is something received, something given, something imparted. That is something more than being born.

The Scriptural Unfolding of the Subject

This word, as you have recognized, is used in different ways in the Scripture. In Romans and Galatians, for instance, we have some light upon sonship. It is seen to have its genesis in a basic relationship with God through our receiving the Spirit. We have received the Spirit, and are called sons because we have received the Spirit; but both in the case of Romans and Galatians the object of those letters was to obviate the

grave peril which had come amongst believers of stopping short at a certain point in their spiritual life as born-again ones and not going on to perfection. Their peril was that of being turned aside by the work of the Judaisers, who were coming in to try to arrest the spiritual progress of these believers and bringing in the law again and the Jewish system.

We may indicate here at once that the enemy always withstands very fiercely this matter of spiritual progress unto adoption. The most perilous thing to the enemy is "the adoption of sons". That is the end for him and he knows very well the significance for himself of the Lords people going on with the Lord unto adoption. These Judaisers were the Devil's instruments to prevent the going on of these people to that glorious end.

So the Holy Spirit, through the Apostle, in these two letters, brings in the light of sonship; that is, he gives the knowledge of sonship in its fuller meaning, and says that basically, by having received the Holy Spirit, we are sons, but that sonship is not realized now in its full meaning and value. That is something unto which we are to go on, in which we are to continue; for the whole creation is waiting, groaning and waiting, for the literal consummation of that which is potential in our having received the Spirit, namely, "the manifestation of the sons of God." When that day comes, the creation will be delivered from its bondage of corruption. But against that deliverance the powers of evil work, and they worked through Judaisers as well as through many other things and people to prevent that glorious deliverance of the creation in the manifestation of the sons of God. So that what we have in Romans and Galatians is light about sonship, the basis of sonship established, but nothing said which carries with it the definite declaration that we have reached all that sonship means. Even in this word, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God", there is no saying that every Christian is a son of God; for is every Christian led by the Spirit of God? It is a spiritual position which is bound up with sonship in God's thought.

Of course, in our birth as children of God, in which sonship is implicit and adoption is prospective, the inheritance is in view, for every one born into this family is a potential heir. If we are children, we are heirs. But it is quite well known that we can be minors while we are heirs, and

that is brought out in Galatians. While we may be born heirs, we are still minors, and we cannot have the inheritance until we reach our majority. That is adoption—reaching the majority, coming to full growth, to full manhood.

Full Sonship a Corporate Matter and Greatly Withstood

So that we are brought face to face with this matter of reaching adoption by the development of sonship in us in the School of God. I think I ought to say here that, while this does become an individual and personal matter and must be that in its application, the matter of adoption is one with that of election, and that it is the Church which is in view, not the individual. It is the Church which is the elect body, and it is the Church which is the elect "son", in the sense in which we are speaking of sonship now; and it is the Church which is foreordained unto adoption of sons, not individuals as such, although it has its individual application, and it will be with the manifestation of the sons in the corporate sense, the Church, that God reaches His full end. I say that, because I feel that this matter of sonship involves the truth of the Body of Christ in a very real way. In reality, it depends upon that truth. Now, you may not grasp what I mean. I mean that sonship requires the Body of Christ, is involved in that truth of the Body of Christ, and it is in our relatedness in Christ as fellow-heirs that we shall be developed, that we shall come to fulness, to God's full end. You and I cannot inherit singly, individually: we can only inherit in a related way.

I think that truth goes further than I am now intending to indicate; but let us recognize that the enemy has something very much in view in keeping the light of the Body of Christ from the Lord's people. The reason for that you see, is on account of our being foreordained unto adoption as sons by Jesus Christ unto Himself, and all that it means to the enemy; for to him it means everything. He loses his place, he loses his kingdom, he loses his title, he loses everything, when this "Corporate Son" is manifested in glory, when this work is completed in the Church and it is found in the throne. It is therefore up to him to keep the light of the Body of Christ from believers: and it is for this reason that, when the Apostle has been led to make the declaration of the truth, "foreordained unto adoption as

sons", he gets on his knees, so to speak, and prays:

"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints..." (Eph. i. 17-18).

It is fervent prayer against this blinding, darkening, withholding work of the adversary as to the light concerning the Church's nature, calling and destiny. You will agree with me that there are comparatively few Christians, when you go over the whole range of Christians to-day in all the world, comparatively few who have light, the revelation of the Body of Christ; and that represents a most disastrous result of Satanic activity, the blinding of the saints. Oh no, this is not some truth which is an optional thing. This is something which is bound up with the very purpose of God and the undoing of all Satanic work.

Well, Romans viii. is a tremendous chapter along many lines, but that great summing up is immense. The creation, subjected to vanity, is seen groaning and travailing unto the manifestation of the sons of God, when it will be delivered from the bondage of corruption: and then, unto that, the elect instrument is shown—"Whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son". It is the Church being brought in and it is a thing of immense importance, and it is necessary to see that, before we can appreciate this training of sons unto adoption.

We are in a school for a tremendous destiny. We are in the school which has as its end something of such significance and importance that we can scarce imagine; and so we have not to regard lightly the child-training of the Lord. Oh, again, our human ideas must not be brought into the Divine realm when we use the word "chastening". What a poor translation! Even the Revisers have not helped us very much. It is simply "child-training". I think that, as a youngster, that chapter in Hebrews was my pet aversion in the Bible when I heard it read! My whole being rose up against that. I suppose that is quite natural; but if only we had been given the two words instead of that deplorable word "chastening". It might at least have taken the

edge off of things. "My son, despise not thou the child-training of the Lord." There is something better about that. "Whom the Lord loveth, He trains", He child-trains.

Well, we come to the business of child-training right away. Here, in this fifth chapter of the Hebrew letter, we have these school features mentioned in various words, as you notice.

"Though he was a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." That is a school verse.

"When by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers..."

It is another school verse.

"Every one that partaketh of milk is without experience..."

That is a school verse.

"... by reason of use have their senses exercised..."

That is what happens at school. Here we are found right in the School of sonship.

The Practical Difference Between "Children" and "Sons"

Now, in the practical way, let us note the difference between infants, spiritually called children in the New Testament, and sons. The difference is simply this, that infants or children have everything done for them and they live in the good of that for which they themselves have had no exercise. That is the difference. An infant is one who lives on the good of other people's exercise and has never had any exercise for itself. Everything has been done and prepared for it. Everything is coming to it as from the outside, and nothing has been done by the child itself. I think that is the main mark of an infant. But a son, in the spiritual and Scriptural sense, is one who is in the way of having the root of the matter in himself, who is progressively coming out of the realm where everything is done for him and where he has no exercise at all about things, to the place where it is going on in him and he is becoming one who is competent in himself, and no longer dependent upon what others do and say. Everything is not being brought ready made to him. There is a sense in which it is being made in him and he is making it in his own experience by the exercise of his own senses. That is the main difference, spiritually, between an infant or child, and a son.

These two words here are very helpful words—"senses exercised". As children of God, we are

regarded as having spiritual senses, and the object of God's dealings with us in His child-training is to bring those senses into exercise, so that by that exercise we may have experience: and what a tremendous thing is experience, and of what value. They are the people who count, these who have experience, and experience comes through the exercise of the senses.

But there are a great many people who never graduate from spiritual childhood and infancy to sonship; and why is it? You see, God does not sovereignly and by determination make sons of us. Oh no, God is not going to make sons of everybody on His own initiative, by His own power. We have a place in this. The responsibility, as you notice, in every one of these scriptures, is thrown back upon believers themselves, and it is made very clear in very strong words, that the responsibility does rest upon them. The bringing up so frequently of those words relating to Israel's downfall in the wilderness shows what responsibility rests upon the children of God in this matter.

"To-day if ye shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation" (Heb. iii. 15).

That has usually been used as a text for a Gospel address to unbelievers; but in the New Testament, it was never used in that way. It may be legitimate, but it was never used in that way in the New Testament. It was always used for Christians, for believers, as a warning, and to bring home to believers this matter of responsibility, of something resting with us.

Purposefulness a Requirement in Would-be Sons

Now, that means there is something basic to sonship unto adoption, and that is a purposefulness to go on with God. There must be about us this sense of purpose, this factor and feature of purpose, purposefulness to go on with God, and the Lord calls for that. Oh, the New Testament might be said to be one continuous urge to that, an urge to be characterized by a spiritual purpose, of meaning to go on, and it is upon that the Lord operates. Now I say that to lead to this. It is just that very purposefulness of heart which brings us into all the trouble. Perhaps if we recognized what that means, it would be as helpful a thing as could be said to us. The people who are not characterized by that spirit of purpose and are just content to be little babes all their lives and to have everything done for them

and dished up to them and who never have any exercise for themselves, usually have a fairly comfortable time. They are fairly satisfied and pleased with life and they do not want anything else. But let a man become marked by this sense of earnest purpose, and it will not be long before he is in trouble! If you mean to go on, then you have come out of the nursery into the school, and the nature of this school is a very difficult one.

The Discipline that Makes All Inward and Living

It just means this, that God is going to put and precipitate us into the most difficult situations. A situation is only difficult if you cannot cope with it. If you find the thing altogether beyond your measure; your measure of strength, your measure of wisdom, your measure of knowledge, then you are in difficulty: and that is the sort of thing the Lord does with people who mean business with Him. He puts them into difficult situations, and His whole object is to get their spiritual senses exercised, so that they may gain experience, may have the root of the matter in themselves. Thus all our nice, comfortable line of things falls away at once and we find ourselves in a realm with which we cannot cope, for which we are not sufficient. We have been in the habit of asking questions and getting them answered: now, no one can answer our questions, no answer comes from the outside. Of course, people can say things to us and we may get a measure of help from those who have experience; but God is going to shut us up to the fact that it has to become ours by experience and in truth. It does not matter what anyone else says, we know quite well that we have to prove that for ourselves: they cannot lift us out of our difficulty. We constantly revert to the old childish way of running around asking somebody to solve our problems, but we have to come out of that. That is not going to work any longer. Really, deep down in us, we know that it does not work. We are not getting what we are after. We know now we have not to have something said to us, but something done in us. We have to be brought ourselves to a position, not to a mental solution; and if you are all the time trying to get intellectual solutions to your spiritual problems, you are still in the nursery. If you are going really to come through to God's full and intended end, you have to know the Lord for yourself in an inward way, and unto

that it may be necessary for the Lord to suspend all external helps and render all others incapable of coming to your rescue, flinging you wholly back upon Himself; to prove Him, to know Him, to be deeply, deeply exercised in your own spirit. That exercise enlarges capacity, and enlarged capacity means enlarged impartation from the Lord. That is the School of sonship unto adoption.

You see, spirituality, which is the nature of sonship, is not mental at all. That is to say, it is not a matter of having all our mental problems answered for us by somebody who has an answer to give us. You can never reach spirituality philosophically, logically, academically. You may go all over the world and get many questions answered, but that does not mean that you have come into spiritual enlargement. No, that is a very small realm, after all. Most of us have been there. We know quite well it never got us anywhere at all: and what a time we had and how disappointed we were!

In my own experience in that realm, where it was all a matter of getting answers to spiritual problems, or trying to get them, along intellectual lines, with a very wide search for satisfaction of mind and heart along that line, I reached a point that Robert Browning (a very much bigger man than I am) reached, as the goal of all his inquiry along that line, namely, that it is as difficult not to believe in God as to believe in Him. Well, how far does that get you? But that is the boundary of all inquiry philosophically! You may have decided not to believe anything about God: then there is a sunset and all your decisions are tested at once. You have to say, Man never made that; where did it come from? and you are back to your old questions.

The Lord Jesus Christ says, "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching" (John vii. 17). That is only the Gospel way of putting in germ form this great truth of sonship, namely, that you know by experience and not by intellectual inquiry and by people telling you from the outside. You do not come into anything by that way, for what logic can build up, logic can pull down. No, God dealeth with us as with—what? Students in the academic sense? No, as with sons. And where do we locate sonship? God is the Father of our spirits; therefore our spirits are the seat of sonship and all His dealings are with our spirits. Thus it is a matter of spiritual growth, spiritual

enlargement: that is growth in sonship unto adoption. Oh yes, it is experience.

A Final Emphasis and Exhortation

Now, I wonder if you have grasped what I have been saying and are going to be helped by it; that, so soon as you mean business with God, you have put yourself in the way of numerous difficulties and all that has been so wonderful to you is going to fall away: all that has been your satisfaction is probably going for a time to cease to be that, and you are coming into a realm where you have to find God in a new way, in a manner in which you have never hitherto known Him, and where you can no longer really get help from the outside; I mean final help. You may just be helped, but the Lord does not allow those ready-made things to come and put you into the position to which He is leading you. You have to get there for yourself. You may be helped as to how to get there, and as to what is God's goal for you, and as to how other people came through to that end; but no one now from the outside can do it for you and you know that God has shut you up to have this thing done in you and it is solely a matter between you and the Lord in your spiritual history. You may be right in the midst of the most mature Christians who have gone that way and who know and you may be as one alone. You know you do not know as they know; but do not despair. If you are marked by this spirit of purposefulness with God, that means He has you in His school, and it is a good indication when you begin to get real deep spiritual exercise. We have all met those people who have lived on the basis of spiritual infancy all their lives, and they can never help us at all in our deepest need. Indeed, everything was so cut and dried with them they would not investigate anything deeper. They regarded anything deeper as quite superfluous and were quite satisfied and had a kind of answer to everything. But in our heart need they could not touch us at all. We have all been that way.

There was an hour in my own experience when I was there, after years of seeking that answer to a deep sense of need; and, not getting it, I began to go the round to try to see if someone could help me, and I went some hundreds of miles to visit a man who was outstanding as a religious teacher, as a Bible teacher, and as a name in Christianity. I went to see him to get

spiritual help : I was in desperate need, and it was a spiritual situation : and when I put my case before him and told him of my sense of need of a new knowledge of the Lord, he said, " Oh, Sparks, the trouble with you is that you are a bit overtired. You had better go and play golf ". He could not understand, could not enter into the situation. I know now why he could not help me and why I got help from no one during that terrible period. I know that God was shutting me up to Himself. I had to come to the place where I could really be a help to others in their hour of need, at least point the way because I had come the way, explaining what God was doing because I had had an experience of His dealings. In order to be of any use at all to those who are going to be sons, to have a ministry for the sons of God, a ministry which, though so imperfectly, so inadequately, touches that great end of adoption ; in order to have the smallest part in such a ministry, God has had to shut us up to Himself so that no one could help us.

Do not take that wrongly. Do not take that to mean that you are to cut yourself off from fellowship and from all help that may be available. That would be a misapprehension of what I am saying and might make things infinitely more difficult and put you in a false position. But I am saying that in your heart of hearts you will find, while there may be help given to you by ministries, fellowship, advice, counsel, by explanation, the real thing has to be born and developed in your own self. You have to have the root of the matter in you and no one can bring that about but the Lord Himself by His own dealings with you. So you will be plunged into darkness. I do not mean the darkness of being out of union with God, the darkness of lost assurance of salvation ; but you will be plunged into darkness in experience in order to make new discoveries, in order that the Lord may give you light through exercise. God deal-eth with you as with—not bricks, but living stones, sons. That is an honour, that is a great thing, that ought to inspire us. If we have boys, they always feel tremendously encouraged if we put our hand on their shoulder and say, " Now, old boy . . ." and begin to talk to them as responsible persons, not just dealing with them all the time as babes. My son, I want you to do this for me ; I want you to take this bit of responsibility ; I want you to look after things for me while I am away. Then something rises

up and there is a reach out to be what father wants.

Now, in a sense, that is what God is doing. He is saying, I do not want you to be babes always, I want to put responsibility upon you ; I have some big things for you to do. Now, come along ! He may put us into some very difficult situation, but the very sense of being called to the responsibility will make us seek to know how to meet this situation. A man flung into the sea to learn to swim learns far better than the man who has the doctrine about swimming. The Lord does that in love : but He does it. Whom the Lord loveth He child-trains.

I wonder how many of us would be very pleased if our parents had always done things for us, always sheltered us from having the trouble, the bother, the worry, the necessity of doing things or finding out how to do them for ourselves. I am quite sure none of us would think that was love in our parents. I think we would come to a time when we would say, I have nothing good to say of my parents ; they have landed me into very very great difficulty by their false idea of love. Here I am : everybody knows I am no good, and I know it myself ! But " whom the Lord loveth, he child-trains ".

Look ahead to see all that is going to be. You see, there is a throne in view, there is government in view. I do not know how men manage in the governments of this world. It seems to me that they are able to pass from one department to another in the State. I do not know how that is done, but I do not believe that it is because it is in them. So much is a matter of routine, of form. It can be taken up as something already highly organized and arranged. Of course, I would not say of all statesmen that it was not in them, but I am speaking generally. Now, the Lord is having no official appointments in the great administration of His Kingdom. He is going to have people who have had quality wrought in them. It is unto that the Church, the Body of Christ, is called, and it has to be in us. That is no child's play. That is a thing for full-grown men. If that is not true, then I do not understand the teaching of the New Testament about going on to full growth, nor do I understand the Lord's dealings with His Church. If all that matters is just that we should be born again, have forgiveness of sins, and go to heaven, why all this in the Bible and in our experience ? It is certainly not for something here. There may

be values here, but they are not commensurate with what we have to go through. It is just at the time when we are beginning to get mature and are a little use to the Lord that He takes us away. We cannot pass it on. There may be some fruit, some value of it here, but not at all commensurate with all this training. No, it is for

some other purpose. We say, "Higher Service". Well, yes, that is what it is.

The Lord give us grace then to endure chastening as sons, so that He may have that company upon which He can place the great responsibility which it is His will to give.

T.A.S.

"All Things are Yours"

READING : I Corinthians iii. 21-23.

The Lordship of Christ means a life of fulness, the most advantageous anyone can lead. To take the pilot on board is not a mark of inability, and the captain of a ship is never fulfilling his office more perfectly than when he does this. It is impossible to overstress the importance of the utterness and yieldedness of the child of God to His Lordship, and we are called upon to submit ourselves in a deep and comprehensive way to a true and deep surrender to Jesus Christ; and we need a new understanding of the power and dignity of such a life.

The Exemplar of True Lordship

In this epistle the emphasis is of Christ as Lord, holding His position in virtue of His submission to God. The One who holds the government of all things in His hands does so on that ground. On the one side, Christ was master of every situation, of every enemy. His was a full life of a Man in dominion. He was always "on top". On the other side, His was a life supremely yielded to the Father. He was not His own, and, in His yieldedness and submission to the Father, He found His true dominion. He was not weakened by this submission, but in everything He was seen to be master.

The Corinthians imagined themselves to be free men, but they were not willing to submit, and instead of being masters they were mastered. They were weak and overcome because they were not yielding to the Lord Jesus, and giving Him His true place as Lord.

The life to which we are called is not a life of weakness and slavery: we are privileged to submit to the Lord Jesus; but in that submission we shall find that we are masters, and in the submission all things are ours.

This is the one comprehensive condition. You

lose your hold directly you take hold. You submit, not to things, but to the Lord. All things are yours.

(i) Your Blessings are Yours

Paul, Apollos, Cephas are yours. But the Corinthians instead of possessing their blessings became possessed by them. This is as true a bondage as ever was known.

Paul came to Corinth as a servant of God to bring spiritual blessings, and later came Apollōs and Cephas; but instead of realizing that as they were men in Christ, the blessings came through Him, these Corinthians were saying, We belong to Paul, Cephas, Apollos!

A blessing comes to us from the Lord—experience, light, illumination that is ours—but if we are not careful we glory in the thing and come under its bondage. The placing of Paul in this position has paralyzed Paul, he cannot do what he would. Apollos was held back from going to Corinth because they had made too much of him, and it was not safe for him to go!

Do not yield yourselves unto blessings from the Lord or they will hold and obsess you. We need to submit ourselves to Christ, so that we possess our blessings and are not dominated by them.

(ii) The World is Yours

You do not belong to the world, nor are you governed by it, but you may use it as you are submitted to the Lord. We are to dominate the world, not be dominated by it. If we are not truly yielded to Christ, worldliness can dominate us; but not to touch the world at all may be a measure of defeat. You must not be underneath it, nor afraid of it, nor dominated by it. There may be many things in it repugnant to you, but if you are truly in Christ you will not be in-

fluenced nor possessed by it, nor mastered by it, but will be "on top" in the spirit; using the world, being its master. You cannot dabble in the world, nor be rash with the world, but if the Lord takes you there you go not as servants, but as masters. The world is ours.

(iii) Life and Death is Yours

The whole realm of experience is ours; but how many of us are held by things, when our business is to take hold of them: *cf.* Moses and the serpent, Samson and the lion. Moses' first impulse was to run away; but the Lord said "take hold"; and the thing of death became the sign of authority in his hand. Death is yours. To these assaults that are meant to kill you, to sap your vitality, what is your attitude? To yield to them? To cry to the Lord? No, that is admitting they are too much for you. The Lord's purpose is to show us that death is ours, when we are Christ's. Take hold of your trouble in the name of the Lord, and do not let it dominate you. Death is the sum total of all that is painful and horrible; our enemy is death, and many yield to it.

Our submission to the Lord does not mean submission to circumstances, nor yet the refusal of everything, but submitting to the Lord in it that it may yield something for Him. The Lord's intention is that we should be more than conquerors, that we should eat honey out of that which was going to devour us: *cf.* Samson and the lion.

Those that face outward persecution with inward sufficiency are masters, in a life of yieldedness to Christ. If you and I are yielded to Christ and seek to have the spirit of obedience to Him, it does not mean that we shall be mere puppets,

but that we shall be "on top"—masters of death, made fit to rule the universe.

(iv) Things Present are Yours

Some things are always present, pressing; for example, temperamental difficulties. You may yield to them, or ask to be delivered from them, but neither is a way of deliverance. We must submit ourselves to Christ about that thing, and so we become masters. There are some things always present, but it is not that thing which decides what we are to do or say, it is what Christ says. You are Christ's: then all things are your's. Do not pray that all things may be your's, but thank the Lord that they are yours. I do not belong to it, it belongs to me, and I master it. Submit the things to Christ, so that they do not govern, but Christ governs. Things may be present in others, but if I recognize that I submit to them in Christ, then those things do not master. I submit to Christ, and stand up to those things; I am not afraid of them. I have the restfulness of a man who is master of the situation.

(v) Things to Come are Yours

That vague apprehensiveness, horror of the future, is a very real thing to many saints of God. We are not to be enslaved by these fears, but master them. When these things come, the Lord will be just as sufficient and master of the situation then as He is now. Take hold of Christ and stand up to it in quiet yieldedness to Him, and affirm that when these things do come we will be "on top".

We are Christ's; we are not our own, we are bought with a price: then let us be sure that in reality we are. In Christ we are masters—"I can do *all* things through Christ who strengtheneth me."
H.F.

SPECIAL CONFERENCE GATHERINGS AT HONOR OAK

(If the Lord wills)

November 1 and 2: Saturday, 3 and 5.30 p.m.
Lord's Day, 11 a.m., 3 and 6 p.m.

The Lamb in the Midst of the Throne

No. 8.

The Cross in the Epistles

READING: Revelation v. and vii.

In this meditation, we are going to look at the Cross in various connections in the New Testament.

When we take up the data which gives us all that we know about the Christians of Apostolic times, that is, the letters of the New Testament, it seems to me that in the main three things meet us.

Three Observations with Regard to the Later Apostolic Times

(a) A Startling Feature

The first thing—and it is a rather startling thing—that meets us is spiritual failure almost everywhere. I say that is a startling thing. This fact strikes us. There is not a letter in the New Testament which is not written to correct something that was wrong, to deal with some fault. All the data that we have about the Christians of Apostolic times brings us in the first place face to face with that, a many-sided and comprehensive faultiness. You may think that is a terrible thing to say: but think again. Before we have finished, we will prove it is so. These letters had to be written because of things going wrong: and, mark you, not only doctrinally wrong. There were undoubtedly some in the churches who did not come under the judgment, who were probably not involved, but the strange thing is that not much is said about them if they were there. What we have in the main is a fairly general statement. The letters were written, not just to some people in the churches who have gone wrong, but to the churches. The majority are the occasion of the letters, not the minority. The minority are mentioned oft-times at the end of the letters. Now that is the first thing. We will come back to that, but it is a very striking thing.

(b) The Note of Warning

The second thing that meets us is the note of warning, admonition and exhortation, with

reference to spiritual growth unto spiritual perfection as a goal. Some of the warnings are very terrible warnings. I am not going through the warnings, but you remember that such a warning as Israel's perishing in the wilderness is used on two different occasions in two different letters. Those Christians of Apostolic times, those wonderful times, needed to be warned by the example of those Israelites whose carcasses fell in the wilderness, to whom God said, "Ye shall not enter", despite their having come out of Egypt. That kind of warning is found. There are many others, some even more severe than that. What of Esau, who, for a mess of pottage, sold his birthright, and found no place of repentance in his father, though he sought it with tears. That is used as a warning to Christians. Everywhere there is warning, admonition and exhortation, to bring home the fact that this state of things is not God's thought, not God's mind, not God's will.

(c) The Cross as the Remedy and Ground of Appeal

Then the third thing which meets us is the Cross, used as a ground of appeal and pointed to as the instrument of sanctification and victory. Every time, these Christians are brought back to the Cross in some way. The Cross is brought before them and made the basis of appeal and indicated as the means for changing the situation.

Now, these three things stand out very clearly upon even a superficial reading of these letters, which comprise the material by which we are informed of how things were amongst believers in Apostolic times. Well, allowing there may have been, and doubtless were, believers of another kind, they are not spoken of very much, and the prevailing impression we are given of these New Testament Christians is as of believers who were far from perfect, and tumbling about all over the place spiritually, and who were still not only capable of, but actually in-

involved in sin ; for all these letters are written to deal with sin, failure, and matters needing to be righted. Well, no one is going to argue we must on that account accept the situation, nor affirm that the Lord has not provided for another position : no one will argue for sin ! Moreover, we are faced with the fact that these letters, while written to deal with sin, were written to point out that this was not God's mind for His people, and also to show how and by what means a different state could be brought about : and that is where the Cross is brought in. We shall not attempt to go through all these letters, but if we take several by way only of indicating, you will see what I mean.

Romans—The Cross and the Christian's Position

The order of the letters as we have them under the sovereign hand of the Holy Spirit is that of spiritual chronology, and you start with Romans, which opens thus :—

“ Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, which he promised afore through his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning his Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead ; Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we received grace and apostleship, unto obedience of faith among all the nations, for his name's sake ; among whom are ye also, called Jesus Christ's : to all that are in Rome, beloved of God, called saints : Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world ” (Rom. i. 1-8).

That is the introduction. “ Called saints ”, “ called Jesus Christ's ” ; these are the people to whom the letter is written. Then, as you read on, it is not long before you begin to come into troubled waters amongst these saints, these who belong to Jesus Christ, and you find yourself involved in a fundamental difficulty and the whole question of righteousness arises. Righteousness : that is a fundamental question : the question of righteousness amongst believers ; not righteous practice, not righteous conduct, but something more basic than that, namely, righteous nature, and you are led by the letter

to see that those who belong to the Lord Jesus are, to say the least of it, unsettled and not sure about the matter of righteousness, fundamental righteousness. It is not necessary for me to develop the whole of the subject of the Roman letter, but it is concerned with the Christian's position. That is the point. The most elementary thing, the very first thing about a Christian, the thing which comes before all other things, a Christian's position before God, the question of his standing, his acceptance, the question of the ground upon which he rests, the question of his relationship with God. Christians here are all over the place on that question, the question of righteousness. It may have arisen subsequent to their faith to which the Apostle refers, but here it is ; and does it need any argument to prove that to be a state of things possible to believers at any time ? Is it not true, right through history and in our own day, that believers may still be found in a state where this matter is far from being finally settled ; where there is still the weakness, the instability, the breakdown, the shame, the unfruitfulness, the inability to bear responsibility, because that thing is still an unsettled thing. Beloved, we find it around us everywhere. But surely it is all wrong for a Christian to be like that ? Of course, it is all wrong ; but nevertheless it is there. The root of unbelief has not been plucked out of even a child of God. You can be a child of God, you can be called Jesus Christ's, called saints, born again, and still have that root of unbelief in you, which can at any time, even with your dying breath, rob you of the assurance of salvation, and many who have lived a life of devotion to God have died under the cloud of uncertainty in this matter. It is there. We have to take things as we find them : and this is how we find them.

Now, I am not saying that, because we find it so, God would have it so. God has provided a means for dealing with this. But if you and I do not use God's means, then however truly we may be the Lord's, we shall yet be found living this terribly wobbly life, never going straight on, never being for any length of time sure and dependable. So the Apostle, while he says these things about them as in Christ, called Jesus Christ's, called saints, has to say these things about them in respect of what they are in themselves, and those two things may differ.

How does he deal with the matter ? Well he steadily works this whole matter of righteous-

ness right up to Calvary. You reach chapter vi, and there his culminating point is that Christians have to come to exactly the same place as those Jews and those heathen had. What place is that? The Cross! He has searched the world, both the pagan world and the Jewish religious world, and not found inherent righteousness; and then he comes face to face with the problem before us and says, 'Neither can we find inherent righteousness in ourselves as Christians'. So far as we in ourselves are concerned, we Christians, we are no different from the heathen and from the Jew in the matter of inherent righteousness, and all of us must come to the Cross, and see ourselves, even as Christians, as believers, in ourselves put out of the way. Romans vi. is for believers. Do not forget that. It is for believers as well as for all the rest, and the Apostle brings these Christians to Calvary, as he brings the Jews and as he brings the Gentiles. He brings them all there, and says, 'Now, all of us have to recognize that in ourselves there is no inherent righteousness. If you believers in Rome are looking for inherent righteousness in yourselves, you will not find it any more than a heathen would. You have, therefore, to let go yourselves; you have to die, you have to pass out in the Cross of the Lord Jesus'. You know how Romans vi. opens.

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein?"

"We who died"! When did we die? When did you die? There is a sense in which you never die in yourself, you die only in Christ. That is when you died. Christ's death is your death.

Now this is where the most familiar word comes back to us; for the Cross is brought in here for the establishment of ourselves now; not that we might become children of God, but that as His children we might be established by the Cross. I know we can never become children of God save by the Cross, but that is not the aspect of things here. This letter to the Romans is not sent to unbelievers to get them saved. This is to establish Christians, and the Cross is the means of their establishment, and it has to do with position, our position before God, our standing before God, our acceptance; which is all on the ground of a righteousness which is not ours, into which we come only by once for all repudiating the suggestion that there is any

righteousness in us. "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing" is the declaration of a saved man, an apostle, and to look for any good thing in ourselves is to contradict Calvary and undercut the very ground of our standing. We stand only on His righteousness, the righteousness which is of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, the point is this, that here we come upon the sin question. What is the sin question, so far as these Roman believers are concerned? The sin question where they are concerned is that of still looking for a righteousness outside of Christ in themselves by works. That is the sin question. That brings them on to a false ground. That nullifies Calvary. When we really recognize the meaning of Calvary, that Calvary is the righteousness of Another provided for us on the ground of our death in that representative Other, then the sin question has ceased for us. The sin question is a matter of our attitude toward what Calvary means. We are responsible, not for our state, but for our attitude toward Him whom God has made a propitiation for our sins. That is the sin question. In the end all judgment comes down to that point. God is never going to judge any man on the ground of his sins as such. God is going to judge every man on the basis of his attitude toward the Sin-bearer. The question that will be asked will not be, How much did you sin? but rather this, What is your relation to the Lamb of God? That is the basis of everything. Faith in the Lamb of God as our substitute and representative deals with the whole sin question.

You see what is possible to believers, and how believers, right at the very foundation of their Christian life, have to get this matter fully and finally settled, that righteousness will never be found in them inherently. It will only be found in Christ who is in them. The Holy Spirit is very careful always to discriminate between us and Christ in us right on to the end. John, who has much to say about sin and holiness and sanctification, is very careful to say, "God hath given to us eternal life, *and this life is in his Son*" (I John v. 11): always a discrimination between what we are and what Christ is. Blessed be God, having Christ in us, we have that which is sinless, perfect, resident within: but we are not that. Only as we abide in Christ shall we not sin. But you and I can at any moment fail to abide in Christ; that is, if I understand aright, we can just step over into ourselves.

I Corinthians—The Cross and the Christian's Walk

We move to the first letter to the Corinthians and see the Cross in another connection. But mark again the introduction.

"Paul, called an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, . . . unto the church of God which is at Corinth, even them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, with all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

"I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus; that in everything ye were enriched in him, in all utterance and all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Cor. i. 1-7).

A wonderful people! Now surely we come to sainthood! What a pity we have to read on; and we shall not move very far before we move into a scene of terrible carnality, carnality expressing itself in a number of ways which make us blush. We do not want to dwell upon that side of things, but we take account of the fact that this is what meets us in those who are called saints, enriched in all things, coming behind in no spiritual gift. How will it be dealt with? What is the matter here?

We have moved on. This is spiritually in advance of Romans. I am not saying the state of things is better, but the phase of things is further on. In Romans it is a matter of position, standing. In Corinthians it is a matter of walk, conduct, spiritual behaviour; and it is all so faulty; and faulty is a weak word for it. It is tragic, it is terrible, and it would be really unbelievable, if we did not know it to be so possible, that we should have to read things which come up in this letter as being true of Christians. But I say we have to take things as we find them, and this is not something which was unique in the case of the Corinthian church. This is the sort of thing which has been true in many other quarters since. There it is, and it is not for us to say that people who do things like this are not born-again people, that they have not been accepted of God by faith in His Son. We must not say that. Who has authority to say that the first letter to the Corinthians, in any

particular, was not written to Christians? Well there you are, and the question now before us is that of a believer's walk.

How will the matter be dealt with? Well, by the very same means. The Cross will be brought in, and the great ringing note foundational to this letter is "Jesus Christ, and him crucified". Christ crucified: that is the note, the basis and the means of dealing with this situation. It is always the same. Believers are still capable of these things, but if there is a true apprehension of the Cross they need not commit them, though they remain capable of them. Capable in themselves of anything—yes; but not following their capabilities if the Cross really has been apprehended. The Cross is not only the means of establishing our position, but it is the means of correcting our walk, governing our walk, and if you and I really do apprehend the fact that, when the Lord Jesus died, we died—and that meant that we not only died to what we call sins, but to self—well, that is the end to such things. We died to self. If we died to self, what man is going to law against his Christian brother to get his own rights recognized? What man is going out in rivalry with his Christian brother to get the better of him, if he has died to himself? What man will bring another fellow-Christian into shame, under reproach, if he has died to self? What man will come to the Lord's table in an unworthy manner, if he has died to himself? Paul applies that aspect of the Cross to conduct, relationships. You see, it will correct everything. Oh yes, you are still capable of these things, but you will not do them if you really have apprehended your death with Christ.

So the Apostle speaks about the natural man and the carnal man, and says, 'That is the ground on which all this is springing up. You are living on natural ground still, and therefore you have all these conditions. Get delivered from your carnal life by means of the Cross, and you will not behave like this'. The Cross is the corrective every time; and, beloved, let me say this, that the Cross is a mightily active, potent thing in the hands of the Holy Spirit. It is not just some position which we take. It is not just some teaching, some doctrine, which we accept. If you and I will yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit in the light of the Cross, in the light of our death with and in Christ, and say, 'Lord, when you died, I died, and I accept my death; now you make it good', the Holy Spirit will come in

and will check us up on our conduct, on our behaviour, attitudes, relationships, talk, criticisms ; yes, everything in our life and walk. He will deal with it and He will bring the death of the Cross upon it, and the death of the Cross for us will be a most shameful thing at that moment. We shall feel ashamed that we said that thing, that ever that thing passed our lips, that ever we did that thing, and we will have to get down before God. No one has charged us with it ; the Spirit of God has smitten us. The Cross has been laid upon us and we know that we are smitten, and we are as dead until we have dealt with that thing before God. It is a real instrument in the hands of the Holy Ghost is the death of the Lord Jesus to our natural life, to our carnality, something by which we are taught. The Cross is God's rod of training, of discipline, to bring out sonship ; not to make us sons, but to bring out sonship, to develop us according to Divine thoughts. Well, that is walk.

II Corinthians—The Cross and Ministry

We pass to the second letter to the Corinthians. We come to a new aspect in the second letter. As we begin to read this, we discover very quickly that we are not out of the first letter yet, but rather in the pangs, the suffering, the sorrow, the soreness of the issue of that first letter. Thank God for godly sorrow which brings us godly comfort : and then, when the Cross has dealt with the walk, dealt with the conduct, dealt with the carnality, the question of ministry will arise.

The second letter, as we know, is the ministers' letter ! It tells us what a minister is from the Divine standpoint when the Cross does its work. Moses, the minister of God, is brought very much into view, ministering in the old covenant, declaring the thoughts of God, revealing the Divine mind. That is what a minister is. A minister, this word says, is one who shows forth the Divine thoughts, who manifests the mind of God. When Moses read the law, his face shone, the glory of God was expressed through him as God's servant, God's minister. That, mark you, was under the old covenant, the covenant of signs, the covenant of symbols, of types ; yes, and a ministry of death and condemnation : and, says the Apostle, we have another ministry, and ministry is the shining forth of God in the face of Jesus Christ in our hearts. That is what a minister is ; and let me put that simply, plainly.

There is no such thing in the New Testament as an official ministry as such. God has never, in this dispensation, appointed officials, as such, to be ministers. The ministry is a matter of a revelation of God in the face of Jesus Christ in the heart shining out, and what constitutes one a minister more than another is the measure of the revelation of Christ in the life ; and we all ought to be ready to give place to that. It must be a revelation of God in your heart, in my heart, that constitutes us God's ministers.

Now, you see, the Apostle is saying that it is the Cross that constitutes ministry and makes ministers.

“ The love of Christ constraineth us ; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died ; and he died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him who for their sakes died and rose again. Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh : even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more. Wherefore if any man is in Christ, there is a new creation : the old things are passed away ; behold, they are become new. But all things are of God ” (II Cor. v. 14–18).

In what context does the Apostle say all that ? That has usually been taken as a text for Gospel addresses. It may be very good, but that is not the Apostle's context. See how this letter opens. See the strain that runs through these early chapters. These people have been calling into question his apostleship, his ministry, his right, his position. They have been saying all sorts of things disparagingly of him to try to set him at nought, to put him behind other apostles. He refers to some of these things. We hear him say, The Gospel which was “ preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timothy, was not yea and nay ”. Why does he say that ? Because they had been saying, ‘ He is a yea and nay man ; we cannot rely on him. He says a thing and does not do it ’. Thus they were setting him at nought. And there are many little things here which indicate that they were questioning his ministry, his apostleship, his credentials : and so he says, ‘ Because we all died, we do not know one another after the flesh. You are judging on a wrong basis altogether. The whole question of ministry is not what you may find of human faults in me. The whole question of ministry is, Has God shone

into my heart? Is there a ministration of Christ going from me? Have your eyes come to rest upon what I am in myself with all my faults, or are you looking for Christ? If you take that lower ground, you know me after the flesh'. On that ground we deny the Cross. We can all take one or other of these attitudes and positions over servants of God. We can all the time be criticizing their natural defects and faults, focussing upon what we see them to be humanly and naturally. If we do that—knowing them after the flesh—well, we do not give a chance to what is of God. Or we can take the other position. 'Yes, it is quite true he is a very frail, faulty, imperfect man, but I choose rather to let the Cross in between what he is naturally and what he is spiritually, and I look to see if he has something of the Lord. If he has, that is the thing I focus upon'. That is the position in II Corinthians, the Cross coming in to deal with the matter of ministry.

First of all, so far as the Corinthians were concerned, it had to make a way for what was of Christ in revelation, and, so far as Paul was concerned, it was to mean a glorious inshining of Christ.

We are on the heavenly ground and on this heavenly ground we have an open heaven. The credentials of ministry are the shining of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ in our heart, and anybody who has that can be a minister; and anybody who has not that has no right to call himself a minister. The Cross must strike at all ideas of ministry which are merely professional, which are anything other than spiritual. Spiritual gifts, spiritual revelation, spiritual knowledge, spiritual resources, spiritual riches, these alone constitute us ministers.

Galatians—The Cross and Spiritual Fulness

I will just remind you that, as you go on in these letters, you come next to Galatians, and then to Ephesians, Philipians, and Colossians, and you are simply taking up the Cross in its relationships to different aspects of things, to get things right, to get things into their right realm. You are moving on all the time. First position was dealt with, then walk, and after that ministry; and then when you get to Galatians, the question before you is, How shall we reach spiritual fulness? The trouble with the Galatians was that they had stopped short. "Ye were running well; who did hinder you...?" They had stopped short and not gone through to

the end. It is a question of fulness, and you know what a place the Cross has in Galatians. Oh, in chapter after chapter, the Cross is brought in. "I have been crucified with Christ." Why have I stopped going right on? Because somehow I have come up again from the dead. "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I, but Christ." The great objective is Christ.

"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. vi. 14). Why have I not gone on? Because the Cross has been nullified in the matter of the world. So the Cross comes in all the time to clear the way for going on to fulness, to finality. That is Galatians—not stopping short of anything of all that God intended.

Ephesians—The Cross and the Eternal Purpose

Ephesians takes you to God's great eternal purpose, and now it is a matter of the corporate life. How shall we know the great, collective, corporate purpose of God from before the foundation of the world, issuing from those Divine counsels in eternity past? How? It will be by the Cross; the eyes of our hearts being enlightened through the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.

Philippians—The Cross and the Fellowship of Saints

Philippians:—yes, now we are in the Church. It is no longer just an individual or personal matter as it has been in Romans and in Corinthians. Now it is a collective matter, and when you come into the Church then the matter of fellowship arises. It is not long before the matter of fellowship arises between Christians, and Euodia and Syntyche get at cross purposes. How are you going to look after fellowship, correct discord among Christians in the same assembly?

"Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross" (Phil. ii. 5-8).

Let the Cross deal with this matter of mind, which in some form of expression has come in to

nterrupt and injure this fellowship. Your "mindedness" has to be dealt with. The same principle holds all the way along. So Colossians takes it up in another way.

Sufficient has been said to point out that there is not a point in the Christian life, walk, service or ministry, in the fellowship of the saints, in the purpose of God; there is not a phase but what the Cross needs to be there all the time. The Cross deals with everything that can arise in Christian history and experience to spoil God's thoughts and intentions. Oh, how we need to say,

"Jesus, keep me near the Cross"! The Cross is the corrective, the remedy, for what may arise still among Christians. We know only too well these things do still arise amongst Christians, all these marks of immaturity. How shall the matter be dealt with in us and in things, where soever we find them like this? Well, there is only one means, namely, the subjective operation of the Cross. Having got the objective side settled once for all, we must allow the Holy Spirit to use the Cross as an instrument to govern us from day to day. T.A.S.

The Normal Christian Life

No. 7.

The Practical Walk of the Believer Before God

READING: Romans vii. 21—viii. 8; cf. vii. 14 and viii. 9.

A Body of Sin and Death

Romans vi. deals with the "body of sin" (vi. 6); Romans vii, deals with "the body of this death" (vii. 24) In chapter vi. the whole question before us is sin: in chapter vii the whole question before us is death. What is the difference between the body of sin and the body of death? In regard to sin, that is, that which displeases God, I have a body of sin; a body, that is, which is actively engaged in sin: but in regard to the law of God, that is, that which expresses the will of God, I have a body of death. My activity in regard to sin makes my body a body of sin: my inactivity in regard to God's will makes my body a body of death. In regard to all that is wicked, worldly and Satanic, I have a body of sin; but in regard to all that pertains to holiness and heaven and God I have a body of death.

Have you discovered the truth of that in your life? It is no good merely to discover it in Romans vi and vii. Have you discovered that you carry the dead weight of a dead body in regard to God's will? You have no difficulty in speaking about worldly matters, but when you try to speak for the Lord you are tongue-tied; when you try to pray you feel sleepy, when you

try to do something for the Lord, you feel unwell. You can do anything but that which is related to God's will. There is something in this body that does not harmonize with the will of God.

The Divinely Intended Issue of the Discovery

What does death mean? We may illustrate from a well known verse in the first letter to the Corinthians. "For this cause many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep" (I Cor. xi. 30). Death is weakness produced to its extremity—weakness, sickness, death. Death means utter weakness, weak to such a point that you can become no weaker. That I have a body of death in relation to God's will means that I am so weak in relation to serving God, so utterly weak, that I am reduced to a point of dire helplessness. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" cried Paul: and it is good when anyone cries out as he did. There is nothing more musical in the ears of the Lord. This cry is the most spiritual and the most scriptural cry a man can utter. He only utters it when he knows he can do nothing and ceases to make any further resolutions. Up to this point, every time he failed he made a new resolution and doubled and re-doubled his will-power. At last he discovers there is no use in his making up his mind any more, and he cries out

in desperation. "O wretched man that I am!" He has come to a point where he despairs of himself. Have you despaired of yourself, or do you still hope that if you read and pray more you will be a better Christian? Reading and prayer are not wrong, but it is wrong to trust in them for victory. Our trust must be in Christ alone. Happily the "wretched man" does not merely deplore his wretchedness; he asks a fine question, namely, "Who can deliver me?" "Who?" Hitherto he has looked for a "something": now he looks for a "Who"! Hitherto he has looked within for the solution to his problem: now he looks for a Saviour outside of himself. He no longer puts forth self-effort; all his expectation is now in Another.

How did we get forgiveness of sins? Was it by reading, praying, almsgiving, etc.? No, we looked to the Cross, believing in what the Lord Jesus had done: and deliverance from sin is on exactly the same principle as forgiveness of sins. In the matter of forgiveness we look to Him on the Cross: in the matter of deliverance we look to Him in us. In regard to forgiveness we depend on what He has done: in regard to deliverance we depend on what He will do. But in regard to both forgiveness and deliverance our dependence is on Him alone. He is the One who does all.

At the time the epistle to the Romans was written a murderer was punished in a peculiar fashion. The dead body of the one murdered was tied to the living body of the murderer; face to face, hand to hand, foot to foot; and the living one was bound to the dead one till death. The murderer could go where he pleased, but wherever he went he had to drag the body of that murdered man along. Paul felt himself bound to a dead body and unable to get free. Wherever he went he was hampered by this terrible dead weight. At last he could bear it no longer and cried, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" But his cry of despair is followed at once by a song of praise. This is the answer to his question—"I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (vii. 25).

We believe that justification is through the Lord Jesus and requires no work on our part; but we believe sanctification is dependent on our own efforts. We believe we can only get forgiveness by entire reliance on the Lord; but we believe we can only get deliverance by doing something ourselves. We fear if we do nothing,

nothing will happen. After salvation the old habit of doing reasserts itself and we begin our old self-efforts again. Then God's word comes afresh to us: "It is finished". He has done everything on the Cross for my forgiveness and He is going to do everything in me for my deliverance. In both cases He is the doer. The first words of the delivered man are very precious—"I thank God". If someone gives you a cup of water, you thank that person, not someone else. Why did Paul say, "Thank God"? Because God was the One who did everything. Had it been Paul who did it, he would have said, "Thank Paul". But he saw Paul was a "wretched man" and that God alone could meet his need: so he said, "Thank God". God wants to do all, for He wants all the glory. If we do some of the work, then we will get some of the glory; but God wants it all Himself, so He does all the work from beginning to end. Paul explains in the first nine verses of chapter eight how we obtain deliverance and are enabled to live a holy life in the world. He shows it is all by the Holy Spirit.

Position and Experience

In chapters five to eight we have four different aspects of things in relation to the Divine work of God in redemption: chapter v "In Adam"; chapter vi "In Christ"; chapter vii "In the flesh"; chapter viii "In the Spirit". There are four different principles here and we must see clearly the relationship between them. We have "In Adam" over against "In Christ", and "In the flesh" in contradistinction to "In the Spirit". We think it is enough to be in Christ, but we must also be in the Spirit (chap. viii. 9). Here is one of the most important points in Christian life.

To live in the flesh is to do something out of myself. As soon as I live in the flesh I get the effect of all that is in Adam. Now the same applies to "In Christ". In Christ my old man is crucified, and in Christ I am "blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places", but if I do not live in the Spirit, then my life may be quite a contradiction of the fact that I am "in Christ"; for what is true for me as in Him is not expressed in me. I may recognize that I am in Christ, but I may have to recognize also that my old temper is very much in evidence. What is the trouble? I hold the truth merely objectively. But what is true objectively must be

made true subjectively, and that is brought about as I live in the Spirit. I cannot live in water, only in air: and Christ cannot live in the flesh, He can only live in the Spirit. Therefore if I live in the flesh, I find what is "in Christ" is in suspense.

Why have we Romans seven and eight? Are not chapters five and six enough? Chapters five and six show our position "In Adam" and "In Christ"; and chapters seven and eight show our position "In the flesh" and "In the Spirit". Though in fact I am in Christ, yet if I live in the flesh, that is, in my own power, then in experience I shall find myself in Adam. If I would have in me all that is in Christ, then I must learn to walk in the Spirit.

The Meaning of "Living in the Flesh" and "Living in the Spirit"

The flesh is connected with Adam; the Spirit is connected with Christ. For the moment we need not consider whether we are in Adam or in Christ, but let us ask ourselves, Am I living in the flesh or in the Spirit? If we live in the flesh, we shall find all that is true "in Adam" is true in us: if we live in the Spirit, then we shall find all that is true "in Christ" to be true in us. To live in the flesh simply means that we try to do something in our own natural energy. We read in the Word what God wants, and at once we set about to do it. For instance, when we discover in God's Word that we must be humble, instead of casting ourselves in utter dependence upon the Lord we immediately draw ourselves together and determine that from henceforth we shall always try to be humble; and we are so earnest about it that we imagine that we are doing quite well, when, as a matter of fact we are missing the whole point.

Living in the flesh means that we believe we can do it: consequently we set out to try. When we really know the corruption of our own nature, then as we discover Divine requirements in the Word we shall never try to meet them ourselves but will simply acknowledge our utter weakness and say, "Lord, I cannot do it, and I refuse to try. If Thou dost not do it in and through me, it will never be done". When we see that God requires humility of us, we shall no longer endeavour to be humble, but simply turn to the Lord and say, "Lord, I myself cannot be humble, but I trust Thee to live out Thy humility in me".

Living in the Spirit means that I trust the

Holy Spirit to do that something in me that I cannot do myself. This life is completely different from the life I would naturally live of myself. Each time I am faced with a new demand from the Lord I look to Him to do in me what He requires of me. It is not a case of trying but simply of trusting. If I have a hasty temper, impure thoughts, a quick tongue, or a critical spirit, I shall not do the least thing to change myself, but look to the Spirit of God to produce in me the needed purity, or humility or meekness. I simply stand aside and let God do it all by His Holy Spirit.

Some of you have no doubt had experience of this kind. You have been asked to go and see a friend, and the friend was not very friendly, but you trusted the Lord to see you through. You told Him before you set out that in yourself you could not but fail, and you asked Him for all that was needed. Then you did not feel at all irritated though your friend was very ungracious. On your return home you thought over the experience and wondered how you kept so calm, and you wondered if you would be just as calm next time. You were amazed at yourself and sought an explanation. This is the explanation: the Holy Spirit carried you through. Unfortunately we only have this kind of experience once in a while; but it should be a constant experience. When the Holy Spirit takes things in hand there is no need for effort on our part. It is not a case of clenching your teeth, and thinking you have controlled yourself beautifully and have had a glorious victory. No, where there is real victory, there is no human effort in it. The object of temptation is always to get us to do something. Satan's temptations are not primarily to cause us to do something particularly sinful, but merely to cause us to act in our own energy, and as soon as we step out to do something he has gained a victory over us. If we do not move, if we do not come out into the realm of the flesh, then he cannot get us.

During the first three months of the present war in China we lost a great number of tanks, and so were unable to deal with the Japanese tanks, until the following scheme was devised. A single shot would be fired at a Japanese tank by one of our men in ambush. After a considerable lapse of time the first shot would be followed by a second; then by a further long silence; then by another shot; until the tank driver, eager to locate the source of the disturbance,

would pop his head out to look around. The next shot would put an end to him. As long as he remained under cover he was perfectly safe. The whole scheme was devised to bring him out into the open.

Self Wholly Set Aside in the Divine Provision

The Divine way of victory does not permit of our doing anything at all. Our victory lies in hiding in Christ and doing nothing, trusting Him to do absolutely everything. As soon as we move we begin to lose ground. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh" (Gal. v. 17). The flesh does not fight against us, but against the Holy Spirit: therefore we do nothing. What is the result? "That ye may not do the thing that ye would" (Gal. v. 17). What is our natural desire? To sin. If we let the Holy Spirit fight against the flesh, then we shall not do what we naturally would do; that is, we shall not sin. If we live in the Spirit we can just stand aside and look on as the Holy Spirit gains new victories over the flesh every day. The Holy Spirit has been given to us to take charge of this business. The Cross has been given to procure salvation for us: the Spirit has

been given to produce salvation in us. Christ on the Cross is the basis of our salvation: Christ in the Spirit is the power of our salvation. If we believe more we should pray less and praise more.

We are very familiar with the words of the Benediction—"The love of God the Father, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the communion of the Holy Ghost". The love of God is the source of all spiritual blessing. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ has made it possible for that spiritual wealth to become ours; and the communion of the Holy Ghost is the means whereby it is imparted to us. Love is something hidden in the heart of the Father. Grace is that love expressed in the Son. Communion is the impartation of that grace by the Spirit. What the Father has devised for us, the Son has accomplished for us; and now the Spirit communicates it to us. So when we see all that the Lord has procured for us, do not let us try to appropriate it by our self efforts, but let us truthfully look to the Spirit to impart it to us; for our Lord has sent His Spirit for this very purpose, that He may communicate all that is ours in the Lord Jesus.

W.N.

The Need for an Utter Trust in the God of Resurrection

READING: Psalm lvi.

I feel so strongly in these days that the thing that the Lord is stressing more than any other one thing in my heart is His desire to have a people who trust Him utterly, trust Him wholly, and I judge that many of the things He is allowing to overtake us in these days have that end in view; that in spite of them, nay, because of them, we shall trust Him yet more deeply and truly.

The Law by Which a Full Trust in God is Reached

But to trust God thus implies the losing of trust in all other, and therefore the process that brings us to trust Him more is accompanied by certain painful experiences, and not a few perilous experiences; I mean, perilous in the realm of our spiritual experience. We do not come to trust God thus utterly and completely as a perfectly simple matter. It is a consummatory

effect of a process, and in the process there is not a little sifting and shaking that has to go on. If we are going to trust the Lord wholly, it is going to mean for us the painful experience of losing trust in ourselves.

As I have gone into this LVith Psalm, I have been reading it in a new way. It is one of the Psalms we turn to in times of peril. "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee."

The Inward Experience of the Saints

I want to ask you to take special note of the heading of the Psalm. We will not attempt to analyse the mystic Hebrew, but begin in the middle. "A Psalm of David when the Philistines took him in Gath." That heading has value. This Psalm was written when the Philistines took him. Historically we know the setting. David, in fear of Saul, fled to the Philistines, and then, when with the Philistines,

feared for his life, so feigned madness and escaped. We will not take away anything of the preciousness of the Psalm as relating to days of physical peril, but spiritually this is a Psalm for the day when the Philistines have taken hold of you. The Philistines in the Word represent the natural man and this is a Psalm for a man who is in the grip of the natural man as in himself: when what I am in myself has gripped me and is dominating me and I am afraid and am helpless and hopeless and see myself nothing but a poor wretched hopeless sinner. When that takes hold of you, well, then you are in a bad plight; and, dear friends, I think some of us are going that way with a view to coming out at a place where we are really trusting Him. God is allowing the consciousness of our own insufficiency to be so dominant that it has taken hold of us and could work despair in us and we are afraid of ourselves. "What time I am afraid. . ."

There is a position that we all need to come to where we are afraid of ourselves and where the dominating consciousness of our own insufficiency and inability so presses down on us that we are literally afraid of what is going to be the outcome of it. Well, the end is to come to perfect confidence in Him. The way to that is the realized insufficiency of all that belongs to me.

If you look through the Psalm with that thought in mind, it can come to us in an altogether fresh way.

"Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up."

That man there means mortal man, corrupt man. Did you ever know anything like that when the consciousness of what you are is so intensely upon you that you feel it would swallow you up? You almost wonder whether it will swallow up your soul eternally and God will have to cast you out eternally.

"All the day long he fighting oppresseth me. Mine enemies would swallow me up all the day long; For they are many that fight against me" (vv. 1-2).

"All the day long they wrest my words; All their thoughts are against me for evil. They gather themselves together, They mark my steps, Even as they have waited for my soul" (vv. 5-6).

Does this describe to you at all your experience, anything of the way that you have gone under the supreme sense of your own unworthiness?

"Mine enemies would swallow me up." If you have never known what it is to be in danger of having all hope swallowed up under the dominating sense of unworthiness, I think it is an experience in store for you. "All the day long they wrest my words; all their thoughts are against me for evil." Do you know the experience, as if there leapt out at you from the secret depths of your own heart accusing voices? When you would do good, there rises up the voice that says, Yes, but you know what a hopeless sinner you are! You know your ineffectiveness, you know your inability, your uselessness to God, you know the unworthiness of your character! How can you stand up as a witness for Christ? And you have to admit it is true. How can I stand in the face of these charges? We know this experience.

I am not attempting to take the Psalm verse by verse. Come over to verse 8 and you get the cry of a distressed soul under the lash of this kind of thing.

"Thou numberest my wanderings:
Put thou my tears into thy bottle;
Are they not in thy book?"

Here is low-water mark. It is the cry of a man who is under the deep sense that he is insufficient; and yet thank God though it is low water mark, it is the turn of the tide, for he says, Lord, You know the cry of despair, but it is a cry; You are taking note of it!

The God of Resurrection

Then the Psalm goes on in other language.

"Then shall mine enemies turn back in the day that I call:

This I know, that God is for me": and so on. I am perfectly sure that one of the words the Lord would have us to fasten our hearts upon is this, that He is the God of resurrection; and, as we were hearing last week, the God of resurrection never gets His opportunity until death is full and complete, and I think the Divine process with not a few of us just now is to bring us to the place where He has the opportunity to show Himself as the God of resurrection. To do it, He must bring us to the place of real despair, a real sense of being at an end, a real sense of insufficiency and hopelessness.

We have been thinking about that at the Lord's Table this morning, on the side of our own moral condition, our darkness; but He, by His Blood, has cleansed us, brought us into the light.

That is one aspect of it. But as to every aspect of self-despair, whether it be along the line of our righteousness, along the line of our ministry in the Lord, along the line of our ability to save ourselves in days of peril—whatever character this thing takes, He would have us to know Him as the God of resurrection. He makes Himself known like that when we have reached the despairing note which really does represent an end of what we are.

The Psalmist, while he reveals the way out, reveals it all the way through; he does not wait until he gets to the end. He says in verse 3, "What time I am afraid, I will put my trust in thee." "In God have I put my trust." There is a being afraid even of non-acceptance with God, when the sense of our unworthiness is heavy upon us. There is a fear of not being accepted with God. If you look upon yourself as one who seeks to serve the Lord, how many of us know the experience of feeling, My futile service is such that God must reject me as a servant of His! Well, the God of resurrection saves you at that point. Though I go down to the deeps, what time I am afraid, even of being cast off as His servant, I will trust in the God of resurrection. There is comfort in this. When the Philistines have hold of you thoroughly, when what you are is thoroughly mastering your conscience, and you are ready to believe for eternal damnation as being your due, then the God of resurrection is the only way out. When death is full and complete, when hope is dead, when service is at an end, there is a God of resurrection to come in and lift you up, set you up on high. The Psalmist ends with that verse, "For thou

hast delivered my soul from death". Well, thank God, I have not lost the sense of being saved, but as to any service that I can render, I can scarce believe God has any such use for me. Yet he says, "Thou hast delivered my soul from death; wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?" You have saved my soul—I believe that! I even believe that you can lift me up from the pit into which I see myself to have come, and thou canst deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before thee in the light of the living. God can even raise me up again from that, set my feet going again; and that suggests walking in His service and His will. The God of resurrection can do this.

I am only just passing on odd fragments that indicate the line on which the Lord has been bringing comfort out of this Psalm for me. When you are in the grip of the Philistines, remember the God of resurrection. When what you are presses heavily, remember that Lazarus had to die thoroughly before God raised him. What time we are afraid of losing out because of what we are, well, the God of resurrection will come in just at that point, when hope has completely gone. In circumstances of utter hopelessness, He would have us, like Abraham, hopefully believe; simply because we believe, as he did, in the God that quickeneth the dead and calleth the things that are not as though they were. It is along this road that God brings us to the place where we really trust Him. That is the end He has in view to-day, I believe; but that trust will be in the God of resurrection.

G.P.

The Lordship of Jesus Christ

READING: Acts ii. 29-36; Col. i. 9-20;

II Chron. v. 1-7; Ps. cxxxii. 1-5.

You will see without difficulty the connection between those passages. The emphasis is upon the pre-eminence of the Lord Jesus; in the universe, in His people, and in the individual life.

"God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified".

And in the second passage—

"That in all things he might have the pre-eminence".

Then in the Old Testament passage, you have a people bringing in the ark to its rightful and proper place.

"The priests brought in the ark of the covenant of Jehovah unto its place."

Finally, in David you have one who, by reason

of opened eyes, of illumination of the Holy Ghost, is consumed with desire that the Lord should have His right place, the place due unto His Name, and therein should be magnified through being in His rightful place, where His glory is set forth.

I have found the Lord laying much upon one's heart that emphasis, and the sense of our need that the Holy Spirit of God should show us anew God's Christ; that the Lordship of Jesus Christ to us should have a new depth of meaning, and should not simply be a doctrine with which we have become familiar. God has set His Son in the throne of the heavens, and it is God who has set Him there. He has appointed His Son to the place of honour and His Son is set there as the One by whom God has dealt with everything that can stand between God and the accomplishment of the purpose which He purposed from eternity. God has reckoned with it in His Son and overturned the power of all that stood between Him and the unveiling of Himself; for that is the desire of God, that His glory might be revealed to the creation which He made for Himself. "Thou didst create all things, and because of thy will there were, and were created." And, beloved, that really is the foundation stone of our salvation.

The Holy Spirit Ever Presents Christ First as Lord

There is nothing so revealing as the Holy Spirit's approach to a life through the unveiling of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That is what brings need to light. God cannot come to hearts with a wonderful presentation of His Son as our Saviour if we are not adequately conscious of need; and it is God's claim upon us with reference to His Son whom He has exalted to the throne of glory, that discovers where we are. Beloved friends, where does the reality of the Lordship of Jesus Christ find you in the sight of God? Is Jesus Christ Lord over you? Is He Lord in you? Is He your Lord? What answer can we make to God in His presence as the Spirit of God searches our hearts? What does the thought of Christ's Lordship evoke in the heart? Is it a thing that holds fear in it for you, or is it to you an occasion of rejoicing? Has God been able to work an adjustment in your life so that His Lordship is active in you to the doing of a deep work of conformity in your heart, and both to reveal to you and through you the glory

of God's Son? Where does it find your heart and mine?

The Foundation of His Lordship is a Moral One

Then, mark you, it is not the mere expression of power but a deep moral factor that is bound up with the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That is the emphasis that is specially upon my heart, that the Spirit of God should show us the nature of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It is not merely exertion of God's power. There are all the questions of practical faithfulness and righteousness in walk and life that are associated with the establishment of the Lordship of Jesus Christ; dutifulness to the Holy Ghost, obedience to the plain sense of the Word of God. It is strangely possible for us to speak of the Lordship of Jesus Christ and be deeply wrong with the Word of God: and that is a tragic and terrible thing. But it is peculiarly the danger of any people who have become familiar with the terms of the authority and Lordship of Jesus Christ, and our only safety is of being born into and preserved in a deep, tender, sensitive relationship to Him as Lord and Christ. If it is otherwise, we are ever in peril of those terms coming down to the littleness of our own human thought of them, and of losing all the majesty and the glory, and all else that God has enshrined in them and in that Person and position of His Son at His right hand. I feel that God would recover that note among us; not merely the note, but the implications; that once again there might rise up in the people of God that burning desire that we see expressed in David and that we see behind that movement to bring the ark to its rightful place. That is to say, it must be the case, not of a showy people, not a people who cherish big ideas and things, but a people in whom the holiness of God and the righteousness of God and the faithfulness of God and the love of God are deeply established by the Holy Ghost in the heart, so that others coming in and out are conscious that the Lord is on the throne of the heart of that people; His presence is a conscious reality, and there is a bringing to light of things indeed as they are in the sight of God. *God is glorified*: Ah! that is the true outcome. Every time such a people come together, God is glorified. Oh, how much it means to God that it should be so!

The Fruit of Heart Vision

From the case of David, we see it very largely

hinges upon the matter of vision and opened eyes. You hear David's expression—a place for the "Mighty One of Jacob". The desire springs out of what he saw, what He knew: and God's exalting of His Son springs out of the worthiness of that One, and out of the accomplishment of that One. He has been the means of realizing God's deep, eternal, heart purpose that was His from the beginning, and God would bring us into that, and He has made it possible in the Son of His love. Having righteously set Him forth as a propitiation for sin, God can offer Him to us as His gift of eternal life, in whom, first of all, we may know Him, and in and by whom that Lord-

ship may be established in our hearts with joy.

That, then is the simple word I would bring. The Lord knows the purpose of it, and one is just content to leave it there that the Lord may do a work anew in us, that the Lordship of His Son may be a thing that men encounter, whether words are spoken or not; not in the sense of that hard, harsh note and expression that is so often the human idea of Lordship and power, but the burning reality of it, of God glorified in a people, the Lord Jesus Christ magnified whether by life or by death in us. The Lord grant it and renew this work of His Spirit in us to have it so.

K.P.O.

"Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory"

No. 6.

The Holy Spirit in Relation to the Exaltation of the Lord Jesus

"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway from the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him; and lo, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. iii. 16, 17).

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil...Again, the devil taketh him unto an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and he said unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. iv. 1, 8-10).

"And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matt. vi. 13).

"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet. Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified" (Acts ii. 34-36).

"... which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power,

and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. i. 20-23).

The Exaltation of Christ

It will at once be recognized that the thing which is in view in these passages is the kingdom the power, and the glory, and now as gathered up and vested in the Lord Jesus, and it resolves itself into a matter of the exaltation of Christ. It is all a question of where the kingdom, the power and the glory reside, of where the Lordship is established, where the government is; and this is the grand issue of all time. It runs through the whole of the Old Testament as the supreme issue back of everything else, and you will always be helped if you take account of that fact whenever you are reading the Old Testament. Wherever you read, you will find that things gather round this one issue. The thing which, while it may not immediately be patent, lies there inherently is the seat of government, the place of authority, rule, dominion; and, of course, not only is it there in the Old Testament whether manifestly or hiddenly as the issue behind everything, but it has come out very clearly as the issue in the

New Testament. Here, for a very obvious reason, it has been brought right out into the light. That obvious reason we shall mention definitely as we go on ; but no longer is the thing hidden when you come to the New Testament, because you hardly begin to read the New Testament with the first chapters of Matthew, before you find this question of the kingdom, the power and the glory, a manifest question, a thing brought right out into the open and made now, not a hidden battle, but a very conspicuous matter of conflict, and from that point right through to the end of Revelation it is this tremendous issue which is being fought out in the heavenlies and having an expression also in the earth. So then, we are now concerned with the issue of all time as becoming more and more manifest as we move toward the end.

This calls for something. It calls for the Church to take up its position most deliberately and positively on the ground of the exaltation of the Lord Jesus ; for, until the Church does take that position, there is no hope whatever of the Evil One being cast down. Let me repeat that in the opposite order. The only prospect of the overthrow of the kingdom of darkness, the powers of evil, the Satanic system, is by reason of the Church standing into all the meaning of the enthronement of the Lord Jesus. That is the challenge of this hour as it has been the challenge of every hour, and it is becoming a much more pressing challenge. It cannot be more definite than it has ever been, but it is becoming more pressing as we near the end. So it is with that the Lord leads us to-day to be especially concerned, really solemnly occupied with it, and it spreads itself over several of the primary matters in our Christian life and activity.

The Holy Spirit and the Throne

In the first place, it brings us immediately into touch with the Holy Spirit and all that is signified by the advent of the Holy Spirit. Let us allow a great many of our particular interests, in the Holy Spirit to fall away from us for the moment. What I mean is that we have particular interests in the Holy Spirit along the line of gifts, power, sanctification and so on. But let us leave those for a minute. They are truly related to the Holy Spirit, but they do not represent the inclusive and the pre-eminent concern of the Holy Spirit. They are the outworkings of something else ; they follow, they are not initial.

What we have to see is that the primary and all-inclusive concern of the Holy Spirit is with the throne. When I use that word " throne " I am speaking about the Lordship, the sovereignty, the government, the dominion ; the kingdom, the power and the glory, and the seat thereof, and it is with that, all that is represented by those various words and terms, that the Holy Spirit is primarily concerned. That statement embraces a vast amount in the Word of God. I am not going to attempt to gather up the evidence of that. I simply indicate it from one or two instances.

A familiar one, by way of type, in the Old Testament, is given us at the opening of the book of Joshua, where Joshua is challenged by the presence of the One standing with the drawn sword, who announces Himself as the Captain of the host of the Lord and whom we recognize to be none other than the Holy Spirit Himself, who is always represented as being in possession of the sword. " The sword of the Spirit " : familiar words, are they not. *Here, then, stands the Holy Spirit as Captain of the Lord's host, and the issue in view is that of the kingdom, the power and the glory. In other words, it is the rule of the heavens. It is the seat and exercise of Divine authority, it is Lordship. The whole thing there lying ahead is the overthrow and casting out of the entire system of false and evil government in the realm of God. Seven nations speak of a complete spiritual government that is in opposition to God, and it has to be entirely cast out and the establishment of God's government, God's kingdom, has to take its place. This, then, is the very object for which the Holy Spirit appears on the scene. His interest now, though including many things, is primarily and ultimately the establishment of the throne of God in the realm where the evil rulers and powers have held sway, and that is a key to the whole subject of the Holy Spirit and His advent.

You may take another illustration from the Old Testament, and perhaps with this one we should be sufficed, so far as the Old Testament is concerned. You come to the matter of the monarchy. David is anointed ; and you know the anointing always sets forth the coming of the Spirit to commit Himself to a purpose. Here, in the anointing of David, it is in type the Holy Spirit committed to the matter of kingship ; the kingdom and the power and the glory. Well, it is not long after the anointing that the antagonism

is dragged out into the open. Indeed it follows spontaneously. It always is the case, because of the issue which is bound up with any coming of the Holy Spirit. The primary issue is not some detail of the Holy Spirit's work, but that inclusive purpose of the Holy Spirit to establish the Divine government. So the anointing of David is very quickly followed by an uprising of antagonism, and David finds himself soon after committed to years of terrible conflict because of the anointing: and that clearly indicates that the evil powers recognize what that anointing signifies. It does not signify anything merely as to man. While it might be of concern to the enemy that a man should be holy, that he should be sanctified, or that a man should have this or that spiritual gift, that is not the thing which supremely concerns the enemy. That anointing sets forth the fact that the government is being taken from the enemy and centred somewhere else. That is what precipitates the warfare. Thus David, because of the anointing is thrown into those years of terrible conflict: and there are two things about that which we may recognize to our encouragement.

Two Grounds of Encouragement

One is this, that the very conflict itself which was produced by the antagonism of the Evil One was the very thing which prepared and qualified David for government; and that is true also of the Church.

The second thing is that, where the anointing really does abide, the issue is settled: the government is there, you cannot set it aside. There may be weakness, there may be failure, David may at points break down; but the anointing abides and he is God's king, and there shall never fail to sit upon the throne of David a king because of the anointing. It is the anointing which is the principle of succession always, and the occupied throne of David for ever and ever is because of the anointing. And where does the anointing rest? Well, upon David's greater Son. That throne has never been vacant because of the anointing. It is the Holy Spirit committed to the throne. Well, there is the Old Testament signification.

The Antagonism of the Enemy

(a) The Assault on our Lord Jesus Christ

When we come to the New Testament, the thing comes right out into the light. The Lord

Jesus steps upon the stage of this world's history, the anointing comes upon Him, and immediately the enemy is out, the battle is set, the conflict begins. There are two sides so that. The fact of the anointing drags the enemy out into action always, but the fact of the anointing also commits the anointed to worst him. While the anointing or the Spirit with us will drag the enemy out and we shall be aware that he is against us with all his force, the fact that we have the Spirit commits us to see to it that the kingdom, the power and the glory are God's; that is, we are committed to stand for the rights of God against the challenge of the enemy. We must not let it be a one-sided battle in which the enemy does all the attacking. The anointing commits us to the battle on the surest ground of ultimate triumph. Here, you see, this committing of Himself to the Lord Jesus at the Jordan on the part of the Holy Spirit, means that the issue is joined anew out in the open spiritually with Satan, and the question at issue as ever is this supreme matter of the throne.

Well, that fact is headed right up: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." That is the seat of authority, of government. It is to that seat that the appeal is to be made, and that, as you notice, over against Satan, in his presuming to offer the kingdom to God's Son; a repudiation of Satan by relating the kingdom to the Father. Then, soon after, we have the Lord Jesus showing His own, His Church in representation, the principles of prayer, and, in the light of chapter iv, He teaches them to say, "Bring us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one, for *thine* is the kingdom, and the power and the glory". Thine! We must be delivered from the enemy in his attempts to get us on to his kingdom line of things and take and maintain our position that the kingdom, the power and the glory are in heaven. The Holy Spirit has that in view.

Well, you see, that follows at once in the temporal realm in the case of the Lord Jesus. Satan has failed in the spiritual realm. He has failed and been defeated in the unseen back of everything. Now he will seek to move through the realm seen, the earthly. Thus we find that Matthew's Gospel heads right up to one issue. The claim of the Lord Jesus to the kingdom is turned against Him as the very case for His destruction. He has claimed to be King of the Jews, He has claimed a kingdom, and subtly—

oh, we see this subtlety working to-day in the twisting of things round in propaganda—subtly there is a taking hold of His very claims to the kingdom, and a turning of it against Him—“ We have no king but Caesar ”. Oh, the evil of it; surrendering to something which was utterly false ! That was not true. Those Jews would not really in their hearts acknowledge Caesar as their king, but they are willing for anything in lie, in false position, in iniquity, if only this One who claims the kingdom can be destroyed. That is the sort of thing the Devil will do. He stands at nothing. When you come to deal with the evil powers, with the Evil One, you are not dealing with any consideration for truth, any consideration for moral standards. Not at all ! That is all flung to the winds. Any lie, any depth of iniquity will do, because of the greatness of the issue. The thing which is at stake is the kingdom, the authority, the throne.

Thus between Christ and the Jews it is the same eternal issue. Where is the Lordship ? Where is the throne ? Who has it ? Satan seeks His destruction because of the anointing. The triumph, you see, over Satan in that last fell, foul, iniquitous act of compromise to destroy the Lord Jesus, is this, that in that very thing the Holy Ghost Himself takes hold and turns it to the supreme triumph over the powers of the enemy, as represented by those words, “ who through the eternal Spirit offered himself ” (Heb. ix. 14). That is another complexion upon the thing altogether ! Satan on the outside has brought this King to the Cross, has brought Him under the hand of the murderer, has brought Him to destruction because of this big issue, the throne. But the anointing is there, and the anointing takes hold of this very thing, this death, this Cross, and makes it something altogether other than Satan meant it to be, and, through the eternal Spirit, the Lord Jesus offers Himself without spot to God and there is triumph. But our point now is that the anointing, the Holy Spirit, is all the time committed to the matter of the exaltation of the Lord Jesus, committed to the throne.

(b) The Assault on the Church

Well now, from Christ Himself, of course, we can easily follow on and see that this same issue has been behind the history of the Church ever since. It was the issue back of the conflict between the Church and the Roman Empire. It

was a question of Christ or Caesar. Where is the authority, where is the throne, where is the government ; where is the kingdom, the power, the glory ? With Christ or with Caesar ? The two cannot co-exist. The conflict between the Church and the Roman Empire was simply the conflict between Satan and Christ as to the throne. So the conflict started on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came in. Again, it is the Spirit committing Himself to this; and what is the supreme note that is sounded forth, that clarion note, on the day of Pentecost ?

“ The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet.”

And the grand summary of all is :—

“ Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified.”

Everything is headed right up to that. That is the topstone and the battle is joined. The Spirit has done that. That is the Holy Spirit proclaiming aloud the Lordship of Jesus Christ through the Church, and it is not long before you come into the new conflict. The Church meets the implication of that, and the Church's history of suffering and persecution begins and has gone on down the ages ; and to-day, beloved, that is what lies behind the world situation. This is not just a bit of the course of history that finds nations once more locked in war as they have been again and again. No one to-day can really fail to see that there are great spiritual factors in this. We are all impressed with it. Men who are not spiritually minded men, who are not really discerning in spiritual matters, but who have just a very ordinary sense of things, leading men, during these past few months have been saying that this thing is Satanic. Has not that escaped the lips of many leading men ? That is the feeling about it. We have never had it like that before. But what is it ? It is the kingdom and the power and the glory. It is the throne, and this thing is intended, back of everything else, to be a blow at the coming, the imminent establishment of the throne of the Lord Jesus.

What I want us to see now is that the Holy Spirit, above all other considerations, is committed to, and concerned with, the throne. Therefore if you and I are at all under the government of the Holy Spirit, it will be in that matter that

we shall be mainly exercised. It will be in the matter of the overthrow of the powers of evil, the dethronement of Satan and his system. That will be the object to which the Holy Spirit is working in us and through us continually, and we must recognize that; because, until we really get on the main thing which the Holy Spirit has in view, we cannot know the fulness of the Spirit. You ask for Pentecost; rightly or wrongly, you pray for Pentecost to be repeated. What do people mean when they are praying in that way for another experience of Pentecost? I think we have missed the point. We are after some *thing*, something to be experienced in the matter of sense, power, demonstration. All sorts of things will happen if only we can get Pentecost again. Revival will come! Such is the common outlook. The Lord open our eyes! While those things may be quite good and may result, that is not the essential meaning of Pentecost. The fulness of the Spirit is related to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, nothing less, and that will find us very much in need of the Holy Spirit because of the intensity of the conflict on that issue.

The Authority of the Name

That means, then, that two things will result from the Holy Spirit being really committed to us. If really the Holy Spirit gets His place and His way, two things will result, will need to result. One is that we shall have to learn the values of the authority of the Name of Jesus. You notice that came up very quickly at Pentecost. Oh, do get hold of that! From that moment when the Holy Spirit came, the thing upon which the Apostles were moving, acting, challenging, was the Name, the Name of the Lord Jesus. You have seen that, of course. That is no new thought to you, but it will do you good if you underline those early chapters of Acts again at the points where the Name was used. "This name, through faith in his name..." and so on. You and I will have to learn the values of the Name of Jesus anew because it is by means of those values that this precipitated conflict is to be waged to a triumphant issue. I cannot stay now to speak about the power of the Name: that is not my point. I am simply saying that, when the Holy Spirit comes, His object is the throne, the dominion, and for the Church, therefore, by the Holy Spirit, the Name has to be known in its values, its virtues; and you see,

you cannot say that Jesus is Lord but by the Spirit. That does not mean that you cannot use the phrase "Jesus is Lord". It is quite clear that the Apostle meant that the spiritual virtue of that declaration requires the Holy Spirit. You cannot, with any spiritual power or value, make the declaration apart from the Holy Ghost; but when you do in the Holy Ghost, something happens all the time.

"God hath highly exalted him, and given him the name which is above every name" (Phil. ii. 9).

It means, beloved, that you stand in the apprehension and appreciation of the exaltation of Christ, and, because you are there, the values of His Name are made effective.

The Testimony to the Lordship of Jesus

The other thing which will arise with the anointing, with the Spirit committing Himself, is that we shall have to stand quite deliberately, positively, on this ground before God against the Evil One that Jesus is Lord, and that stand will be challenged, challenged up to the hilt, challenged in every way, and we shall find that our Ephesian position becomes a necessary one—standing, withstanding, and having done all, to stand. By that I mean that just to take a position will not be enough. We have to act upon the position in resisting every encroachment upon that position—standing! And, when you have done all that, you have still to be found there, holding the ground. It is all a matter of the throne as related to the people of God, as the thing with which you and I, in the eternal counsels of God, are connected. Perhaps as we go on we shall see more how that is so, but here we begin, and our first important thing is to recognize this fact, that the Holy Spirit has one object in view, and all His activities are toward that one object, namely, the establishment of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That is what He is after, and if you want the Holy Spirit to operate, to work in your life and through you, remember it is to that He will work, and it is not always the Holy Spirit's way to give us lovely sensations and beautiful experiences which would bring us into prominence, and make something of us. The Holy Spirit may take us into deep depths in order to get the Lordship of Jesus Christ established, and He will do it in the way which will reach His end best. He will dethrone. He will break down all our strength, our glory and our

kingdom. His end is the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost prayer is, "Thine is

the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever".
T.A.S.

Hindrances to Fulness of Life

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

Christian Fellowship

For instance, there is the matter of our relationship to, and fellowship with, all other children of God. Fellowship with the Lord's people is an established law of spiritual fulness, and there can be no fulness apart from it. This question of Christian fellowship will have to be taken in both hands and settled finally. We shall—if we are going to have an "open heaven"—have to sit right down with this matter and do some honest and energetic thinking and deciding. What is the Lord's ground in this matter? It is absolutely nothing other, more, nor less, than Christ Himself and our common sharing of His life through new birth and utter yieldedness to Him as our Sovereign Head and Lord! Get down on to any other

ground and we forsake the place of fulness. If we get on to the ground of a teaching, an interpretation, a particular and specific doctrine, or even emphasis, as something in itself, we at once set up standards or draw lines between ourselves and others, and even unconsciously we divide and give out an implication of division.

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

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

mentalities, mere traditions, or *our own fears* ?

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

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

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

The Sovereignty of the Holy Spirit

It was on this very matter that the book of "The Acts" was founded. The Lord Jesus enunciated the law when He said to Nicodemus, "The wind bloweth where it listeth . . . so is every one that is born of the Spirit". On the day of Pentecost there was "a sound as of a mighty rushing wind". Have you ever been in a really mighty rushing wind? The thing about a real wind storm is that it takes the government out of all other hands and proceeds to do as it chooses without reference or deference to conventions, traditions, common acceptances, inclinations, or fixed ideas. While it lasts it is sovereign. That is how it was then; but there were those who were offended, shocked, scandalized, and who said in effect that such a way could never be of God. A little later Peter himself came flat up against this basic law of the Spirit and had a controversy with the Lord. The Lord showed him that a way of enlargement (although he did not see at the moment that that was what it was) lay in the direction of transcending or even violating all his traditions and established religious rules. The Lord knew that for Peter to go in unto the Gentiles would be like a most orthodox and conservative Jew being asked to eat unclean meat—"all

manner of four-footed beasts, and creeping things . . . and fowls of the heaven"—even apparently to take a place superior to Moses and Leviticus xi; but He asked him to do it. Peter said, "Not so, Lord", a contradiction in terms; but the Lord insisted, and Peter, in explaining himself to those who suspected him, said, "Who was I that I could withstand God?" Now what we have here is that, over against the sovereignty of the Spirit was the fixed tradition of Peter in the one case, and the same in the case of those at Jerusalem who "contended with him" for doing what he did. On a later occasion Peter fell into the same old traditional snare and Paul had to contend with him very strongly about it. The point is that the Lord was making for spiritual increase, but an obstacle encountered was this unpreparedness to leave room for the sovereignty of the Spirit. If a child or servant of God in his or her secret walk and history with God is led to move in a way that is not according to the recognized and established system, but new and different, and seemingly in violation of all the accepted and fixed conventions or associations, there is all too often a repetition of what took place in Jerusalem; a suspicion, a contention, and an opposition.

Now, dear friends, look here; we have got to take ourselves honestly in hand over this or we may be found to be "withstanding God" and "limiting the Holy One". Read the Gospels and the Acts again and ask the question as you proceed, "How can *this*, and *that*, and *that* be interpreted or construed as doing violence to an accepted and long-established Divine order?" You will not get far before you are in the company of those who opposed Christ at every step, and of the Judaisers who pursued Paul across the world with the one object of making his ministry impossible. They were very jealous and zealous for the Divinely established order—as they believed it to be. Do you not recognize that every movement of God down the ages has been in conflict with something that men believed to be the Divine order, and those concerned have been regarded as doing the Devil's work? It was so with Christ, and it was so with Apostles. It has been so again and again when God has moved to enlarge His people by ignoring their fixed framework of custom. It is so easy to use thoughtless and misapplied slogans, or apply fragments of Scripture wrongly, such as "By their fruits ye shall know them".

Very often such damaging dagger-thrusts are only because of a failure to give the Lord room and right to take some of His children by a way that is new, unusual, or very strange. Philip leaves a centre and scene of great revival activity; he is suddenly missed, and is—for a time—isolated to one man in a desert. But it was under the sovereignty of the Spirit, and we must wait until the whole story is written years afterward before we pass judgment and say that Philip went wrong. So we see that for all en-

largement and increase we must leave room for God to do *new* things, strange things, things that we cannot understand for the moment. We only put ourselves outside of His intention to enlarge spiritually if we bind Him to our own fixed judgments.

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

T.A.S.

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