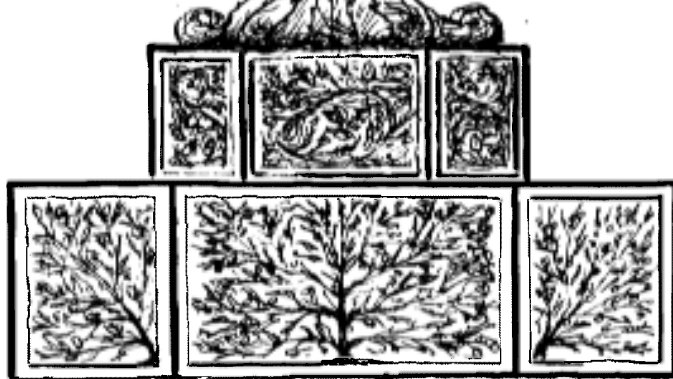


"A Candlestick of Pure Gold: of Beaten Work" Exodus 25. 31.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

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



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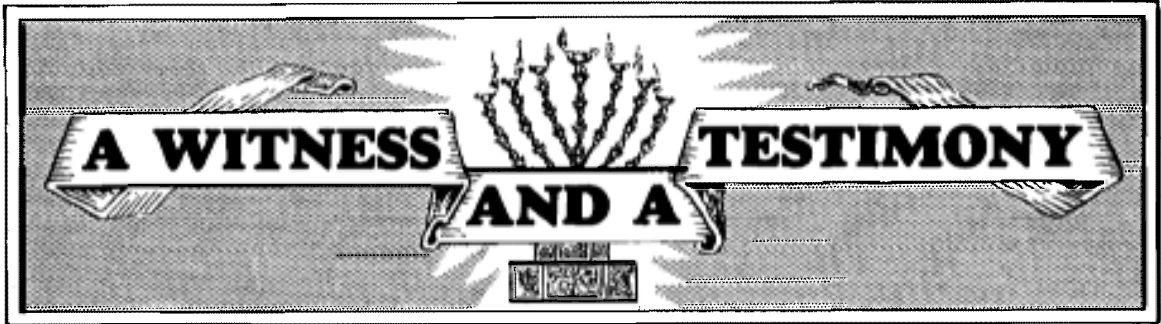
THIS MINISTRY

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

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

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

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



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EDITORIAL

JANUARY, 1955.

Beloved fellow-members of Christ,

With this first issue of another year, I want, on my own behalf and on that of all my fellow-workers, to send you warmest greetings, and to thank you most warmly for all your loving and helpful fellowship during the year now past.

This year has been outstanding in our history. On the one hand we have known very much Divine blessing. There has been constant growth in every way. More unsaved people have come to the Lord in our midst and through ministries out from here than in any previous year. The gatherings, both weekly and at the special times, have been larger than ever. A specially blessed feature is the large proportion of young people with us all the time.

Much life has characterized every part of the work. The output of, and demand for, the literature have increased considerably. There have been many outgoing ministries: to colleges, hospitals (medical Christian unions) and schools, and to other countries. The number of different countries represented at our 'Conference' times is always most impressive. All this, and more, without any 'attractions', 'entertainments', advertisements or propoganda: just a seeking to exalt the Lord Jesus and to make His fulness known.

This is written for two purposes only: one, to draw out praise to our Lord; and two, to encourage you to continue to pray.

There is another side to the story, but we have no desire to dwell upon it or to give details. Suffice it just to say that never in our history have we known so much opposition of every kind. Spiritually, the pressure has sometimes almost reached the limit of endurance. Opposition, in the form of misunderstanding leading to suspicion, misrepresentation and positive antagonism, has seemed to reach such dimensions and violence as to be intended to bring this ministry to an end.

When we were given our motto for 1954—"THE LORD IS GREATER THAN ALL"—we little thought how great that "all" would be. But He has been faithful, and the motto for 1955 is born of that

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true experience—"JESUS *HIMSELF* . . . WENT WITH THEM". We go into the new year with this confidence, and believe that, although it may be a year of testing, we shall know that His presence is sure salvation.

We want to reaffirm that the sole object of this ministry is that of bringing our Lord Jesus into the fulness of His inheritance, and of bringing His Church into its inheritance in Him. It is intended to be a wholly spiritual ministry. We have no desire to set up or maintain any particular or separate 'movement' or 'sect'. We have no vested interests in this work, and when the Lord shows us that the purpose for which He brought it into being is fulfilled we shall have no difficulty in letting go. Our continuance, growth and sustenance over these years is not due to any effort of ours, but—we believe—because the Lord has had a use for such a ministry, and this is all we want.

We covet your prayers, dear friends, and are always grateful for your fellowship.

In a time when, because of the grave and terrible threat to the very destiny of the peoples of the earth, statesmen and responsible persons are wearing themselves out to find some way of mutual understanding and co-existence, should we not pray that—with a much more solemn issue in view—all the Lord's people, and responsible leaders in particular, may make a corresponding effort to destroy the spreading and intensifying work of Satan, as he seeks to divide the people of God, by pouring out clouds of suspicion and fear.

The greatest menace to his kingdom is a united people of God, and he will stop at nothing to put that beyond possibility. We must seek to meet on the ground of Christ—not movements, institutions, teachings, but just that we are His.

When He comes, that is the only thing that will go through and abide. It would be a glorious thing if this should be the year of His appearing! Let us remember our own part in "hastening" that day—to be prepared ourselves, and to labour that there shall be "a people prepared for the Lord".

Again, we greet you, and send you our love in Christ.

Yours in that "Blessed hope",

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.

THE MAN GOD HAS ORDAINED

III. THE SEALING OF HIS BRETHREN

"... in whom ye also, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation,—in whom, having also believed. YE WERE SEALED WITH 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" (Eph. i. 13, 14).

SEALED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

I want you to note at the outset a very important little word: "ye were sealed *with* the Holy Spirit", not *by* the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not the sealer, but the seal. God the Father seals, and the seal is the Holy Spirit. The value of that is that the seal-

ing is not a matter of some feeling, some experience in the realm of our senses. The sealing is definitely the receiving of a Person for indwelling.

The Apostles were very careful and very particular as to this Divine consummation of saving faith. They never left anything to chance. If there was a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus, if there was a declaration of the acceptance of Him, the acknowledgment of Him as Saviour and Lord, they never allowed it to stop there. If a report came that some had turned to the Lord through the preaching, they went to verify and to see that the thing was sealed, and for them the consummation of that saving faith, that faith unto salvation, was that they received the seal of the Holy Spirit. You notice

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here that, although it is in Ephesians, which goes so much beyond beginnings, it is connected with "having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation,—in whom, having also believed" (heard the Word and believed), "ye were sealed".

Now the enemy will allow anything short of that. He will allow you to have a lot of sensations; to make a lot of declarations, sign a lot of papers and cards, and go out to a lot of penitent forms. He will allow anything short of this particular thing, and it was there that the Apostles were making so sure, not accepting anything less than this, that these people definitely and positively did receive the Holy Spirit as a Person to indwell them. 'Ye were sealed by God with the Holy Spirit of promise as an earnest of our inheritance'. Well, that is all bound up with this little word "with"—*with* the Spirit.

Then come these two words which are word-pictures—"sealed" and "earnest". 'Sealed with the Spirit as an earnest.'

THE EFFECT OF A SEAL

(a) THE MARK OF REALITY

What is the nature and effect of a seal when it is put upon anything? I think it has several meanings and several effects. First of all it is the mark of reality, that is, of security. It introduces this element: 'Now, that is that! That is a real transaction, that is a definite act. Something has happened that is very real—you cannot get away from that.' In the New Testament, when this sealing took place, when they received the Spirit as a seal, it was precise, it was real, it was definite; it was lifted entirely out of the realm of vagueness, indefiniteness. It was a mark about those first Christians which was unmistakable. The seal gives that character to the life: that is, the receiving of the Holy Spirit as a Person makes everything very real—it makes for an unmistakable addition to the life that has to be noted, taken account of. From that time, if it is a genuine thing, there is nothing vague about that one's Christian life, nothing indefinite.

(b) THE MARK OF CERTAINTY

And then the seal is the mark of certainty. When we receive the Spirit, when this seal is set to believing faith, there enters in something that is very positive in the life. We have certainty; that is, we *know*. That positive note is struck so much by John, "The anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you" (I John ii, 27). That does not mean that we are exempt from instruction in the things of God,

but it does mean that we do not need that anyone should tell us we are saved—we *know*. "We know that we have passed out of death into life" (I John iii, 14). It is the seal of security and certainty.

(c) A MARK OF DISTINCTION

And another thing about a seal is that it brings a resemblance. When we put a seal upon a thing, that seal bears a mark. It may be the Great Seal of the realm, it may be a family seal, a business seal, a personal seal—an initial or monogram. It bears a mark, has a character; it distinguishes that which is sealed. And in the same way the Holy Spirit gives a certain mark, a certain character, a certain resemblance, a certain design to the life. He brings in this mark of the Lord.

These are very simple things, but this is the out-working, the immediate result, of receiving the Spirit. You have only to look into the book of the Acts to see this borne out. "They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts iv, 13). They knew the seal, the likeness; they saw the mark, the design.

"AN EARNEST OF OUR INHERITANCE"

"An earnest of our inheritance." Of course, in ancient times this was a very well-known thing, as it is to-day. It is the legal pledge of a commercial transaction. In old days, if a man was buying a piece of land, he was given by the seller a handful of the earth of that land as an earnest that he was to have the whole, the whole was his by right, it was his inheritance. The word 'earnest' is the Greek word *arrhabon* (Hebrew *erabon*), which means a surety, a pledge, such as an engagement ring; that is, I make you a promise, I commit myself; this is a token. That is the word that is used here of the Holy Spirit. He is the pledge, He is the promise. He is the token of all the inheritance which God has for us in His Son. "An earnest of our inheritance"; the "Spirit of promise".

"An earnest of our inheritance." A little earlier the Apostle has said, "in whom also we were made a heritage". A little later he will speak of God's inheritance in the saints, but here he is speaking of our inheritance; not God's inheritance in us, but our inheritance in God. This letter to the Ephesians has a very vast sweep. It looks right back to the past eternity, and tells us of the great purpose of God from before times eternal, before the world was, "the eternal purpose"; it tells us of our election, 'chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world', and it tells us unto what; and then it sweeps on through time, through the ages, on to

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the eternity future, and shows us the realisation of that purpose and that election—and what a glorious picture is brought into view of being “unto the praise of his glory”, “the glory of his grace”!

The word ‘glory’ here is the key to it all. I am quite sure that you have been impressed with the fact that the New Testament is so futurist—not just in the prophetic interpretation of the Bible, but in the sense that the writers are always looking on. Whatever they are doing, they are looking beyond this life. They have their eyes filled with a wonderful future. The Apostles are full of that, straining after that; their teaching is concerning that all the time. They are seeking to bring the believers, the saints, the Church, into the mighty inspiration of a glorious hope, a marvellous future, and this letter to the Ephesians, perhaps more than any other, brings into view that great future realisation of eternal purpose and calls it our inheritance—that to which we are heirs, through the grace of God, in fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

But my point in saying this is that this is not just some glorious presentation of ideas, or even of truths in words. How shall we know that it is not a beautiful story? how shall we know that it is not just the production of men’s imagination? how shall we know that it is not just wishful thinking? how shall we know it is not just a dream, a beautiful dream? How shall we know that, having given up everything in this world and abandoned all interests here for this, we shall not at last find that we have made a mistake and have lost both worlds? How shall we know that this is *true*? And the Apostle answers all such questions and says, ‘You can know in a very real and practical way right here and now—in as practical a way as it is possible to know anything. You can know it right inside yourself!’ And I venture to suggest that that is a more real way of knowing things than any other way. I am not always certain of you, you are not always certain of me—but I am perfectly certain of what goes on inside of me! That is the real thing. And so the Apostle says, answering all questions as to whether this inheritance is a solid thing, whether this eternal purpose is a real matter: ‘He has given us the Holy Spirit as an earnest’.

A POSITIVE SENSE OF PURPOSE
AND DESTINY

This is borne out very clearly and precisely, inasmuch as when we receive the Holy Spirit, when we have the indwelling Holy Spirit, the first thing that results is that He gives us a positive sense of purpose and destiny. He lifts life out of unreality

and vagueness, and we become conscious that there is, after all, some real purpose in our being on this earth. Whatever we may have felt before, as to its having been a matter of chance, or as to there having been anything accidental in our coming into this world, a mere fragment among the teeming multitudes: now it is as though we—individually insignificant as we are in ourselves naturally—are, in a right sense, somehow characterized by a tremendous importance. I mean that rightly. A meaning, a significance, is given to us; we feel that we are bound up with some tremendous thing. When the Holy Spirit comes in as the seal and the earnest of our inheritance, a sense of positive destiny takes hold of us. We know we are linked on with something. You can test yourself by this, as well as testify to the truth of it.

And then the Holy Spirit gives us a positive urge and incentive toward something. We become aware that we are apprehended—there is an urge in us, there is an incentive, there is a pull; we are gripped, we are being drawn on, led on; and that is the explanation of all our reactions. If we lapse, if we get slack, if we cease to press on, presently we shall have a bad reaction, we shall realise that something is lost, we are losing out; life has lost something: we must see to this matter. The Holy Spirit has linked us with that purpose, and He is the incentive within us, the urge, the dynamic.

A PROGRESSIVE UNDERSTANDING OF
GOD’S PURPOSE

And then again the Holy Spirit gives us a progressive understanding and knowledge of the purpose. It should be characteristic of every Holy Spirit-indwelt life that there is a progressive, increasing understanding and knowledge of God’s purpose, the purpose unto which we are called. It was this that governed the Apostles in the writing of their letters. They were “moved by the Holy Ghost”. They spoke and they wrote “as they were moved”, that is, “as they were borne along by the Holy Ghost” (II Pet. i. 21). The word-picture here in the Greek is of a crowd, a surging crowd, moving in a certain direction, and here is one life standing by, that suddenly finds itself caught up in the crowd—and what is the good of trying to resist that? It has simply got to let itself go, be borne on with the multitude. That is the word that is used here. They were borne along by the Holy Spirit as they wrote and as they spoke. And what was it they spoke and wrote about? It was about this purpose—explaining, informing, giving growing knowledge, as they received it from the Holy Spirit.

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The same Holy Spirit will do that in us. There is something very wrong with a life—a Christian life—which, after a given time, is no better instructed on God's purposes in salvation than at the beginning; something very wrong. The Holy Spirit is there for that very purpose. Growing intelligence is a mark of the Spirit within, as the earnest of our inheritance.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO HONOUR THE HOLY SPIRIT

Then we are brought by the Holy Spirit, as the earnest of our inheritance, to face the responsibility of His indwelling. Here we have such words as: "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, in whom ye were sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph. iv. 30). Our responsibility is to cherish the Holy Spirit, to honour the Holy Spirit. We read so much about 'walking in the Spirit', 'walking by the Spirit'. What does walking in the Spirit mean? Well, it means, in the simplest of language, first of all that we recognise and acknowledge the Holy Spirit. That is the first simple thing—to walk in the Spirit is to recognise the Spirit and to acknowledge the Spirit; not to ignore, not to affront Him; to give Him His place of honour and right and then to obey—to yield to the Spirit and to obey.

And the Spirit within us is mainly very quiet. When the Lord speaks by His Spirit within, He speaks very gently. I have for many years tried to train myself to recognise His voice. We expect tremendous impressions, a loud voice, something that we cannot mistake, and my experience is that the Lord very rarely speaks like that until He has to, that His Spirit is gentle, and if we really were being led by the Spirit, we should be attuned to a very, very quiet voice, just intimating something. How easy it is for us to go on and pass it over, to ignore it, because it is so gentle—and yet when we look back we have to say, 'Oh, what a pity I did not take note of that very simple, gentle little touch of the Lord—I would have been saved such a lot!'

We should never need to have our ears trained if there were shouting going on all the time. But the ear is trained by having to listen, and this inner ear of 'hearing what the Spirit saith' must be an

ear that is attentive, an ear that is inclined, an ear that indicates the attitude of our hearts. If someone is speaking, I can be perfectly careless and preoccupied and looking round, but if I realise that what the speaker has to say is of very great importance, I am all attention, showing the state of my heart. "He that hath an ear, let him hear." This is what walking in the Spirit means—inclining, being set upon knowing all that the Lord has to say and give.

THE NEED TO PRESS ON

I close just by reminding you that the meaning and value of an earnest, of a token, of a promise can all be lost if you do not follow it out to its fulfilment.

The man who received his handful of soil had the guarantee that the whole field was his by right of transaction; but supposing he just carefully preserves the handful, without following up and pursuing the transaction, and taking possession and turning to account his inheritance? The handful is no good to him at all! What it signifies is all lost, nullified. I knew a couple who became engaged, with an engagement ring given, and they went on—one year, two years, three, five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five years. They were never married! They were engaged all those years, but the transaction was never completed. We are not, of course, appealing for hurried engagements and hurried marriages! But the point is: do let us follow up—do not let us make a fiasco of this thing. We have the earnest, we have the Spirit as a seal and earnest, but we have not yet got all that is meant, all that is included; and we can miss it all—even while we have the earnest we can miss it all—if we do not follow up, if we do not pursue, if we do not go on.

You know the place of the many 'ifs' in the New Testament, "If we hold fast . . . unto the end" (Heb. iii. 6). You know the great urge of the Word that we should go on. "Let us press on . . ." (Heb. vi. 1). Why? Oh, it is not enough to have believed, and it is not enough even to have received the Spirit as an earnest. We must follow on to make good all that is represented by the earnest, to possess all that is included in the guarantee.

T. A-S.

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THE BURNING BUSH

Reading : Exodus iii.

THE importance of Moses' experience at the Burning Bush is clearly shown by the fact that it is referred to four times in the New Testament. It was intensely personal, the experience of a man alone with God, and yet we must realise that God was not dealing with Moses just for Moses' own sake. His concern was with a realm very much larger than the personal. So often we err either by making the Lord's Word too personal, or else by not making it personal enough. Sometimes we take everything to ourselves, as though we were the only person in the universe that mattered to God, and at others we get so involved in large ideas about great needs or movements among the people of God that we forget our own responsibility as individuals. There was no such confusion in this meeting of Moses with God, for the two matters were brought together.

THE PERSONAL CHALLENGE OF GOD'S FLAME

We need to read back to get the true approach to the chapter :

" . . . the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up to God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant . . . And God saw the children of Israel, and God took knowledge of them. Now Moses . . ." (Ex. ii. 23 - iii. 1).

The background of the interview was a very deep need among God's people and a great enterprise to which He had pledged Himself on their behalf. In the light of all this, He came and stood right in the path of one man, Moses. For the moment let us forget that Moses was a great man, for at that time he was not considered such ; he was a shepherd and a fugitive, and had been so for a long time. He was just a plain man, as we are. Nevertheless God met him, and met him because He planned a vital connection between just one single person who really shared His burden and was available to Him, and the realisation of a great purpose for His people.

How wonderful our God is ! Only He could take up such a nation-wide enterprise by beginning with one little desert bush. There is no need for us to get inflated or imagine that we are something wonderful because the Lord calls us to serve in His great purpose. He was not looking for something

big or important. He will not thank us for trying to be big. As His heart yearned over His captive people and longed to bring them into His inner-tance, He looked for one humble man, who might be likened to any ordinary desert bush, and determined to use him by filling him with Divine fire.

By this time, two-thirds of Moses' life was already over. We say 'over', not 'wasted', though that is the word which perhaps Moses would have used to describe it all. God does not waste. If any man is called, as Moses was, and responds to the call sincerely, as Moses certainly did, nothing will be wasted. It is true that he had to endure long years of discipline, of blunders, of disappointment and emptying ; in the end he was discredited in the eyes of others and still more so in his own estimation. Now the emptying had done its work, and God's time had come. He felt, as perhaps we do, that because of his failure somebody else would have to do the work, but the burning bush was to assure him that God had not cast him off.

It may well be that Moses had no warning of what was to happen on this momentous day. It probably seemed to him a very ordinary day, and only a casual action in going to look at the bush. Yet this was not only a crisis of commission for him, but the day of the great revelation of the name of God : " I AM THAT I AM." It is as though Moses almost stumbled across it. Sometimes we grow very tense, and work ourselves up into a great strain, and somehow God does not meet us. But there are times when a simple response to His prompting may bring us face to face with one of the great moments of life. How important it is, then, when God appears, to turn aside, as Moses did, and enquire what it all means.

And so we come to this matter of the flame, the burning flame of God's revelation.

A LIVING FLAME

In the first place it was a living flame. We are not told when the bush began to burn, but when Moses arrived it was already alight. Nor are we told when it ceased to burn, but it is more than likely that it kept on burning until Moses was well out of sight. It went on burning. What a difference there is between the flame kindled for the occasion and the flame that goes on burning ! " I AM THAT I AM."

Critics of God's Word would have us believe that the bush was not really on fire, but that this was just an optical illusion. Somehow the sunset

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glow had caught the bush and made it look all red with fire. All we can say to that is that while Moses might have turned aside to an illusion, he would very soon have turned away again. He might have looked, but he would very soon have been disappointed. What a challenge to us as the people of God! Is our testimony an illusion or is it a living flame? Does it attract people's attention for a moment, or can they find that in having touch with us they meet God? Alas! that so often people with hungry hearts turn aside in the hope that at last they are going to find the real thing, only to be met with disappointment.

There are many, like Moses, who are perplexed and confused about the ways of God—men who may have had a vision and expected to see God fulfil it, but who have now lost heart and lost hope. Moses had had many disappointments, but this time he was confronted with the real thing. God was in the bush. How glad he must have been that he had turned aside! There must be many like him to-day: those who are looking for the living flame of God, even if it be in a humble setting, and who will turn aside if only they can find it.

A GOD-KINDLED FLAME

No man lit this bush. From this time forward, the testimony of the Lord among His people was due to the fact that they had a divinely-kindled fire at the heart of things. What was true of this bush, afterwards became true of the altar fire in the Tabernacle. No man lit it. Men kept it alight; they did their bit to see that conditions were right and the flame maintained, but the original fire, at the institution of the Tabernacle worship, came not from men but from God. Then again, in the Temple, God acted from Heaven once again, to kindle the altar fire which should never be allowed to go out.

This is the only thing which can answer the challenge of our day: a people among whom is found that which God Himself has initiated, a living fire which only He could kindle. It is a poor and inadequate thing, is it not, when we try to start something for God. Even if it is large, it is so often empty and disappointing. But however small and simple it may be, whether an individual life or a community of Christians, it is a great thing when God comes into it and sets it on fire with His own living flame.

THE WHOLE BUSH AFLAME

The flame seemed to fill the bush, from its centre outwards, though it did not consume it. This is

what God is like. The fire was not just a partial affair—it filled the whole bush. Moses was seeing that God burns with one whole-hearted, consuming passion. He is the God of one thing. Of course that does not mean that He does not give proper attention to all His other responsibilities. He does not let the stars get out of their position, He does not grow careless about the natural, physical laws of this earth, because He is concentrating on one spiritual end. He did not neglect all the other nations because He had chosen the one nation, Israel. Yet we are impressed, as we read here about Egypt, and later about the great empires of Assyria and Babylonia, and later still about the Roman Empire, that, while God is greatly concerned with the whole civilisation of man, He is concerned with it in its right subordination to the one great central purpose.

Moses' successor, Joshua, found that God would even make the sun and the moon stand still when the interests of that one purpose were involved. We must not get unbalanced, and fail in our daily duties and responsibilities by trying to concentrate on 'one thing' in a false spirituality, but we must learn how God can make every part of our lives contribute to His one concern, not contradicting or interfering with it, but ministering to it.

A PERSISTENT FLAME

Unlike Moses, the flame persisted. Moses had long ago had a vision. It was a right vision: it was God-given, and it was closely associated with God's own desire and purpose. But forty years' delay, with everything seeming to emphasize its impossibility, had made him lose hope. How different God is! He had been waiting over five hundred years for the vision to be realised, and as far as He was concerned the flame still burned on. When He first brought Abram out of Ur, He had in mind the establishing of His people in the land. All the strange vicissitudes of the years, and all the long delay and captivity in Egypt had not turned Him from His purpose. God is not to be extinguished; He is "the God of hope".

The vision which has come to us, finding its full expression in Christ, is not the vision of an earthly nation, but of a people gathered out from the nations; it is not of an earthly kingdom to be placed in the midst of other earthly kingdoms, but a heavenly kingdom from which God shall govern the whole universe. When at Pentecost the fire fell and the flame was kindled, that was the purpose which the Lord had in view; and He has never swerved from it, and He never will. We do not

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know what Moses thought about the promises given to Abraham: we do not know how much he had understood when he first resolved to devote himself to the liberation of God's people; but we do know, in ourselves as well as in him, the tendency of the human heart to give up when there are many difficulties or a long delay. We are so often tempted to give up if a thing looks impossible. However much God may have stated it in His Word; however much it may have been God's purpose at the beginning; however much we have prayed and expected that God would do it: it seems impossible—too hard or too late—so we turn to something easier, if less important. That is what Moses was doing when God confronted him with the reminder that He had not given up, His flame of purpose still burned on.

How wrong we are to give up! Surely we must believe that what God intended to do, not only at Pentecost but in His eternal counsels concerning the Church, He will really fulfil. The burning bush says to us, as it said to Moses, You may quit, but the Lord never will: nothing will ever turn Him from completing what He has begun. Now whether the Lord has from time to time to set aside human material because it will not serve His end, we do not know. It seems quite likely. Whether in this case there was any danger of His setting Moses aside and choosing some other, we are not told. One thing, however, must be certain, and that is, that, whatever Moses or any one else did, God would still have had His way. He does not allow Himself to be defeated; He does not look around for easier alternatives. The flame of His purpose is unquenchable: it burns steadily on.

CAUSES OF A DYING FLAME

If God's flame does not die down, it is sadly true that man's so often does. The burning bush is a rebuke to us all. It was to Moses, and yet if ever a man might be excused, Moses was that man. Perhaps by considering his case we can discover some of the causes for a dying flame.

(a) SATANIC OPPOSITION

The chief cause of such failure is a hidden one. From before ever Moses was born, because his life was destined to be associated with the purpose of God, things political, things social, things industrial were all laid hold of by the Enemy to destroy him. Moses' very existence was a miracle of Divine intervention and preservation. No doubt the fight went on. In the providence of God, Pharaoh's daughter was used to save Moses' life, but Satan

has a cunning way of using even God's blessings against the fulfilment of His purpose, if he can. The young man Moses met not hatred and murder but great prosperity, and became exposed to the seductive power of the Evil One, to see if the flame of purpose might be quenched. Let us make no mistake about it—the Devil is just as busy when we are having a good time as when we are having a bad time. He does not begrudge us success or popularity, if by that means he can quench the flame of purpose.

(b) DELAY

Then, of course, another factor which must have had a strong influence on Moses was that of delay. The years went by and God seemed to do nothing. Moses himself attempted to precipitate the matter by his own actions, but only with disastrous effects. It may well be that some of us are finding our greatest test in this very matter. The years go by, and the vision of earlier days is not realised. We see no sign of God beginning to do what we have felt sure He wanted done and intended should be done. This is the time when the flame can easily grow dim. But we must not let it. God is not mocked, and God will not mock us.

(c) MISUNDERSTANDING

Perhaps few men suffered from being misunderstood and maligned as Moses did. No doubt he felt that his first bitter experience of the Israelites' ingratitude was the worst that any man could have, but, could he only have known it, there was worse still to come. When he renounced everything for the sake of God's people, and took their part at such great cost to himself, they only turned against him and forced him to flee for his life. Probably he thought that he had plumbed the depths then, but in fact he was to suffer such treatment from them all through the wilderness.

No wonder the flame had died down. When other servants of the Lord misunderstand us, when the very people whom we long to help misjudge us, when our sincerest motives are criticized and misrepresented, it is hard not to give up. It is true that at first the Israelites turned against Moses because the latter had done a foolish thing. But later on, even when he was wise, Moses was blamed and misunderstood. Perhaps the burning bush warned Moses that misunderstanding is no excuse for allowing the flame to be quenched. All through the rest of his life he must learn to burn steadily on, through good report and through evil report.

The Israelites were always quick to blame

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Moses. Though they welcomed his return to them after this vision, it was not long before increased trouble with Pharaoh made them turn against him, saying: "The Lord look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh" (Exodus v. 21). Whenever things went well there were no complaints, but as soon as a difficulty arose they turned to blame Moses. At the Red Sea they told him that they preferred the shame and futility of bondage in this world—with its apparent security—to the precarious position to which he had led them in their whole-hearted response to the Lord. It is always a most painful experience to encourage people to step out in faith in the Lord, and then have them blame us for the problems which their obedience provokes. They blamed him when they had no food; they blamed him when their water supply ran out; and, though they would not realise this, the whole weight of their murmuring was like some great satanic snuffer to quench the flame of Moses' purpose of heart.

But here we must pause to see how God reacted on behalf of His servant. It is most helpful to note that these outbursts against Moses were always followed by new experiences of Divine power. When, in his distress and perplexity, Moses took the first of their bitter complaints back to the Lord, he was encouraged with the assurance: "Now shalt thou see what I will do . . ." (Exodus vi. 1). It was always like that. At the Red Sea; when the manna was given; when water came from the rock—on each of these occasions Moses had ample evidence that the vision of the burning bush was a true one, and that he could count on the faithfulness of his Lord.

MOSES' OWN PERSISTENCE

It seems that the vision kindled an undying flame in Moses himself. It was not only that he had the amazing revelation, "I AM THAT I AM", but that something of that I AM came to dwell in the heart of Moses. That, of course, is why God reveals Himself to us. It is not only to show us what He is like, but to communicate something of His own nature to the inner man of the one so met. Moses went from this wilderness—not a perfect man, not a man inspired by his own strength of will—but a man in whom there had been kindled something of this persistent flame which was so characteristic of the Lord.

We shall never know how much the people of God owed to the steadfast patience of Moses. If they were to get through to their inheritance some-

one had to share with God this watchful purpose, this refusal to be put off; someone had to hold on through every kind of opposition and discouragement until the victory was won. That day, in the wilderness, God lit a flame in the heart of Moses which was the secret of multitudes coming into liberty and blessing.

It is true that on one occasion his patience did break down: and then that which in the life of a lesser man would have been a mere incident, in his case became a glaring fault, just because it was such a contradiction to what he stood for. If we are going to serve God, we must not have moods, we must not take things personally; we must never let the things that other people say or do deflect us from persistent devotion to the will of God.

A HOLY FLAME

As Moses drew near to the bush he was warned that this was no ordinary flame; it was the holy Presence of the Lord. That is why the bush burned and yet was not consumed. Alas! that it is often so different with us. The fire is meant to purge the dross and increase the value of what abides, but, instead of the dross being consumed, we are consumed while the dross remains. We wear ourselves out, and yet the things that ought to have been destroyed seem to be there as strongly as ever. Moses was not like this. The presence of the Lord was as a refining fire within him. By the time the wilderness journey was ended he was a man wonderfully purified and refined, but not worn out. He often thought that he was going to be. He sometimes felt that he could not bear any more. But he did not die of exhaustion or senility; he went right on to the completion of his work, and at the end was as strong and fresh as ever. That is what God is like. The bush burns but is not consumed. The work of sanctification in us is that all the dross may be burnt up, but that the essential man may abide to the glory of God.

It is very striking that when Joshua saw the Lord as he was about to enter the land, he received the same injunction as that which was given to Moses: "Put off thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy" (Joshua v. 15). Perhaps the matter which the two had in common was that their holiness was a practical matter, related to service and warfare. Both of these men were about to enter into a mighty movement of God. For them holiness was not to be the quiet satisfaction of feeling better, but a burning separation of them, that they might share in the work of God. After all, holiness is nearness to God.

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When the Lord said to Moses, "Draw not nigh hither", He only meant to warn him of being found on a wrong basis. The Lord wanted Moses near Him; He kept him near Him all through the years. A flame for God is no use at all unless it is a flame that burns in the Presence of God. If the burning zeal is to be effective, if it is not to do more harm than good, it must be the result of a life lived close to the Lord.

Moses' shoes would be a figure to express his self-confidence. In taking them off he would be abandoning the firm foundation which he had made for himself, setting aside all self-reliance, all self-chosen movement. He was told to take off his shoes as an indication that he was moving off his own ground on to God's ground. May we put it like this? The only occasion when Moses really contradicted the holiness of the burning bush was when he got angry with the people. They had already proved how the Lord could give water from the rock, so that really there was no excuse for their second murmuring when there was no water. In spite of that, however, God in His infinite patience simply said to Moses: "Speak ye unto the rock" (Num. xx. 8). Moses got out of tune with God, and instead of showing the same patience, he took things into his own hands, strode out to the people hot with indignation, and not only smote the rock but cried out in a temper: "Hear now, ye rebels; shall we bring you forth water out of this rock?" It was as though he had put his shoes on again. In his early life he had been a leader; there are traditions that he had been a military general. All his natural instincts were for harsh discipline, not for gentle patience. The burning bush calls for us to forsake what we are naturally, and this Moses had done when he took off his shoes. From then onwards he had to depend on the Lord, not on himself, and the moment he fell back on to his own ground he became involved in confusion and loss. How much havoc is even now wrought among the Lord's people when His servants put on again the shoes of what they used to be or of what they are naturally!

The shoes also speak of contact with the earth. There is nothing more calculated to quench the pure flame of devotion to the Lord than sharing in the spirit of this world. A further practical result of taking off your shoes is that it means you are committed to stay—you are not going to run away. When Moses first turned aside to the burning bush, he was by no means certain that he was going to linger there. It might perhaps be better first to find out as much as possible, and then decide whether to stay. God will never allow this. Moses must

take off his shoes before he will receive the revelation or the commission. And so must we. God is not going to bring out His holy things to see if we approve of them or not. He is not prepared to show us what He wants us to do, so that we can consider it, weigh it up, and eventually decide whether or not to obey. No, He will say nothing more until we are committed. When we take off our shoes, when we confess that we will not run away as soon as the implications of obedience become clearer to us—when we are committed, then God will speak. The man whom God uses is the man who in this sense has taken off his shoes for ever. In one great crisis he has become wholly committed to the will of God, whatever that will may turn out to be.

A FLAME OF PURPOSE

Having said what we have about the flame, we now come to the point of greatest practical significance. There is nothing vague or general about this burning; it is the steady flame of a single and definite purpose. In the case of Moses we deal with the shadow—the emancipation of an earthly people for an earthly kingdom. In Christ we are called to the substance, the great spiritual reality. Men in bondage to this world are to be delivered by redemption, built together in holy fellowship to worship their Lord, and led into the spiritual power and glory of an everlasting kingdom. They are to provide for God's great King the spiritual house of which He can say: "This is the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell . . . for ever" (Ezekiel xliii. 7).

First of all Moses was given a token. God told him that if he would be obedient to the vision, before very long not he alone but the whole nation would be worshipping God in that very mountain (Ex. iii. 12). Then it became not only a burning bush but a burning mountain (Ex. xix. 18, xxiv. 17). This is a gracious promise, to be privileged to bring others, a whole nation of others, to share your experience and meet God as you have met Him. How greatly the Lord's people need to be led by men who have a vital experience into which to lead them. They cannot be pushed on, urged on, preached on; they need to be inspired by a man who has his own history with God. To such a one God promised that he would have the great joy of leading the nation back to this very mountain where they, too, would meet God for themselves.

But after all, this was only a token. It was but the first step. They were meant to go on from there: to feed on heavenly bread, to drink water from the Rock, to prove God's faithfulness, to live in vital

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fellowship with Him and with one another in Him, and so to move into that land of victory over every enemy and of the possessing of the full inheritance, that the throne might be given to God's king, and the land become a centre of glory, a point from which the holy fire of His presence might be radiated to the whole world.

Is God's purpose our purpose? Have we been set alight with this holy flame? God is not looking for those who are wise or able. He is not wanting us to get wrong ideas about our own importance or value. He wants a bush—a simple bush—but He wants it to be aflame with Himself.

H. F.

“THIS IS THE VICTORY”

“THIS IS THE VICTORY THAT HATH OVERCOME THE WORLD, EVEN OUR FAITH” (1 JOHN V. 4)

(II) “. . . SHALL LIVE . . .”

“I through the law died unto the law, that I might live unto God, I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I LIVE IN FAITH, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me.

“O foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth crucified? This only would I learn from you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh?

“For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one which continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them. Now that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident: for, THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; and the law is not faith; but, He that doeth them shall live in them, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us.

“For freedom did Christ set us free: stand fast therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage.” (Galatians ii. 19, 20; iii. 1-3, 10, 11 (A.V.)-13; v. 1).

WITH the letter to the Galatians, in which we next meet with our quotation from Habakkuk, we pass on to a new problem. It is the problem not now of beginning but of continuing. These Christians have made a sure start and it is a matter of maintaining in full freshness and vigour the Christian life upon which they have lately ventured. Whereas in writing to the Romans Paul was concerned primarily with establishing the foundation, by securing the standing of the sinner before God, here that question is already settled. The Galatians, “having begun” (iii. 3), are being troubled

rather in the matter of their further progress. It is not now a question of their justification, but of practical holiness and of a maintained walk.

Now it is just here that many of us are likely to be led astray. We have been fully convinced that justification by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the sufficient and only gospel for the sinner. But the trouble is that we want a different gospel for the saint. We would like something more concrete than faith. It appeals to our sense of the fitness of things that we should be *doing* something to help sustain and develop this new life which we now enjoy, and, by meticulous compliance with God's rules, be so ensuring the faultlessness of that life as to give Him pleasure. And the trouble is that there are plenty of people who will come along and play into our hands in this matter by presenting us with lists of rules to follow and of demands that God is supposed to be making upon us.

It was just this very thing that was happening to the Galatians. Their conversion as a result of the ministry of Paul and Barnabas is recorded in the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of the Acts, and it is a striking fact that there in those chapters we find that the crux of Paul's message is this very matter of justification by faith. “Be it known unto you therefore, brethren, that through this man is proclaimed unto you remission of sins: and by him every one that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts xiii. 38, 39).

It is in Acts xv, shortly afterwards, that we encounter a challenge to this faith position. “Certain men,” we read, “came down from Judaea (to Antioch) and taught the brethren, saying, Except ye be circumcised after the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved” (vs. 1). Their argument apparently was that justification was indeed by faith, but that thereafter God still demanded the fulfilling of the Law as a condition of continuance in a holy life. The fifteenth chapter of Acts is taken up with the controversy that raged around this

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question, and which ended with the sending out of a letter by the apostles and elder brethren at Jerusalem absolving the Gentile believers from all obligation to keep Moses' law. This letter was taken to the Galatian churches by Paul on a second journey thither (xvi. 4), and his own Epistle to the Galatians, probably written between his two visits, reflects these circumstances (see especially Gal. ii. 3 - 5 and v. 1 - 4).

This, then, is the background of the letter. 'But what', you ask, 'has it got to do with us? Are we not anyway commanded to live a holy life? Is there not a law of God, a "Thou shalt" and a "Thou shalt not", even for the Christian? Is there not a standard of life to be maintained? Am I not to discover the will of God and do it?' Yes, of course all of that is true. The attitude of the Son of God, who said, "I do only those things which please him," is to have its counterpart in the life of the sons of God. But the question is, *Who* is doing God's will? Are you? And are you successful?

It is very easy for us to have a set of rules to govern our Christian life and walk, which we carry out carefully in detail, and for us to feel that when we have done so we have fulfilled the will of God. We think that the mere fact that we read our Bible daily, and pray, and attend worship on Sundays, and witness in the open air, is in itself an assurance that all is well. It may of course be so, if these activities are an outward manifestation of a healthy inward walk in the Spirit; but if the regular carrying out of a programme of Christian activities has nothing more behind it than a sense of obligation to fulfil certain rules, then all is very far from well with us. To think, 'I do this and that and the other, and because I do them God is satisfied with my Christian life', is false and very dangerous reasoning.

For the whole force of Paul's argument in this letter is that, if you start on the basis of law, of "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not", you put yourself under an obligation to fulfil the entire Law (Gal. v. 3); and that if at any time you fail in *any single detail* you come under the curse that God has pronounced upon "every one which continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them" (Gal. iii. 10).

What, then, does God require of us? The answer is that, in a sense, He requires nothing: nothing, that is to say, of us *in ourselves*. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by taking the curse upon Himself when He took our place upon the tree. In doing so He set us free from the Law's obligations. He Himself had satisfied them. The Cross stands at the heart of Paul's argument. "O

foolish Galatians," he cries, "who did bewitch you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth crucified?" "Do not be drawn back on to the old ground of works. It is no longer a question of your doing something to fulfil the will of God. Learn that *you* cannot do it. God already knew that long ago and has made other provision for it. He has sent His Son to fulfil the Law in you'.

"I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me" (Gal. ii. 20). In the death of His Son, God has ruled *me* out. That spiritually ineffective, natural life has been nailed with Christ to the tree. I have been buried with Him, and I am risen with Him too; but, though now I live, it is no longer the old, weak, ineffectual 'I' that lives, but Christ who lives in me, and *I live by faith in the Son of God*. It is He who, indwelling and empowering me, now fulfils the will of God in me.

And that will is indeed fulfilled. It does not go by default. For what has just been said in no sense implies that I remain impassive. No, "*I live . . .*"! And living, I walk. And walking, I work and speak and spend myself in His service. But having begun in the Spirit I am not so foolish as to seek to be perfected in the flesh. No! Living by the Spirit I set myself to walk by the Spirit, and so not to fulfil the desires of the flesh. And being led by the Spirit I am no longer under the Law. It is Christ that lives in me, and as a result my life is bearing the Spirit's fruit, against which there is no law. (Gal. iii. 3 and v. 16 - 25).

I no longer attempt to produce that which will satisfy God *from myself as originator*. I know that even if I try I shall only fail. But I *do* seek to please God *by faith in the activity of Another*. The Son of God who indwells me by His Spirit is able and willing to carry out in me "those things that please him"; and I count upon Him to do so. Consciously, day by day, I take the attitude that I trust *Him* to work the will of God in me, and in that attitude I go forward and serve Him. I do not trust myself. "I live by faith in the Son of God." "The just shall live by his faith."

(III) ". . . BY FAITH"

"Christ . . . having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that WAIT FOR HIM, unto salvation,

"Cast not away therefore your boldness, which

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hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, having done the will of God, ye may receive the promise.

*For yet a very little while,
He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry.
BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH:
And if he shrink back, my soul hath no pleasure
in him.*

But we are not of them that shrink back unto perdition; but of them that have faith unto the saving of the soul.

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen.

"Therefore let us also . . . run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith." (Hebrews ix. 28; x. 35-39; xi. 1; xii. 2).

IT is in the Epistle to the Hebrews that we find the third and last quotation of those momentous words of God to Habakkuk. That letter, perhaps more than others, deals with the goal that is before us. It sets forth the purpose and objective of our redemption, and stirs us up to press forward thereto. That objective is variously described as glory (ii. 10), rest (iv. 1, 9), perfection, or full growth (vi. 1), inheritance of the promises (vi. 12), full salvation (vii. 25, ix. 28, x. 39), and a part in the city of the living God (xi. 10, 16, xii. 22, xiii. 14).

Clearly man has a destiny. There is a place that he is to occupy in the fully outworked plan of God, and, while by faith in Christ he in a measure enjoys its values here and now upon earth, just as clearly all such enjoyment is for the present inward and partial, awaiting as it does the full outward realisation of that destiny hereafter. So Hebrews speaks of a day yet to come, which will be both "the end" (iii. 14) of that old, straitened order of things, and the ushering in of an era of glory and fulfilment.

That day is to be marked by one distinctive event: the coming once more to this earth of the Lord Jesus Christ in person, and the summing up in Him of that great design of God that runs throughout spiritual history, hidden yet always governing. Then, when all the threads are tied off and the completed pattern is revealed, we, His children, shall find our place and the fulfilment of all our desires and hopes. As Paul says in Ephesians: ". . . he purposed . . . to sum up all things in Christ . . . in whom also we were made a heritage . . . to the end that we should be unto the praise of his glory, we who had before hoped in Christ" (i. 9-12). So it is to His coming that our hopes are directed. "Christ . . . having been

once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him, unto salvation" (Heb. ix. 28).

"To them that wait for him . . ." We catch here the echo of God's word to Habakkuk: "Though the vision tarry, wait for it." But it is that waiting which is just our difficulty. And this may be the more so as we near the end. It is commonly said that 'the night is darkest just before the dawn.' Whether this is a fact of nature, or just a subjective impression that men get who keep night vigil, the weight of Scripture certainly supports the view that it will be a fact in history; and present world developments, equally certainly, bear this out.

Nor is this just an external thing, manifesting itself in the closing of doors to the Gospel, the rising up of ever more overt wickedness in the world, and the growing persecution of and pressure upon the children of God. These are no small things in themselves, but along with them, as preceding and associated with the Lord's return, there so often goes an inward sense of difficulty and darkness in the heart of the believer. The outward "helps" to spiritual life that have so long served him are being systematically removed; the things that can by any means be shaken are going down; and everything that might, through the medium of his senses, assure him that all is well is being steadily withdrawn.

The Hebrews were themselves, we gather, passing through some such experience. Watching with a lingering regret the overthrow of the old outward forms of religion (for it is probable that the fall of Jerusalem was now very near), they were needing to be reminded again that these external things were, after all, but a shadow, of which the reality, as yet unseen save to faith, would be manifested openly when Christ should appear. The apostle could of course appeal to their past. "Call to remembrance," he says, "the former days, in which, after ye were enlightened, ye endured a great conflict of sufferings . . . knowing that ye yourselves have a better possession and an abiding one" (Heb. x. 32, 34). Yet even this argument had somehow lost its appeal. 'Yes!' we can imagine them replying, 'it is true that we were greatly helped at the beginning. The Lord was wonderful to us then, and has certainly brought us safely through so far. But our doubts concern the end. The question now is, Shall we finish? Can we possibly survive until that day, or shall we go under before He comes? What if, after all that has gone before, we should fail Him at the last?'

It is at this point that the writer brings in with such force the quotation from Habakkuk's pro-

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phesy. "Ye have need of patience", he has just said, "that having done the will of God ye may receive the promise" (x. 36); and now he breaks forth into the words of the Vision, using, however, under the Holy Spirit's sovereign leading, the strikingly different reading before him in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures:

"For yet a very little while,

*He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry.
But my righteous one shall live by faith."*

"Though the vision tarry . . ." What, then, is the Vision that Habakkuk only glimpsed, but that now shines forth in clearness? It is no earthly or material solution to his problems. It is not even a doctrinal answer to his difficult questions. It is: "*He that cometh.*" "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son" (Heb. i. 1, 2). The Vision is Christ Himself. He is the One who, hastening to meet us, will so very soon be here.

This is a tremendous discovery for any man to make. For, if it were merely an event we were waiting for; if we were but marking time until the arrival of a date in the calendar: then the question of whether we could last out as long in the face of the onslaught of evil without and within would become a very real one. But: "my righteous one shall live by faith." Faith in what? Faith in no event or point of time, but faith in a Person: faith in a Coming One. "*He . . . shall come, and shall not tarry.*" Commit yourself to Him.

We have been labouring this word "faith", and it is well that we should look at it more closely for a moment. It comes from a Hebrew root which is very widely spread among the old Semitic tongues of the Near East, and which now, in the word "Amen", has been adopted into every language spoken by Christians throughout the world. Its fundamental idea is of firmness, security, reliability, faithfulness. Whatever holds, or is steady, or can be depended upon, is "aman"—'faithful'; and the word in our verse derives from this root. *It is therefore solely from its object that faith derives its value.*

It is not the measure of your faith that matters so much as the security of that in which your faith is placed. An infant is wholly dependent upon the parent in whom it trusts, and, in just the same way, I in my weakness dare to place my confidence in the faithful One who has become the Author of my salvation. The saving power resides exclusively, not in my act of faith nor in my attitude of

faith, nor yet in the nature of faith itself, but in the object of my faith, which is Christ my Lord. "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness" (Rev. iii. 14); and to such an One faith responds: "Amen: come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. xxii. 20).

Yet, when we face the problem of finishing, it is that long-drawn-out darkness just before the dawn that tries us. If you have travelled much by railway you have perhaps been in a part of the country where the line passes through the hills by way of long tunnels. In some parts of the world there are tunnels that go for several miles under the mountains, and a train may take a quarter of an hour or longer to pass through. Let us imagine that a small child with his father is travelling by train in such a country and has never before been through a tunnel. He has been enjoying the view from the carriage window of houses and villages and cows and sheep and railway-engines, and then, suddenly, the view is shut off and he is abruptly plunged into darkness. He begins to cry with surprise and alarm, and his father immediately begins to reassure him: 'It's all right, Sonny, it's only a tunnel—we shall soon be out again,' and the small boy, somewhat doubtfully, quietens down. But the tunnel continues, and before long he is whimpering again, and his Daddy once again has to comfort him: 'Don't be frightened, Sonny, we'll soon be out of the tunnel.' As the time is prolonged he has again and again to repeat the reassuring words. 'We're nearly out now. It's all right!'—until at last the daylight is reached again and, with equally dramatic suddenness, a new scenery is spread out before their gaze.

What is it that comforts that small boy? It is his confidence in his father's word that all is well: that the darkness is not the end of all things, but a passage-way into a new daylight. That word is something on which he knows he can rely. The assurance may have to be repeated several times, but as he hears it and rests his troubled and questioning heart upon its sureness and strength, he is at peace. The end may not be yet, but it will surely come.

The Lord, in His lifetime on earth, made a pertinent inquiry concerning the last days. "When the Son of man cometh." He asked. "shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke xviii. 8). The writer to the Hebrews, faced with that very problem, expresses his own attitude and that which he confidently expects in his readers, when he recalls the Lord's word through the prophet, and then goes on to say: "We are . . . of them that have faith unto the saving of the soul" (x. 39). Passing

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in review the example in history of representative men of faith, he returns again in chapter xii to the standpoint of his readers. "Let us", he appeals, "run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." Our beginning was by faith in Christ for justification, our continued walk is by faith in Him as our life, and now the matter of our finishing—

can it be otherwise than by faith in Him?

Yes, all is well. "The night is far spent, and the day is at hand." With the eyes of faith set steadfastly upon our Lord Jesus, the Finisher, we shall be carried through. "Ye have need of patience . . . for yet a very little while, he that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry." Wait . . . ! Wait for *Him!* "The just shall live by *His faithfulness.*"

A. I. K.

(Concluded)

WE BEHELD HIS GLORY

(CHAPTER VIII OF VOL. II)

Reading: John chapters xviii and xix.

THESE chapters, read as narrative, might be thought to be historical in the sense of giving an account of the 'trial' and crucifixion of Jesus, but there is that which is much more and much deeper than that. Indeed, the true meaning and value is not the historical but the spiritual. Jesus has, at length, come to that for which supremely He came from Heaven. This is the "My hour" of which He has so often spoken. He had said so many things as to why He came into the world. Now they are all concentrated into this "Hour".

Let us be quite clear on one thing. All that ever Jesus has proved to be, through the long period of nearly twenty centuries; over an ever-growing area of the world; to an ever-increasing multitude of people of every nation, tongue, class, and circumstance: all that, He was in that hour. He was no less than He is now. He has not become a bigger or greater or more wonderful Christ than He was then. To realise this is to have an altogether transforming view of His so-called trial, judgment, and death. The elements of His subsequent history in the experience of peoples were all present then. The final and inclusive reality is His lordship. But nothing could ever look more unlike lordship than that which a superficial reading of these chapters conveys.

Let us look again, after having cleared and adjusted our minds as to the essential constituents of government and lordship. Over a very far-reaching area of the world, as it was then, the Jewish hierarchy, centred in High Priest and a Council of Rulers, held sway. The far-flung Jewish system referred and deferred unquestioningly to their judgment and authority. To dispute that authority or to question its integrity was to bring down the very

judgment of Heaven upon the offenders—their excommunication and execution.

Very well, Jesus knew all this, and then did two things. He challenged and refuted it, and then made havoc of it.

In that very hour, when, from all physical and natural standpoints, He was at a complete disadvantage and in "weakness", He utterly demoralised them right at the top level.

They had repeatedly to change their methods to make up a case. They darted from one point and argument to another when they sensed the weakness of their position. They resorted to subterfuges, half-truths, and false witness. They, who stood for ceremonial cleanness, were made by Him to show their inward corruption by stooping to moral infamy (xviii. 28). If there was one thing which in their heart of hearts they hated, repudiated and would never have entertained, it was Caesar's authority. But here they are being utterly false to themselves and to their people, and are saying the most humiliating thing conceivable: "We have no king but Caesar" (xix. 15).

The case against *them* is much greater and stronger than this, but the point is that they—*on all grounds*—are in His judgment hall, and He is the Judge, not the other way round. This surely shows that Christ's kingdom and kingship is spiritual and moral, in righteousness and truth, not official, political, temporal, of this world; and it is a thing of terror, a devastating thing to all that is not of it. Even if you think—as they did—that you have done Him to death, got Him out of the way, you have—as they did—to meet Him and reckon with Him on these terms, and for them it has meant centuries of unspeakable misery!

But that is not all. What of Pilate?

If the Jewish High Priest and the Sanhedrin

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

were the centre of religion over a wide area of the world, Pilate was the local representative of a still wider and more powerful world system. The long and indomitable arm of Rome and Caesar reached over the world and held it in an imperious sway. This, in a very real sense, was the world—the kingdom of this world. It could crush at a word and silence with a gesture.

The Jewish hierarchy, thinking to secure its ends through that austere and relentless power, blindly forced Jesus into the judgment hall of Pilate. With every kind of indignity and humiliation heaped upon Him He stands with no defence and no appeal.

But look—listen! What is happening?

He is quietly and steadily tearing down the moral structure of that whole edifice, and exposing the utter rottenness of its moral foundations. Pilate is nonplussed, disconcerted, cornered like a trapped creature. He is writhing, looking in every direction for some way out. Subterfuges, tricks, expedients, policy, pretension, play-acting!

Jesus is the Judge and Pilate is in His court.

He for ever and for history discredits Pilate as a rightful executor of equitable laws by proving him guilty of accepting reports without getting evidence (xviii. 34, 35); He makes him hide behind the transparent veil of cynicism (38): compels a verdict of innocence; draws out his inconsistency; drives him to subterfuge; makes him repeat his verdict twice; (38, 39; xix. 4, 6); uncovers a secret fear (8: note—"the more"); puts him in the place of a puppet (11); discloses more moral weakness (12, 13); proves him to be a mere worldly time-server (12, 15, 16); draws forth an acknowledgment—even if in irony—of universal sovereignty (19, 20).

So Jesus has established His claims. He came to bring the kingdom of God—but, thank God, not of the rotten kind in this world. He claimed to be the Truth, and He has torn the mask from the Devil's system of falsehood. He claimed to be the Light, and He has exposed the haunts and works of darkness. He came to die not at man's choice and will, but by laying down His life of His own accord. He came to overcome the world and its Prince—and He has done it! And so we might go on.

The one inclusive and glorious issue is that, while men thought themselves to be in the saddle, driving on to their own ends, God in sovereignty was in charge fulfilling His own predeterminate and foreknown counsel. The real government was with the supposed 'victim'.

"We beheld his glory"—the glory of the transcendence of moral excellence—"glory as of an only begotten from the Father . . . full of *grace and truth*".

The so-called 'trial' of Jesus is a parable. It for ever illustrates and demonstrates the judgment of this world—religious and secular—and postulates the ruin of all that is built upon corruption, falsehood, pretension, and mere formality.

Here is the—

'one death-grapple in the darkness,
twixt old systems and the Word.

Truth for ever on the scaffold,

Wrong for ever on the throne.

Yet that scaffold sways the future,

And amidst the dim unknown,

Standeth God, keeping watch above His own.'

By His cross He conquers!

T. A-S.

THE WORD OF GOD AND THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS

" . . . the word of God and the testimony of Jesus " (Rev. i. 9).

" . . . the word of God and the testimony which they held " (Rev. vi. 9).

" . . . her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and hold the testimony of Jesus " (Rev. xii. 17).

" . . . thy brethren that hold the testimony of Jesus " (Rev. xix. 10).

THE FOCUS OF DIVINE INTERESTS
IN THE EARTH

IN these expressions, which, after all, come to but one expression, we have what is nothing less than

the focus of Divine interests in the earth, and the focus of all the enemy's antagonism. There is something on the earth which to God is the focus—the thing that His eye rests upon, and which matters supremely to Him; and it is therefore not surprising that that same thing is the focus of the enemy's attention also. If that is for God, then it is the thing against which all the wrath of the enemy is set.

Any who in these days are seeking to walk with God, seeking to be in fellowship with Him, are finding themselves spiritually in a very real battle. There is no doubt about it: we are in a tremendous issue that is being fought out. Anyone who prays knows that there is a battle on. Anyone close to the

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Lord knows that it is no easy way. An immense conflict is raging in the spiritual realm. But it is the history of all the ages that what is of God is only realised through the fiercest conflict. When anything is of vital account to God, it always creates an intense battle. It is resisted, it is fought for—and then the victory comes.

If, then, there is something in these days fraught with great issues, we need to know what it is. Unless we know very clearly what we are in, and what it is about, we shall be confused people, we shall be baffled people; we might really be people out of the fight, because it is beyond us—we cannot make it out. It is most important that we should make it out, that we should know what is the greatest thing that matters in these days. If there is one way in which the enemy is seeking to keep us, the people of God, from the supreme issue, it is by providing other alternative occupations and interests, so that, when the greatest issues of the ages are consummating, God's people should be found trifling. Yes, this is really so. Satan would keep us fighting about little departmental matters, or little things of an historical interest—and a very remote antique history much of it is. It is the up-to-date thing that matters. What is God doing now? and are we in it?—and is it because some of us are in it that we are meeting a reaction and forces that are almost overwhelming? What is the thing?—what is it all about?

Well, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and light unto my path" (Ps. cxix. 105). We come back to the Word of God for His explanation, and I believe that in those words that we read together from the book of the consummation we have a key to the whole matter. John, of course, typifies a man who is in full fellowship with God, counting for God, and counting for Him in a day of great difficulty. It was a day in which there was declension on all hands, and yet there was this which represented God embodied in a man—a man, as regards himself, in distressing circumstances, a man relegated from the scene where things seemed to be happening, a man right out as far as men were concerned, and yet the man representing fellowship with God in the situation. The explanation John gives us of what he was going through is in those words—"for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus". And when we come to the further passage a little later on, the Apostle uses very strong terms, that in his vision he "saw . . . the souls of them that had been slain"—notice, "that had been slain"—"for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held".

There are, therefore, two factors in this thing.

in this reality that is vital to God and that is the enemy's point of attack. There are two factors, and both of them are important.

(I) THE WORD OF GOD

The first factor is the Word of God. Why was John here?—"for the word of God". Why were they slain?—"for the word of God". Why do things happen?—"because of the Word of God"—yes, and the other part of it—"the testimony of Jesus." But what is the Word of God that sets up all this? What is the Word of God that creates this terrific antagonism?

Well, we need an adequate conception of what God Himself means by 'the Word of God'. He does not just mean the Bible—that, because we have the Bible, then we are slain. We are anything but slain. You can get Bibles at every bookshop. It is nothing to do with the Bible—except that the Bible is the vessel of God's revelation of Himself. The Bible can be the Bible—and a closed book as far as its meaning goes. No, it is more than that. It is not even Bible doctrine. You need not get slain for holding sound evangelical doctrine. Indeed, mere 'soundness' may be quite a deadly thing. Assuming 'soundness' in matters of doctrine and Scripture, there is something even greater yet, and that relates to the *spiritual* understanding of the *meaning* of the Scriptures.

(a) AS THE REVELATION OF GOD AS HE IS

What is the Word of God? We need to be clear as to what we mean. We cannot afford to have a whittled-down conception of the Word of God. Nothing inadequate will do in these days. Of course, the Word of God is the speaking of God, God speaking. But I think we can put it like this. It is the *revelation* of God, and of His mind and will.

It is the revelation, first of all, of God Himself as He really is. A word is a means of expression. It is a means by which concepts are conveyed. And the Word of God is the conveying to men of what God is, what He is like—not the God of men's imaginations, not the God of an enfeebled Christendom, but God as He is. "Our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. xii. 29). How little God is known as He is! Yet God has revealed Himself as He really is. But how much of that revelation has broken through at all? For every little glint of Him we thank Him; but how much more is needed of the living God, of a mighty unveiling of what God is like—and moreover God in the

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Person of His Son. What a terrific thing God has done in sending His only-begotten Son into the world—emptying Himself and taking the form of a servant.

(b) AS THE REVELATION OF GOD'S MIND AND WILL

Yes, 'the Word of God' is the revelation of God Himself through Jesus Christ. But it is not only that. It is the revelation of God's mind and intent and will concerning all things. The Word of God is all-inclusive: it is the expression of God's mind about things. What a tremendous need for God's thoughts to be unveiled, so that we see them—so that we understand them and know what God is after. One of the great rebukes of the prophet Jeremiah was concerning the prophets who prophesied "a vision of their own heart", and had seen nothing. The Lord says that they "steal my words every one from his neighbour" (Jer. xxiii. 16, 30): it is all secondhand, it is all just getting bits from people and books and so on. That is not the Word of God. The Word of God is what the Holy Spirit reveals in power of God's own thought and mind.

(c) AS THE REALISATION OF GOD'S MIND

Yes, it is the revelation of God Himself, and the revelation by the Holy Spirit of His mind and will. But it does not stop there. The Word of God is revelation unto realisation. It is not only the revelation of God's mind: it is the realisation of it that is bound up with the Word of God. It is the Word actuating and operative that matters. It is not only the seeing of what God is like, and seeing what God wants. The vital thing is a people in whom that begins to operate. John was not in Patmos because he agreed with the Bible and its revelation. He was there because it was true in him. It was because the mind and thought of God began to operate in his own life, and to make him a certain kind of person, that the wrath of the enemy was roused and brought to bear upon him. It is the Word of God not only revealed, but realised, that Satan hates. He hates it working, doesn't he? He just hates it working.

The Word of God is valueless, or at any rate it has not attained its object, until it is lived and expressed. We should not be content with an objective conception of Divine thoughts, while we ourselves remain just the same as ever, should we? We should not be people of a very beautiful ideal, but in whom it is manifest that the thing does not work. That is the battle. It is where the thing begins to work that the enemy is roused. Then he is furious. He does not mind how 'sound' we are

as long as it does not work. He does not mind what truth we hold about the Second Coming, or anything else, so long as it does not work. But God is not content with a revelation without a realisation.

CHRIST THE SUPREME SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WORD OF GOD

What is the Word of God? What is its supreme significance? There is a *meaning* of Scripture, not just the text itself. It is very important to know the text—we ought all to know our Bible: we ought all to know what is in Genesis, and we ought to know what is in Chronicles, and so on. It is most important that we should know our Bibles. But you can know the whole Bible, and not know what it means. It is the *meaning* of the Bible that matters. The Holy Spirit must light it up and say, 'This is what I mean by that, this is the significance of that', and when that comes, that is revelation. For years the Church has had the Epistle to the Ephesians, but very few people have seen what it means. It has to light up.

The supreme significance of the whole Word of God is Christ. In other words, God has revealed Himself inclusively in the Person of His Son, who is the meaning of all things; and if we have not seen the meaning of Christ, we do not know the meaning of the Word of God. The point is this. Our Christ has to be much bigger than our Bible ideas. He has to swallow up the meaning of every book. He has to overwhelm everything with Himself. No book, however helpful, is really registering with us unless it has a Christ-meaning. The Person is the meaning of it all.

Every tag of Scripture is related to the Person—every bit of it. 'Not one jot or tittle shall pass', the Lord says; and I believe the fulfilment of the Law is going to be embodiment in Christ of the ultimate reality lying behind it. It is going to be Christ Himself; there is a meaning in every bit of the Law that has a fulfilment in the Person. There is a meaning in all the glories of Israel's economy which has an eternal and an abiding counterpart, "the heavenly things themselves". The heavenly things themselves are all going to be realised in a Person who will fill all things. And our Christ needs to get bigger and bigger, so that the Word of God has its content and meaning ever enlarging.

What antagonism there has sometimes been to that statement that we need an enlarging Christ! People say, 'How can Christ ever get bigger? What nonsense!' Of course, He cannot literally get bigger, but He can mean a great deal more to you and to me. You and I have to have a Person

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who is much bigger to us to-day than He was a few months ago, until we are crying out, 'Oh, what a Christ have I!' You did not say that a few months ago. You said, 'How glad I am that I'm saved!' Well, praise the Lord for that. But 'What a Christ have I' is different. Paul's motto is: "To me to live is Christ" (Phil. i. 21), because he has seen something of Christ's greatness.

THE WORD OF GOD OPERATIVE

Then we need to consider not only its meaning, but its application and realisation in life—the Word of God revealed and operative. The question is how much it *works*. It is when God's Word begins to work in our lives that all the trouble begins. Let us take these few examples.

(a) CHRIST AS LORD

We will all agree that, according to the Bible, Jesus Christ is Lord. The New Testament says so. "He is Lord of all" (Acts x. 36). Yes. But let me apply that to my life and say, 'Lord, I want you to be absolute Lord of everything in my life'—ah, then the trouble begins, doesn't it? The whole life begins to get turned inside out. The Holy Spirit comes and says, 'I am not Lord there, I am not Lord there'. 'But, Lord, I could never . . . I do not agree, I could never face that'. And so many just sheer away from that initial matter of the Lordship of Christ, and the enemy laughs. 'A theoretical Lord—it doesn't work!' Yes, apply the Word of God and everything begins to come up.

Take a child of God who in their home, to begin with, simply says, 'Lord, I want you to be absolute Lord of my life', and as they go back to their profession or their office they seek to go with Jesus as absolute Lord. 'If there is anything, Lord, that is not according to You, I want You to show me'. Well, that is a very good covenant to make. Yes, but then things begin to happen, difficult things begin to happen, misunderstandings seem to arise, and those who have most committed themselves to the Lord seem to run their heads into the worst trouble, and at first they cannot think whether it is they themselves or the other people who are wrong. You have set up the whole matter of this battle for the testimony that Jesus is Lord. That is the first thing.

(b) CHRIST AS LIFE

Take the next one: Christ not only as Lord, but as life. We read in the New Testament that Christ is our life (Col. iii. 4). But how ever is Christ to be

our life? Only when "it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth" (Gal. ii. 20): so it presupposes an utter committal to the Cross—'I do not want to live my life, Lord; I want You to live Your life.' What a tremendous crisis is needed to make the Word real! 'Christ our life'. Oh, friends, it is a tragedy that God's people are looking at an objective truth in Scripture, and saying, 'Oh, yes, Christ is our life, so we are all right'—but He is not our life in practice, in experience. It is a most terrific thing for us to be in any way really living in the power of His risen life. It can only happen where the Cross is accepted, and we say, 'Lord, I have got to go out—there is too much of me'. And do not let us think that that is a sort of miserable, introspective life. Not a bit. It is a practical crisis that says, 'Lord, no more nonsense: I want Your life, not mine—that is all'. He replies, 'All right, My child, I will show you what it means', and then it begins to happen. Christ begins to come through that life, and wherever that life goes, something will happen. That is the Word of God in operation.

(c) CHRIST OUR LIFE TOGETHER

Take another great factor. 'Christ *our* life'—that is, *together*. You know, God has given a revelation of what He means by the Church—Christ as the life of His people—and, do you know, there is nothing in the Word about religious orders or denominations or anything like that. They just do not exist. But people say, 'Oh, well . . . you see, it is rather convenient . . . we must have these things. They are not in the Word, of course. Still, we must make the best of things.' The Word of God is just 'made of none effect'. But if we take the Word, and say, 'Lord, we stand for what You have revealed: make it real in us as a people'—then trouble begins all round. We do not want anything for ourselves, we only want what is in the Word of God; but the trouble begins all the same. The Word of God made real causes trouble.

We will not stay longer on that, but let us note it. There is a battle for the *reality* of the Church: the saints dwelling together in true spiritual oneness, knowing Christ as their one Life and Head in the power of the Holy Spirit. But *that* is God's mind about it all, *that* is the Word of God which needs to be made real and expressed. So there is a battle about *that*! The enemy hates the real thing. He says, 'Do keep it theoretical—just bring it down to earth a bit, so that we can fit in with people's ideas.' But God's Word says, 'No!'

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

(II) THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS

(a) THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST

We come briefly to the tremendous second factor—"the testimony of Jesus". 'Testimony' means spontaneous or unconscious witness; it is thus not just the witness *to* Him, but the witness *of* Him—that is to say, it is Jesus embodied and expressed in terms of life. We are only a testimony in the measure that Jesus is manifest. It is not certain people expressing themselves in terms of doctrine or opinions or preachings. No, it is a life manifest. Paul says: 'I bear about in my body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifest' (II Cor. iv. 10). It is Jesus expressed. How?—by His character. The enemy is not interested in characterless Christians, Christians without character. We are speaking, of course, of Christ's character, not our own. Unless there is something of the mark of what is Christ about us, we have no impact.

What is His character supremely? I think we can bring it down to one word—meekness; and meekness is very near to selflessness. But *we* cannot bring that about; it is only the Lord in us who can do it. For us, the Christian life is impossible. Only Christ can live it. You have to say, 'Lord, I give it up—but please go on with me', and you get through. And by His grace *He* will get through, His beauty will be seen upon us because He is there. And let us have a positive note: He *is* there! Praise His Name, 'Christ in us' is 'the hope of glory'; and if Christ is in us, then His meekness is in us, and we can trust Him for its manifestation. And not only His character, but His Cross will be there: yes, it is a crucified life, the Jesus life. The name Jesus speaks of His humanity and of His humility and of His suffering. That is the kind of person the Lord is trying to make us, is it not? That is the testimony.

(b) THE CROSS OF CHRIST

And what a painful way it is! Whatever we are going through of trial, it is in order that the Jesus testimony may be manifest. I was speaking to a brother recently who has been going through great trials, and I said to him, 'Well, how are things? Are they any better? Have they changed?' His answer made me rejoice. He said, 'Well, no, they haven't; but we have changed!' Praise the Lord! And the Lord keeps us in the fire which we want cooled off. He keeps us in the fire because He says, 'I want to change you'. Yes, it is the Jesus life He wants. That is the testimony: and

wherever it is, God is well-pleased, and wherever it is the enemy is annoyed. Do not let us worry about annoying the enemy. It is going to happen.

(c) THE CROWN OF CHRIST

And thirdly, not only His Cross but His crown. Yes, one evidence of Him is that His Name, the Name of Jesus, is above every name. We have the KING dwelling within! Beloved, we are to "reign in life through the one, even Jesus Christ" (Rom. v. 17). The Lord Jesus is triumphant, victorious and glorious, and He is the One who is in us; and as our faith rests on that, counts upon it, the testimony will begin to be evident that He is Lord, that He is our life, that He is our character. The testimony is not just some ideas or teachings, or some association. It is a real thing. It is the Word of God made real; it is the life of Christ made an actuality. Yes, it is Christ made manifest: a people and an humanity according to God: God's beloved Son expressed.

GOD'S GOAL: REALITY

Now, all this is very searching, very testing, but we want to sum it up. God has spoken in His beloved Son: His whole Word is a speaking of Christ; and that which matters to God is His mind revealed to us and realised in us—the Word of God made real. Do you ever test yourself? Take a well-known word: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace . . ." (Isa. xxvi. 3). Well, am I in perfect peace? And consider some of the promises, such as: "Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh" (Gal. v. 16). Well, walking by the Spirit will fully extend us, will it not? One verse, one fragment of the Word of God, is a terrific challenge. What an accumulation of theories we have! The Lord wants, little by little, to turn every bit of it into reality, so that *we are* the thing—the mind of God revealed and realised. Our prayer should be: "Lord, I know so little of all this in realisation—I want it to be realised in me."

And then the "testimony" is God's Son embodied and expressed. That is, Jesus, not us; not a lot of well-meaning Christians, but people out of the way, so that the Son of God can be seen. That which is precious to God is a reality: with that God is satisfied. We must not be surprised that things happen from the enemy's side, but we must go on unashamed, rejoicing, keeping our eyes on Him.

C. J. B. H.

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FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

LOST IN THE DARKNESS

“ Again therefore Jesus spake unto them, saying, I am the light of the world : he that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life ” (John 8. 12).

IN His Word, God tells us that we are all lost in the darkness. This is a very dark world. We know how dark a night can be when there is no moon, and when we cannot even see the stars. This world is darker even than that. Perhaps we may say that it is like being in a black fog, since, of all the kinds of darkness that there are, a fog is surely the worst. I ought to know, for not long ago I was lost in one.

What happened was this. It was night, and already rather foggy, but I was able to drive towards home until I began to pass into thicker and thicker gloom until it got quite black. I had to stop the car. I could see nothing. Misty figures passed around, as men on foot tried to grope their way along ; voices called out from the darkness as people tried to find one another ; then all was silence and blackness. I was lost.

It seemed foolish to be lost so near to home. Yet, unless there were some kind of light, I had little hope of getting there. Of course, there were lights on the car. The headlights were made to shine far out along the road, and they were very good, but these were of no use in the fog. I switched them on to see, and found that, instead of helping me, they only made things worse. Fancy lights making the road darker ! But there was no doubt about it. Without them I could see next to nothing, but when they were on I felt more blind than ever. They made a white wall in front of me. My headlights could never light me through the fog.

There were street lights, too, and they were good ones, for it was a main road. I wondered where they were, for as I peered through the windscreen of the car there was no sign of them. As I crawled slowly along, I found that when I got very near to a lamp-post I could just faintly see them. They gave just enough light to save me from bumping into the post. I was thankful for this, but not very thankful, for after all, I thought to myself, if there were no street lights there would be no lamp-posts to bump into ! Indeed they could even be a cause of danger, as I saw in the case of one poor muddled motorist, who had mistaken the side of the road, and had swerved over to keep the lamp-post on his left when it should have been on his right, and so

mounted the pavement on the wrong side. It made me even more careful. And it made me realise that if my own lights were no use, the city lights were very little better.

Just as everything seemed hopeless, I heard a voice which called to me from the darkness. It was a warning voice, telling me that once again I was going wrong, but it was also a helpful voice, for its owner said he would guide me along the road. The man was walking home in my direction, and so he offered to walk along the edge of the kerb, so that I could follow him. It was hard to see him, but if I began to stray away he called me back, and so we crawled along, very slowly, it is true, but safely. At least, I was safe so long as I kept my eyes on my unknown friend. Other lights had failed me, but he was my light, to lead me out of the thick fog on to higher ground, where it was clear enough for me to find my way home.

As I said at the beginning, this world is like a black fog. What makes fogs so dark is that all the smuts and fumes of the city are added to the darkness of the night, and what makes this world so dark is that, to add to the natural darkness of man's heart, there is all the dirt and smoke of sin and unbelief, which blinds men to the love of God. No wonder that people are lost. The only way through this darkness is to hear the voice of Jesus and follow Him, for He has promised to give us “ the light of life ”.

This is not our own light. It is no use switching on our headlights of reason, study, effort or good intentions, for they will only make things worse. That is why so many clever people do not know the way to God ; they are trusting to their own headlights.

Nor is it the light which we get from those around us, for this will be like the street lights : just enough, perhaps, to save us from some bad bumps, but very dangerous if it makes us think we are right, when really we are out of the way.

No, we need Someone to lead us ; we need the Light of the world. At first the Saviour's voice is a warning one, and we may not like it. I did not at first like the man who called out to me. But I found that he was a true friend, who could guide me, and act as a living light. As I followed him, I was no longer lost in the darkness, but able to reach home in peace. The Lord Jesus is the Light of life, the living Light, who will walk before us in the

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

way. So long as we keep our eyes on Him, and obey His voice, we shall journey safely on, not walking in the darkness, however foggy it may be,

but led to the Homeland where all is light and blessing.

H. F.

THE TREASURE AND THE PEARL

Reading: Matthew xiii. 44, 45.

THE multitude has gone or has been left (vs. 36). The Lord is alone with His disciples. He is interpreting to them what He has said to the multitude. Then He adds three more "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven". Two of these are undoubtedly twins, they belong to each other.

Various interpretations have been given and usually they have been interpreted as being two entirely different things. It is not easy to be dogmatically final about this especially if a new interpretation is suggested.

But there are some things about which we are surely agreed. These are—

(1) The "Man" in both cases is the same "Man" as sowed good seed, firstly in the form of the Word of God, and then in the form of genuine Christians, over against "darnel". The seeker here in these two parables is not an unbeliever nor a believer.

However much we sing, and shall go on singing

"I've found the Pearl of greatest price,
My heart doth sing for joy;
And sing I must, a Christ I have:
Oh, what a Christ have I"—

all that is true *excepting its association with the parable.*

(2) The "field" and the "sea", where the treasure and the pearl are respectively, correspond to the earlier field of the Sower, and the sea of the drag-net. It is one thing—the world. Jesus purchased the world at the cost of all that He had. It is His by right of redemption, although that right is repudiated, and therein is the ground of judgment, as He has shown elsewhere.

(3) Neither Jesus, the kingdom of heaven, nor Salvation are up for sale to the highest bidder. Who has the fabulous wealth required? Who has a sufficient "all" to procure this? The idea of our buying the treasure or pearl would rule out entirely the whole nature and truth of grace.

Whatever we might 'count as refuse that we might gain Christ' is an after thing when we have already found and come to possess Him, and only speaks of how little everything is in comparison.

Paul would never weigh the "things which were gain" as a *price* for Christ, but only as "refuse" in comparison. Those things just went, they were not sold for Christ.

We are brought to common ground in our interpretation when we alight upon one idea, it is that of preciousness, and preciousness to the Seeker.

If Christ is that Divine Seeker then there is that which is of superlative value to Him. In the light of the Holy Spirit's later fuller revelation of the "mysteries of the kingdom" have we any guidance as to what these precious things are? I think we have. As to the treasure, is not this the answer, "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for it" (Eph. v. 25): referring back to verse 2 where the reference is to the Church—"as Christ . . . loved you, and gave himself up for us (or you), an offering and a sacrifice to God". "The church of God which he purchased with his own blood" (Acts xx, 28). This is the only realm where purchasing comes in. All the teaching concerning the Church and its superlative value to the Lord finds its place here.

Our point, at the moment, is just this: if the Church is of such transcendent and inestimable value to Christ, ought it not to have such a place with us?

If *this* love were shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit would it not be a corrective to criticism, division, suspicion, and exclusiveness? Would it not be a directive as to how to approach the rumours, reports, and suggestions which could otherwise be so disaffecting? Would it not cut an immense amount of ground from under the Devil's feet in his campaign to frustrate the great purpose of God as bound up with the Church? Would it not be the ground on which the Holy Spirit would repeat His mighty work throughout the world, as at the beginning? "Christ loved the church". So ought we to love.

But what of the pearl of great price?

In what we are going to say we want to repeat that we would not be dogmatic that this is *the* interpretation of the parable, but there is little doubt that there is truth in what we say.

It is difficult to make two *separate* objects of the Treasure and the Pearl, just as it is difficult to allow of two all-inclusive prices being paid. If "all that

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he had" has gone for one thing, then it cannot go for another. Surely these are two aspects of the same thing? It is true that the Church inclusively and without exception is the object of the uttermost love and giving, but it is also clear that the Church's uttermost love for the Lord is included in His desire and longing. As it turns out we find the Church divided in this respect, and the last New Testament picture of churches is one of a dividedness of love. The messages to the seven churches are surely—while judicial—an appeal from Him who is "girded about *the breasts* with a *golden girdle*" for "first love". The division is between being Christ's and being *utterly* Christ's. The final symbolic picture of the Church is "the new Jerusalem", and her gates are of *pearl*. Does

not all this point to a particular preciousness to the Lord of that fruit of His sufferings born in believers and proved by their willingness to suffer with and for Him? The pearl is the symbol of suffering, suffering unto agony, and agony producing beauty and great preciousness.

Said Paul, "I fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ, *for his body's sake*, which is the church". Is not this something infinitely precious to Christ? Would He not give all for a Church that *so* loves Him?

We leave it there. Whether it is what He meant by the second parable, we will not contend, but we are sure that this is something supported by very much in the Word of God.

T. A-S.

We want to thank very warmly all the friends who have sent us greetings and messages of fellowship at this Christmas time.

The number is too many—more than ever—for us to write a personal letter to each one, so please accept this as for yourself, if you are one of that number.

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A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

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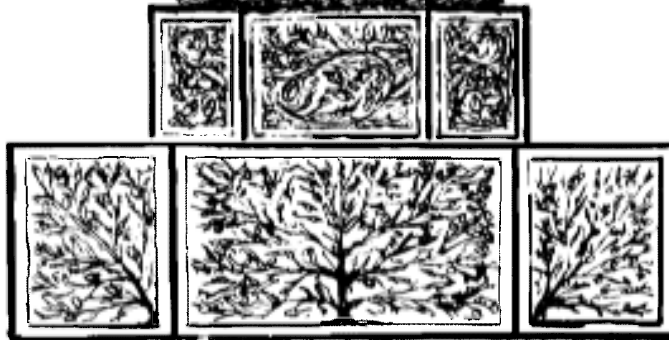
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THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF SERVICE

I. THE BELOVEDNESS OF CHRIST

Reading: Ex. xxxii. 1-6, 15-29; Mal. ii. 4-6, iii. 1-3; Num. iv. 1-3; Luke iii. 23.

THE matter of the priestly service or ministry of the people of God, the service of God in terms of priestliness, is one which has been on my heart for a considerable time now. We will introduce the subject with a very simple consideration of what I am going to call the 'belovedness' of Christ, in this particular connection—His priestly ministry.

In the passages which we have just read, to which a great many more could be added, two things are quite clear. One, that the Lord's people are called to be a priestly people—that is their vocation; two, that in that function they are peculiarly precious to the Lord. You cannot read the many passages in the Scriptures about the Levites without being impressed by that one thing, that they are very precious to the Lord. The last reference to them in the Old Testament, which we have read, indicates that. There is a tone of very real endearment in the words of the Lord about Levi at that point. At the end of the story of the Old Testament, after all that has taken place through the years, the Lord looks right back to that day of which we read in Exodus xxxii, and speaks of how precious and valuable the Levites

became to Him, so much so that He entered into a covenant with them, a covenant of life and peace. "My covenant was with him of life and peace".

THE PRIESTLY MINISTRY OF CHRIST
AND THE FATHER'S LOVE

And you will notice the connection between the statement in Numbers iv. 3, that the active Levites started their ministry at the age of thirty, and the statement that Jesus was likewise thirty years of age when He began His public ministry: indicating not only in itself, but by other features which we shall notice, that His ministry was essentially a Levitical, that is, a priestly, ministry. We all believe that, and we know how much is made of that, especially in the letter to the Hebrews. But notice that that statement in Luke iii—"Jesus . . . when he began . . . was about thirty years of age"—follows immediately upon His baptism and the opening of the Heavens, and the Father's voice and attestation: "Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." There is something about the Lord Jesus, just at this point when He takes up His priestly ministry, which draws out the love of the Father for Him in these affectionate expressions. It is true that He was the Son, and therefore

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He was beloved of God as His Son, but I believe there was a particular connection between His beginning of a priestly ministry, and this expression of the Father's love and appreciation for the preciousness of this upon which He was entering. That is the point of our concentration just now—the 'belovedness' of the Lord Jesus, and so of the Levites, as entering into the meaning of Christ's ministry in terms of priesthood, precious to the Lord.

I suggest to you, dear friends, that the thing that you and I need, and perhaps more than anything else desire, to be assured about, is: What is there, peculiarly precious to the Lord, into which we may be brought, in which we may be found, which may be entrusted to us? What we really are seeking for all the time is: What is it that the Lord wants more than anything else? What is it that is more precious to the Lord than anything else? Can there be something in the life of God's people corresponding to this 'belovedness' of Christ? It is very important to know that. There are many things that may be of value, but they may be of comparative value. What we want to know, what we must know, is: What is that which the Lord really looks upon as most precious to Himself, which will serve Him to the greatest value? The Lord Jesus received the assurance that the Father's love, appreciation and valuation were focused upon Him, just at the point when He stepped out into His public ministry. It is a great thing to start any work or move out into any service on a basis like that, is it not? Just think of what strength there would be if we had absolute assurance that that to which we were committed was something of tremendous value to God!

As we go on in our Christian lives and in our manifold work for the Lord, we find that time is a great sifter. Trial, testing, adversity and suffering, and all the things which come to bear upon us, very often make us raise seriously the question of values. 'Is it worth it? Is it justified? Does this really matter? Is this of such importance?' From time to time we are forced to ask, 'Now, what does it all amount to, after all?', and it is then a great delivering and confirming thing to have the answer: 'This is precious—of very real value—even of supreme importance to the Lord'. It was the starting-point of the Lord Jesus in His life-work—His belovedness to the Father, not only in His Person and Sonship, but in the thing to which He was committing Himself.

It is very important to know, and it is not wrong to say, that we can be brought into that belovedness. The Levites, representing God's thought for

all His people, came into that in a very real way. The Lord let it be known right through the centuries that they represented something very valuable, very precious to Himself. "My covenant was with him of life and peace".

AN OPEN HEAVEN

Then you notice that when the Lord Jesus began at the Levitical age of thirty, the one thing that marked that beginning was the opened Heaven. The Heavens were opened. Now look back again at Exodus xxxii, and you see that that is exactly what is there. Moses, receiving the law and the testimony on Sinai in communion with the Lord, came down from the mount. The Lord had already told him what was happening down below, but Joshua did not know. Joshua was always a man of war, and any noise to him sounded like war, and when he heard the sound from the camp he interpreted it as war. His spirit rose to the occasion for fighting, but Moses said, 'No, that is not war—I know what that is', and he came down and saw, and took it all in.

Moses stood in the gate, and Israel became divided into two parties. On the one side, Heaven was closed. No doubt about it, Heaven was closed to them that day. It was doom, judgment, darkness, exclusion; they were set aside, cast out. Heaven was no longer open. On the other side of Moses were the Levites, and the open Heaven was with them. On the basis of their action, their decision, the open Heaven was their inheritance that day, and from that time onward theirs was the ministry of the open Heaven. Levitical ministry is the ministry of an open Heaven, and the opened Heaven is the sign and seal of the preciousness of that to the Lord. To be living, walking, working, in the good of a Heaven opened, is the mark of preciousness to the Lord. No judgment, no exclusion, no doom, no darkness, no wrath, but an open Heaven—the inheritance of the Levite, and the inheritance of the Lord Jesus, the greatest of the Levites.

Do you grasp the significance and importance of that? We are talking about *service*. Forget for the moment the terms in which we couch the message—'Levitical' and 'priestly' sound very ecclesiastical, very formal—and just think about the service which is precious to the Lord. That kind of service means the service which corresponds to the Lord Jesus, that pre-eminently marks the Lord Jesus. It has the seal of God upon it, that this is something supremely precious to the Lord; and the seal is that you have an open Heaven. That is, the way between you and God is wide open: there

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is no shadow, no cloud, no interruption: the course is clear between God and yourself, and yourself and God. If it is not like that, the service will be hard going, always under a sense of Divine reservation, that the Lord is not really with you as you feel He ought to be.

THE MARKS OF THE MINISTRY

An open Heaven, and "My covenant . . . with him of life and peace". What is the mark of this kind of ministry? what is the mark of a people standing in such a position, such a relationship with the Lord under an open Heaven?

(1) LIFE

Well, it is always with this twofold characteristic. First of all, *life* is being ministered all the time. Look at the whole history of the work of the Levites. We shall perhaps say more about that later. Their whole ministry was one of maintaining life, keeping open the way of life, ministering life. But for them, death would have set in: they were the bulwarks against death. They were the channel of life from Heaven to the people of God, and I suggest again that the real test of the service that is precious to the Lord is not 'size', not many things that men think to be the marks of success, but whether there is a ministration of life: is life being ministered, is life being poured out? is the one thing of which you are conscious in that ministry the presence of life? It is not just a matter of our understanding the terms and the phrases and the language and the teaching, but our recognition of *life*.

And what do we want apart from that, and what do we want more than that? Is it not that that the people of God need, after all? Oh, for life! It is life we want, we must have life—give us life! We cannot live without life! And the Levites were the ministers of life. Christ, the great Levite, was the Minister of life; and real service to the Lord is that we minister life—not that people come necessarily into a great range of truth, a vast amount of knowledge and information that is purely intellectual or mental, but that they have life ministered to them. That is the seal of the real service of God.

But when you come to think about it, that, after all, is the whole matter. It is summed up in that, and—because of the preciousness of this kind of service into which you and I are called—in the 'belovedness' of Christ. Oh, what a wonderful thing! That is something that we cannot talk

about; we can only feel and sense. If it might be that the Lord should be able to look toward us with deep appreciation and say 'beloved', in recognition that there is something in our lives, in our service, in our ministry, of very, very great account to Himself; that there might be transferred to us something of the belovedness of His own Son.

(II) PEACE

"And peace". Was it peace for those people who broke loose on that day? No, in the very deepest sense it was war. It was war between them and God, and between God and them. No peace with that. But the covenant of life over against their death, and of peace over against their controversy—or God's controversy with them—the covenant of life and peace was with Levi. Peace: it is a wonderful thing to be in the place where God is satisfied, and your heart is at rest. That place is in Christ.

GOD'S JEALOUSY OVER THE LEVITES

Now, because of the value of that to God, see how jealous He was over the Levites. It is a long story of Divine jealousy concerning their place and ministry. God was so jealous about the Levites, as to their rightful place, and the ministry which was entrusted to them, that some of the most terrible things in the history of Israel happened when the Levites were not given their place and their portion. This book of Malachi is just full of that. Glance through this short book, and note how many times reference is made to priesthood and Levi. You will find that the whole thing really focussed upon that. And what is the trouble? Oh, everything is wrong in Israel at the end. It is a wretched, miserable story: everything is breaking down, everything is wrong, there is nothing happy at all. And why? The Levites are not in their place, the Levites are not functioning, and the Lord's people are not giving the Levites their portion; and the Lord is so jealous about that, that everything else is allowed to go wrong.

But the conditions that obtained at the end had occurred repeatedly in the past. You recall the tragedy in the case of Uzzah and the ark. The Lord smote Uzzah, so that he died. Why? Because the Ark had been put upon a cart, when the Lord had prescribed that it should be carried by the Levites. The Lord is very jealous. Dear friends, it does matter, does it not, whether the Lord is jealous for us—whether the Lord is ready to stand

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by us, to uphold us, to be with us, to let it be known that "he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye" (Zech. ii. 8)? There is something in that—to have the Lord on your side, to know that God is jealous over that to which you are committed, and fiercely jealous over it, that the Lord is not going to let it be set aside, the Lord is not going to let it be overlooked. Even if, in all innocence and in all good motive and good will, as with David and his cart, the principle of the Levites is forgotten, is overlooked, the Lord does not overlook it. This is something which is pre-eminent with the Lord, God is jealous for something; and what matters is that we are in that something for which God is jealous. Oh, to have the jealousy of God on our side in the work to which we are committed!

Now, the history of the Levites is a long and varied and mixed history. They were not always in good condition; they were not always in their right place, position and function. Sometimes they were incapable of ministering simply because they were involved in the bad state of the people of God. Sometimes they themselves were out of adjustment. It is a long and painful history. But what I want you to notice is this, that even in the last recorded phase of that history—a long history in which there are many dark chapters—even in the last phase, as we see it in Malachi, God has not given them up. The last word about them is that He will "purify the sons of Levi", after all. He has not abandoned them; He has not given them over. The Lord has made a covenant, and He is standing to it.

But it is not always a matter of the people. Here it is a matter of the ministry. There is some ministry which is of this kind, which has this importance and value in the sight of God. There is a particular kind of service to the Lord to which He is peculiarly committed, and, while those who are connected with it may change, may sometimes go wrong, the Lord is jealous for this thing, and He is not giving it up, He is not casting it aside. If that had been His way, where would the ministry of the Lord be to-day? Think of the Dark Ages, even of Christendom. Think of all those periods in this dispensation when things have been in a deplorable state, and the Lord has seemed to have little or nothing of this kind. But the Lord has never given it up, and He never will. The last chapter of the Old Testament sees the Lord coming back to it again. He is committed to it. It is a great thing to know that there is that which is of such importance to the Lord that if we come into it, we shall find God persisting in spite of failures.

of weaknesses, of imperfections, of days of darkness, of seeming eclipses. God is going on with that thing.

There are things to which God has not committed Himself. There are those things which God has left, from which He has withdrawn; but there is that concerning His Son to which He has committed Himself, which He will never give up, no matter what happens. If we ask what that is—in a phrase, it is priestly ministry. We have to learn what priestly ministry is.

THE CHASTENING OF THE SONS OF LEVI

There is chastening connected with it. "He will purify the sons of Levi". Yes, chastening. But let us always keep a broad line between judgment and chastening. The Devil always tries to wipe out that difference, and interpret all chastening as judgment. Judgment is for rejecters of the Lord; chastening is for the accepters of the Lord. The form of the judgment may seem to be exactly alike for unsaved and saved: you cannot see any outward difference. The unsaved may suffer physical judgment for sin. The saved too may suffer physically—yet this is not judgment, but chastening. One is destructive, the other is constructive, and God's dealings with Levites are always on the constructive principle. Remember that. There may be suffering, there may be the fire purging and purifying, but it is always constructive. God is just using these ways to secure that upon which His heart is set.

SATAN'S HATRED
OF LEVITICAL MINISTRY

This has been but an introductory word, but note one thing before we close: the hatred, the Satanic hatred, of this Levitical ministry. When Jesus began He was, as we have seen, about thirty years old, that is, of Levitical age, indicating that the ministry that He was beginning was priestly ministry—the open Heaven attesting that this Person and this ministry were peculiarly precious to the Lord, beloved of God. What came next? The wilderness and Satan. And what was the point of assault? The very point upon which God had focused everything—the 'belovedness'. 'My Son, My Beloved'. "If thou be the Son . . ." He might just as well have said, 'If Thou be the Beloved'. for that was the point of the thing. 'If you are beloved, if you are so precious to the Father . . .' "If thou be the Son . . ." Satan hates not only this Person, but this thing. Satan is not only against

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the Person, but he is against the ministry; and the one thing that he will always try to do, in order to cripple, destroy or nullify that ministry which is so precious to God, is, if we may put it this way, to becloud the belovedness.

Do you not realise how Satan is all the time trying to make you believe otherwise than that God loves you, that you are beloved of God? It is often the last thing that we can believe, is it not, that we are beloved of God? Satan is always busy from every angle to try to becloud our belovedness. If he cannot do it by direct assault, he does it by suggestion, by insinuation. Or he will do it by trying to cause us to slip up, make mistakes, go wrong, and then bringing upon us accusation, saying, 'You are no longer beloved of God'. His devices and his efforts are countless and unsearchable, with the one object, as with the Lord Jesus, so with those who are with the Lord Jesus as the sons of Aaron, as Levites, of somehow bringing a cloud, raising a question, over this preciousness to the Lord.

I use the word again because it is a good word and gets us a bit off our beaten track—the *belovedness* of Christ, transferred to His fellow-priests or His Levite sons, the beloved. Let Satan get in there and he has destroyed everything. If there should be one reading these lines who has lost the assurance that God loves them, you not only know the unspeakable misery of it, but, what is more, you know how you are put out of service—you know quite well that you would not attempt to serve the Lord. It is no use—you are paralysed until you know and are assured that the Lord loves you. If you have lost that assurance, you have lost your testimony, you have lost your ministry, you have lost everything, and that is the chief work of the Devil. Paul says: "he hath made us accepted in the beloved" (Eph. i. 6, A.V.). That is the belovedness of Christ transferred to those who are

in Him. Do not believe the Devil. "Evil company doth corrupt good manners" (I Cor. xv. 33), and if you have a talk with the Devil, and listen to him, your whole conduct will be affected and coloured by that. The one object the Devil has in view is to raise a question, nay, to establish in you a question, as to God's love and your belovedness to God—that is, personally.

And then he is after something more—he is after your ministry. You see, on that day when the Lord Jesus stepped out to His ministry, the Devil stepped out too, and said, 'Not only will I raise a question, if I can, about His relationship with God and God's relationship with Him, but by raising that question I will destroy this ministry, if I can, right at its birth'. You and I are no use to God if we have a question about either His love for us or His love for that to which we are committed. If we have any doubt about that, we are finished. This sense of what I have called 'belovedness' is essential, not only to life, but as an assurance and rest in service. It gave encouragement to the Levites to go quietly, assuredly and restfully about their work, and so they did. Day after day, by day and by night, they went on quietly with their ministry. To go on quietly, persistently, assuredly, in peace, all rests upon this—the recognition that that into which I have been called by God is of infinite value to Him, and because I am called according to His purpose, I am beloved of God.

That is a simple word with which to begin, but it is basic to everything. May I just sum it up like this? The Lord is calling us to something which is not a comparative thing, but an absolute thing: which is not just something that, well, the Lord likes and will bless, but is that upon which all His heart is set, which means more than anything else to the Lord. May our hearts reach out for that in these days, and may the Lord show us what it is.

T. A-S.

THE REALITY OF GOD'S HOUSE

Reading: Genesis xxvii. 1 - 46; xxviii. 1 - 22.

"And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Genesis xxviii. 17).

THAT moment when Jacob had a glimpse of family life as God meant it to be was, perhaps, the most critical one of his whole career. It was not in Heaven, but here on earth: yet it was so Divine and glorious that it filled him with wonder and

awe. "This is none other but the house of God", he exclaimed; and then added, "and this is the gate of heaven".

THE HOUSE OF SELF

How different it was from the household which he had just left behind at Beer-sheba! Of all the houses on the earth at that time, Isaac's should surely have been the house of God. It ought to have been, but it was not. Even Jacob must have

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been struck by the contrast. What he had left behind ought to have been the house of God—but it was the house of self. No visitor there would have exclaimed with wonder, Surely the Lord is in this place. There was very little registration of the Lord's presence in the house of Isaac.

I. ISAAC'S PART

Let us consider the various members of the family. We will pass quickly over Esau, for he was a man of the flesh, from whom no spiritual values could be expected. But can we say much better of Isaac? A superficial glance may make us feel that he deserved pity as a poor blind man who was being imposed on, but a more careful consideration will show us that really it was he who precipitated the whole unhappy story of lies and deceit. (Genesis xxvii. 1 - 4). There is no indication that the Lord had ordered this pronouncing of the blessing. Isaac imagined that he was going to die, and was evidently anxious to make sure that Esau became his heir. As a matter of fact he still had many years to live. It is not easy to calculate the exact chronology of these events, but one thing is perfectly plain, and that is that Isaac lived much more than twenty years after this time. We are told that he lived to be 180, and that Jacob had returned from his exile and had all his twelve sons before he and Esau buried their father (Genesis xxxv. 29). Was Isaac really worried about his death? Clearly he need not have been. Or was he rather making this an excuse to press on with his own self-willed scheme? Haste is almost always a mark of carnality. The spiritual man's first lesson is to wait upon the Lord and to wait for Him. When we have schemes of our own, though, and are pressing our own ideas, we so often act rashly and in haste.

Moreover one gets the impression that Isaac was trying to transact this business secretly. He did not call the household together, but spoke privately to Esau, and it was apparently only by chance that Rebekah overheard their conversation (v. 6). She was not meant to do so, for she might have reminded Isaac that he was acting contrary to the revealed will of God. We may ask, Why this haste and why this secrecy? The truth is that Isaac did not like Jacob. We can hardly blame him for that, since nobody ever did like Jacob very much—except his mother (Genesis xxv. 28). Here we notice that there was nothing very noble about Isaac's preference; it was attributed to his love of what Esau did for him rather than for anything that he was. Not that it was so unusual for fathers

and mothers to have preferences among their children, but the matter was serious in this case, for it meant that Isaac was allowing his natural preferences to obscure his spiritual judgment.

In earlier days Isaac and Rebekah had had a history with the Lord. In spite of Isaac's position as Abraham's heir, and in spite of the special marks of God's working over his marriage to Rebekah, the couple had lived together for twenty years without having any children. Only after much seeking of the Lord were they granted a family, and then it was limited to the twin sons who were involved in this affair. At the time of their birth, Rebekah passed through peculiar suffering, which led her again to seek the Lord, and she then received a definite indication that Jacob was to have the priority over Esau. This divine choice is everywhere emphasized in the Scriptures; it is inconceivable that Isaac was not well aware of it. Here, then, was the fundamental contradiction in the house of Isaac: he was allowing natural preferences to govern, instead of submitting to the revealed will of God. And he was the head of the house.

II. REBEKAH'S PART

What wonder, then, that Rebekah descended to lying and deceit! She, too, was doubtless governed by her own preferences, but though her natural desires happened to tally with the will of God, that did not alter the fact that her motives were selfish and impure. She was right in insisting that Jacob should have the blessing, and yet she was so very wrong in her method of bringing it about. She met carnality with carnality—a fatal mistake. She had discovered old Isaac plotting to have his own way, and she set herself by craft to get the better of him. How much better if she had walked boldly in to Isaac, reminded him of the Lord's word, and then left the issue with God! Or perhaps better still, if she had sought the Lord in prayer as she had done when the boys were born. She could have reminded God of His faithfulness; she could have appealed to Him. Instead of that she was provoked to meet flesh with flesh. How often does that happen in what ought to be the house of God! If any feel that this is a harsh judgment on her, and that in her position she could not be expected to do other than she did, let us say the best that we can for her, and suggest that she was trying to help the Lord. But that can be a very dangerous thing to do. The Lord's work is as often hindered and marred by carnal attempts to help Him as it is by deliberate defiance. Beware of trying to make

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things easier for the Lord! Calamity often comes that way.

III. JACOB'S PART

The last member of the family to be considered is Jacob himself. He performed the actual deceit, and he gets all the blame; yet really he was the tool of Rebekah, though of course a willing tool. She it was who schemed for him, and it was her ambition which worked on his own and encouraged him in his evil. The name Rebekah means "Flattery", a most significant reminder of what lies behind so many actions of the flesh among God's people. Flattery supported personal ambition, and this ambition led to unscrupulous scheming, and out of it all came great disgrace in what should have been God's house.

Jacob's great concern was that he should not be found out. The flesh is rather particular about appearances. Jacob did not worry unduly about his real state, but he was very concerned with what he might be seen to be. "My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver" (Genesis xxvii. 12). But perhaps the worst feature of the whole story was his readiness to associate the Lord's name with his deceit. "Because the Lord thy God sent me good speed" (v. 20). Notice it is 'thy' and not 'my' God. It may seem incredible to us that a man should be found in such gross wrong-doing, and yet glibly bringing in the Lord's name, but this is one more common feature of carnality. It cloaks its own action under an assumed piety.

THEIR SUFFERING AND LOSS

Well, they were a poor lot! The transactions of that day were a disgrace to any house, let alone the house of an Isaac. The wonder is that anything at all could be salvaged for the Lord. But it could! More than that, the very actions of Rebekah and Jacob were overruled in Divine sovereignty to prevent Isaac from his self-willed folly and to ensure that the declared will of God should be done. So wonderful is the grace of God that He does not abandon His unworthy people, and so mighty is His sovereignty that He can even use their follies to reach His own ends. This should give us much cause for praise and for hope.

Let us notice, however, that those concerned reaped a bitter harvest from the flesh. Isaac "trembled very exceedingly" (v. 33), and had the painful experience of hearing his favourite son cry "with an exceeding great and bitter cry" (v. 34).

Rebekah got her own way, but she lost her son, for Jacob had to go far away, and although she expected it to be only for "a few days" it was in fact for so many years that she probably never saw him again. And what shall we say of Jacob? He did indeed receive the blessing, but how he had to suffer!

THE HOUSE OF GOD

It was at the beginning of these sufferings that God showed Jacob a different kind of society, a community governed not by the will of the flesh but by the will of God. It was more than a dream; it was a glimpse of how wonderful life can be for those who pass from the house of self to the house of God. "This IS the house of God", exclaimed Jacob. There is a place where heavenly life is lived out here on earth. There is, indeed, and the New Testament makes it clear what the house is.

I. OVERRULING GIVES PLACE TO CO-OPERATION

Firstly it is a place where man is no longer forced to bend to the will of God by Divine compulsion, but where he gladly embraces that will and co-operates with it. Let there be no mistake about this—God's will must triumph. It did triumph, in spite of all the folly and deceit in that home at Beersheba. We cannot break the will of God, though we can break ourselves in trying to resist it. God's house, however, is not the place where God intervenes from the outside, overruling in spite of men, and forcing them by circumstances, suffering or calamity to bow to His will. His house is the place where hearts are sensitive and responsive, seeking to be teachable and obedient. It would appear that Isaac finally came to such a place of willing co-operation. We are told that he blessed his sons "by faith" (Hebrews xi. 20). This could hardly apply to the unhappy scene which we have described, but it does seem to deal with the occasion when Jacob actually left home. When Isaac sent him away to Haran, he gave no indication that he grudged the blessing to Jacob, or that he would have withdrawn it if he could have done so. On the contrary he repeated and confirmed it, being whole-hearted in conferring on Jacob "the blessing of Abraham" (Gen. xxviii. 4). He justified God. He recognised what he ought to have done in the first place. He accepted the rebuke, and not only submitted to the will of God, but co-operated with it. This is a mark of spirituality, when a man is ready to be corrected and willing to learn.

Jacob himself showed a surprising sensitiveness

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to the Lord in this very matter when his own turn came to die. His great act of faith is also described as taking place when he blessed Joseph's two sons (Hebrews xi, 21). Even Joseph found it hard to accept that the younger should be blessed before the elder, but Jacob insisted. Clearly he had learned his lesson, that in the house of God all personal preferences must be set aside, for only the Lord has a right to choose and to decide.

II. DECEPTION GIVES PLACE TO THE TRUTH

The next thing to notice is that in God's house the light of Heaven dispels all earthly muddle or error. In Isaac's house the Lord seemed a long way off, for the whole atmosphere was full of darkness and deception. Everybody acted as though the Lord were not present, including Isaac who was so anxious to have his own way. It was because Isaac's own conscience was bad that he allowed himself to be deceived by Jacob. If he were blind, why trust to his own senses of touch and scent? Why not ask the Lord for light? He dare not, for he was out of touch with the Lord. It was because his spiritual eye was evil that his whole body was full of darkness. To Rebekah and Jacob also, the Lord seemed a long way away. So long as they could manage to outwit Isaac they had no fears. But how different it was at Beth-el! There Jacob cried out: "Surely the Lord is in this place" (Gen. xxviii, 17); and for that moment, at least, it seems that he had no illusions about himself. The Spirit who rules in God's house is the Spirit of truth, so that no blindness or deception can continue there.

At Beth-el Jacob heard the very voice of God. In Isaac's home there were many voices, but no one stayed to listen to see if the Lord was speaking. Isaac, Esau, Rebekah and Jacob—they all joined in the tumult of human voices, expressing their own ideas and plans and scheming for their own interests. There was Jacob's voice, so unmistakable that if only he had not been in such a hurry Isaac would have recognised it for what it was and been warned. There was Isaac's own voice, speaking indeed the will of God, but doing so as it were by mistake, in spite of himself. Whereas at Beth-el, although there were many messengers, there was only one voice—the voice of the Lord. It was He who spoke from above the ladder.

III. NATURAL DECLENSION
GIVES PLACE TO NEWNESS OF LIFE

The contrast of the two houses was also one between human staleness and declension and

Divine renewal and freshness. The pathetic feature of this story of Isaac in his old age was the revelation of how different he had become from his earlier days of spiritual vitality. From Abraham, his father, he had received a rich heritage of godliness, and we know how much of God were his own beginnings. As he grew up he entered into his father's life of faith for himself. The main feature of his middle life was the way in which he reopened Abraham's wells which had been stopped up by the hostile Philistines, as though to show that he personally entered into the same life with God as his father had enjoyed. As has already been said, the birth of his twin sons was the outcome of spiritual exercise and prayer. But now he was old; he had become feeble, blind and self-indulgent. This is typical of everything human, for deterioration and decay are inevitable where the natural life rules. At Beth-el, though, Jacob was impressed with the energy and effortless activity of those on the Divine ladder. The angels of God were ascending as well as descending; there was a constant stream and flow of heavenly life. God's house will always be like that. There is movement there all the time. It is not the headlong downward rush of that which ministers to the flesh, but the living movement of that which ministers to Heaven.

IV. PETTINESS GIVES PLACE TO ENLARGEMENT

Finally we see that the house of God is the place where littleness and limitation give place to tremendous enlargement. If a visitor had looked in that day on the family at Beer-sheba, he would have been impressed with the pettiness of it all. What was all this scheming and quarrelling about? It was chiefly rivalry over the question of which of the two would inherit most of his father's goods—all that greediness and cheating for a few earthly possessions. How mean and petty self-interest always is! When Jacob got out of that stifling earthly atmosphere, into the clear heavenly air of Beth-el, he heard God speaking of blessings as vast as the universe and as infinite as eternity. "And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis xxviii, 14).

From that moment Jacob was in the way of enlargement. Having been reduced to nothing and forced to let go of all except the promises of God, he was given assurance that there is no littleness with God. We should note that whatever Jacob got from his trickery, it certainly was not worldly

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wealth. There is a certain justice in God's ways, even with such men as Esau. While the latter forfeited the spiritual inheritance—in any case he had despised and disregarded it—he did not lose materially. In that realm he was not cheated after all; indeed, instead of receiving only a part of Isaac's wealth he had more than the firstborn's portion, for he had it all, and in the end he even received an extra gift from Jacob. Jacob had to start from nothing and earn his own fortune away in Syria. What he grasped, he failed to receive; when he let go, he was promised all the Divine fullness. He seems to have appreciated this principle at Beth-el, for it was there that he undertook

to give God a tenth of all. In the house of self, men seek their own, and it is all so very petty; in the house of God, man—as such—has nothing, but grace undertakes to lead him into universal blessings and fullness.

"This IS the house of God". There may be some who are asking where such a house can be found. The answer is—anywhere, so long as these spiritual conditions are found there. It does not depend on the locality. The house of God is not a place: it is a people—a people among whom the Lord is everything. And those of us who have tasted such a life together gladly agree to Jacob's description: "This is the gate of heaven."

H. F.

THE MAN GOD HAS ORDAINED

IV. THE SPIRIT'S WORK IN THIS DISPENSATION

"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth" (John xiv. 16, 17).

WE are going to think about the dispensation of the Spirit. This is not something apart from what we have been considering hitherto. I think we shall see how this matter of the Spirit is a part of that greater vision that the Lord has been bringing before us—the Man in the glory. In our last study we were for a little time occupied with the subjective side of this matter of the Spirit—receiving the Spirit as an indwelling Person, the seal and earnest of our inheritance. We shall now look at it from the other side—the objective side of the Holy Spirit and His work.

Let me say here at once that, while the subjective side of truth is of very great importance, as a source of strength and light and help generally to the spiritual life, the objective side of revelation is usually the more joyful side. If we are feeling ourselves to be in need of more joy, I doubt whether we shall find our need supplied by more subjective occupation. Our need will be met by objective occupation—by turning outwards and viewing the Lord's provision for us, as in Heaven and as here, altogether apart from our own inner attainment unto it. It is this matter of attainment that is the trouble with us, and so, although we may not find the same inward teaching value in the objective side, I am quite sure we shall find a great deal of inspiration and uplift as we contemplate for a little while those activities of the Holy Spirit out of His own sovereignty.

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"THE ACTS" COVERS THE DISPENSATION OF THE SPIRIT

Here, then, in the passage from John that we have read, the Lord Jesus points to that event so soon to take place as He was going, the advent of the Spirit. "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter" (or "Advocate"—neither word is an exact translation), "that he may be with you for ever (for the age), even the Spirit of truth". He indicated an age, or, in the other word, a dispensation—the dispensation of the Spirit. *The Holy Spirit has inaugurated a dispensation and has taken charge of it.* That comprehends everything. The book which goes by the title of "The Acts"—certainly only in a subsidiary way the acts of the Apostles, primarily the acts of the Holy Spirit—is a book which covers the age or dispensation of the Spirit from first to last.

You may argue with me that the book only goes as far as Paul's imprisonment and leaves him there. I repeat, it covers the whole dispensation. That will be shown quite clearly before we are through. Actually, as to time, the book only covers about thirty years. All that took place as recorded in this book was crowded into something round about thirty years. How do we arrive at that? Well, the ascension of Christ was about 33 A.D. and the last letter written within the compass of this book was written about 64 A.D. So you see all that is here is within that brief time.

"THE ACTS" A BOOK OF PRINCIPLES

What a crowded thirty years it was! What a seed plot for a dispensation, a whole dispensation!

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And that is exactly what it is—a seed plot. This book of the Acts laid the foundation of the whole dispensation. The dispensation was to rise out of and upon what took place as recorded here, and so the book is a book of principles for all time. The meaning of this is that, while it is not at all necessary for the Holy Spirit, at any other time in the dispensation, to repeat Himself in exactly the same form, nevertheless He will always act on the same principle. If you read this book and see what is here, as ‘acts of the Holy Spirit’, you will have to come to one of two conclusions. Either that the Holy Spirit is not the same to-day as He was then, because the things that are recorded as the normal and ordinary happenings no longer happen. Or, that what is here embodies a principle, and whether the form of its expression is repeated or not, the principle remains intact.

Take the simple example of Ananias and Sapphira and their sin against the Holy Ghost. I venture to say, with very little fear of contradiction, that there are many in the Church to-day who are guilty of a like misdemeanour, a like sin; seeking to hoodwink the Holy Spirit—forgive the word—seeking to deceive the Lord, seeking to cover up a double life. There are many who are positive contradictions to a life under the government of the Holy Spirit, whose lives are an affront to the Spirit of truth: there is a lie. But in how many cases does the same thing happen as happened with Ananias and Sapphira? I suppose we should be involved in very serious legal trouble if it did! It would not do for any Peter among us to-day to pick out such people, with the result that they instantly fall down dead and have to be carried out as corpses! The Holy Spirit may not do things in the same way physically, but He has established a principle that, if any Christian lives a double life, if any Christian is living, acting, practising inconsistency, a lie to the Holy Ghost, their spiritual life is seriously at stake, and they will become corpses in a much more serious way than physically. There are a lot of ‘corpses’ in the Church—dead people—because of something that is an affront to the Holy Spirit. We cannot continue to deceive the Holy Spirit and at the same time maintain spiritual life. That is the principle.

So we could go through this book, indicating that it is a book of principles. We have to say all the time, ‘Now, are we to expect a repetition of the form of the act of the Holy Spirit in every matter, or are we to look to see the principle that is involved?’ For when we find the principle, and lay hold of it, we find that the principle works; whatever may be the external form of its working,

the principle works. May that not be a key to the very difficult subject of the gift of tongues? It is there. Are we to say that that manifestation is to follow in that same form, universally and invariably, throughout the whole dispensation, or are we not to conclude from the book of principles, and from the full way in which the principle was established at the beginning, that in the Spirit there is a universal spiritual language which you and I speak, and we understand one another in that language of the Spirit—not necessarily literally in a tongue; that Pentecost sees the triumph over Babel—the destruction of that cause of division—in a spiritual way, so that, in Christ, all nations and tongues and languages and peoples understand the language of the Spirit? We know we have something in common: spirit speaks with spirit. We may not speak one another’s language, but somehow there is a concord and a flowing together, and it is so often more easy, even in the spoken word, when you are spiritually one, to understand things of the Spirit than to understand natural things. There you have a principle.

So the Acts is a book of principles, and it is for us to look at it and say, ‘Now, what is the principle in this?’ Do not let me be understood as saying that the Lord does not sometimes exactly repeat His actions—He does; but not as a normal and general rule. He has shown us, by very clear, positive examples, what His principles are, and He would say to us, ‘If I do not smite you dead for that lie, do not think that I condone the lie, that I am any less against the lie than I was in the fourth chapter of the book of the Acts.’

THE SPIRIT PROVIDING FOR THE WHOLE DISPENSATION

Now, the next thing is that, in providing this book, God has provided for the whole dispensation. I said that, although its actual history according to time was gathered into about thirty years, yet this book covers the whole dispensation, and it does so by way of its provision—through that which it provides. The Holy Spirit gave in those thirty years all that which was to be the Church’s life and light for the whole dispensation. That needs no argument. We should not be meditating to-day on the record of those thirty years, and deriving spiritual life and benefit and instruction from it, if that were not true. The Spirit provided, then, for His own full dispensation—provided Himself with what He would need right to the end of the age; and He is using it still, not acts only, but utterances. Let us then look at

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this work of the Spirit, this acting of the Spirit, as we have it here.

THE SPIRIT BRINGING THE CHURCH TO BIRTH

First and inclusively, His act was that of bringing the foreknown and foreordained Church to birth. He reached right back to the eternal counsels, right down to the hiddenness of past ages, and He brought from the eternity past and from the hiddenness of the ages the Church foreknown, foreordained. Sooner or later we shall find that, in the course of this record, He gives His own explanation of that. But here is the act, bringing the Church to birth. In the light of its eternity past and future, what a mighty act that was! In the light of those eternal counsels of God, in the light of the meaning and calling of the Church, what a great thing it was to bring that Church to birth, to bring it out into actual being on the day called the day of Pentecost. Yes, He at once reached back to those counsels before times eternal and took up the purposes and intentions of God in and through the Church, and brought them into the Church to which He gave birth, to which He became the Spirit of life on that day.

I said He reached down into the hiddenness of the ages. I am not one of those who hold that there is no Church in the Old Testament Scriptures. Agreed that it was not recognised; agreed that they did not see the meaning of what was going on in themselves as a people. Oh, yes, agreed that there was no revelation of the Church in Old Testament times: but *not* agreed for a moment that there is no revelation of the Church in the Old Testament ages to the Church in this age. With the Holy Spirit's enlightenment now, we can see all the eternal principles relative to the Church hidden in the Old Testament Scriptures. They are there; we can see them now. And the New Testament uses the Old Testament Scriptures to explain and illustrate the Church. Strange things are said about some of the Old Testament Scriptures, that might well be thought to be straining them, making them mean what they do not mean, unless the Holy Spirit had shown the mystery. 'Mystery' simply means something that was there but hidden. You cannot hide a 'nothing', a something that does not exist. If it says that it was hidden, it must have been there to be hidden. But now at the end of those ages it is brought to light. And so the Holy Spirit uncovered the mystery hidden from the ages or in the ages, and brought out the eternal counsels of God when, by

sovereign act, He brought the Church into being on that day, at that time. That was no mere happening; there was nothing casual about that: it was a sovereign act of the Spirit.

THE SPIRIT DIRECTING THE CHURCH'S MOVEMENTS

Then we find that from that point He proceeds in the directing of the Church's movements, that being the object with which He is concerned. Having brought it into being, He assumes charge of its movements. Here is a wonderful story of the sovereign activity of the Holy Spirit to make the Church move—and moreover to make it move as it would not move, as it would refuse to move, as its prejudices would forbid its moving; but He sees that it does. If it does not do so spontaneously and voluntarily, it will do it under compulsion of circumstances. He has taken up this matter of directing the Church's movements for the age. This obtains with the Holy Spirit as much now as it did at the beginning.

THE SPIRIT ORDERING THE CHURCH'S CONSTITUTION

Next we see Him arranging and ordering its constitution: wonderful sovereign acts in the choosing of men and the giving of ministry, gifts in persons, selecting, choosing, bringing forward. It is as though the Spirit reached out His hand, and, where men would not have looked, where men were afraid, fearful, put His hand on this one and on that one; and they had to come forward, they had to come into place, and they had to be taken into account. The Spirit has said so; the Spirit is doing this: you cannot refuse Saul of Tarsus and keep him out, however bad his record is.

In other cases He is ordering the constitution of the Church. He is seen giving the gifts of the ascended Lord and establishing the functions by means of those personal gifts. It is a matter for the Holy Spirit, what ministry men fulfil in the Church. It is not for us to select our ministry, either its kind or its place; it is not for us to choose what we are going to be in the work of God; it is not for us to say what kind of ministry we are going to engage in. 'I am going to be an evangelist'; 'I am going to be an apostle' (if you like you can use the word 'missionary' in its place—it is the same word in another language); 'I am going to be a pastor, a teacher'. That is not given to us at all, thank God: that is with the Holy Spirit.

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And every other gift and function is the Holy Spirit's matter, entirely in His sovereign hands, and that is a thing set forth here. Would to God that men would keep close to this book of principles and not try to do that for which they are not qualified, and to which they are not called, by the Holy Spirit. There are many misfits; many have to give up because they find the Lord is not taking them through, is not with them in it. There are many who are trying to do that for which the Lord never called them. It works too the other way: there are many who are not doing, simply because they do not feel qualified to do so. They have not recognised the principle that it is not on the basis of any ability of our own at all, but by the Holy Spirit. He can take up the most unlikely and make functionaries or functions in the Church. Both negatively and positively this whole matter is seen here to be a matter of the Holy Spirit's sovereign ordering of the constitution of the Church.

THE SPIRIT'S SOVEREIGN USE OF EVERY AGENCY

Then, further, we see the Holy Spirit using all agencies in relation to the purpose of the dispensation. This is grand—this is where I think objective contemplation is so inspiring and helpful. Would to God we had a more ready apprehension or grasp of this: the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, not only in the Church through this dispensation, but as wide, as far, as all-embracing as the Throne of the exalted Lord Jesus. And here you see Him using all agencies, heavenly agencies. In this book you have a record of angelic activities: the ministry of angels co-operating with the Holy Spirit. In the letter to the Hebrews, we are told that we are come to “innumerable hosts of angels” (xii. 22). “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to do service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation?” (i. 14).

Now see one beautiful little example of co-operation between angels and the Holy Spirit. It is in the tenth chapter of this book—the record of Peter on the housetop in one part of the country, and the sheet let down from Heaven, and Cornelius in another place, 35 miles away, seeking the Lord for light. Now Peter is a man who knows the Holy Spirit: therefore the Spirit can speak to Peter. But Cornelius is not yet in the dispensation of the Spirit experimentally. He has not come into the realm of receiving the Spirit yet. That is coming soon, that will not be long: in three days it will happen, but not yet. Therefore an angel comes to him. He cannot understand the Spirit yet, but he

can understand angels. A beautiful co-operation. But do not think that the Holy Spirit is confined to spiritual people, or that spiritual people have only the Holy Spirit. They may have both the Holy Spirit and angels, for Paul, who certainly knew what it was for the Spirit to speak to him, was able to say: “There stood by me this night an angel of the God whose I am, whom also I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul” (Acts xxvii. 23, 24). But here, in this incident of Peter, is a heavenly system at work in co-operation with the Holy Spirit, and this is soon to happen again and again. My point is this, that the Holy Spirit has all agencies of a celestial order at His service, co-operating with Him; all heavenly resources are at His command.

Then we also see how the Holy Spirit is making use of earthly agencies, people and things—very often of those that are inimical, unsympathetic, hostile. He just uses them, that is all. And behind them there is the sub-earthly, the diabolical. Oh, what a record of forces of evil at work this book contains: the spiritual hosts of wickedness, the adversary himself, working through things, working through nature, working through people. What is the Holy Spirit doing? He is just using them. They mean it for evil; He makes it work for good. Of course, that is easily said. In actual experience, we do not always look at it like that. It is the last thing that we do, when we are up against some terrific position of the enemy, to say, ‘That is all right! This is splendid! The Holy Spirit is going to turn this to glorious account!’ We do not do that. But this book is a record of the sovereignty of the Spirit, using all agencies, heavenly, earthly and sub-earthly, unto the purpose of His dispensation. He has taken charge. Is that not helpful? That is what I mean by objective apprehension.

THE SPIRIT'S PROVISION IN THE MATTER OF REVELATION

Next, we see the inspirational work of the Holy Spirit making provision for the whole dispensation in the matter of the revelation of the Church—the Church's nature, the Church's vocation and the Church's destiny. The Holy Spirit has taken up this matter and is here seen giving progressive instruction, by inspiration, as to what this thing is that has been brought in by birth on the day of Pentecost—what is its vocation, what is its destiny.

The progressive aspect of this fact is a most helpful one. We probably know that, although the letters of the New Testament are arranged in our Bibles in a certain order, this is not the order in which they were written. The order in which the

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Spirit has sovereignly arranged them for us is the progressive spiritual order, the right spiritual order. For students of the New Testament, and for merely informative or academic purposes, it is quite helpful to have the New Testament in the chronological order. You can actually buy a New Testament bound up in the order in which the letters were written. The first is Thessalonians, and so on. But the Holy Spirit has had a say in our having it in the order in which we do have it. It is quite clear. You cannot get anywhere until you have got Romans. Everything else will wait until what we have in Romans is established as the beginning, the very genesis, of the new creation. And it is quite as much in order to have Thessalonians at the end, its chief theme being the coming of the Lord. And if you look you see that each letter as we have it represents one step further than the last. It is in the progress of things—spiritual progress. You would not want to have Ephesians before Corinthians. It would be terrible if, after reading Ephesians and Colossians, we then had to drop right down to Corinthians—that awful contradiction; but, with the letters in the order in which we have them, we say, ‘Well, here is Corinthians, and this is not how it ought to be: we must get out of this on to higher ground!’

So the Holy Spirit has brought about this order, given it to us by His sovereignty as a progressive revelation of the Church’s nature, of the Church’s vocation and of the Church’s destiny. For the whole dispensation He inspired the providing of this light, this truth, this revelation of God for the Church. Men of God wrote ‘as they were moved by the Holy Spirit’, and there is far more in that than I have been able to point out. The most enlightening, the most instructive matter is to see how the Holy Spirit puts things in order—to see the order in which He puts things as He gives His revelation.

THE SPIRIT RELATES EVERYTHING TO CHRIST

Finally, for the present, we see in this book how the Holy Spirit relates everything to Christ. While He, the Spirit, is the worker, while all that is here is the expression of His energy, His activity, He is keeping Christ in view all the time. He is not speaking of Himself; He is keeping Christ in view and relating everything to Christ. He is relating to Christ in a three-fold way.

Firstly, eternally. He makes it perfectly clear that God’s purposes, His vast, great, wonderful purposes, were all settled in His Son before ever

this world was. Before this world was, He summed up all things in Christ, He centred all things in Christ. The Holy Spirit makes it perfectly clear that all things relate to Christ eternally.

Secondly, incarnately. What is before is subsequent. It is all heading up to that great consummation, and all things are gathered together in Christ, related to Christ incarnately. (This is the point at which I think this falls into line with our first two meditations in this series—the Man, the Son of Man, and how this Man gathers up all things into Himself.) He is made man, becomes man. The Holy Spirit keeps the Man in view—“the Man Christ Jesus”. In the seventeenth chapter of this very book of Acts we have: “He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained” (v. 31). There is another fragment very much like it in the tenth chapter (v. 42). The Holy Spirit is keeping everything related to Christ incarnately as the Son of Man, God’s Man.

And then, in the third place, exaltedly: for what the Holy Spirit is always careful to point out is that God raised Him, God exalted Him, God gave Him the place of supreme exaltation and glory—‘crowned Him with glory and honour’—and everything is related to Him as there. He it was who filled Stephen on that memorable occasion, when Stephen, “being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God” (Acts vii. 55). By the Holy Spirit Stephen saw Christ exalted at God’s right hand. Everything is related to Him as exalted. The Holy Spirit quotes the Psalms—the inspired Psalms. How the Holy Spirit brings in all that He Himself has before provided! See how He uses them through inspired men. He draws in the Psalms concerning the exaltation of the Lord Jesus: “Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet” (Heb. i. 13). “Therefore being at the right hand of God exalted . . .” (Acts ii. 33). That is the work of the Holy Spirit, to keep everything related to God’s central object and interest and concern—His own Son.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY IN RELATION TO THE SPIRIT’S SOVEREIGNTY

All this robs us of every bit of ground for being introspective. All that has been said is a provision for rejoicing. If this is true, what a wonderful confidence it brings—this contemplation of Divine sovereignty. And yet remember that there is another line running parallel—the line of our

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responsibility in relation to the Spirit's sovereignty. The Spirit says very often, Go here, go there, do this, do that. Then responsibility comes in to respond, to obey, to be in subjection to the Spirit, to be completely yielded to Him; and that is all embraced in one principle at work all the way through. The Spirit's ground of sovereign activity, so far as the Church is concerned, is the ground of the Cross—the application of the principle of the Cross all the time. Unless the Lord's children, even these Apostles, will allow a further working of the Cross, the Holy Spirit, as far as they are concerned, is unable to go on. He must by-pass them, He must take up some other instrument.

Yes, responsibility is there, even in sovereignty. Do not let us, in our joy of contemplating the sovereignty of the Lord, think, Oh well, we can sit down and it does not matter—He will do it in spite of everything. So far as the Church is concerned,

and that means you and me, there is a responsibility running alongside of the sovereignty of the Spirit: the call for yieldedness which is the principle of the Cross, the setting aside and putting to death of self-will, self-interest, self-assertiveness; and everything that is of self. All that is of self must go under the power of the Cross, and the Spirit goes on (and *only* goes on, where we are concerned) on that ground—the ground of the Cross. That is how He makes the Cross work for us unto glory: whereas those outside of the Church, who do not accept the Cross, find that the Cross is made to work for their undoing, their destruction. Herod knew all about the Cross, but he refused to be subject to it. He set himself and his own interests in opposition to it, and he was destroyed out of hand. For its enemies, the working of the Cross is death, but for us it brings to glory, by the sovereignty of the Spirit.

T. A. S.

A GREAT ANSWER TO GREAT NEED

"Now consider how great this man was . . ." (Heb. vii. 4).

"His Son . . . who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. i. 2, 3).

"Now in the things which we are saying the chief point is this: We have such a high priest, who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Heb. viii. 1).

"Having then a great high priest, who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need" (Heb. iv. 14-16).

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IF we were to give a title to the thoughts that are embodied in these Scriptures, we might call it 'The Great Answer to Great Need'. We would probably all admit that this world is one vast scene of need. It is probably true of all of us that we have a great sense of need, that we are not people who find everything easy, or who feel we have the answers to everything. We all want an answer, and we want that which is the real answer; but, deep as

our own need is, and some may be more deeply conscious of it than others, we are but a drop in the ocean. There is a very great need among the people of God, but what shall we say about the need beyond—the desperate state, not only of world conditions, but of every soul without God? The world is just a scene of immeasurable need. We are needy, and men are needy.

A GREAT ANSWER

And now there comes this astonishing thing—that *God speaks*. God speaks from Heaven: and He says that there is an answer, an adequate answer, to the deepest need. Great as the need is, there is also a great answer. It is not just that the need is very great and that there is a partial answer to it. No, it is rather the other way—that the answer swallows up the need. That is God's emphasis. A great need, and—notice this—a great High Priest. "Now consider how great this man was". Yes, the answer is a very great answer, and I wonder to what extent we can say that we have the answer in our own hearts, that we are people with an answer. Yes, there may be problems, but the answer is bigger than the problem. Like Paul, we are able to set a 'but' over against the situation. Paul is saying "persecuted, *but* not forsaken"; "as dying, and behold, we live; . . . as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (II Cor. iv. 9, A.V.; vi. 9, 10). There is an answer that is greater than the situation. Only as we have the

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true answer in ourselves, and embody the answer, have we the answer for the need around. We ought to be people with an answer for everybody. We ought to be able to mediate the answer to the desperate plight. It is a plight, if ever there was one, and we ought to have the answer, which is sufficient for, and even greater than, the need.

Now, this letter to the Hebrews is not just a kind of doctrinal treatise. From beginning to end it is a burden—a sustained burden. It is being poured through a heart—the heart of one who has seen something and is saying, ‘*This is it!* Oh, you people, do you not realise this is it? Now let us go on—let us go on into the good of it!’ It is, so to speak, red-hot right through; not just a calm, calculating thing. Here is a man with a great urge of the Spirit because he knows the answer, and he is offering it and presenting it, and saying, ‘Come on—let us be *in* it—let us *have* it!’

We underline the word ‘having’. “*Having . . . a great high priest*”, and: ‘The sum of all we have been saying is that we *have* such a High Priest’. Not ‘we shall’, or ‘we had’ but ‘we *have*’! We *have*; we have got Someone so great that need is completely swallowed up, Someone so sufficient that there is no excuse. The answer is a Person; and this part of God’s Word—this wonderful ‘letter to the Hebrews’, as we call it—is the unveiling and presentation of a Person who is seen to be so great that He answers to every aspect of the need as it is. And that Person and His work are expressed here in terms of priesthood. Notice that. A High Priest, and priesthood: that is to say, it is a mediatorial function or office. He is the great Mediator, He is the great link between God and human need and He is the great representative of man in need brought to God. He is the mediatorial link that brings all that there is in God into the need and the meeting of it.

But let us also notice this: that, though the vision is of the greatness of Christ, nevertheless what Christ is in His priestly, mediatorial work and power is something that has its counterpart in the saints, something that has a reflection and a reality in the people of God. It is not that His high priesthood is a remote thing, merely objective, or merely for our helpfulness. There is a very real point at which we are called into union with Him in that very ministry and function—priestly service. Though Christ is Himself uniquely the great High Priest, there are priests and there is priesthood; there is the mediating of Heaven to others. We are to constitute a link between Heaven and earth, between God and man. Spiritual service, which we shall come to in a moment, is just

priestly service. That is just a brief glimpse of what is here.

THE HIGH PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST

But at this point, if we are to see how great the priestly work of Christ is, we need to notice that His high priesthood is really in view right at the beginning of this letter. If we look into this epistle to see where it really begins, we find the first mention of the priesthood at the end of chapter ii, but really the first indication and setting forth of it is in the third verse of chapter i, where we see that He “made purification for sins”. He in Himself dealt with the sin question; His priestly work, His mediatorial work, is in view here. But in that one verse, as a background to all that follows, there are three things about the Lord Jesus that we can see.

(a) THE TRANSCENDENCE OF CHRIST’S PERSON

First of all, the transcendence of His Person. “Who being the effulgence of His glory, and the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power . . .”. This is the Person, the transcendent greatness of His Person. There is none like that. “Consider how great *this Man is*”, who is the brightness of His glory, the very character, the very express image of what God is, and in His infinite fulness upholds all things by the word of His power. Such is the One who is great enough to accomplish so great a work as our High Priest. He is indeed transcendent.

(b) THE COMPLETENESS OF HIS WORK

It was this great Person who, it says, “made purification of sins”, or “purged our sins”—that is, put away all our sins and dealt with the whole question of sin between us and God, in all its many dark and terrible aspects. Its defilement was removed, its power broken; it is a thing dealt with and settled by Him once for all. So the greatness of His Person leads to the greatness of His work. What a great *work* He has done for us, which no one less great could have done. But He has *done* it, and what a tremendous finality and all-sufficiency that represents! The completeness of His work! We need eyes to see what He has done for us, that we may enjoy all its infinite values and blessings.

(c) THE SUPREMACY OF HIS POSITION

And then, thirdly, He “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high”—the supremacy of His position. He is in a position of com-

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plete authority and power, so that all He is and all He has done is now *available*. He is able to do *in us* the thing that He has accomplished in His coming and in His redemptive work. He sat down; He is in the place of absolute supremacy.

That is tremendously important as the background—that He *is* the Son of God, He *is* so great; He has *completely* dealt with the situation in His Cross, He is absolutely Lord of all. That is where we begin, and that is all at the back of the mind of the writer when he says: “We have”; “having a great high priest”. We have Someone very great as our High Priest.

Now, with that glimpse of Him, let us come to the need.

THE GREAT NEED

For this we need to look at chapter iv and verse 16. We have a need, to which He is the answer, and this great need has two factors in it.

(I) THE NEED OF PERFECT ADJUSTMENT TO GOD

In a Christian's life, the first matter that needs to be quite clear is the matter of being rightly related to God: the whole question of sin, failure, defeat, bad conscience, rebellion—everything about us that will not do, everything about us that comes as a cloud between us and God. Our first need is that we should be a people who have discovered the adequacy of His high priesthood as the answer to that kind of thing; no longer people who live in a cloud, who have something that hovers between us and clear fellowship with God, but people who have a song in our hearts because our Heaven is continually open.

Is that not important? The very first thing is adjustment to God, and if we are right with God it ought to be evident. If we are right with God, our whole being and person are different. Anything further, whether of growth, of increase in Christ, or of value for the Lord's interests, depends entirely on adjustment with God. We must be a people continually right with God; and, if we are right with God—“If God be for us, who can be against us?” It does not matter about other people then, does it? Of course, if we are wrong with other people, we are not right with God. The two things go together. Matters of wrong attitudes to others, and so on, are a part of our being right with God; but when we are right with the Lord, when we are pleasing to the Lord, when there is no shadow with the Lord, then everything begins to move.

The tragedy is that so many of the Lord's people are so to speak spiritually cloudy—they are not really happy. They are either feeling that they have been a failure or have done something wrong, or they just do not know why they are not rejoicing. There is something weak about their open Heaven with the Lord, something wrong, and this matter must be really cleared up with every one of us if we are to come into that great matter of priesthood. Before we can be in the service of the sanctuary, we have got to know the mighty delivering power of the altar from sin and defeat and a sense of condemnation. We have a great High Priest: and there is one word in which is implicit the settlement of the whole sin question, and that is the word ‘mercy’.

‘Come to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy’. Mercy is the word that answers the whole matter of having failed, having sinned, having done the wrong thing. ‘There is mercy with the Lord.’ The Lord is toward us, as if to say, ‘Can we not get this cleared up? will you come that it may be cleared up?’ The Lord is never holding us at arm's length because of some failure. He is always saying, ‘There is mercy, if you will come; you can get right if you like to come.’

I wish I could shout this from the housetops! *Do you know that there is nothing wrong that you cannot get right?* Perhaps you did not know that! Well, then, why be miserable—why not come and get it right? The work of the High Priest has put everything wrong right, and we are the people who are to enjoy the rightness of everything because of mercy—not the kind of rightness in which we ourselves are always right, but the rightness of God that He has provided because of mercy, the absolute provision for glorious, joyous fellowship with God.

THE DIVINE PROVISION FOR PERFECT ADJUSTMENT

We are the recipients of mercy, an ever-abiding mercy, from which we need never run away. There is always mercy available to get right. Yes, but it took a tremendous priestly work, a mighty priesthood, to do it, and it is here that we shall need to see the importance of the Old Testament. The whole Bible is the Word of God, but many of God's children do not quite know what Leviticus is all about. They think, ‘Well, that is a bit too difficult, a bit too complicated for me’. When they read, ‘Thou shalt take a lamb of the first year, or a goat’, and so on, they say, ‘Well, that is beyond me.’ And yet the meaning is not beyond us, because it is for us. The meaning is absolutely vital

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to the whole showing forth of what Christ has accomplished in His Cross: there is nothing unnecessary at all. The whole of that great system of sacrifices was with this one object of dealing with everything wrong.

'If any man sin, let him bring a lamb'. You must do something about sin, or it remains, and the only thing that removes any sin is death and the blood shed. Do you know that the least little sin needs blood to cleanse it? It does not just drop off. We shall never get rid of shadows, however insignificant, by forgetting about them and trying to be happy. They have to be brought to the precious Blood and be dealt with, and then Heaven opens again. I believe many of God's children have accumulated shadows. They have not kept short accounts with God; they are out of date in their dealings with the Lord in the matter of cleansing by precious Blood. They have pretended something did not matter, or they have been sorry about it, but it has never gone. I wonder if there are some things we still have to catch up on?

THE GREATNESS OF THE SETTLEMENT OF SIN

The book of Leviticus opens with the setting forth of the Five Offerings. All these have a spiritual meaning for us, in the work of the Lord Jesus on the Cross. Now among the five great offerings there was the 'trespass offering'. That had to do with injury done to other people. You can be forgiven for something you do wrong against the Lord—there is provision for that; but sometimes things we have done have hurt other people. What do we say?—'Well, praise the Lord, I am forgiven, but it is rather unfortunate for them; I am all right?' Not at all. We must deplore and confess to the Lord wherever wrong has been done to others, and there is a provision for that in the Blood of the Lord Jesus, in His Cross. Every angle of our delinquency has been answered by His infinite sacrifice. We cannot stay to go through the offerings, but, however great the sin or its effect, the sacrifice is greater. What a wonderful provision for us to be happy people! For there is nothing wrong that has not been compassed by His work on the Cross. Sin, guilt, even rebellion, the hardness of our own hearts, has been dealt with at the Cross, and we can be changed.

So it is just because everything *has* been settled for us, that there now comes this: "Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy". I do hope you get that: that whatever has been wrong shall not be left standing, but put right immediately. If you

do not know what is wrong, ask the Lord about it, and if you still do not know what is wrong, have fellowship about it, but do not be content with a 'cloudy' life. I do not mean by that—Be introspective and try to search for and think of all the things you may have done. Not at all. You get close to the Lord, praise Him that everything is right, and trust the Blood to cleanse all that you cannot remember; if there is anything outstanding, the Holy Spirit will show you what it is. Keep rejoicing, and refuse to be clouded with a sense of guilt, because there is a throne of grace where we may obtain mercy. May the Lord help us to do that.

(II) THE NEED OF ABUNDANT GRACE

Our second great need is the need of abundant grace. Why 'abundant'? Because a little grace will not do! Life is much too difficult. We need much grace simply to live, and we need much grace to show forth Christ. Living is one thing—it is getting through behind the scenes; but grace to be gracious takes a lot of grace! Grace to manifest another character, another nature, all the time—I think you will agree that that needs very much grace indeed. So that we cannot do with a little grace, we need abundant grace; and the answer is we have a great High Priest—we have great grace for living.

For either we live by grace, or we live by our own energy and our own strength. If you are one of these heroic people who can do it all yourself, all right, but even you, I am afraid, will eventually meet your Waterloo. The Christian life is only possible by grace. The spiritual life can only be lived by dependence on Another. We are all being made weak in ourselves, so that we just have to have grace to live. We have to have grace really to get up in the morning—at least some people do!—; grace to go ahead into the duties of the day; grace for a thousand things that come on us. How much we have to cling to the Lord just to get through!

You will remember a wonderful little word about the saints in the early days: "Great grace was upon them all" (Acts iv. 33). That means that they were so dependent on the Lord that the Lord was just flowing through them. It was not them at all. They were so dependent on Him that they were gracious. Oh, how we need to be gracious! Yes, how we need to reflect and to manifest Him who is our Life. You say, 'How is that to be?' Only by coming to the throne of grace, that we may find grace.

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THE PROVISION OF ABUNDANT GRACE

Yes, but before the throne of grace and finding grace, John the Apostle helps us with that word in chapter one of his Gospel, where he says: "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth . . . For of his fulness we all received, and grace for grace" (John i. 14, 16). Of His fulness we *have* all received. If we have received Christ, we have received the fulness of grace. We have grace because we have the great High Priest. We have all the resource within because Christ is in us. The writer to the Hebrews says: "Let us have grace" (Heb. xii. 28). He says, 'You have got it, but let us have it'. And here is this very practical appeal: 'Let us come to the throne of grace, that we may find grace to help in every time of need'. What a beautiful thought that is of just 'finding' grace! As we come to the throne, it is there—we shall find it. Yes, we need grace, and in His greatness there is the abundance of grace.

Now, in conclusion, we return to the important

matter we have already touched upon, leading to our responsibility as those called to exercise a priestly ministry. The basis of all true spiritual service—and we are called to that—is found in our discovery of the greatness and sufficiency of Christ to meet our need. We must know Him truly as our 'Great High Priest' and learn to come boldly to the Throne of Grace. But that is not the end. From that point our whole life can move on in fellowship with Him, serving Him in the Spirit and mediating of His grace and fulness to others. For this there is also abundant provision, for we read: "How much more shall the blood of Christ . . . cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb. ix. 14).

This, as the original Greek word used here shows us, is the service of the sanctuary, not the service of slaves, and we may with rejoicing hearts, out of unshadowed fellowship with God, bring to the needy situation around the great answer—greater than all the need—which we have ourselves discovered in Him who is so great! "We have such a high priest"!

C. J. B. H.

THE MEANING AND PLACE OF PRAYER

PRAYER has an inner significance as well as an outward expression, and this is what is indicated by the words of our title. To consider the *meaning* of prayer is to consider its inner significance; to consider the *place* of prayer is to dwell more particularly upon the outward expressions of prayer in the Christian life and in the life of the Church. All the varied expressions of true prayer take their rise from the inner secrets of the life of prayer, which will be our chief concern at this time.

In approaching such a matter as prayer, we are conscious of several things. In the first place, we are surely conscious of an acute sense of *need*. So often we find prayer the most difficult thing in the world. Somehow we find it much easier to engage in any form of Christian activity than to pray. Prayer is so spiritual, so largely hidden; we feel out of our depth—which, of course, we are!

Then we must be growingly aware of the immense *privilege* of prayer. What a privilege that such as we should be able to have audience with the God of Heaven, that we should be able to draw near to God, through His Son, and call Him "Father"! Alas, that so often we take it all for granted. But at the heart of effective prayer there must lie a real sense of privilege.

Again, surely we all feel something of the *importance* of prayer. However small our experience, we just know that contact with Heaven is of vital importance, that prayer must be the most effectual work to which we can give ourselves. We are conscious that, in such a day as this, vital, intelligent fellowship with God by prayer is the first need of the Church, and of the greatest importance to the Lord.

Lastly, as we approach this matter, we must all be aware of a peculiar *hostility* to prayer: that there is an enemy, one of whose chief objectives is to throttle the prayer-life of the Church. But after all, Satan's bitter hostility to prayer only serves to underline its far-reaching importance, and we should be encouraged by his antagonism to lay hold of our immense resources in Christ, for the life of prayer is fully provided for in Him.

One further thing we must say, by way of introduction, and by way of indicating the important place that prayer occupies in the Christian life. *Prayer is the pulse of the spiritual life, infallibly revealing the true state of our hearts and the true state of the churches.* A Christian's true spiritual condition and stature is mirrored by his prayer-life. Where the life of prayer is clear and strong and

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growing, the whole man is girded for action, the whole life is moving on with the Lord. But where the prayer-life is weak or neglected, or where the enemy has disturbed our life with the Lord, the whole life is undermined and out of action.

What is true of the individual is true of the churches. The spiritual state of a church is not revealed by the crowds who come to special meetings, but by the strength and quality of the routine prayer-meetings. *Prayer is a most revealing thing.*

For our present purpose we must put from us any thought of a detailed consideration of what is disclosed in God's Word regarding prayer; the scope of the subject is too vast. It may perhaps help us to some appreciation of the greatness of this matter if we suggest certain possible lines for detailed meditation.

1. The recorded prayers of the Old Testament saints. What a range is here!
2. The Spirit of prayer moving in the Church in New Testament times.
3. 'The distilled essence of prayer', given by the Lord Jesus to His disciples and generally spoken of as 'The Lord's Prayer.'
4. The Lord Jesus as 'The Man of Prayer'.
5. The profound mysteries of the Lord's great prayer in the seventeenth chapter of John's gospel.

For the present, however, we will be content with directing our attention more particularly to certain foundations of the life of prayer; and our method, for the sake of simplicity, will be that of 'Question and Answer'.

Q. *If God is ruling this universe as sovereign Lord, in love and wisdom, according to His will as expressed in unchanging laws, what is the use of prayer?*

A. *Prayer is one of the superior laws of the universe.*

The question is an old one, the stock-in-trade of the sceptic. At first sight it does seem absurd that human prayer should affect the Divine will and apparently change the unalterable laws of the universe. To the sceptical mind it is ridiculous, nay, impossible, that the sun should stand still in answer to the prayer of Joshua (Joshua x, 12-14); but the truth is that *there are laws operating in the universe unknown to and unsuspected by men. There are superior laws which, when brought into action, transcend other laws without violating*

them. Prayer is one of God's superior laws. Through prayer these greater laws may be brought into action. These facts may be seen both in the natural and in the spiritual realms. Every time an aeroplane flies the law of gravity is transcended by the laws that govern flight, but the law of gravity is not thereby violated. And every true Christian knows that the Christian life is a far greater miracle than that of flight, for in his very being the law of sin and death is being overcome by the superior law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Rom. viii. 2).

Prayer, then, is a Law. God has willed, God has chosen, to work not in sheer sovereignty on His own but in fellowship with men, in the following out of His purpose. Enough is revealed in the Bible for us to say without hesitation that, in the accomplishing of His purpose, God has never acted without the co-operation of men of prayer. This is most clearly seen at every crisis, at every turning-point in spiritual history. To take but one of many examples: when the purpose of God for His people focused upon their extrication from Babylon at the end of the captivity, the Lord had in Daniel, and doubtless others with him, the fellowship that He wanted. The story reveals that the great issue of the return to Jerusalem was the answer to prayer. As Daniel prayed, the powers of Heaven were set in motion, and the powers of hell stirred to antagonism. The power and the purpose of God were released through the prayer of a man—a man in tune with the heart of God, a man who knew what God wanted to do and acted accordingly (Dan. ix, x).

What a great thing is prayer in the will of God! There is no limit to what prayer can do within that will. True prayer is the most fruitful work in the world. When we consider that the very purpose of God may wait upon the prayer fellowship of at least some of His people, surely we must be moved to yield ourselves more thoroughly to such a privilege and responsibility in the critical day in which we live.

Q. *Is there an inner secret, a master-key, to prayer?*

A. *The heart of prayer is communion with God.*

Just as the inner secret of the Christian life is 'union with Christ', so the inner secret of prayer is 'communion with Christ'. A Christian's communion is founded upon his union. Prayer is a very close relationship expressing itself. The point that we must see is our *nearness* to God in Christ.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

What a word that is that says "he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (I Cor. vi. 17). What a close relationship is implied in those passages that speak of our communion with the Father and with His Son and with the Holy Spirit (I John i. 3 ; II Cor. xiii. 14).

Many people who are not Christians pray, especially in times of need, and God may answer them ; but such cannot have communion with God, for they have no union with Him. We must appreciate this fundamental distinction between the Christian and the non-Christian. Through the Lord Jesus every true Christian is united to God in Heaven by a life-link. We are not praying down here on the earth to One who is a long way off in Heaven. We are one with Him there and He is one with us here! The Devil is all the time trying to create a sense of distance between us and the Lord : but there is no distance between if we abide in Christ, for no one can be closer to the Father than the Son, and we are in Him!

But about this we must be quite clear: that prayer is essentially spiritual. It is essentially the communion of the human spirit with God who is Spirit. By new birth the human spirit is united to and quickened by the Divine Spirit, and true prayer springs from this union. Very much prayer is unanswered because it does not take its rise from such communion. If we pray "in the flesh", according to our own ideas, desires, impulses or will, we are setting aside the true meaning and purpose of prayer. But if we abide in Christ, we shall pray in the Spirit, and the answers will always be sure, for He has said: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John xv. 7).

If we have a firm grasp of this master-key of communion, we shall avoid many pitfalls. Let us consider two such for a moment. In Matthew vi. 7, 8, the Lord Jesus exposed that pitfall of "much speaking" which of course betrays a completely wrong conception of prayer, but a conception which is prevalent in the Church to-day. It is often thought that if only we pray long enough and hard enough, perhaps all through the night, the Lord is bound to answer. Alas! such prayer can often be a substitute for the reality of communion. *Prayer is not a means of getting God to do what He does*

not want to do ; prayer provides Him with a way to work His own will. When the Lord Jesus "continued all night in prayer", He did not decide in advance, as it were, to have a 'night of prayer', but He was *drawn out* in prayer through the night, which is quite another matter. Self-effort in prayer is one thing: the constraint of the Spirit is another. One word uttered in communion with the heart of God will effect more than many of 'our' best prayers. The primary thing is quality—the quality of vital communion with the Father.

Then, there is the pitfall of 'organized prayer' which is so often an effort to get the Lord interested in 'our' work for Him. The importance of prayer is recognised by all Christians, and so no Christian enterprise is now complete without organizing the appropriate prayer-backing to see it through. The question as to whether the enterprise was born out of deep heart fellowship with the Lord, as to whether it really is the work of God, has now become secondary. Until we see that the Lord does not want to be interested in 'our' best efforts for Him, but wants to get us interested in what is truly His work, we shall waste a great deal of time in such prayer and fruitless activity.

Surely we can see that it is the Lord Himself who is the great Architect, Designer and Builder of all things ; He is the great Worker, with His whole work spread out before Him ; He alone can know how the work is to be done. Our concern must be to be in vital touch with Him, so that we may be with Him in what He is doing and not building castles in the air on our own.

The first practical step to communion with the Lord is to be quiet, and to 'cease from ourselves'. The noise, rush and hurry of our fevered natures have no place in the calm of His presence. David says: "My soul is silent unto God" (Ps. lxxii. 5, marg.). We must learn to get quiet with the Lord, and to retire from the fret of our souls. We must lay aside all our presumed knowledge of His will, and be willing to be shown otherwise. Thus, as we become centred on Him and realise the majesty of Him to whom we belong and to whom we have come, we shall find ourselves in an attitude of worship—for how can we draw near to Him without worshipping? Then, and then only, will the way be clear for an effectual ministry of prayer.

T. L. M.

(to be concluded)

MARCH—APRIL, 1955

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

THE NEW SONG

SPRING must be on its way, for the other day I saw two red-breasted robins together, and that is something which never happens in Autumn or Winter. Cock Robin is very unfriendly for half the year; he cares only for himself and will not allow the hen to come into that part of the field or garden which he has marked off as his own. Not that the hen's manners are any better, for she has her special territory too, and will not let any other robin come into it, not even her mate or her children.

Somehow we are surprised to hear that robins are cross and unkind to one another, for they are so very friendly to humans. We like them too, for they are about the only birds which sing almost all the year round. In the Autumn, when all the leaves are falling from the trees and the rest of the birds are more or less silent, it is such a joy to hear the sweet song of the robin. But although the song sounds happy to us, it is really a grumble and a threat. It is a kind of war-cry by which the robin warns all the other red-breasts that if they do not keep away it will be the worse for them. The robin, you see, has two songs, the old one and the new.

It is the new song which he will be singing from now onwards. Some say that it is sweeter in its tone than the Winter song, and it is certainly sweeter in its meaning. It is a song to his mate to come and make a nest, a song of welcome and friendliness, which will go on through the Spring into Summer. Like the songs of most other birds, it tells of gladness, of the joys of home and little ones, and of his willingness to help his mate and take care of the youngsters. It is the song of blessing and of new life.

Some time about July, though, the robins stop singing. They all get new red breast feathers, fathers, mothers and children, and then the families divide up, some of them flying abroad, but most of them choosing in the woods or gardens a small area which they will look upon as their very own.

Once they have decided just where their territory shall be and what are its limits, they begin to sing again. But this time it is a very different song, for it tells of selfishness, of a wish to be left alone, and of a determination to fight any other robin, whether cock or hen, if it dares to pass the boundaries of his special piece of ground. If he

catches a glimpse of a red breast he sings louder and louder to frighten the other robin off, and if it still persists in coming on he goes out to fight it and to chase it away. To human ears the song may sound sweet, but really it is a selfish song, full of complaints and threats. Instead of giving a glad welcome, the robin tells others that they must keep out, for he has made up his mind to live alone, not to care for anybody else and to keep all his space and food for himself.

No wonder I called it the old song, since its theme is 'ME, ME, ME'! It seems to say, 'I don't want anybody else; I won't share anything with the other robins—no, not even if they are my own parents!' And all across the fields, in the woods and in the gardens, every other robin is doing the same thing, crying out against his friends and neighbours, keeping them at a distance and not caring if they starve.

Now the old song is not only self-centred—it also speaks of a very petty and restricted life. Have you ever noticed that in the Winter the robin never flies any distance? He has marked out his selfish little patch, and he never moves out of it. If you disturb him he just flies a very short distance and settles again. If you still walk on, he will not continue, but will fly round you or over your head and then land back again where he was at the first. His is a very small world, and so long as he sings the old song he stays within that world and never sees anything new. This is always true of selfish people: the more they sing 'ME, ME, ME', the smaller and more petty they become in mind and spirit.

It is high time that the robins began to sing their new song, the Spring song of friendliness and family joys. When the song changes it is a sign that something has changed inside them; they have thrown off their selfishness and become good mates and kindly sacrificial parents. Instead of thinking only of themselves, they begin to think of one another and to work hard and care for those who belong to them. However, I am sorry to say that the robin's new song does not last. By midsummer, he and his mate—as well as all the young robins—will be back in their old selfish ways and singing the old song once again.

Christians, too, have their new song. "And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God; many shall see it, and fear, and

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

shall trust in the Lord" (Psalm 40. 3). It is the song of new life through the sacrifice of Christ. It tells of our wanting to show our joy to others and to share it with them. It means that we have stopped thinking only of self, and want to glorify our Lord and share His blessings with others. It is not a grumble or a warning, but a testimony and an invitation. The old song made us petty, but the

new song leads us away from our own interests to care for others and to take the joy of salvation to them. Unlike what happens with the robins, our new song need never pass away. It begins here on earth when we trust Christ as our Saviour, but it can go right on until we get to Heaven, where it is the only song which anyone sings.

H. F.

WE BEHELD HIS GLORY

(CHAPTER IX OF VOL. II)

THE GREAT SHEPHERD RETURNS

Reading: John xx.

AFTER having read this chapter of John, we should immediately add Hebrews xiii. 20:

"Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant, even our Lord Jesus, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ . . ."

We are nearly at the end of this record, and therefore we would expect to find its message and content embodied in some kind of definite, inclusive summary. And so it is.

In accordance with prophecy, the Shepherd has been smitten and the sheep have been scattered (Zechariah xiii. 7). That scattering meant that they had been "offended". "All ye shall be offended in me this night" (Matthew xxvi. 31). The offence, or stumbling, was due to a false expectation, a wrong basis of hope.

This was mainly the expectation and hope of something temporal, earthly, tangible, in which they would have personal interest and position.

That was all shattered and lay in ruins. The 'sheep' presented a sorry picture while He lay in the tomb!

But the Great Shepherd has returned, and in this chapter we see Him reconstituting everything on the *eternal* basis. First He moves hither and thither, re-gathering to Himself the scattered and bewildered sheep.

Then He takes pains to reassure them that it is He Himself who is alive. But, while the same, there is a difference: a constitutional change, in which there is a combination of reality and mystery; a new kind of Man; humanity, but not as we know it.

He lingers long—forty days—to establish His

identity, to leave them in no doubt as to His reality; and yet to leave the indelible impression of His otherness.

All this undoubtedly was meant to give meaning to the Church of which they were the nucleus. This chapter is a beautiful and concrete presentation of what the Church is in principle, according to God's mind.

(I) The Church is the aggregate of those—

(a) who have been completely disillusioned as to this world and as to any hope for it as it is: who have come to an end of all selfish and personal ambitions and interests in the Kingdom of God: who have known that disintegration in themselves which comes from trusting in their own sufficiency; and

(b) who have been gathered up and integrated upon a completely other basis—a spiritual and heavenly one.

(II) The Church is an *exclusive* witness to the Resurrection of Christ in its own experience, and in its very constitution. He confined, and always does confine, the revelation of Himself as the risen Lord to the "heirs of salvation"; it is never given to the world in general.

The Church is constituted a spiritually corporate company or 'Body', a heavenly people (by His ascending to the Father as Head, verse 17)—very real but yet inscrutable. There is reality and mystery in the true Church. This mystery or inscrutability is its strength. Remove it and seek to be popular, and you destroy its authority. This is not mystery in the sense of being 'mysterious', abstruse, occult, and so on, but possessing a power, a vitality, an endurance, a wisdom, a life, which is not of this creation but of another.

(III) The Church is constituted upon the basis of the peace which was made by the blood of His Cross (verses 19, 21, 26; Col. i. 20). "The God

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of peace . . . brought . . . from the dead the great shepherd . . . by the blood of the eternal covenant”.

That title “the God of peace” is used by Paul in relation to the whole matter of righteousness upon which justification rests (Rom. xv. 33, xvi. 20). In the same great argument he speaks of the Church in its corporate oneness (xii. 4, 5). The very existence of the Church demands this great value and effect of the blood. It rests upon an eternal covenant, made and sealed thereby. There is no Church of God apart from that which He purchased with His own blood (Acts xx. 28). His Church rests upon His peace—the peace of reconciliation. There should be no conflict or controversy between the Church and God, or God and the Church. The Church should always mean the place of peace for all its members. So the repeated announcement of peace by our Lord in this chapter carries with it the great and fundamental work of His Cross, and is not just a nice word to allay fears and agitation at His appearances. It links back with chapter xiv.

(IV) Then the risen Lord establishes the fact that the Holy Spirit will be the governing reality in the Church for this age (verse 22).

This ‘breathing’ on them was a symbolic act. Firstly it symbolized a new creation, the “one new man”, indwelt and energized by a new life, the life peculiar to this resurrection body—‘raised together with Him’. Then it was a prospective securing unto the great receiving. If the real ‘receiving’ of the Holy Spirit took place on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts i. 8, then this of which we read here was not an actual receiving, but rather a potential or prospective appointment which in due course would carry with it the authority of verse 23.

The main point is that the Church, the New

Creation, the Body of Christ, is indwelt, energized, actuated and endowed by the Holy Spirit. This is not an official, but a spiritual thing. It is not ecclesiastical, political, or traditional, but vital, dynamic, and of a nature, not a system.

(V) The section which brings Thomas so much into view sets forth the fact that the fulness of blessing by fellowship with the risen Lord is only, but surely, on the basis of faith. It is possible to be in and of the Church, where the fulness of Christ is to be found, and yet to be almost like an outsider. It is possible to be doctrinally or positionally of the Body corporate, and yet for all practical purposes, enjoyment and blessedness to be like an isolated and unrelated unit going a lonely way.

This is the lot of all doubters who have a question.

Faith brings into fellowship, life, experience, and worship!

(VI) Finally. The most beautiful character of the Church, which lifts it out of all cold formalism, legalistic death and stiffness, and mere ecclesiasticism, is indicated by the family terms here used—“Father”, “brethren” (verse 17). Here again we are taken to the letter to the Hebrews, ii. 11–13, 17; iii. 1.

The Church is a family. “The last Adam” is “a life-giving Spirit” (I Cor. xv. 45). He begets sons and daughters through “the travail of his soul” (Isaiah liii. 11).

He makes His “brethren” the “congregation” in the midst of which He ‘sings’ (Heb. ii. 12).

All this leads to the testimony to His Divine Person. The main evidence of His being “the Christ, the Son of God” (verses 30, 31) is found in His significant (or “sign”) acts in the Church, i.e. the mighty effects of His death and resurrection.

T. A-S.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

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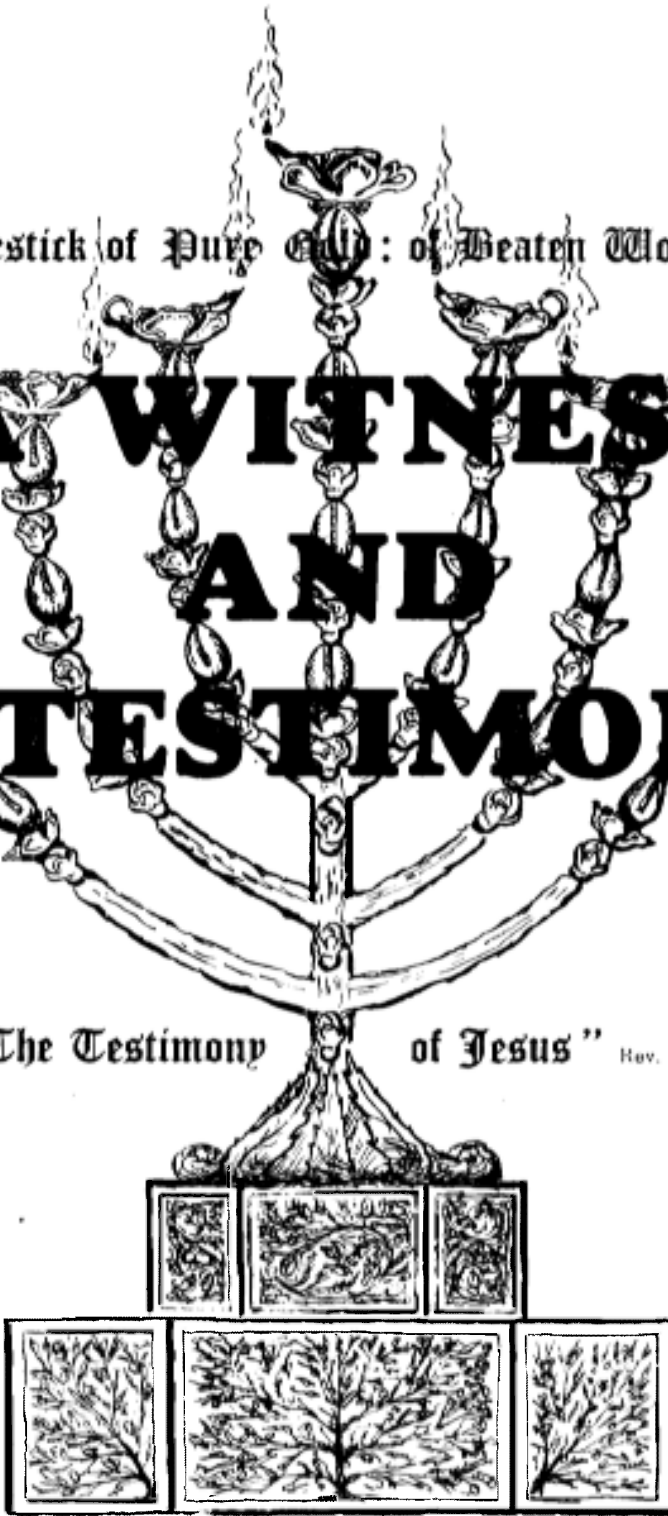
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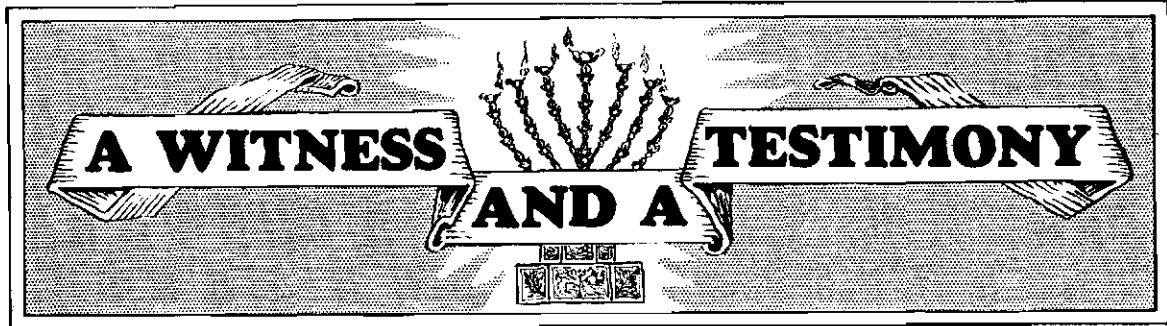
THIS MINISTRY

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

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

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

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



MAY—JUNE, 1955.

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IN THE TRAIN OF HIS TRIUMPH

"... and by me sends forth the knowledge of Him, a stream of fragrant incense, throughout the world. For Christ's is the fragrance which I offer up to God, whether among those in the way of salvation, or among those in the way of perdition; but to these it is an odour of death, to those of life." (II Corinthians ii. 14 - 16, Conybeare's translation).

THE MINISTER AND HIS MINISTRY

THE Apostle Paul is setting forth one of his conceptions of what the minister of Christ is, and then what the effect of the ministry. He is thinking here of the minister of Christ as an incense-bearer. The picture in the background of these verses is one with which we are well acquainted. Verse 14 brings into view the triumphal procession of a victorious war-lord, as he moves from place to place with his captives behind him, celebrating at many points his victory, and using them to provide the evidence of his conquests. But also in the procession there are those who carry vessels of incense, and the incense being diffused everywhere speaks in two ways, to two different classes of people.

There are some who are going to celebrate this day of victory by being slain. It was a custom to hold certain notorious or distinguished captives in bondage until the day of the great celebration of the victory, and then that day was marked by their execution. On the other hand, there were those who were appointed to be released as a distinguishing

mark of the day. To the one the incense brought death near, and made them know that their hour had come. To the other the same incense made known that the hour of emancipation, of liberation, was drawing near. The same incense proclaimed death and life, life and death.

In the second part of the picture the Apostle sees himself in a different rôle. In the first, he has been viewing himself as one of those prisoners, led in the triumphal procession as an object of public exhibition, celebrating the triumph of the great Warrior. He has seen himself as in the train of the triumph of the Lord, being on full view as a demonstration of the greatness of that victory. Now he transfers himself into the second part, and takes the place of an incense-bearer in the procession. He says that he passes on through the world bearing incense, and that that incense is saying two things, having two effects, speaking to two different classes of people. It relates to life and death.

But the Apostle does not think of himself as merely *carrying* a censer of incense. He regards himself as *being* the vessel, and even—in a strange, deep, inward way, so as to become a very part of his own being—as the incense itself. He thinks of himself, not only as being the giver forth of the sweet savour, but as being the sweet savour itself; he sees himself as the means by which this effect is registered upon these two different classes of people.

In that presentation of the servant of the Lord,

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there is a deep, strong and solemn word for all of us who stand in the position of being the Lord's servants. The thing which should be going forth from us, the thing which should be the effect of our lives, according to these words, is the knowledge of Christ. Everywhere, not just as by us, but because of us, men should be coming to a knowledge of Christ. The very object of our being is that Christ should be known because of us. The Divinely appointed way by which men are to come to know Christ is simply through our being here and moving amongst them.

THE VITAL ELEMENT IN MINISTRY

That is simple, and perhaps we recognise and accept it. But the extra point which has to be noticed is this, that it is something more than our giving out knowledge *concerning* Christ—it is that we are *to be* to men the knowledge of Christ. There is a very big difference between the giving out of truth concerning the Lord Jesus—even in large measure, in a great fulness, truth which cannot be denied because it is the truth—and that strange, deep, indispensable element of *ourselves being* that truth: so that the truth itself takes its power, its strength from the fact that here are those who are the living expression of it; who have gone through the depths, have been tested, tried, taken from place to place, subjected to experiences of intense severity, and in the fires have learned Christ, and are therefore themselves the embodiment of the knowledge of Him. Wherever we go, it is not that they have truth to give—it is that men and women learn Christ because of them. Of them it can be said: It is not what they say only; there is something coming from them. There is an indescribable 'something' which is an extra element to what they say. That thing has its reality in their being, and you feel that it is not only the words but the very virtue that comes out when they speak, or by reason of their presence. It is that of which the Apostle is speaking.

That is the real value of any knowledge of Christ which we can give, which others may come to possess by us. It is not that they come through us to know more about Christ, but that there is a

ministration of Christ Himself. That is the thing for which we should seek the Lord very earnestly.

THE COSTLINESS OF TRUE MINISTRY

We should recognise that this represents the costliness of ministry. Ministry of this kind is an intensely costly thing. It is so different from being a preacher, as such. There may be a glamour about preaching, a fascination about gripping a congregation, and all that sort of thing, which is not costly but is gratifying to the flesh. The snare of the lime-light, the snare of publicity, the snare of the satisfaction of feeling power over other people, has robbed preaching of that essential blood, and passion, and anguish. Paul was not a preacher of that kind. It is all very well to talk about Paul as the great preacher and orator, and to try to be another Paul along that line. But to be a Paul is a desperately costly thing, and to minister Christ is a thing into which our very blood will be poured.

This kind of ministry can bring no satisfaction to the flesh. This kind of ministry is not something for which to reach out for ourselves. This kind of ministry is something from which we should plead to be delivered, unless our life and heart passion is that Christ Himself—not ourselves, but Christ Himself—should be known.

That is the true value of ministry. It is indeed a costly thing, it is a thing of suffering, but it is the thing which goes beyond words, far beyond clever thinking and clever expressing, far beyond that acute needle-like brain that grasps truth and then begins to give it out. It is something which is an extra factor, without which the very best equipment in nature will fail to reach the Divine end. It is, in a word, *Christ ministered*: not Christ ministered about, but Christ ministered. Paul saw that there was no doubt about it—this ministry was effective, although effective in two directions. Not always did it result in people leaping into life, but it always resulted in something. If it plunged some people more deeply into death it was a proof that it was effective. If it brought death home to some consciences, that proved its power. To have real spiritual effect demands that we shall be ministers after this sort.

T. A-S.

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THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF SERVICE

II. LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD

"Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be mine own earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom possession from among all peoples: for all the of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel" (Ex. xix. 5, 6, A.R.V.).

"And bring thou near unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office" (Ex. xxviii. 1).

"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 . . . But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (1 Pet. ii. 5, 9).

"And he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father" (Rev. i. 6).

" . . . and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests" (Rev. v. 10).

"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: over these the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ" (Rev. xx. 6).

WHEN we come to look into the Word of God, from the beginning to the end, to discover what the service of God really is, we find that it is always set forth in terms of priesthood, or what priesthood means. We are not concerned specifically with the priests or Levites of the Old Testament as a class or system or order in themselves. They are there to set forth spiritual meanings, and we are using them—that is, we are using the Word of God—to discover the spiritual meaning of service. I say that because these words—'priest', 'Levite', and so on—suggest a *subject*, and they can be very technical. There is a great deal of what is technical connected with the priests and the Levites, and I am not attempting to deal with it. There are many technicalities to which we make little or no reference—for instance, the question as to where the priests end and the Levites begin. Sometimes they are put together and are called "the priests, the Levites": at other times the priests are put in one category and the Levites in another. But such technicalities are not concerning us just now.

ALL GOD'S PEOPLE CALLED TO BE A SERVING PEOPLE

What we want to get at is this: What is the service of God, and what are the principles and laws of that service? And so we approach this matter by way of looking inside the framework to secure the spiritual meaning. So, taking up this matter of the Levites, we begin with the fact that they represent or set forth the service of God. They set it forth in this way, that the Lord's people as a whole are called to be a serving people. This is quite clear from the passages which we have read, right through the Old Testament and right through the New Testament to the end. There is a very trite and hackneyed phrase, which has lost its edge by familiarity and constant use—'We are saved to serve'—but that does mean what it says! It may perhaps seem unnecessary, and yet perhaps it may have a reviving or refreshing value, if I emphasize this point at the outset—that it is made abundantly clear by the whole Word of God, in both Testaments, right on to the end of the Bible, that the Lord's Church is called pre-eminently to be a serving Church.

But of course, this can only be true of the whole as it is true of all its parts—which just means that there is no such thing, in the thought and purpose of God, as an inactive, unerving member of the Church. If ever the Levites were not functioning, everything was wrong, and that means that, if you and I claim to be in the Church of God, we are, according to the very thought of God about His Church, supposed to be serving Levites. You will not take that name on yourself, I am quite sure. You will not go out into the world and tell people you are a Levite. You might perhaps tell them you were a missionary, or something like that. But it means that you are supposed to be a Levite, and if you look at the Levites and their history, you will see what God means you should be.

In the full unveiling and revelation of this truth, it comes out at last that priests and Levites were not, in the thought of God, a separate, detached, isolated body of people, but the whole nation, in the thought of God, was meant to be what they were. We will return to that presently, but just begin with this: that the nation—which is the Church, which is God's own possession—is, in God's thought, meant to be in active, Levitical

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service, in all that that means. We begin very low when we begin there. But let us begin right at the beginning, and challenge our hearts, and say, 'Now then, what does my Levitical priesthood, my Levitical service, amount to?' You ask your heart that before the Lord. What does it amount to? That is a very, very important question. We will not stay with it, but we begin with it.

The Levites, and their priesthood, bring right into view the fact that God's primary thought for a redeemed people is service. The service may be many-sided and varied, as we shall see, but service is the characteristic of the people of God, if His own thought for them is realised.

BRINGING GOD AND MAN TOGETHER
IN ONE

But what is this service? When you ask, 'Now, what did the priests and Levites set forth as to the matter of service?', you have to say: It was nothing less than the bringing of God and man together in one. There had come about a rift between God and man. We know about that, we know where it took place, we know just what happened; but there it is. God and man are apart, there is a big gap between. And it is not only a gap, not merely distance, but there is a condition of positive conflict—conflict of natures, conflict of interests, conflict of realms—in short, enmity. Enmity is that which makes a distance. It is called 'alienation' (Eph. ii. 12). God and man are at variance in their natures. And the whole service of the people of God, as set forth in the Levites and the priests, was to stand in the gap and put the hand of man into the hand of God, and the hand of God into the hand of man; to come between and to bring about union—of course, in virtue of sacrifice, in virtue of shed blood, but that is another aspect.

The service was thus to represent, to set forth, the fact that God does not accept this state of division. God never intended it, He does not accept it, and He has provided against it; and here are those who know in themselves, in their own history, in their own experience, what it means to have peace with God, to be united with God in life (as we were saying in our last study); to be there themselves, and so to set forth God's mind in this matter of union in a practical way.

That is service—not to talk about the doctrine of atonement and redemption and reconciliation, but to *be* that. The Church can have all the fundamental doctrines of atonement, and so on, and still not be a unifying factor itself, still be divided, still maintain divisions. The important thing about

service is to unify, not to talk about it; to set forth the ground of oneness, and to live on that ground. We shall probably have more to say about that at another point.

PRESERVING THE GROUND OF
GOD'S PRESENCE WITH MAN

And then, as consequent upon that, the further object of service was to set forth and preserve the ground of God's presence with man. The whole issue of the Bible is just that—God's presence. The last thing in the Bible is the declaration: "The tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples" (Rev. xxi. 3). That is the end finally reached. It was always God's desire from the beginning to dwell with man, to be present. So the real service of God is to set that forth actually. If the Church were fulfilling its priestly ministry, wherever men and women came into it they would meet God. They would say: 'God is here. These people are not only concerned with correct doctrine and teaching and with proper practice and form. You meet God when you meet them.' We are failing of our service to God unless, as the effect of our being here, God is found in the midst of us—unless God is found in us first of all individually, and then, when a few individuals are together, He is all the more found.

That is the importance of relatedness in Christian life and fellowship, and that is the thing that Satan hates and is against—the gathering and abiding together, in life, in fellowship, in the Spirit, of the Lord's people. It is something very great. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I . . ." (Matt. xviii. 20). The real ministry, so to speak, is to provide a ground for God, and to bring God in so that He is found there.

May the Lord save us as a people from ever being an empty shell! The Lord save us unto this—that men know where to find God: if they want to find God, they know where to find Him. That is so very largely not true. Many go round, searching for God, wanting God. They try this place and they try that place—and go away disappointed. 'No, He is not there. The form may be all right, and much may be quite good, but I have not met God.' Do let us always, wherever we are, hold strongly to that, that when we come together, people are to find God amongst us. We are bent upon that—the presencing of God. This is a principle so clearly set forth in the early books of the Old Testament—of course in the first place in relation to Israel—the presencing of God.

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SERVICE IN RELATION TO THE TESTIMONY OF GOD

In the third place, the service of the priests and the Levites was in relation to the Testimony of God. The central object of their service, their work, their ministry, was the Ark of the Testimony. That was at the heart of everything; they gathered round that ultimately. It was the final thing, the ultimate thing. They were gathered round that, and they ministered in relation to that. The Ark was entrusted to them on their journeyings. There is much of detail—and very, very important detail—connected therewith, but we state again the simple truth, the simple inclusive fact, that their service was related to the testimony of God: and the testimony of God is the testimony of Jesus, just as that Ark was in type and figure the Lord Jesus in His inclusive, essential, mediatorial Person. It is the Lord Jesus, it is the testimony of Jesus.

And what a testimony that Ark bore! Let that Ark come up against anything, and see what happens. Let it come up against the Philistines or the Philistines come up against it, and see what happens. Let Uzzah put forth his hand and touch that Ark, and see what happens. The testimony of Jesus is not something in word alone. It is not a theory, it is not a type, it is not a figure. It is an *impact*, and the service of the Lord is to register the impact of Jesus Christ. We fail altogether, if, with all that we may do and say, that impact is missing. Oh, let us pray for a recovery of the impact of Christ, that by our presence there may be a registration of Him.

The Lord Jesus, when He was here in Person on the earth, could be nowhere without registering His presence. Demons cried out at once before He had said anything. All the evil forces were stirred. Men governed by those evil forces could not keep silent: they found that they had to do something about Him—anything to get rid of Him, to quench Him. On the other hand, people in need sensed that their need would be met in Him. He just could not be present and be hid.

Service, then, means bringing Christ in as a registration upon situations. That is what the Church is here for, and what you and I are here for: we are here in relation to "the testimony of Jesus". When John used that phrase, as he did so often, especially in the book of the Revelation—he said he was in Patmos "for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus"—he simply meant that he had been sent there because he stood for the testimony of Jesus. It would be far better to be sent to Patmos than to be ignored. If men can be indifferent, if they can just leave us alone, and not send us

either to Patmos or to 'Coventry', there is something wrong with us. If we are really doing the work of God in a priestly way, something has got to happen, even if it is cruel opposition.

A REPRESENTATION OF GOD'S FULL THOUGHT

A further thing about this service so far as the Levites were concerned was that they embodied and set forth in representation God's full thought concerning all His people. Let me remind you of the events in Exodus xxxii, which we were speaking of in our first study in this series. There we see a crisis, a crisis through and by which the Levites came into their place. What had happened was that God had said beforehand (Ex. xix. 5, 6) that Israel should be to Him a kingdom of priests. That was the Divine thought. And then He followed by saying: 'Bring near Aaron and his sons' (Ex. xxviii. 1)—the Divine thought taking shape. And then Moses goes into the mount, and is with God forty days and forty nights. Toward the end of that time the people weary of his absence, and there then follow the events of which we read in chapter xxxii.

The people call Aaron and ask him to make them gods that should go before them—'for what has happened to this Moses who brought us out of Egypt, we know not.' And Aaron gives way, weakly, very weakly, and has to cover it up with a lie. If you compromise, you will always have to add a lie presently. And he makes them a calf of gold. (You notice the lie. It says definitely that he worked it: he wrought it with a chisel (vs. 4). When he described what happened to Moses, he said he threw the gold into the fire and, as though by magic, a calf came out (vs. 24). You always have to resort to magic, if you get yourself into a tight corner by prevarication and lies and so on. That is by the way.)

Moses came down, heard as he came down, saw, was very wroth, and challenged Aaron, as to why—why—why he should have let the people in for this sin, with its inevitable judgment. And then Moses went and stood in the gate, and threw out an uncompromising challenge. (Notice the form of his challenge: 'Whoso is on Jehovah's side, to me!' (vs. 26). So there is another side that is not Jehovah's. That is very discriminating at this point. Whose side is this? Well, that touches very, very vitally upon the whole matter of service. However, let us go on.) At that point the sons of Levi went over to Moses in the gate. Moses said: 'Put every man his sword on his side, and go throughout the

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whole camp, and slay every man his brother, his friend, his neighbour'. And the Levites did so, and they did it thoroughly, and at that point the tribe of Levi was set apart for this ministry.

Now, God's thought was that all the people should be like that. He had said so (Ex. xix. 5, 6). But the people as a whole failed—failed God and failed of their calling, their vocation—and so God, raised up, so to speak, this 'Israel within an Israel', and thus the tribe of Levi became the embodiment or representation of God's full thought for all His people.

Representation: that is what is true of them in more senses than one. You know that it was the firstborn in all the houses, the homes, the families of Israel, who were the priests. Now the tribe of Levi takes the place of the firstborn in all Israel. The half shekel of silver (Ex. xxx. 13) becomes the symbol that they have taken the place of the firstborn. So they become in representation 'the Church of the firstborn ones' (Heb. xii. 23). The very number of the tribe is also significant in this matter. It means representation, if you look at it. We will not dwell upon that, or go further with it; it is one of those details, but it is significant. The point is that it was when the nation as a whole failed that the Levites were taken, to become those who set forth—by embodying in themselves—God's full thought for His people, that they should be serving priests.

Now, this is a very delicate point, but we have to face facts: and the fact is this—that the whole of the Lord's people, although redeemed, although His by redemption and by atoning Blood, are not fulfilling this priesthood. The people of God as a whole are not living up to their calling, are not fulfilling their heavenly vocation. That was true in Paul's time. The ministry of Paul was so largely—we might say mainly—to get Christians to live up to their calling. His prayers for believers were that they might apprehend their calling, 'the hope of His calling'. So the fact has been, from so soon after the beginning, that, as a whole, the Lord's people do not express His full thought.

But God reacts to that failure, and sets to work to get those who will. The peril has always been, and it is a peril into which many have fallen, to say, 'Well, things are as they are, everything has broken down, it is a state of failure: we had better make the best of a bad job, accept the situation, and do the best we can.' God has never so compromised, and He never will. He did not just patch up that situation at Sinai. He definitely and concretely reacted to it in the Levites. Now, do not interpret that necessarily as a separate body of

people. That is our peril—to think that here are the general people of God, and here is another class of people who are on a pedestal, very much better than the general. Beware of that. But, while we say that with great emphasis, we also say, with equal emphasis, that God's heart is set upon finding amongst His people those who do answer to His full thought.

So that the Levites represented what God meant, and not what God found later on, or what came about in a general way; and that is service to God. And it is a very costly form of service. While God really seeks to have 'all men saved and come to a knowledge of the truth', His heart is really set upon a people who satisfy Him as to the fullest thought that He has ever expressed, and that is priestly service: representation, in the midst of failure, in the midst of departure, in the midst of weakness, in the midst of tragedy, of that which satisfies God. Take that to heart. That is service—service on the highest plane, service in the fullest realm. Service, in the most essential sense, is not to be doing a lot of things for God, but to be sure of what God wants most, and then bend everything to that.

THE LEVITES RELATED TO THE WHOLE MATTER OF LIFE

Then, further, the Levites in their service were related to the whole matter of life. We touched on this a little in our previous study. The great characteristic of the Levitical service was that everything should be living. 'Livingness' was the great feature. They were really up against death. Death, the great nullifier—spiritual death—had entered by sin, and they were up against it; and their ministry was, on the one hand, to nullify the power of death, and, on the other, to make everything live, to see that everything lived. Everything was to be living. I do want you to grasp this. It is so important that 'livingness' characterize the Church in every part of its life and activity.

We have the Lord's table. It was there in symbol in the Tabernacle. Is this a form, is this a rite, is this the 'Lord's Supper', is this the 'Communion Service'? What is it? It is supposed to be, meant to be, a ministration of *life*, a testimony of *life*. If you and I come to the Lord's table and that does not mean to us 'livingness', if there is not something about this that is living, well, it has missed its meaning. We are a people of the table. The table is supposed to be a living thing: so much so that in Corinth, because of a touching of that table in an unworthy manner, the people met something.

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Many were sick and some died (I Cor. xi. 30). This thing is living. It is as though the Lord would say: 'You cannot just come to this, touch this, without it meaning something, and without your meeting something.' It should be like that.

Oh, may God hallow the table! God make the table to live! Lord, make the table a challenge! Lord, make people afraid of that table, if they are not going to adjust to its meaning! Yes, it would not be a bad thing if there were such an effect, such an impact about this, that, if there were carelessness or wrongness of approach and wrongness of state in coming to it, it led to actual suffering or affliction. But that is the dark and cloudy side, the shadowed side. On the other side, it should be living. Theirs it was to keep things living.

And everything else must be like that in the house, in the tabernacle. Is it the altar of incense—is it the prayer life? We need a word on this, friends. There should be something tremendously living about our prayer life, and our prayer life together as the Lord's people. We do not just come and say prayers and offer requests—no, no, no, it is a question of life, of effect, of 'livingness'. Is it the lampstand of truth, of revelation, of illumination? Is it the revelation of Jesus Christ? Oh, there is a great deal of difference in teaching. We may have good addresses, very good teaching, all very true, absolutely true; and yet—and yet—what have we got afterward? What do we take away? Do we go away more living than we came? Have we met life that has challenged us, exposed us, illuminated us, elevated us? This is the service of God. Oh, to have companies of people, the characteristic of whom is livingness: livingness in prayer, livingness in fellowship, livingness in teaching—all living!

That is power. The Levites did minister in the power of this life. It is something tremendous. Let anybody come in, interfere with this, take this on, and see what they meet. There was power present in their service.

THE CONTINUITY OF LIFE

And then a further thing about the life was its continuity. God made a covenant, as we read in Malachi, with Levi, a covenant of life and peace; and although Levi deviated often, seemed as it were to go underground, and were often in a state most reprehensible, yet the Lord goes on, and in the end Levi survives. Although the old typical system passes with the old dispensation, there is more life in the New Testament than there was then. The Lord Jesus, as the great Levite, as we saw in our previous study, commenced His Levi-

tical ministry at the age of thirty, just as the Levites did—and oh, the life of this Levite! Was Paul a Levite? Surely he was, and many another.

But note, this life of the covenant goes on. What is the principle of continuity? What is the principle of succession? It is not that someone has a position or an office, and when he dies someone else has to take his place, go into his office and position, and so on, in a kind of formal, ecclesiastical, 'apostolic succession' principle. Not that at all. The principle of succession in the Word of God is *Divine life*. As soon as Divine life departs, you had better shut down the whole thing. Any church or system that has not the life has lost the very reason for its existence. The principle of continuity is life. The Lord save us from losing the tremendous factor of life and becoming resolved into a mere 'thing' with a teaching and form.

And when we have said that, we need only say further that life—this livingness, this power, this continuity, which are the elements of this life—is incorruptible. That means that it is a life of absolute purity and holiness. As soon as corruption is allowed to come in, the life is suspended. The Lord will not let His life go on where there is corruption. Holiness is essential to life. Allow sin to persist, and you find the life is suspended. The Lord will not go on with us.

So the inclusive characteristic of the Levites, as the Lord's servants, was life.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

I mention just one other thing: the matter of spiritual warfare. I wonder if you have taken note of this. Going back to the passage in the book of Numbers, iv. 3—" . . . from thirty years old and upward even until fifty years old, all that enter upon the service, to do the work in the tent of meeting"—you notice that the margin tells us that "the service" is literally "the warfare", "to do the work in the tent of meeting." "The warfare . . . in the tent".

Now, that indicates a difference of kinds and realms of warfare. Others in Israel were called for the warfare of the nations. They could start at the age of twenty. They were more numerous: every young man, as soon as he reached the age of twenty, was eligible for the army. The Levites started ten years later at the age of thirty, but it says that they entered the *warfare* for work in the tent of meeting. This is a different kind, a different realm of warfare. It is not conflict with the world. They had to meet the world and the nations: Joshua became their commander-in-chief in that

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realm ; but here is another kind. It is an inner kind of warfare. I am not going to make a lot of it, except to point out this : that, when any of us begin on this basis to serve God in relation to His full thought for His people, we meet a peculiar kind of opposition. It is an internal kind. Such ministry has to be fulfilled amidst strange opposition, an opposition that is directed against the Christ dwelling within.

Many of you know that that is true. We put it in many different ways from time to time. When you become a Christian, you know that you are precipitated into conflict with the world: you are up against it, and the world is up against you, and you become a soldier of Jesus Christ in that realm. But when you become one who is going to serve God in relation to all His intention concerning His Church, you meet something other—and, mark you, you will meet it amongst the Lord's people themselves.

There was a time when there was a movement to oust the Levites from their particular position by people in Israel who wanted to usurp that position. They were jealous of them, they criticized them, and took steps to nullify them, God met that movement in His own jealousy for this very thing. He must have His full thought represented. He was very jealous about it. But the point is this, that there is a strange, unexpected kind of warfare related to the full purpose of God. It is spiritual. It is not carnal warfare at all. It is not with the world. Give it terms from Scripture if you like, but the fact is that you find yourself having to fulfil your ministry in the midst of opposition which comes from very much nearer than the world.

Spiritual warfare: oh, yes, it is so wonderful to glimpse the great eternal purpose of God, the "unsearchable riches of Christ", the "exceeding greatness of his power"—these superlatives, all true. Yes, but do not forget that while half of the letter to the Ephesians is occupied with the superlatives of Divine purpose and calling and blessing, the other half contains superlatives in relation to conflict. You get conflict of a fuller, higher and more terrible nature in the 'Ephesian' realm, if I may put it like that, than you do anywhere else, because that brings into view God's ultimate purpose for His people.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE LEVITES

Well, this is the meaning of service, the cost and nature of service. It is tremendously real to God. So we gather it all up into one word. Here is particular and peculiar responsibility. Look again at

the Levites—not as a class ; dismiss that from your thoughts—and see their spiritual meaning. I would like, in closing, to dwell briefly upon some things which seem essential to complete and round off this presentation, such as the spirituality of the Levites. Spiritual men is what they represent. Now it is not possible—I say this with hesitation and with regret, but it is true—it is not possible to say that all the Lord's servants are spiritual people, really spiritual people. Many may be very devout, very much in earnest, but as persons they are not all spiritual persons.

Look at it like this. When these Levites came into being, as in that thirty-second chapter of Exodus, on what ground did they come into being as functioning Levites? Well, the whole nation, because Moses remained in the mount so long, had lost patience. Why did they lose patience? Because they wanted things seen, and they could not endure things not seen. The principle of the life of Moses was that he "endured, as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. xi. 27). That was something they could not do. They must see ; things must be tangible, must be present, must be within the realm of the senses. Religious things—yes ; things of God—yes ; Moses—yes ; but it must be within the compass of our senses, that we can see and handle and have evidence before our very eyes.

Now spirituality is just the opposite of that. It is going on with God in faith. Jesus is in Heaven. "Though now ye see him not", says Peter, "yet . . ." (I Pet. i. 8). We are going on. Peter's line of things is different from Paul's, as we know. Peter's line of things is 'pilgrims and strangers here'. Peter consistently says: 'though now we see him not'; 'we are pilgrims and strangers.' 'Our greater Moses is in Heaven, but we are going on our pilgrimage'. Paul's line of things is 'seated in the heavenlies in Christ. Both sides are right. But the Israelites could not go on until they could see. They must have a god that they see. So—'make us gods to go before us'.

But alas! they do not see what they are doing, what they are letting in. What was all the gold for that they had brought out of Egypt? It was for the Tabernacle and the service of God. It was the gold of the sanctuary. Satan found advantage by their carnality, and stole the gold of the sanctuary, and turned it to his own worship in the place of the worship of God. Spirituality sees through. These Levites were spiritual men. They saw through this. Spirituality sees something more, sees the ultimate significance of things. Oh, for men with spiritual discernment—men who can see

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through and get hold of the ultimate significance, who can see where this is leading, how this will work out, where this comes from, what this means, what is really the nature of this thing. Carnality and spirituality, you see, are two different things amongst the people of God, and the Levites were spiritual men, the embodiment of spiritual perception.

Again, work out this principle of spirituality. What was required of them? "Gird every man his sword upon his thigh"—'and slay every man his enemy'? 'Get even with that man with whom you have had a grudge for so long'? No—'slay every man his brother and his friend and his neighbour'. Brother, blood-kin; friend, neighbour; heart-relationship. This is a test of spirituality. You need not make it literal, unless you like. Sometimes it comes down to that, if we are putting father, mother, sister, brother, children in the place of the Lord; sometimes it works down to that very literally. But spirituality means that nothing

that is of our natural life is allowed to influence us when Divine principle is at stake, however dear, however costly, whatever it involves. Friends and dear ones must not stand in the way of God's full purpose. If they have come across the purpose of God, or if they threaten it, I am sorry, but I must take the sword: and as I take the sword to them, I take it to my own heart. But: "Whosoever shall seek to gain his life shall lose it: but whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it" (Luke xvii. 33). You know that that word 'life' also means 'soul'. The sword to our own souls—that is spirituality. It is very searching.

Well, all this, as I was saying, amounts to taking responsibility for the Lord's highest interests. It is costly, as the Levites knew. It was by sacrifice, it was by blood, it was by tears. Yes, it was costly; but therein lay the preciousness to the Lord. He is jealous for that which answers to His own heart most fully. The Lord give us grace to be true servants—true 'Levites'.

T. A-S.

BY FAITH AND NOT BY SIGHT

"For we walk by faith, not by sight" (II Cor. v. 7).

THESE simple words are not really a part of the apostle's argument. They are only an aside—and yet they enshrine the great secret of his successful ministry. His eager and active approach to things is typified by his constant use of the word "walk". But progress is never possible without a vital faith. For spiritual progress you cannot walk by sight, for the moment you pay heed to things seen you cease to walk—you are hindered, arrested, paralysed. The only way onward is the way of faith.

THE REAL CONTRAST

Faith does not mean feelings. It is true that we shall not go on if we look around, but it is equally fatal to look within. Faith is a very different matter from our own soul's emotions or reactions. Faith is indeed an inward exercise, but it is also the means by which we are linked up with the Lord in glory. The mariner on the open seas cannot be guided by appearances, for there is nothing to be seen. He needs his compass, and will only get his true direction by using it. Nevertheless the compass is nothing in itself, for it only functions by reason of magnetic forces: it is the magnetic pole which decides the seaman's course, though the compass is his means for obtaining that guidance. In the

same way our faith is nothing in itself. We must be governed by the fixed point of the will of God. Faith, like the compass, enables us to adjust to that will and to be governed by it.

So it would be a mistake to turn from outward evidences in order to rely on the inward evidence of our feelings. We must not be ruled by the things we see, but neither must we be ruled by the things we feel.

SPIRITUAL FEATURES OF A WALK OF FAITH

The Christian's walk needs something more than a negative, a turning away from the things seen. Why, even men of the world can have guidance from within. They have, perhaps, an impulse or an urge, or else they are restrained by a sudden and quite inexplicable fear, an inner warning. Sometimes people have remarkable intuitive impressions which lead them to ignore outward appearances and act according to some inward sense. They have nothing to go by except the urge or the warning, yet not infrequently it turns out to be right. Now whatever may be the explanation of such phenomena, the fact remains that this cannot be faith. We must have something far better than this. Our feelings can be as unreliable as the evidence of things seen. For us the opposite of sight is not feelings but faith.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

It may be helpful in this connection if we ask what it is that makes the Christian differ from those whom we have just described. What have we which others do not have, and how can we distinguish true faith from the impulses of our own souls?

In the first place our faith keeps us very dependent on the Lord. We know Him as a real Person, and our faith is not a virtue separate from Him but that which links us closely to Him. The work of the Spirit within us is not detached and self-contained, but is an operation which keeps us in close touch with the Lord Jesus. We cannot see the Lord, nor can we hear His voice, so we cannot walk by sight, but we can have an inward awareness of His nearness and of His will, and it is for this that we need faith.

Then our faith finds its source and strength in the Word of God. It is not just a matter of reading or learning the Scriptures, but of acting in faith as the Lord speaks to us through them. Such faith involves a conviction that the Lord really means what He says, and that He will do what He promises. It also involves a complete committal to obey His will as it is revealed to us. We must not read the Bible to decide whether or not it suits us to obey it, but only to discover what is that will, to which we have already promised implicit obedience. Such a life in the Word will correct mere impulses or feelings.

Finally we should be always growing in our knowledge of the ways of the Lord. We must not be governed by *our* feelings; what we have to know is, what are *the Lord's* feelings. Perhaps this is included in Paul's claim to "have the mind of Christ" (I Cor. ii. 16). He did not mean that he always knew infallibly what Christ's will was, but that he had an intimate sympathy with the way in which his Lord looked at things. This is illustrated in I Corinthians iv. 17, where Timothy is put forward as one who had this same close relationship with the apostle himself, and could be trusted rightly to interpret his mind to the Corinthians: ". . . who shall put you in remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, even as I teach everywhere in every church." When Timothy went to Corinth, he would encounter new problems which could not immediately be referred to Paul; but he had such a close familiarity with Paul's principles and mental processes, that he would know almost instinctively how the apostle could be expected to view the case in point. This, surely, is part of our walk of faith. We learn by experiences—some of them painful—that the Lord likes certain things and disapproves of others. We must remember

these lessons, and profit by what we learn.

THE CONTRAST IN PERSONAL LIFE

Before applying this principle to ministry we must see what it means in the personal life of the worker, for it is there first of all that the walk of faith must be established.

1 FAITH MUST GO ON WITHOUT THINGS SEEN

From the beginning Paul knew what it was to have his own walk with God, a walk which did not depend on anything outward or on anybody else. It would be quite in accordance with his method of writing to render this statement, 'I walk by faith and not by sight'. How very true this was! At times he was cut off from all outside help or fellowship; at other times such fellowship was withheld by those who should have given it: yet this made no difference to him—he ran straight on with patience the race that was set before him, "looking away unto Jesus".

Directly after his conversion he was associated with the disciples at Damascus, but after a short time he went away into Arabia. This move was not the result of some personal caprice, nor did it spring from a spirit of separation; it was the will of God for him. But for a time it meant that he was found in circumstances where there were none of the comforts and inspiration which we get by proximity to other Christians. For that period there was nothing 'seen', not even of the things of God. This gap is not mentioned in Acts ix, where the narrative runs smoothly on as though there had been no such interval. This suggests that in his spiritual progress there was no marking time, and no lost ground to be recovered, as there certainly would have been if his life in prayer and in the Word had depended on meetings. When he first went to Jerusalem none of the Christians, not even the apostles, would give him any brotherly encouragement, until Barnabas put that right. And then at Antioch Barnabas himself parted from Paul and went off with Mark. Fellowship unobtainable, fellowship withheld, fellowship withdrawn! No man prized fellowship more than Paul did, yet he never let the lack of it hinder his onward progress with the Lord. He learned that faith must go on if necessary without any help from things seen.

This is the very first test of a worker for the Lord. Does he really have his own life in God, or does he depend on others? Is it the 'work' which keeps him going, or is it the Lord? Can he pray

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alone—and get answers to his prayers—or must he always have an audience?

2 FAITH MUST CONCENTRATE ON THE REALITY BEHIND THINGS SEEN

The Church is not just mystical ; it is very practical. The Lord Himself has ordered visible testimonies, and He expects us to obey Him in giving these practical expressions of our faith. But if the things are only things, or if they are chiefly things, we are missing the whole meaning of them, for these testimonies only have value as we lay hold of their spiritual truth and find them producing inward life.

Let us take, for instance, the matter of baptism. This will become merely formal, a thing 'seen', and so a hindrance unless we make it a matter of vital faith and concentrate on the reality behind what is visible. How sad it is when a baptismal service is robbed of its true power, even though the Lord's people are seeking to be true to the Scriptural command! This will surely happen if faith does not lay hold of the hidden and spiritual significance of the act. Is it just an occasion of rejoicing that new converts are openly professing their faith, an occasion when perhaps the more established believers indulge in sentimental recollections of the time when they were baptized? Does it involve a mental classification of the people of God, according to whether they have been through believers' baptism or not? If it is, then baptism has become largely a matter of what is 'seen'. Surely every such service should be a time when the spiritual meaning and challenge of baptism are brought vividly and with power to the conscience of all present. We should see through and behind the visible testimony, to the great fact of identification with Christ, and the Spirit should witness in the hearts of all present as to how much this is true and up-to-date. Baptism was not meant to be a "middle wall of partition", but a milestone on the road of spiritual progress.

The same is the case with everything else visible in the realm of the things of God. We make advances in the life of the Spirit according as we concentrate on the reality behind the things seen.

3 FAITH MUST LEARN TO TRIUMPH OVER THINGS SEEN

Appearances are sometimes faith's greatest enemies. Both at the beginning and at the end of this letter on ministry, we are told of experiences which seemed to prove conclusively that it was impossible for Paul to go on with the Lord's work. The

verdict of appearances was altogether against him. It was only the reaction of faith which made it possible for him to go on. These happenings did not take place at the beginning and end of his ministry, for there is no chronological order about them, but they serve as a reminder to all would-be servants of the Lord that from first to last they will find appearances to be fierce enemies, which can only be overcome by real faith. We would very much like to know what were these trials which came to Paul, but they are kept secret from us, so that we may give attention to the principles, which never vary, rather than to the accidents, which are different in every case.

The principles are two: Life out of death, and Strength out of weakness. The first affliction is described by Paul as "so great death" (II Cor. i. 10). The Lord allowed something to happen to His servant which completely overwhelmed him. It was meant to do so. Even a man like Paul was capable of taking things into his own hands and trusting in his own natural powers. He had to learn to let go, so that he could prove the reality of service in the power of resurrection life. We often try to 'lay hold', but all unintentionally we are making the work of the Lord a matter of our own strength and energy. We must 'let go' before we can 'lay hold'. When Paul had the "answer of death" in himself, he had the secret of true power, which is Life out of death.

The second trial is called "a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan" (II Cor. xii. 7). It does not seem to have threatened Paul's life, but to have pained and humiliated him. As it came soon after a special vision, we can well imagine that its effect was to make Paul feel that he could not go on with the outworking of that vision until it had been taken away. He prayed much to this end, the burden of his prayer being, 'Lord, remove this trial so that I can go forward with my ministry.' The answer was unexpected, but in keeping with the whole principle of walking by faith. For if the Lord had taken away the thorn in the flesh, Paul would have walked by appearances. He would have felt that now that the trial was no longer to be seen and felt, he was ready for God's service. To wait until the affliction had gone would be to walk by sight ; faith demanded that he should not wait, but go on, even with the thorn, getting the victory by the grace of God. This is what he did. All he had to go on was the Lord's assurance : "My grace is sufficient for thee"; but this was enough for faith. God's grace is not a thing which can be seen, but to faith it is mighty and all-sufficient.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

THE CONTRAST IN CONNECTION WITH
MINISTRY

So much for the principle in the personal life of the Lord's servant. Are there any further ways in which it applies to the work of the Lord in which he is engaged?

1 WE MUST NOT AIM AT APPEARANCES

We must not aim at appearances ; our objective must be more than just the thing seen. Now it is no excuse for a barren life to claim that we must not expect to see results, nor must we shelter behind the truth that spiritual values are often hidden. Paul's ministry was spiritual enough, yet it had very practical and lasting results. Nevertheless our work will lose its spiritual power if our chief concern is to get visible results or to justify ourselves to other people. What really matters is not what is seen now, but what will be seen when everything is revealed in its true light at the judgment seat of Christ (II Cor. v. 10).

It may be helpful for us to realise that Paul had no preconceived ideas as to the form and pattern of the churches which he was used to found. The letter to the Ephesians was not written at the commencement of his ministry, and it did not represent a blue-print given to him before he started, in order that he should set to work to build up churches according to a set pattern. He laboured on, largely in faith, learning even as he taught, and trusting the Holy Spirit to give substance and shape to the fruits of his ministry. Paul does not seem to have set to work to produce a federation of churches, identical in form and procedure. He had no set programme, but simply went on as he was given liberty by the Spirit, doing the next thing, but doing it wholeheartedly and with discrimination, concentrating on spiritual values rather than on conformity to a pattern.

The letter to the Ephesians shows us that there is a pattern, but it is essentially a heavenly one, and can only be realised by believers being brought into ever deeper union with the crucified and exalted Son of God. The apostle insists that all his efforts were directed to this one end: "to present every man perfect in Christ" (Col. i. 28). Nothing must hinder this ; nothing, however good, must deflect from this ; no sacrifice will be too great if it helps to produce this.

2 WE MUST NOT BE GUIDED BY APPEARANCES

If Paul had used his natural reasoning he would probably have concentrated his efforts on building

the church in two great cities, Jerusalem and Tarsus. We know that he longed to work in the Jewish capital, that he pleaded with the Lord to be allowed to do so, but we know also that he was never able to contribute to the work of the Lord in that city. We are not told much about Tarsus, except that Paul seemed to be proud to have been a citizen of such an important metropolis. He doubtless witnessed there, but we have no record of any seal from God upon it. On the other hand, may we not say that, from a natural point of view, he would never have gone to Philippi, and that, if he had judged things in Ephesus by the first unsatisfactory disciples encountered in that city, he would probably never have stayed there? Yet how precious and important were the churches in Ephesus and in Philippi, and how valuable the letters written to them! It seems very clear, then, that the apostle was not guided by the things he saw.

What, then, are the ruling principles of guidance? How can we avoid the snare of being governed by sight, and how, in the matter of ministry, can we walk by faith? Outward appearances must never be the first consideration. We cannot follow any set path, we cannot imitate others, nor can we repeat our own previous experiences in a mechanical way. Somehow we have got to find the way of the Spirit, and see to it that we are transparent and whole-hearted in our obedience to Him. Every movement must be born out of earnest prayer, and made with no other argument than a deep heart conviction that the thing is of God.

There may well be outward indications of the Lord's will, but we shall need spiritual sense to interpret them. The real question is not whether we enjoy our ministry, or whether people say kind words of appreciation about it or agree with it ; the real test is how much lasting glory to Christ is produced in those to whom we minister. Faith takes nothing for granted, but is always looking beneath the surface, to get its direction from that which the Spirit is truly sealing.

3 WE MUST NOT BE DISCOURAGED BY APPEARANCES

Paul tells us that this walking by faith kept him going when nothing else could have done. "We faint not" (II Cor. iv. 1). "Wherefore we faint not" (vs. 16). "Being therefore always of good courage" (II Cor. v. 6). "We are of good courage, I say" (vs. 8). If we are going to judge the prospects by what we can see, we shall certainly lose heart ; only faith can save us from despair.

Perhaps as he wrote these words Paul was think-

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ing of the Corinthians themselves. Enough is described or hinted at in the first letter to show us how tempted he must have been to give them up. The things seen at Corinth, not in the opposition from the world outside, but in the character of the church members themselves, must have made him feel that it would be easier to abandon them and to devote his time and strength to more promising groups. It was only faith which kept him from giving them up. The verdict of things seen was that nothing of vital spiritual importance could be hoped for from such a company. It was faith, though, which enabled him to ignore this verdict; faith, not in himself, nor in the Corinthians, but in the transforming power of his message.

Too often we are ready to give up because of what seems to be the poor response to our ministry. If we look at the people concerned, at their faults, their tardiness, their contradictions or at what they are in themselves, we shall be tempted to leave them and to seek an opening in some more promising place. But we must not be discouraged by appearances. Great changes took place at Corinth. Prayer was answered; the whole outlook was transformed—and all because Paul did not faint or lose heart, but went on in faith.

How good it was, also, that he did not lose heart about himself. Though by no means an old man, he seems clearly to have been thinking that his life's work was nearly over. He wrote of 'groaning', and "longing to be clothed upon with our habitation which is from heaven" (II Cor. v. 2), and confessed that for his part he was "willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord" (v. 8). Appearances said that

Paul was finished. Faith, however, enabled him to go on for at least another eleven years, and they were probably the most fruitful years of all. It is true that there came an outward change in the manner in which he served the Lord. Soon after writing these words he was imprisoned, first at Jerusalem, then at Caesarea, and finally at Rome. But through it all he did not faint. He was able to ignore all the discouragements, to be lifted above all his personal trials, and to take an active part in the work of the Lord, even though he could no longer do evangelistic journeys.

Discouraging appearances must never turn us aside from the work. When things seemed all against the remnant of the Jews who had returned from Babylon, they were ready to give up, saying: "The time is not come for the Lord's house to be built" (Haggai i. 2, mg.). Actually they were on the eve of great things for Jerusalem and for the Lord's house. All that was needed was that they should ignore the seeming impossibility of it all and get on with the building. They had to walk by faith and not by sight. When James was killed and Peter put in prison and the rest of the apostles forced to hide, faint hearts might easily have capitulated. The rank and file of the church, however, spurned the evidence of things seen and turned to prayer (Acts xii. 5). From that very night there began a new expansion of the whole Church of Christ in all the earth.

Which are we going to accept? The evidence of sight and senses, or the verdict of faith? Our whole life's ministry may depend on the way we answer that question.

H. F.

THE MAN GOD HAS ORDAINED

V. THE PROCESS OF REPRODUCTION

Reading: Acts x. 1 - xi. 18.

THE NEW CREATION MAN IN PROCESS OF FORMATION

ACTS x follows on what we were considering in our last message. It concerns this particular dispensation or age of the Holy Spirit, and the specific object which the Holy Spirit has in view during this age. We can put it in one phrase—the formation of the new-creation man. This chapter is a phase in that formation, and therefore a phase in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit.

It is a remarkable chapter. Much that is in it can

only be explained in the light of something very much bigger than the conversion of an individual. Not that the conversion of an individual is a small thing, by any means, but it would have been very easy and very much more simple just to have sent a preacher to Caesarea to proclaim the Gospel there, so that this one man heard it and got converted. Things like that were happening; that in general was what was taking place.

But there is a tremendous amount of—if I may use the word—'paraphernalia' about this that actually happened. It is something quite 'extra' and extraordinary, even for the general movement of the preaching of the Gospel in those days. That an angel from Heaven should visit the man, that

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the Holy Spirit should speak to Peter, that there should be these strange accompaniments of the sheet let down and the voice speaking, and many other strange features and factors, all indicates that this incident must be set in a realm that is, as I said, more than the conversion of an individual, however important that may be. It is a part of a great dispensational movement: all the forces at God's disposal in Heaven and on earth are brought into a 'combined operation' in relation to this matter, for the man in the case is not just a man—he is a representative.

If you think that that needs proving, you have only to look further into this book. You can see that this is a phase, and the outstanding phase, of all that is happening. You have only to step back two chapters—and remember there are no chapters in the original record, it is one continuous narrative—step back into chapter viii of our arrangement, and you have that extraordinary matter concerning the Ethiopian. Here was this man, holding a position of great power in the palace of the queen of the Ethiopians, who had been up to worship, and was now going back—a dissatisfied man. On his way back to Ethiopia, back to his seat of influence and activity, he has to pass by way of the desert; and the Spirit—the Holy Spirit, the same Holy Spirit—speaks to a servant of God, named Philip, in Samaria. Great things are happening in Samaria, very important things are taking place there, much is going on under the power of the Spirit; but the Spirit touches Philip and says, 'Now, go down toward Gaza, the way of the desert.' And Philip obeys. He is at the disposal of the Holy Spirit; he has no arguments and no personal objectives. There is nothing contrary about him—he is yielded to the Spirit. He obeys, and is brought into touch with this outstanding man, this representative man, this man who is right at the heart of everything in Ethiopia.

In chapter ix we meet with another man, even more outstanding than the last. Saul of Tarsus was undoubtedly an outstanding man in every way. Whatever we may think about his persecutions, we must remember that he did it in all good faith. For him it was conscience: he was being utterly conscientious. Yes, he was an outstanding man, and again, a representative man—a representative of a nation and a great nation, a man who had a place right at the very heart of things in that nation. And the same mighty movement of Heaven comes to him and lays hold of him. There are big things happening in relation to individual men.

And so we come, with the straight course of the narrative, to what we have in chapter x. Here

is another man. He is away up in Caesarea, the capital of the country, the very stronghold of Roman influence. All that Rome stood for was centred there. This man holds a place of power, position and importance right there, and so an angel and the Holy Spirit, as we pointed out previously, co-operated in relation to the winning of this representative man.

So we have an Ethiopian, a Jew, and a Roman: men representing nations of no small significance and influence. This is no ordinary thing. What is it all about? Well, as I have said at the beginning, there is a 'new-creation man' in process of formation. Out of this dust of the earth God is forming His new corporate Adam after the image of the One that He has in His own presence, in the likeness of His own Son. A new creation is in process of formation, and it centres in man—in a Man—and that Man is in the glory. But that new creation man that is being formed after the likeness of the Man in Heaven is corporate—the collective man after the likeness of *the Man*, the last Adam.

Well, the new creation man is firstly Christ, and you notice how everything circles round Peter's words—"Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God" (Acts ii. 22). And then in chapter x, verse 42—"He charged us to preach unto the people, and to testify that this is he who is ordained of God to be the Judge of living and dead". That word 'ordained' is the word with which we commenced our first meditation in this series. It is the Greek word from which we get the English word 'horizon': we may perhaps think of Christ as marking the horizon of everything with God.

So everything here is within that horizon. The Holy Spirit is working within the horizon of Christ, the new creation Man, the last Adam. He is the new creation personally in God's very presence, but then He becomes the new creation Man dominantly. He is governing everything here—not officially, but by His likeness. It is the likeness of this Man that is governing everything. God is working by the Holy Spirit to bring about something after the likeness of this Man, a collective man in the image and likeness of this individual perfected Man before God. And this Man is dominant, in the sense that His character dominates all the activities of the Holy Spirit: that is, the Holy Spirit is in action to bring about a collective reproduction of this individual new creation Man. Dominating the activities of the Holy Spirit is *what Christ is as man, according to God's mind*. Then follows, of course, the collective side of this, and that brings us here to these representative people.

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THE NATURAL MAN DISMISSED

Of what will this new-creation collective man be made? Will he be made of Peter and Cornelius and the Ethiopian? Not at all. You see, Peter is here very much in view as an instrument, and Peter naturally, according to his earthly life, is of Jewish constitution, Jewish mentality and Jewish horizon—very much of Jewish horizon by reason of his very blood and his birth and his upbringing. He is horizoned by Judaism, by Israel. That is how he is constituted. Cornelius—well, he is very Gentile-constituted. He is Roman, and he is very Roman, or he would not be a centurion. He certainly would not be in that place without being a Roman of the Romans. You know how these centurions were selected, on what grounds they were appointed. They were magnificent men, humanly speaking, splendid specimens, the best specimens of Roman life and training and discipline, and very thoroughly devoted to Roman interests. This man, being in Caesarea, is not a centurion of an outpost. He is at the heart of Roman influence in that part of the world, so that he is naturally Romanly constituted.

What we find, therefore, is not that these two men are brought into Christ just as Peter and Cornelius, but that they are disintegrated, broken up, broken down, put out, as to what they are naturally. They are born from another country, from above, brought into the kingdom of Heaven, brought into the 'new creation man' the Church, where there is "neither Jew nor Greek" nor Roman nor Gentile, but "all . . . one man in Christ" (Gal. iii. 28), and "Christ is all" (Col. iii. 11). You notice that even Peter has to be broken down, disintegrated, when he allows what is natural in his constitution to begin to influence his judgments and cause him to argue with the Lord. A transition has to take place in him, from the point at which he was commanded by the Lord to rise, kill and eat, and he said, "Not so, Lord" (vs. 14)—a transition had to take place, under this mighty breaking down of the Holy Spirit, to the point where he said, "He is Lord of all" (vs. 36). Notice, not only of the Jews—"Lord of all". That meant something very drastic in Peter's case, but it had to be done.

And so far as Cornelius is concerned—I shall say a little more about him presently—it is quite clear that in the issue of this he became a man governed not by Rome but by the Holy Spirit; under the influence not of what was natural but of what was spiritual; not earthly but heavenly. For you notice that the Heavens were opened—the Spirit of God from Heaven fell on them, and in so

doing made them different. But they both had to be broken down in what they were naturally, and formed again, another vessel, not according to nature but according to Christ.

THE SPIRITUAL EDUCATION OF THE BORN-AGAIN

Now just one further glance at Peter in this connection. Peter had already been born from above, he was already in the kingdom of Heaven, he was already under the government of the Holy Spirit, but even with such people as Peter—and none of us would claim to compare with him—the Lord will not allow any of the old natural influences to arise and control judgments and movements. Those influences have to be put back, there has to be still fuller, deeper conformity to the image of the Man who is not this or that, but is different altogether from all the rest. You and I must remember that, though we are born again, we are not permitted to allow our natural judgments, standards, conceptions or mentality about people to influence us. We have to get Heaven's estimate.

And what a revolutionary thing that is! Consider for a moment the contents of this sheet that was let down to Peter: four-footed creatures, reptiles, birds—and the inference is that they are 'unclean' birds naturally—just the very things that were forbidden in Leviticus xi to be eaten by the Jews. And Peter is informed that Heaven's point of view is altogether different from his. Although he may have the most utter conviction about this matter and his mentality may judge this people to be altogether outside the pale of the kingdom of Heaven, Heaven's view is quite different, completely different. Peter has got to learn not only what it means to be born from above, but what it means to be conformed to the likeness of the Man above.

There is a great deal to be done in all of us about this matter. We are so influenced by our own constitution, by our own make-up, by our own natural outlook, mentality or training, and we think God has got to come into line with that, conform to that and accept that. But the Lord is teaching us the very hard lesson that He does not accept our mentality at all, He does not accept our standards, He repudiates much that is a strong conviction with us, even religiously, and demands of us things that 'religiously' we would never do. That perhaps needs a little safeguarding, but I say it within the right realm and the right limits. What it amounts to is that when the Holy Spirit comes in we have to go out of court. He must be allowed to have His mind about things and people and

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ways and means, for He is not going to accept ours. Peter, as Peter naturally, will have to be set aside. It is a large part of our education.

And if that was true of Peter, it was of course much more true of Cornelius, because he was not yet born from above. He has got to be born from above—to cease to be Cornelius, the Roman centurion, and simply become a man in Christ. Thank God, there were all the possibilities of that with Cornelius. God had an open way with him.

Well, the Holy Spirit obliterated Peter and Cornelius and put Jesus in their place. That is what it amounts to, that is what He was working toward. But you see, the whole dominating objective is this Divine conception of a man as gathered up in the Person of Jesus Christ, a new creation man in Himself. His purpose is to gather into Himself, not *of* all nations, but *out of* all nations—there is a profound difference—to gather out of all nations that which will compose and comprise the collective new creation man. Let us therefore at once be ready to be stripped of all our national prejudices, to let go all those things which govern our attitudes and judgments. Let us be free for them to go, to leave us. Let us seek very much, earnestly and continually, to ‘know no man after the flesh’, but to know only Christ, to cleave to Christ, to make everything of Christ in one another.

Oh, may God give me, and give you, grace to make more of Christ—even when we may feel there is only a very little of Him—in other people. Fasten on to that measure, small though it may be, and make that the all-important, paramount thing. It is an absolute essential in our apprehension of the Body of Christ, and that is the very work of the Holy Spirit in this dispensation. If the Holy Spirit is in us and we know anything about registering the movement, the voice, the influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, when we pass a wrong judgment upon someone else or take more account of that which they are naturally than of Christ in them, we shall meet a rebuke, we shall sense a displeasure of the Holy Spirit. Ask the Lord to make you sensitive to the Holy Spirit in this matter, that Christ may grow and grow. We do make it difficult for Christ to grow in other people. We do get in the way of the Lord Jesus. We do tie Him up, because we do not seek to release Him and make the most of Him in one another. We are so ready to fasten upon the things that run counter to our prejudices and contrary to our ideas of what ought to be. Let us make more of the Lord Jesus. That is the setting of this tenth chapter of Acts, in its dispensational meaning and its supreme concern.

THE NEED OF THE NATURALLY MORALLY GOOD FOR SALVATION

In conclusion, I want to indicate briefly the bearing of this word upon the preaching of the Gospel. There are many aspects of the Gospel application of all that is going on in the book of the Acts. Take this man Cornelius. There are some grand things said about Cornelius. He is a very devout man, he honours God, he is a man who prays to God; he is a man of practical charity, he gives alms—that means he has the interests of other people at heart, he is not living to himself. As you look at him naturally, he is a fine man, characterized by an honest and pure spirit—there is no doubt about it. We wish everybody were as ready as Cornelius was to respond, to answer without argument, without prejudice. He was a fine specimen of a man: I expect physically he was that; certainly he was that morally, mentally and religiously.

And yet—and yet—Heaven and earth are combining in a mighty movement to get that man *saved*. Everybody would say, ‘That is surely enough; that man honours God, he is a God-fearing man, he prays, he puts his religion into practical expression. That man is unselfish, he is generous, he is kind in his actions, he cares for other people, he is full of charitable works: what more do you want? That man is going to Heaven, if any man is!’ And yet, I say again, Heaven moves, and Heaven moves earth: the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of the great dispensation, on the one side; on the other side, angels at work, co-operating. For what purpose?—to get such a man saved. He is not yet born again, he has not yet received the Holy Spirit. With all, he does not know the Lord Jesus in a personal way. He knows about Him, Peter says so. ‘You know all about what happened, you know the story of Jesus of Nazareth; but you do not know Him personally.’

Well, what are you going to make of that? That is not my interpretation, that is not my Gospel, that is not my prejudice: that is the clear statement. If anything could be more vivid, tell me what it is! Here is the point. Why, as I put it earlier, all this excitement, all this ‘paraphernalia’, all these extraordinary things? Why does Peter go up to the housetop and pray at 12 o’clock, and then want his dinner terribly, so badly that he sends downstairs and asks them to get something ready, and Heaven comes in and takes hold of his very hunger to make him to understand, appreciate, heavenly things, taking occasion by this to give this vision? What is all this about? Why

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should an angel go up there to Caesarea and visit Cornelius and speak to him, and why should it be necessary for him to send men and a soldier all the way from Caesarea down to Joppa—35 miles—and then for Peter to have to take the long journey back? Why all this, if this man is such a good man and is going to get through all right?

No, the new creation is something much more than religion, than praying, than giving aims, than being charitable. Christ is much more than that; the Holy Spirit is after more than that. You may say, 'I do not agree—I believe if you do your duty and you are kind and you recognise God and you go to church you will get through all right'. You take this account and read it again. This is a positive denial of any such thing, and to settle down in such a position is to assume something which is not true. There are many in the position of assumed salvation, and there will be for them a very great undeceiving unless something happens. This is not enough. The Spirit of God takes great pains to get even a Cornelius—as he did also with another devout man, the Ethiopian, who had been up to Jerusalem to worship God. Likewise Saul of Tarsus, a man who was utterly devoted to what he believed to be God's will, God's way. The Holy Spirit—Heaven—comes in in mighty power to get these people saved. Salvation is a very big thing, far transcending religion and a good moral character and many kindly activities. Salvation is far more than that.

But, thank God, Cornelius was prepared. Here is something very precious about it all. You may be like that—you may not be one of those who could be classed as an outrageous sinner and criminal and offender, marked by all those things which society calls bad. You may be God-fearing, you may pray, you may be doing many kind things; and yet, like Cornelius, you may still have, somewhere deep down, the feeling that there is some-

thing more. 'I am after something, I am reaching out for something; I do not know what it is, but I feel I need something more; all my praying and all my doing is only an expression of a longing for something—I want to get somewhere that I have not yet got!' That was Cornelius, and God took account of it and worked to see that he got what he needed and what his heart longed for. When Cornelius heard it, he instantly responded, and in effect said, 'This is just what I have been after! I did not know what it was, but this is it! This answers my longing, this answers my praying, this meets my deeply-felt need!' The very story at its end seems to say that. Oh, how full of joy and thankfulness they were! God had been doing something in preparation.

It may be that you who read these lines are prepared for something God has for you—you do not know what it is. Do not be deceived by the fact that you pray and go to church, even that you attend Christian conferences, or do kind things; do not be deceived. Be sure that you are positively born again—that you have received the Holy Spirit into your life, as a living Person, and know that He is there. Do not rest until that is true—otherwise there will be a grievous awakening and disillusionment. Do not assume anything. Demand that you *know*. The basis of your knowledge is the present, instant indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It may be that some longing of yours, some hunger, some unexplained and inexplicable feeling of need in you is just God's way of preparing you for what He offers, what He presents, and what He may be saying to you at this very moment. There is something more, and you will find that 'something' when you receive the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of the Man in the glory. That Man is God's satisfaction, and therefore He will be our satisfaction too.

T. A-S.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

THE STRANGER IN THE NEST

HAVE you heard the cuckoo yet? If not, I expect that you soon will, for no one can mistake his call, and sooner or later almost everybody hears him. But have you *seen* the cuckoo? Ah, that is another question. He is not easy to see; indeed, many people who hear his call year after year have never yet had a clear view of him. I must admit that I have only seen him properly once, and that, strangely enough, was as he was flying over a London street. Even then I could have had

no idea of his true story if it had not been told me, for while the cock bird flies about here and there, singing his own special song, it is the hen who is silently and hiddenly doing the work for which cuckoos have become so famous. She knows how to work in secret, even from other birds, and she manages to lay her eggs in their nests without their knowing about it.

Cuckoos really play a trick on their neighbours. Being unable to feed their own young, they de-

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ceive pipits and other small birds into hatching and rearing their chicks for them. The plot is made with great care and carried out with much wiliness. First the hen cuckoo chooses the right nests, then she watches them constantly, and at the right time lays just one egg in each nest. She is clever enough to take out one of the eggs which truly belong to the nest, so that the unsuspecting mother-bird goes on keeping the eggs warm and waiting for the little ones to be born, without any idea that really there is a stranger in the home.

And what a stranger! The baby cuckoo is no sooner out of his shell than he goes straight to work on his first main purpose, which is to have the whole nest to himself. Though he has only just been born, he has strong legs and he also has a hollow sort of back. By much effort he manages to get underneath the eggs or other chicks, and holding them on his back he works himself up to the top of the nest, and tips them out on to the ground. If he is to survive, everything else must be thrown out of the nest, so he wastes no time in seeing that this is done. The parent birds seem not to notice or to mind, and they begin with all their might to feed this one baby in the nest. He is all alone, so he gets their full attention, and indeed it takes them all their time to find enough grubs and insects for his food. He grows quickly, has a great appetite and an ever open mouth. So, hour after hour and day after day, the birds go on searching for food in order to rear this monster baby, which has been brought into their nest by a trick. The cuckoo grows much bigger than his foster parents; indeed sometimes they have to perch on his shoulder to put the food into his beak. Still they work on and on, tiring and wearing themselves out, till at last the young cuckoo leaves them and flies off to spend the Winter abroad. They do

not seem to realise that they are rearing an intruder and that in doing so they have been robbed of their own family of little ones.

No doubt this is necessary. God has so provided that cuckoos should be hatched and cared for in this way because their parents just cannot manage it themselves. In the realm of nature cuckoos are very necessary birds, for they have special beaks which enable them to eat tough and hairy caterpillars which would otherwise become a pest. Perhaps God meant them to be a warning to us about spiritual things. Their one egg in a nest means trouble and destruction for innocent birds, reminding us of the danger of letting something into our hearts which should not be there.

What is the stranger in the nest for a Christian? Surely it is unbelief in the heart. Just as the cuckoo secretly lays its egg among the proper eggs, and so spoils all else in the nest, so unbelief in the heart will not rest until it has thrown out all the things which ought to be in a Christian's heart. The cuckoo not only grows by greedily taking everything for itself, but it wriggles and pushes with all its might until the other eggs are thrown out. If unbelief gets into a heart it will grow bigger and bigger until it crowds out all the blessings of true faith, and all our time and strength will be wasted. Love will be thrown out, then joy, then peace. And so the intruder will take up all the space, demanding all our time and energy while robbing us of our true blessings in Christ.

The birds are deceived. They do not know any better. There is no need for us to be deceived, though, for the Lord can show us the secret dangers of unbelief and deliver us from the stranger in the nest. Let us pray the prayer of Mark 9. 24—"Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

H. F.

WE BEHELD HIS GLORY

(CHAPTER X OF VOL. II)

Reading : John xxi.

IT is fairly generally agreed that this part of John's record is a kind of after-inspiration. The main narrative closed with the comprehensive statement of xx. 30, 31.

We have to try to see why John should have had this reaction from his closure and should have felt constrained to append this further episode with its several aspects. He evidently felt it important and necessary to do so. Hence it must not fail to register with us as being something more

than an afterthought or a sudden recollection of an omission.

Firstly, we must realise that what is here is a part of Luke's emphatic statement: "To whom he also shewed (presented) himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God" (Acts i. 3).

This, then, is an integral part of the purpose of the forty days. The Lord's definite purpose in that period (which was probationary and testing: the number forty always indicates this in the Bible)

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was—on the one side to detach His Church (here represented in another symbolic number—seven) from an old, purely earthly, sentient and natural relationship with Himself, and on the other side to establish a new basis of that relationship and service, that is, a heavenly, spiritual, and universal.

John had just written concerning Mary's sudden recognition of her Lord, probably by the way in which He spoke her name (xx. 16). He said to her: "Take not hold on me". This would at least imply that the old relationship and its physical form (Mary had anointed His feet and head) no longer obtained, but had changed. It was now a spiritual one entirely. John's Gospel is the one of spirituality; he called the miracles of Jesus "signs", meaning that they were intended to signify spiritual truths and principles and not to be just mighty acts. So this last part of the record is full of spiritual principles. These we must grasp.

Having seen, then, that the first principle is the new kind of relationship, let us take that a step further. This new basis requires that the men of the new dispensation be spiritual men, and their work is to be spiritual work. This is exceedingly testing to the natural man. Indeed, he cannot stand up to it. Until he receives the Holy Spirit as an indwelling reality, and so becomes a spiritual person basically, all attempts to cope with spiritual things will be defeated. 'The natural man cannot know the things which are spiritual', said Paul (I Cor. ii. 14). Now this is borne out in the case of the central figure in the circle of disciples in our chapter.

PETER'S DEFECTION

It would seem evident that the new phase or form of things, which had come in with the Lord's resurrection-appearances and disappearances, was too much for Peter. He was no mystic. There was nothing of that in his make-up. He was just one of the very practical type, with whom policy is often more than principle. Things must just 'come down to earth', and be 'black or white'; one must 'call a spade a spade'. 'Let's see exactly where we are', they say. 'It is ends that matter, not so much how you reach them.' To such, anything that cannot be defined in obvious explanation is not real; indeed it is most unsatisfactory.

So Peter, not made for this 'uncertain' and 'illusory' kind of life, cannot bear it longer, and he says: "I go a fishing". 'That is practical and tangible, anyway, and we do have some qualification in that realm—we are at home there.' Sensitiveness and imagination are not the strong points of this temperament. It rides roughly over delicate

ground. Rough seas, and the practical features of a fisherman's life, are more in keeping with this disposition than tender lambs and foolish sheep. Indeed, it would sooner beard lions than feed lambs!

So 'I go fishing' is the reaction from the *seeming* uncertainties of the spiritual life. Peter was going to learn differently before long. Peter seems to have had a magnetic influence over others. Even the more spiritual John seems to have been affected by him. Although John had just recently outrun Peter to the tomb, his sensitiveness kept him from doing more than look in. But following up, puffing and blowing, came Peter, and he, without any such delicate restraint, 'entered in'. "Then entered in therefore the other disciples also". Unconscious influence! And so on this other occasion the rest said: "We also come with thee".

There is a strange and notable anomaly about this particular type of person. With all the physical venturesomeness, initiative, aggressiveness, and even self-confidence, there is the contrast between physical and moral courage, to say nothing of spiritual courage. Peter is a well-known example, and the particular instances need not be pointed out. This representative seven will learn the fundamental lesson of the new age which had dawned.

So "they went forth, and entered into the boat; and that night they took nothing." "That night"!

We now have the background set for the message of the important 'afterthought' or new urge of John in this 'appendix' (?). But let us note at this point that a very great deal of spiritual value—enlargement, adjustment, and eternal significance—may be bound up with frustration and disappointment. "That night" was a turning point. There is often Providence in reverses. Success along natural lines might seriously jeopardise or sabotage the whole spiritual intention of God! So, whether it be in a swift and almost immediate setback, or in a long-drawn-out sapping of gratification, a slow realisation forced upon us that we are getting nowhere in the things that really matter, the faithfulness of God makes reverses and abortive labour one of His ways of deep education.

So, then, the inclusive lesson of this chapter is that of—

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE NATURAL AND THE SPIRITUAL

Natural capacity. Natural disposition. Natural ability. Natural direction. Natural energy. Natural courage. It is so evident that the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost meant a change in this whole realm. Note that this was just the point

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at which things went astray. The Lord had "charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father" (Acts i. 4). Peter said: "I go a fishing". Jesus had said much about the coming Holy Spirit. Peter said "I", and they said "We". Very well, then, there can only be "nothing" along that line! This is the age of the Holy Spirit, and apart from His absolute government the story must be one of toil for nothing where the Church is concerned.

Peter seems to have had little capacity for the spiritual; he seems to have broken down at that point all along. See such instances as: "Lord, thou shalt never wash *my* feet"; "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee"; etc. But this capacity came in a new and wonderful way with the Holy Spirit. The same was true on all the other points mentioned above.

The Lord turned this many-sided difference upon one point, both in the symbolic act and in a final word. The point was—

ABSOLUTE SUBJECTION TO THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

All the natural grounds of assurance being exhausted—training, experience, facility, ability, the suitable season, etc.—the Lord issued a challenge. It was a critical moment. All natural arguments would have been naturally justified in flouting the suggestion.

But—it may have been the last resort of a forlorn hope, or something in the tone and manner of the command—they obeyed.

Peter ever stands out afterward as the man who, when Christ prevailed, moved into a new fulness in a new realm—I leave you to follow that out. He is *the* great example of the principle that subjection to Christ is the way of spiritual fulness. This was the lesson of the early morning—the new day. This was the Lord's meaning when He said: "*Truly, truly*, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither *thou* wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither *thou* wouldst not."

The Lord knew Peter—that there was, and always would be, that element in him of "*thou* wouldst" or "*wouldst not*", but that in progressive and final submission he should "*glorify God*".

In this Lordship of Christ two further factors existed.

One, the whole question of the nature and

quality of his love for Christ. It is so well known that in His threefold challenge to Peter (verses 15–17) the Lord used one word for love, while Peter used another and a lesser. We do not enlarge upon this, beyond pointing out that the quality of love is tested by our ability to let go to the Lord and empty ourselves of ourselves before Him.

The other thing is that—

SERVICE FLOWS FROM SUBJECTION AND LOVE

The Lord had more than once sought to inculcate this principle with His disciples—notably in the feet-washing incident (chap. xii). It was the principle of His own coming and service. Through Paul it came out in its fulness (Phil. ii. 5–8). He, our Master, emptied and humbled Himself, and became the Good Shepherd, laying down *His* life for the sheep. It was actuated, not by 'fondness', but by 'love'. Not by protestations of love (as with Peter), but by proved and *faithful*—undenying—love.

This is the heart of this dialogue between the Master and the servant, the Chief Shepherd and the under-shepherd, in our chapter.

As we have said, it represents a change of disposition in Peter. Some thoughtful, patient and humble care is required to "feed my sheep", "feed my lambs", and impulsive, erratic, blustering hotheadedness will not do; neither will self-will and self-confidence.

So the "*third*" time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after that he was risen . . ." (vs. 14) taught them the great principles of the new age of the Spirit into which they were entering:—

1. Christ can, and must, be known only after the Spirit now, not after the flesh.

2. When we have become spiritual men and women by having received the Spirit, this is actually a more *real* way of knowing Him.

3. Working in the flesh from our own impulses; reactions or lapses from this heavenly—resurrection—position into natural efforts and energies, will result in "nothing".

4. The Lord, in mercy and grace, does not leave us finally in the despair of such failure, but even allows—or orders—the failure to teach us the lesson that the way of abundant fulness is that of resurrection life and power.

5. The absolute Lordship of Christ is the supreme and inclusive law of life and service in this age, involving our utter submission.

6. That law may mean work for which we are

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not naturally qualified, or to which we are not temperamentally disposed, but for which ability comes by the fulness of the Spirit.

7. Although the situation is so strange and

mysterious to all our natural make-up, and we need new and other capacities, yet it is more potent, fruitful and permanent than all that we could do on the level of human natural abilities.

T. A-S.

THE MEANING AND PLACE OF PRAYER

(concluded)

Q. *Has God made any provision for such a high and holy relationship and service?*

A. *A full provision in His Son and by His Spirit.*

WELL might we shrink back from such a privilege and responsibility if the Lord had not provided for every need and disqualification of ours, and given us every encouragement to draw near to Him, and to live near to Him! It will help us to sum up this provision in two words, CONFIDENCE and HELP.

CONFIDENCE

What a lot there is in the Word about "confidence", about "boldness", about "full assurance"! A spirit of confidence is essential to prayer and indeed to the whole Christian life. If we are uncertain and unsettled in our relationship to the Lord our whole life is undermined. Let us remind ourselves then of some of the scriptures that inspire confidence.

"Having therefore . . . BOLDNESS to enter into the holy place BY THE BLOOD OF JESUS, BY . . . A NEW AND LIVING WAY . . . AND HAVING A GREAT PRIEST . . . let us draw near with a true heart in FULL ASSURANCE of faith" (Heb. x. 19 - 22, mg.).

" . . . our Lord Jesus Christ ; through whom also we have had our access by faith into THIS GRACE WHEREIN WE STAND " (Rom. v. 1, 2).

" . . . THROUGH HIM WE . . . HAVE OUR ACCESS IN ONE SPIRIT UNTO THE FATHER " (Eph. ii. 18).

" . . . Christ Jesus our Lord : in whom we have BOLDNESS AND ACCESS IN CONFIDENCE through our faith in him " (Eph. iii. 12).

True confidence is based upon the knowledge that **through Christ** we have an undisputed right of **entry into** the very presence of God, that He has **perfectly provided** for such access, and that He **Himself is our right** of entry so that we may ever draw **nigh to the Father** in His Name. We are not called upon to **present** our own names (how fatal that would be!), but are always able to come in His

Name—to hand in His Name, as it were.

The word "access" is a beautiful word, a word used for 'a presentation to a royal presence'. Christ has not only provided for the possibility of our return to the Father's House—He has introduced us, He has presented us to the Father as those redeemed with His own Blood and as those alive from the dead with Him! We have not to go into the palace on our own, in all our conscious unfitness, but we have One who takes us by the hand and leads us in, clothed with the robes of His own righteousness. It is Christ Himself who is our confidence.

HELP

Blessed as it is to have such an "access in confidence", well do we know our helplessness in the face of such a privilege. Somehow we feel so weak and ignorant that we should be dumb but for the Spirit's help. *But we have such a Helper*, for it is written: —

" . . . the Spirit . . . helpeth our infirmity : for we know not how to pray as we ought ; but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered ; and he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God " (Rom. viii. 26, 27).

In nothing is our weakness so apparent as in the matter of prayer! The complete paralysis of man by nature in regard to the things of God is never more clearly seen than when man tries to pray. How well we understand the difficulty of the disciples in Gethsemane, when they just could not "watch and pray". But the mighty Spirit of God is our Helper. We must rely on Him as the Indwelling Spirit, "the power that worketh in us", for He is the answer to our weakness. And He is the answer to our ignorance too, for it is very true that "we know not how to pray". The Holy Spirit is in us as the One who knows the will of God and all the details that lie within that will, and He will surely teach us how to pray in intelligent fellowship with the Father: He will make communion a reality.

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Let us then cleave to Christ our Confidence and the Holy Spirit our Helper.

Q. *Why is there such a conspiracy against prayer?*

A. *Because Satan is determined to cut our lines of communication with Heaven, and to prevent true prayer at all costs.*

We need to be alive to the fact that a relentless and continuous assault is being made upon the prayer-life of every Christian and of the Church. Satan knows that, if he wins the battle for prayer, there will be little else to worry about. We must WATCH, we must be alert, we must be on our guard, if we are going to pray.

This continuous assault of the enemy has some fairly well-defined aspects.

(i) There is the assault upon our confidence. If Satan can overwhelm us with a sense of our unworthiness and helplessness, he knows that we shall have no heart for prayer. We have already considered the answer to this.

(ii) There is the assault upon mind and body, upon our nervous and physical resources. We can be too tired, too exhausted to pray, and if he can the enemy will see to it that we are so. We must watch against an over-tiredness which is our own fault! For the rest we may count on the Lord.

(iii) There is the assault against specific times of prayer, both in our personal lives and in our life together. We all have experience of the deeply-laid plot, either to rob us altogether of our times of prayer, or in some way to neutralise them, to rob them of vitality.

(iv) There is the assault upon communion, upon our moment by moment life with the Lord, and the insidious attempt to get us 'out of touch'. Well we know that the enemy has many ways of bringing a cloud into our relationship with the Lord, of bringing something between. 'Ambushed lies the evil one' is not just a line in a hymn!

(v) And, finally, there is the determination of the enemy to keep us in the dark and out of the situations that really need prayer. Ceaselessly he strives to keep us occupied with our own affairs, so that our prayer-life is crippled and petty. We must not play into his hands through failing to gather fuel for prayer by looking out with the Lord upon His interests throughout the whole world. "The field is the world", and prayer recognises no smaller boundary as its responsibility. Let us then—

"Watch and Pray."

Q. *What is the Lord's answer to the limitations of personal prayer?*

A. *Praying together—the prayer of the Church.*

We are taking nothing from the value or importance of personal prayer when we recognise that in the will of God it has limitations. It is a law of the Kingdom of God that we cannot do without one another. In the very nature of things we need one another in Christ, and never more so than in prayer. Every Christian who is going on with the Lord finds it imperative to have fellowship in prayer, from time to time, over needs and situations which demand something more than individual prayer; and when it comes to the great matters of the Kingdom, only the combined resources of the Church are adequate. Perhaps we need to ponder afresh the significance of what the Lord said:

"My house shall be called a house of prayer" (Matt. xxi. 13) (to which we may add from Hebrews iii. 6: "whose house are we");

and again:

"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" (Matt. xviii. 19, 20).

The fact is that there must always be more of the Lord in our life together in Him than ever there can be in the experience of any one of us individually. There is something extra of the Lord in our gathering together in Him and unto Him. He is in the midst of the Church; He cannot be in the 'midst' of one! When we are really together with the Lord, we sense that we have come into a larger world of possibility in prayer, we sense an added strength for the battle, and this is what the Lord intends. And not only so, but it is so often in our prayer-life together that the Holy Spirit reveals His mind and burden, giving utterance to prayer which is truly the will of God. Much more might be said about this most important matter, but we must be content to leave it there, with just this final word, that the prayer of the Church is no substitute for personal prayer, which will ever lie behind and govern our prayer-life together.

Q. *What aspects of prayer are opened up by the master-key of communion?*

A. *Some of the varied aspects of the ministry of prayer are the following:*

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(i) *Sharing* our whole lives with the Lord is an obvious first aspect of prayer. We may and we must bring all the details of daily life to the Lord, for there is nothing ordinary or insignificant in the life of a Christian. Communion with the Lord about everything should be a spontaneous habit with us. (Phil. iv. 6).

(ii) *Ask! Ask!* The Lord loves to be asked, for He is a bountiful giver! And He loves to be thanked too! "If any of you lacketh . . . let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting". "Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss". (Jas. i. 5, 6; iv. 2, 3.) Asking implies dependence and desire, and these are very good things, when our motives are pure.

(iii) *Mediation, Intercession*: by which we mean our standing before the Lord for others, which is really fellowship with our great High Priest in His unceasing intercession for His people and their needs. (Col. iv. 12).

(iv) *Prevailing Prayer*: perseverance in prayer; the prayer of importunity. Here, we must first rid ourselves of the idea of a reluctant God. Prevailing in prayer is simply holding on for what you know the Lord wants. But why does the Lord require such long-drawn-out, long unanswered prayer? There are at least two reasons:

(a) He requires an adequate response in us to His own deep desire and concern, and
 (b) There are needs and situations which will only yield to such prayer. There are spiritual strongholds which require more than one or two assaults. (Matt. vii. 7, 8; Mk. ix. 28, 29).

(v) *Governing Prayer*: prayer in fellowship with Him who is "far above all", as one with Him in His throne; prayer in the authority of "the Name which is above every name". (Eph. ii. 6).

(vi) *Militant Prayer*: prayer that brings the victory of the Cross to bear upon situations; prayer that moves in the train of His triumph. (Acts iv. 23-31).

(vii) *The Prayer of Faith*, which, springing out of a Spirit-given certainty as to the will of God in a situation, issues in an immediate answer. (Acts ix. 40).

(viii) *The Burden of Prayer*: prayer that is travail, an entering into "the fellowship of His sufferings"; prayer in fellowship with the Father's heart, and in harmony with the yearnings of the Spirit unto the appointed Day of Glory! (Gal. iv. 19).

And this leads us on to a final question -

Q. *What does the Bible reveal as the central issue of prayer?*

A. *A glorious Church!*

The securing of a glorious Church for Christ, a Church worthy of Him, must be the central issue of prayer, for the whole Bible reveals it to be central to the heart and purpose of God. We must surely take particular note of such a disclosure of the Lord's heart as is given in His great prayer before the Cross (John xvii), and also note the prayers of Paul for the saints as revealed in his letters. This will take nothing from the scope and range of our praying, but it will give to all prayer a central issue and a single goal, and enhance the significance of each contribution by placing it in its true setting. We shall not pray less, but more, over this lost world, if we see that salvation goes far beyond the saving of a soul from death, into the limitless wonders of union with Christ in glory. And further, what greater need is there to-day than that the world should see something of the glories of Christ through the Church? The Church, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, should be the means of bringing challenge and conviction as well as blessing to the world.

In conclusion, the Lord is surely saying that He is wanting us all in an intelligent, ever-deepening fellowship with Himself. This is the meaning of prayer. He is wanting many sons in His presence in union with His One Beloved Son, our Lord Jesus; He is wanting many priests before Him in company with that Great High Priest who ever lives to make intercession for us.

"HE MADE US A KINGDOM, PRIESTS UNTO HIS GOD AND FATHER" (Rev. i. 6).

"A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD" (I Pet. ii. 9).

T. L. M.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

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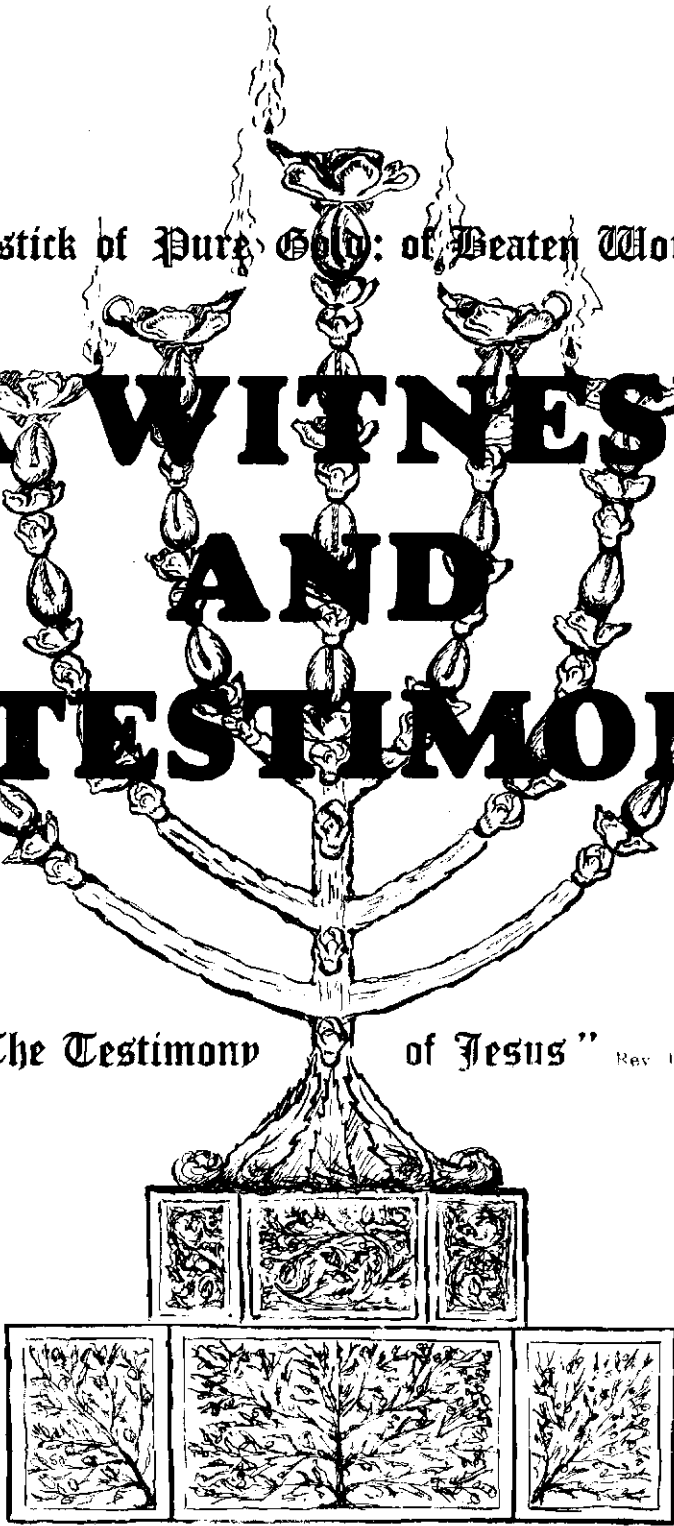
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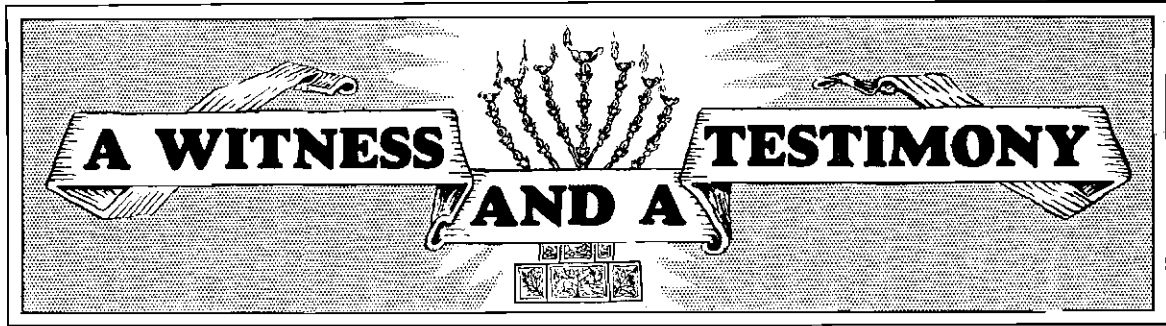
THIS MINISTRY

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

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

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



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THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF SERVICE

III. SOME LESSONS FROM ZACHARIAS

Reading : Luke i. 5 - 25, 57 - 67.

THE Lord is ever desirous of making His people know His real purpose in fulness concerning them. We need to come to a very settled position on this matter. It is not a question of how the Lord’s people may be at any given time. It may be that, as we have read here concerning Zacharias and his wife, and the people gathered there at that time, conditions are fairly good. We might think that this is quite a beautiful picture, that is just how things ought to be. There is the servant of the Lord correctly and faithfully fulfilling his ministry. There is the temple order being carried on correctly ; there are people gathered in the court, apparently in a great company, giving themselves to prayer. There is a spirit of devotion, and other characteristics, which present a picture which might be thought to be perfectly satisfactory.

But it is not a matter of whether at any given time things are apparently quite good, answering to much that the Lord has shown to be His mind, or whether things are maybe not so good, or even bad, as has been the case at times with the people of God. The point is always: Is this, after all, what God really has as His end concerning His people? It may be very good, and yet it may after all be only comparative—for that is the upshot of this very incident. It was good, yes, but it was not all

that God wanted, God had something more than that in view, however good it might be. The thing that governs all the way along is *the full thought of God from the beginning*, and until you and I have settled that, we have not settled many things. What we need to ask is: What more is there that is yet required by the Lord for completeness, for fulness?

And so our object must be, not to seek the comparatively good, not some more, some extra, some further light and truth, but to be with the Lord for His ultimate, His full, His final, His complete intention. The peril is to look upon what is very good and has the blessing of the Lord upon it, and settle down, and say, ‘ Well, why want any more than that, why not be content, why not just get on with that? Why not leave aside all the other questions, those disturbing questions, very disturbing questions, and just get on with what is so obviously quite good in the blessing of the Lord?’ No, the Lord shows by His Word, Old Testament and New Testament, that there is still something ahead, still something more, and it has never been the Lord’s way to let His people settle down with anything less. That is what is brought to us so clearly here.

GOD’S NEW THING

Let us look at this story again. The traditional order is being followed out meticulously. The priest is doing his work, the people are gathered

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to prayer, the temple routine is being pursued, the service of God is going on. And then, right in the midst of that, God breaks in from Heaven, and He makes it clear that He is purposing to take a further step forward in relation to the promised Messiah. God is here seen to be taking another step, and a very big step this time, in relation to His Son Jesus Christ. This story can be gathered very largely into those words of the seventeenth verse—"to make ready a people prepared for the Lord". But all this—the temple, the services, the priesthood, the people—was not this a state of preparedness for the Lord? The story says, 'No—only comparatively.' Something more and something else is required. John the Baptist must come in. Another very definite step by God is about to be taken.

Now God has always appointed to move toward His end along the line of priesthood, and all that that means, and so, in taking this further step, God moves in the direction of His appointed way, and, consistently with this, He makes His mind and His intention known. He lets the priesthood know, quite definitely, quite clearly, quite precisely, what His thoughts and His intentions are.

And He is immediately confronted with an obstruction. Right in that very place He finds His difficulty. Just where He ought to have a clear way, He finds the way is blocked. In the very midst of that which bears His Name, which stands in the long tradition of Divine things, He meets His main difficulty. A difficulty arises instantly with Zacharias—in the very priesthood, in the very house of God, and in the order of things which obtains—and it is almost an affront to Him.

NO NATURAL GROUND OF CONFIDENCE

Now, what were the features of this obstacle, this rebuff to the Lord? For it was nothing less than a rebuff that the Lord met here. If we could really catch the tone of Zacharias, I am sure we should discern something that was a challenge to the Lord, a question. What were the features of it?

First of all, this thing that God is making known, this thing that God purposes to do, has no natural ground whatsoever upon which to rest confidence. That is very searching. The whole matter of confidence arises. The first question raised is: 'Can we be sure? What about the reliability of this thing?' People begin at once to look round for the ground of confidence, and if they do not find it according to their established ideas, then this thing is doubtful, it is open to question. This is not in the recognised and established way.

That is what arises with Zacharias and Elisabeth. The recognised, the established way, is the way of nature. But the way of nature has no place here at all. It is quite in another realm. Elisabeth's childlessness, and their advanced age—it all puts aside any kind of hope, any ground of confidence, so far as the natural is concerned. And therefore, it not being according to what has always been, and what is always regarded as the right way, the regular way, the natural order—therefore it is a doubtful proposition, and even God has that doubt presented to Him. 'This is not according to tradition, this is not according to what we have always been led and taught to believe to be God's way of doing things. This is so out of the usual!' Is that an argument with God? Let us pursue it.

'This is far too spiritual, this is far too other-worldly, this is far too much for the earth! This makes demands for factors altogether beyond our comprehension!' Is that an argument to present to God? When God is going to do a new thing, has He got to confine it to human understanding, even to the understanding of religious tradition at its best? Has He ever done it? Must God reduce His infinite purposes concerning His Son to the comprehension of man's mind? Must He? Then it will become the measure of man and not the measure of God. But man finds this a point of great offence. It stumbled Zacharias and it stumbles the Lord's people. There is something in this that is altogether beyond us, something about this that we cannot grasp, we cannot understand. It is off the beaten track. It is not what we are used to, it is not what we have been accustomed to—so much argument. And because of that, because this thing is beyond us, beyond our comprehension and understanding, therefore it is doubtful, it is questionable.

Let us put this on the positive side. We have got to accommodate ourselves to the fact that the greatest things that God will ever do will always be beyond us, beyond our power of understanding, beyond our attainment in knowledge—even in the things of God. God is always going to take us out of our depth with His new thing. He is always going to prove that we in our own resources cannot follow Him, this is too much for us, God is making demands for which we can make no supply. He has got us completely out of our realm. That is God's way. That was the trouble with Zacharias, and so he presented God with this objection, this question. It was the fixed position of the traditional order of things that caused the difficulty with Zacharias.

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THE OBSTACLE OF PRIDE

And that fixed position had a very unfortunate effect. Think of the superiority and pride of Zacharias. He is in the presence of an archangel from Heaven—"I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God"—who has come down right alongside of Zacharias, and made an announcement concerning the will of God, and Zacharias has the effrontery to call him into question, simply because his position is so fixed. 'It has always been like this—this is the understood way of things. This other is so much outside the realm of our understanding, and therefore . . .' What pride can be ours, when we think we have it all and know it all, and have our position so fixed that even God Almighty does not stand a chance, because we have boxed the compass of spiritual truth. We have got the whole thing so set, so fixed, that the archangel Gabriel cannot move us.

Is that not terrible? Here is the priesthood arguing with an archangel! But that is spiritual pride. It was for that that judgment fell upon Zacharias. It always does fall upon spiritual pride. God cannot tolerate spiritual superiority, this terrible lack of adjustableness and submission, such as was shown in Zacharias—in a member of the very priesthood. If only we were broken, if only we were pliable, if only we were open enough for the Lord to do what He wants to do, whether we understand it or not, whether it comes within the compass of what has been in the past or not, or what is new or not, and say, 'Lord, this is beyond me—but, Lord, if You want to do it, I am with You for it', what things God could do, and how much more swiftly He could do them.

TESTIMONY SUSPENDED UNTIL ADJUSTMENT MADE

In the incident before us, God went on, but the priest's ministry became merely formal, inarticulate and tentative, until the lesson was learnt. I said 'formal'—he finished his course and went home. It seems to say to me that Zacharias was only wanting to get this job done to go home. He had to stay it out, he had to go on with the routine of the thing; but it had become a mere performance, and he was longing for the day when he could just leave it and go home. "When the days of his ministrations were fulfilled, he departed unto his house." The whole thing had become empty form, it had become inarticulate, dumb.

The point is this, that the real testimony was suspended until adjustment was made to the situa-

tion—until there was a recognition of the Divine, the heavenly, the spiritual, the supernatural, that which was outside of man's power of comprehension and execution. For, after all, the argument seems to have been, 'If we cannot do it, then it will never be done.' And that is very much the attitude of systematized religion. If it cannot do it itself in its own way, then the thing never can be done. And so the testimony is in suspense.

THE OBSTACLE OF CONVENTION

Now, when God moves from Heaven in relation to His Son and all those fulnesses which yet lie ahead concerning Him, what do we find? We find that His movements are not according to convention. Let that be settled. God does not move forward according to convention. God's great movements are always very unconventional movements. God refuses to be put into a box. He demands liberty to take us beyond any limits that we may impose upon Him. So often convention is God's main obstruction. The spiritual, the heavenly nature of God's developing movements is altogether beyond the understanding of men; and because man cannot understand it, he does not believe in it. He doubts it, he questions it, he throws suspicions upon it, he raises issues as to its soundness, if he cannot understand it, and therefore it is not acceptable to man, it is put aside.

GOD'S ACT A COMPLETE BREAK WITH THE NATURAL

But note: the instrument to be used—in this case John the Baptist—is God's act, and wholly God's act, not man's. That is the issue of this thing. If God is going to do something peculiarly related to the final fulness of His Son, it will be His act, uniquely God's act. John the Baptist was God's act, not the act of Zacharias or Elisabeth, nor of them jointly, nor of any other means or instrumentality. "A man, sent from God, whose name was John" (John i. 6). 'He shall be filled with the Holy Spirit from his birth'.

And John, being God's act, represents a complete break with the natural. That is seen in his very name. The name (the Old Testament Johanan) means 'God's gift', or 'God's favour'. When he was born, all the people of tradition said, 'Of course, his name is Zacharias: that carries on the old tradition, that secures the future in relation to the past.' But Elisabeth, the principle of spiritual discernment, said, 'No, not at all. His name is to be John.' And when they asked Zacharias about it,

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he said, "His name is John." 'We are not going to call him John—he is already called John.' It meant a complete break with tradition not to take his father's name. When God moves and raises up an instrument, so often it is a complete break with what men expect and demand.

Finally, if you do not accept it, if you do not believe it, if you do not come on to God's ground, that is an end of your testimony—you will be dumb. You may go on with your work, you may continue in the old system, but your days are numbered. You may uphold the old tradition, but in the true sense of *testimony*, you are dumb, you have not got a living message. The simple principle is of very wide application. If you do not believe God, then you have lost your testimony, and you

will not have a testimony, and if you are dumb it is because somewhere or other you have doubted God, argued with God, answered back to God, tried to reason with God. A real living testimony comes of faith. As soon as we begin to allow questions as to God's ways and purposes, methods and means, we shall lose our testimony, we shall become silent, our ministry will go.

But that, as I say, is a very wide and far application. We *must* be in line with God in His full purpose, though we may not understand, it may be altogether beyond us and our resources. We may see in nature no hope or prospect at all: yet, knowing that God means this, we believe God, and our mouths are opened and the ministry is given. May the Lord teach us what this means.

T. A-S.

"THAT I MAY KNOW HIM"

(A PRE-CONFERENCE MESSAGE)

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed unto his death" (Phil. iii. 10).

IN this matter of knowing the Lord Paul might well have stated that his great concern was that others might know Him, that everybody should know Him. This would, of course, have been a true expression of his ministry as he travelled from place to place, and yet it would not fully have represented the one great concern which governed his whole life. He had one supreme longing, which included every other holy desire, and that was to have a better and a fuller knowledge of his Lord. Like the apostle, we are full of joy that recently so many have come to know the Saviour, and we are continuing in prayer that many more may come into this knowledge; but we are challenged by his words, "That I may know Him". How well do we know the Lord? and what price are we prepared to pay in order to get to know Him better?

We are rather surprised at Paul's confessed lack of knowledge of his Lord. If ever a man had intimate fellowship with Christ, that man would seem to be Paul. As a matter of fact the confession reveals how much he did know, for it is the man with little knowledge who thinks that he has it all. We may, perhaps, be forgiven in the first few days of our Christian life for thinking that we know it all. That is a mark of immaturity. As time goes on, however, we ought to be impressed with how very much more there is to know of Christ, as Paul certainly was.

THE ESSENCE OF ALL PRAYER

The words are really like a prayer, a prayer born not so much of his own desires as of a sense of what God desired. This was not his own idea, but a perception of the fact that more than anything else God wanted him to have an ever fuller knowledge of His dear Son. "That I may know him".

In a sense this prayer is the essence of all prayer, the one great petition which includes all the lesser. We must pray for ourselves. Some people pray only for themselves, and that, of course, is very bad. It is possible, though, to get into the way of praying only for other people, and that is also bad, though perhaps not quite so bad. But what shall we pray for ourselves? What matters most? Surely it is that we may be more like our Lord. This is the essential prayer behind all prayer. Our prayers may be about personal concerns such as sickness or health, movements or jobs, or they may be about our work for the Lord, with its questions, difficulties or opportunities; but in these and many other details which go to make up life, the one prayer which should lie behind all others is that, in it all, we may learn more of Christ. That is what matters most to God, and it should therefore matter most to us.

The same basic concern should govern our united prayer. We have reached the eve of another Conference. It is quite reasonable that those who are newly among us should ask why we have these Conferences. It is also right that those who have been longest here should ask the same question,

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for the ones who are responsible have prayerfully to re-examine the matter before the Lord from time to time, so that we shall never fall into any dead routine. It is not just for the sake of multiplying meetings. It is certainly not to propagate any special teaching of our own. We know of no special 'Honor Oak teaching'. What we do seek is that on such occasions we may gather together around the Lord's Word to learn more of Him. That is our purpose—"That I may know him". It may be that certain truths relating to that knowledge have to be recaptured or re-emphasized, truths that perhaps have not hitherto been appreciated as they should have been. What matter, so long as they lead us to an ever deepening knowledge of Christ? That, surely, is the sure test of all ministry of the Word. Our Conferences, then, are meant to be occasions when we come together in an attempt to help one another to a richer, deeper, fuller and more vital knowledge of the Lord. "That I may know him". Anything else is a sheer waste of time.

THE SECRET OF ALL SERVICE

This objective, far from hindering us in our work for the Lord, is the Divine secret of all true service. To "know him" is very closely associated with knowing "the power of his resurrection". God knows, we need power! His Church needs power; His servants need power; we all need it. But in the Divine order, power for service is made to depend on this personal knowledge of Christ. Service, even if it is successful, lacks the essential thing if it is not accompanied by a true knowledge of the Lord. All service should spring from that knowledge. Not that we must allow this truth to paralyse us in our work for the Lord, vainly imagining that we cannot begin to serve until we have some deep knowledge of Him. Not at all—we learn as we serve. Learning of Christ and serving Him must go hand-in-hand; the one must never outstrip the other.

There are, of course, many perils associated with this matter of serving the Lord. We do not need to look beyond this letter to the Philippians to find those who had fallen into such perils. There were men who were earnest and busy, perhaps in a certain sense self-sacrificing, in the work of the Gospel, yet they gave way to unworthy and even vindictive feelings toward others of God's servants. They "did not so learn Christ". Paul was able to thank God for the work they were doing, but he was forced to regret the un-Christ-like spirit in which they were doing it, even though he himself bore them no bitter feelings. Motives may not be apparent now, but in Heaven's sight they are of

supreme importance, and there must be something badly lacking in work for the Lord if it does not make the worker more like his Lord. In Philippians ii, 21 Paul writes: "For they all seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ." He was not writing about people outside of the churches; he was not even speaking of the ordinary church members, as such. Sad to say he was describing those who should have been, and in some cases had once been, his fellow-workers, and who were no doubt still busy 'in the work'. It is very easy for those who are active in service to become jealous, unkind or self-seeking, and indeed we shall fall into this peril unless we make it our first prayer "that I may know him".

Another great peril is to be so busy in the work as to be careless as to personal relationships with the Lord whose work it is. I suppose that when the Philippians thought or spoke of the apostle's stay among them they were most impressed by the great work which he had done in their city, but I am quite sure that Paul himself dwelt most on the new lessons which he himself had learned there. He learned more of *Christ* at Philippi—even in the dungeon, and in the grace given him, when the doors burst open, not to seek his own safety in flight, but to seek the salvation of his guard, without at the time knowing whether or not he would forfeit his own liberty in so doing. "That I may know him": here is the safeguard from the perils associated with service. It is a purpose which will not make us work less, but will inspire us to richer service.

THE CAUSE OF ALL THE CONFLICT

Such a purpose is strongly withstood by Satan, so that to gain such knowledge Paul affirmed his need to "press on" (verses 12 and 14). One does not drift into a fuller knowledge of Christ, nor does one come into it by merely repeating a prayer that the Lord will empty us of self and fill us with Himself. There is more to it than that. Not that we can achieve anything by self-effort, but we need to know that the one focal point of all the Devil's attacks is to keep men from knowing Christ. He does all he can to keep a sinner from knowing Christ the Saviour. When he has failed in this respect, he seems to redouble his efforts to prevent that person from entering into a deeper knowledge of the Lord to whom he now belongs.

"That I may know him". Satan fights even the idea, by raising prejudices and suspicion at the very suggestion that there is some deeper knowledge and experience for the people of God. We only have to read of the early days of the Keswick

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Convention to prove this. In those days there were a few godly men—pioneers in a sense—who stressed the need for Christians to press on from the mere fact of their conversion into new heights and depths of spiritual knowledge, and they encountered every kind of misrepresentation and prejudice. It is so facile to charge other Christians with pretending to be superior; it sounds so modest to affirm one's satisfaction with 'the simple Gospel'; but may it not be, after a.l., that the real truth is that Satan is seeking to rob them of their full inheritance in Christ? Prejudice is one of his master weapons.

Moreover Satan contests every practical step which will lead to such a fuller knowledge of the Lord. At every phase of Christian life, from the first stage, all along the way and right to the end, there are always practical matters which arise in regard to spiritual increase. The first of them, perhaps, is baptism. It was with the Philippians, anyhow. There is no doubt that their church was among the most vital and Christ-like of them all, and we cannot fail to be impressed with the immediate and whole-hearted way in which baptism followed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are always being faced with challenges to practical obedience. They may seem nothing in themselves and yet they may be the key to knowing the Lord better. For this very reason the enemy seeks to involve us in questions, arguments and delay. The only answer to him is to say: "I press on . . ."

We always need to remember that the Devil is *unscrupulous*. There is nothing that he will not try to do if it can keep someone from knowing Christ better. Make no mistake about it—this conflict concerning an increase in the knowledge of Christ is very fierce. Satan will stop at nothing; he will use anybody or anything to turn Christians aside from pressing on with Christ. It was solemn and most striking at Wembley to hear Mr. Billy Graham close his meetings with a grave warning concerning the converts: "Whoso shall cause one of these little ones which believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck . . ." (Matthew xviii. 6). There was clearly a need for it to be said, concerning these newly born Christians. But is it not equally serious, all through, that we should not do the Devil's work in turning believers aside from knowing more of the Lord?

THE PURPOSE OF ALL FELLOWSHIP

This letter makes much of Christian fellowship, and it is in this setting that Paul speaks of his personal longing to know Christ better. Why do we

emphasize the importance of the House of God, the Church, the life together of the saints? People will say that, if they have the Lord, that is enough: why bring in these extra things to add them on to the knowledge of Him? Why indeed, if that is what they are? It would be foolish and wrong to introduce anything extra to Christ. But church life is not that, for it is all IN Christ, and moreover true fellowship together is intended by God to provide the means by which the individual believer can grow in the knowledge of Him.

Practical fellowship in the House of God may demand discipline, but it involves no real limitation to the individual. Of course, such fellowship requires the inward working of the Cross, and so at times it may seem to make less of us. But there is no *real* limitation. It is in the very nature of the Cross to reduce, but such reduction proves only to be God's way of enlargement. If the letter to the Philippians stresses fellowship, it also says much about the crucified life: "the power of his resurrection" is followed by the words "and the fellowship of his sufferings". This is the way the Master went, and we find our fellowship with Him and with one another only as we go the same way. Before Paul could "press on" he had to 'let go'. And so must we. Christ, however, entered into His great fulness by His self-emptying for the glory of God. Following in the footsteps of his Lord, Paul found that great spiritual enlargement came to him by way of the Cross. It is always like that.

It is, however, negative and altogether inadequate just to say that fellowship with others will not bring us into limitation. The truth is that the discipline of fellowship will bring us into an increased knowledge of the Lord. That is what it is meant for. Both by the joys of fellowship and by its problems we are drawn closer to the Lord to learn more of Him. Those who deliberately dissociate themselves from other Christians are thereby limiting the Lord in His desire that they should know more of Him. Those who make their fellowship selective, associating only with those whom they like or with whom they agree, are really robbing the Lord of opportunities to give them a fuller knowledge of Himself.

THE PREPARATION FOR HIS COMING

The particular paragraph which we have been considering leads straight on to the declaration that "we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory . . ." (Phil. iii. 20, 21). The Coming is to be for us the climax, the last act of a process of trans-

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formation. There is nothing in Scripture to warrant the idea that once we are saved we remain in a static condition, until suddenly, in a moment, we are transformed into the image of Christ, at His return. We are expected to pursue a steady course of being conformed to Him, growing in grace and in His knowledge, persistently putting off the old man and putting on the new, all with a view to that final, miraculous transformation when, seeing Him, we shall be like Him (I John iii, 2).

The final act of redemption will be the deliverance from all the weaknesses and failings of our mortal bodies. We are to be given a new body of glory at His Coming, but the preparation for that

Coming, and the challenge associated with it, is this matter of our knowledge of Christ in terms of likeness to Him. To Paul, deeply impressed as he was with the imminence and importance of that Coming, nothing else mattered but to know the Lord better. Everything which distracted him from that pursuit was loss and not gain; everything else in his life and service was regarded, not as an end in itself, but as a means of realising his one great prayer: "That I may know him". Whether we are newly converted or experienced Christians, we all need to make sure that this is the supreme purpose of our lives too.

H. F.

THE MAN GOD HAS ORDAINED

VI. GOD'S STANDARD OF JUDGMENT

Reading : Revelation ii, iii.

SEVEN is the governing number of this whole book of the Revelation. We have the seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, seven angels, seven spirits of God, and so on. We know that seven is the number which speaks of completeness and fulness. God ended His works and rested from all His labours on the seventh day. The seventh is the sign of completeness: the works were complete. So that when we come to seven churches, we at once find ourselves in the presence of something which is being judged as a whole, in completeness—the completeness of the Church in itself and the completeness of the Church in all time. I am not staying with those details of Biblical exposition which are familiar to everybody. This is not an exposition of the book of the Revelation, and so we are not touching on any of the theories which have been propounded, such as whether these seven churches represent seven stages in the dispensation, and so on. That does not concern me at all just now, and I do not think it should concern us so much as it has done, because theories as to times are quite unnecessary here. At any given time you will find conditions such as marked all these churches. You may find them all simultaneously in different parts of the Church. In the Church scattered over the earth to-day, different parts may be marked by all these things which are found here in the sevenfold message. So we can dismiss those technicalities and say that what is really being brought into view is that the Church as a whole, in itself and for all time, is being interrogated by this Man, and by

the standard which He represents as the Man according to God's heart, whom God has made the horizon of all judgment.

THE LORD'S UNALTERABLE STANDARD

The next thing with which we find ourselves confronted is this. As we come to the sevenfold message to the Church, we are brought right to the very heart of God's purpose. We are compelled to take account of one thing, and that one thing is that the Lord will not accept a lesser standard than His full thought for the Church. However we may cringe, however much we may dislike that, however much we may try to get round it, here it is. The Lord will not accept anything less than His full thought concerning His Church, and He is going to have it. We shall see, as we go on, that He may not have it, in the first instance or at the beginning, in the whole Church, but He will have it somewhere. That is the heart of things.

Many difficulties and questions may arise in this connection. When there is a presentation of God's full thought concerning His Church—when we come to these wonderful revelations of the eternal counsels and purposes as we have them in some of the later letters of Paul, and when they are presented, expounded, explained to us, and the Lord throws light upon them and shows how great, how perfectly astounding and marvellous are His conceptions concerning His Church, and what that involves and necessitates—our immediate reaction, and in a sense a very natural one, is, 'But only one in a thousand sees it, one in a thousand has any apprehension of it! And as for

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entering in, going on, coming to expression of it—well, look at the Church! where do you find it?’ And because that is true, alternatives have been sought and back-doors have been fled to.

Now, the fact is this—and I bid you to confirm or, if you can do otherwise, repudiate this by the Word. The fact is that, in the Word of God, God has never made provision for anything less. You say, ‘Well, what is going to happen to all the other people who have not seen it, or who have had it presented and just do not accept it and will not go on? What is going to happen?’ The Lord does not give a provisional revelation, that, if they do not—well, it is all right, He will be comparatively satisfied, He will accept the situation simply because He cannot do otherwise, He will make the best of a bad job. There is nothing like that at all. There is plenty to indicate that failure to go on to the fulness involves in very serious loss, very serious consequences; if not in the loss of salvation, at least the loss of the great purpose of salvation. There is plenty there, but nowhere will you find the Lord saying, ‘Well, we will put this lot of people into a second category, and be quite satisfied with them where they are.’ The Lord always keeps His full standard in view, and says, ‘That is what I am after, and I will never be satisfied unless I have it. Satisfaction for Me is found only in fulness, in completeness.’

That is the real upshot of these messages. While there is so much that is good in the churches, so much commendable, the Lord does not settle down and say, ‘Well, that is very good, very nice; I will be content with that, I will be satisfied with that.’ Men very often have to do that, but God never. There is no provision for a lower standard and no reprieve given to a lesser measure. He holds us to the fulness of His original intention. So He presents the Church, not with a second-level challenge but with a first-level challenge. He is judging here—not in a second man of an inferior type: He is still judging in the Man who is complete and perfect before God. That is God’s horizon.

The next thing—perhaps, in the light of some people’s ideas, this needs to be said—is that these churches are composed of Christians. There has been a theory put forth that these are only professing Christians and not real Christians; that these are professing churches, not real churches. Well, I am not accepting that. These are churches with a history, a spiritual history, and the challenge is on the ground of that from which they have fallen, that which they have lost, and that which they have let in. They are Christians. “Thou didst leave thy first love. Remember . . . whence

thou art fallen”. “Thou sufferest the woman Jezebel”. (ii. 4, 5, 20). They have a history, a spiritual history. They are not merely professors. It is what they have allowed to happen to them and amongst them. So this is not just an attempt to get people saved. It is an effort to get Christians where they ought to be. That of course is very simple. I am quite sure it hardly needs to be emphasized, but we take it on the way to the objective in view.

DISTINCTIONS MADE BY GOD
AMONG CHRISTIANS

And here we come to something which is of course the ground of much controversy, but about which we have to be very bold and take the consequences. This book of the Revelation reveals, clearly and unmistakably, distinctions and divisions made by God amongst Christians. God makes distinctions and God makes divisions, and the whole book is full of that fact. These divisions are not the schisms in the Church, the divisions in the Church, with which we are so unhappily familiar, but God’s divisions, God’s distinctions—yes, God’s separations. There are distinctive companies here, indicated by various titles and designations.

There are ‘overcomers’ and they are distinct from the rest. There is a ‘firstfruits’ company, and you will find that they are distinct from the rest. The very word and title itself would have no meaning if there were not a ‘second-fruits’—if there were not others. There is the ‘hundred and forty-four thousand’, a distinctly marked out company, different from the rest. There is the ‘bride’, and language does not mean anything if that which is meant by the bride comprises all. There are those who are ‘bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb’. They are not the bride. I could follow that very closely. If the Lord wills, we shall devote our next study to this matter of the bride. But my point at the moment is this, that here in this book there are distinctive companies, there are divisions made by God between His own people—believers—and they are marked out in the main by spiritual measure. Spiritual measure determines their distinctiveness.

DISTINCTION ACCORDING TO SPIRITUAL
MEASURE

What is the meaning of firstfruits, if it does not mean they are ripened before the harvest, before the rest? You have only to go to the Old Testament for that. The sheaf of the firstfruits was that

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which ripened before all the rest and was brought in as a token of what was to follow. Ripeness indicates spiritual measure. It does not say that the others will not come to that—do not misunderstand me. It does not mean that others will not follow on and come. But it does mean that here are those who are earlier satisfying God's standards, who have matured more quickly, who have responded more readily, who are spiritually leading the way. They are not an 'elect of the elect', they are not people who are exclusive. They are representative: yet they are at the same time distinctive, because they have more readily and more quickly come to that place of satisfying God's heart, and that of course has involved them in particular and peculiar difficulties, adversities, sufferings and conflicts.

But again to our point: there are these, and there are the rest. *These* are not *all*. They are something distinct in themselves. I do not think we can get away from that, if we honestly face this book in a spiritual way. We cannot escape this fact, that God marks out people as distinct according to their spiritual measure, according to how far they satisfy His fullest revealed mind. And those people will come to a particular position, will be invested with a greater measure of glory, will be entrusted with administration. These are all things which follow. That is what the Lord is set upon, and that is what this book clearly reveals. So that these distinctive companies in the first place represent an approximation to the characteristics of the full revelation in the Man in chapter i: they are like Him, they partake of those characteristics which we have studied; and, secondly, they enter on to the vocation of the Man in the glory: spiritual administration now, and both spiritual and literal administration later.

GOD'S CONCEPT IN CREATING MAN

So we are brought to this, that the dealings and judgments of God in Christ by the Holy Spirit in the Church must be viewed in the light of the full conception and purpose which has been presented. These dealings must be considered in the light of the revealed purpose in fulness. Now inasmuch as it is the new-creation Man who is governing everything personally, and the concept of the new-creation man corporately that is governing all these judgments, we find much light thrown upon things from the first creation, which was a material, temporal, earthly representation of heavenly principles. We mentioned this earlier; suffer a repetition.

(a) GOD-LIKENESS

What was the concept that governed God in creating man? What is man intended to mean, to *be* in his very being? "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness": he is intended to set forth what God is like in His own Being and Person. That is the governing concept of man. The first man failed of it; the last Adam achieves it, reveals it, manifests it. This Man is tested, tried and proved to the very last degree: tested as to obedience, love, faithfulness unto death, even the death of the Cross; and He comes up as the Man who wholly satisfies God, in showing what God is like. So that, when you look at this Man, you can say, 'Now, that is what God is like.' When you hear this Man speaking, you say, 'That is what God is like.' You hear Him giving some of His illustrations and parables, such as that of the Good Samaritan. The priest passed by on the other side, and so did the Levite, and the Lord Jesus is saying, in effect, 'God is not like that—that is exactly what God is *not* like!' But then comes the Good Samaritan, as he is called, and he crosses the road and takes in the need and distress of this poor fellow, and delivers him, brings him home and pays for his needs. The Lord Jesus is saying, in effect, 'That is what God is like.'

Or take the prodigal, with the elder brother representing the Jewish conception of God. The implication is—That is not what God is like. God is so different. This poor fellow who is worthless, who has no claims whatever, who has forfeited every right—a wastrel—the Father does not just pity him, and say, 'Come home, you rascal, I will give you a bed and a corner'; no, he lavishes everything upon him and goes as far as he can possibly go, as though to one who had not failed him, but had completely satisfied him. And the Lord Jesus is saying, in effect, 'That is what God is like.' So you look at Him in His Person, in His manner of life, in His teaching, and you have this contrast—what God is like and what God is not like. That is what is making people so miserable, so unhappy, so enraged—they feel what a poor picture they are in the presence of this Man and what He says. They make right deductions when they conclude that He has said this about them, against them. They are right.

Here, then, in the Revelation, He is brought out in all the completeness of the Man made in the image and likeness of God; and that is governing—the whole corporate new man. I want to press this as a very real part of this message, for if we take what is said merely as teaching, interpretation,

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and so on, it will all be of no profit. We have got to be motivated by this primary consideration: that in the new-creation man, which we are in Christ, the thing that God is looking for is His own likeness. What matters most is not how much teaching we possess, how much Bible knowledge we have, how much work we do. What matters is: How much is the Lord manifested? It should really engage us continually. This should be the basis of our self-judgment, of a right kind. 'That was not Christ, that was not like the Lord, this is not like the Lord.'

'Ministry' is the cause of so much trouble. 'My ministry', getting a place for our ministry, being able to fulfil our ministry. Oh, let it drop. The Lord will test us on this matter. Are we going to hold on to our ministry, our place, what we believe to be our Divine calling—hold to it in the strength and tenacity of our own will, our own fleshly conviction that that is what God has called us to? Oh, no! If God has called us to anything, He will hold us into it, and we must let go to Him if there arises a situation in which that is necessary. The Lord will see that the ministry is fulfilled and the position occupied that He wants for us. The thing that is far more than the ministry, and out of which the ministry must come, is that I should be a Christlike man, and that you should be a Christlike man; and we can show Christlikeness in just letting others get into our place in ministry, being very meek about it, not fighting to keep our position. The Lord will look after the rest. "The meek shall inherit the earth" (Matt. v. 5). That is God's word. The image of the Lord is the all-governing matter.

(b) SPIRITUAL GOVERNMENT

Then—"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion." Now, dominion issues from likeness. We are not talking about offices and appointments. We are talking about spiritual matters: for dominion now is a spiritual matter. That is obvious, of course. Dominion with us is not at present temporal. But dominion is none the less a very pertinent matter. This word in Genesis—"Let them have dominion"—is the earthly, material, temporal representation of the spiritual reality, and the spiritual reality of which it is only a representation is found in Ephesians vi: 'principalities and powers', 'world rulers of this darkness', 'hosts of wicked spirits'. And the Church is seated together with Christ in the heavenlies, "far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named" (Eph. ii. 6; i. 20, 21). There is a proposition for you and for me! It is a question of domin-

ion in the spiritual realm, the Church's dominion in the spiritual realm. This man, this new-creation man, is to have it, and we are brought into it in a spiritual way in Christ.

Now, you see, it is just here that our education is so much at stake, so much involved. There are numerous situations which the enemy projects. Why did the Lord let Satan come into that garden? The Lord knew all that was involved. Why did He let him get in there? Just for the very purpose of giving the man the chance to exercise his dominion: because the Lord knows quite well that back of the material is the spiritual, back of the world and flesh is always the Devil. You have not conquered when you have only mastered material things. You are only at the beginning of conquest then. It is the spiritual forces behind. Men are—to some limited extent—mastering the material today, but God only knows how they are being defeated by the spiritual lying behind the material.

I am saying that the Lord allows the enemy to precipitate and project all kinds of situations and conditions and difficulties—situations in the home, situations in the business, situations in the Church, situations in our personal, private and secret experience. They are Devil-projected, Satanic in origin, though not always seen to be so. But you calculate what they will do if they triumph, and you will see that there is something sinister about them. And the Lord allows them! What are we going to do about it? Begin to pray and plead with the Lord to take this difficulty away, change this situation? Nothing happens. We try to fight and get on top of it by being optimistic, being hopeful, being cheerful. We do not get very far; we may indeed just get worn out; and still nothing happens. What is the meaning of this? It means that we are in the school of rulers, in training to be made rulers. The whole destiny and vocation of the new man is at stake in these situations. We had better settle it quite soon that we are in this very matter of having dominion, and that this situation is something that has to be dealt with on a spiritual level, from a heavenly position.

But the great effort of the enemy is to get us so involved morally that we have no fighting power left, because he has the right to the position. He is trying to destroy our testimony, destroy our vocation, destroy this very calling to have dominion, by getting us involved in a situation where the Lord cannot come to our rescue. He says: 'You have got to get out of that, repudiate that, put that back, before anything will happen. You have become caught in something wrong, and until you break clear of that, you are defeated; I cannot do

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anything for you.' Some of you may be thinking, 'This is a Christianity that is very complex, very difficult!' Need it be stressed that we are not now speaking of our salvation? We are moving in a realm altogether beyond 'simple salvation'—although salvation is never a simple thing. This is not a matter of our being saved from Hell, having eternal life and going to Heaven. This is the great eternal purpose of God, centred in His Son personal and corporate. This is the central conception and idea of God in making man to have dominion. So that in future let us as quickly as we can face whatever situation may be exercising or perplexing us, and say, 'Is this something in which I am to exercise my position in Christ, as above this, as over this—to bring this thing under my feet, in Christ as the exalted Man?' For we inherit with Him the dominion that He has taken since God has "made us to sit with him in the heavenly places" (Eph. ii. 6).

The judgments, then, we were saying, and dealings of the Lord with His people, are in the light, firstly, of the likeness, and, secondly, of the dominion. The question for these churches in the Revelation is not whether they are Christians and are going to Heaven. It is the question of how they are reigning in life, how they are exercising spiritual dominion in the spiritual world.

(c) FRUITFULNESS

The next thing about the new-creation man is this. "In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him: male and female created he them . . . and called *their* name Man" (Gen. v. 1, 2). He said to them: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (i. 28). So the new-creation man is related to Christ, or is the functioning of Christ, in reproduction after his own kind. This is a test. The idea of stagnation has no place in the things of God. Anything that draws a circle, that is limited to a smaller sphere than that of continuous development, continuous growth, continuous expansion, continuous reproduction, is contrary to the thought of God. Reproduction is a law of the creation, and in the new creation it is that. In the book of the Acts, you see this thing at work. The new-creation man has come in truly—and look at the multiplication and the reproduction after his own kind! This is the calling, and this is the ground of testing and judgment: Are there those, and more of them, in this world, who are in existence as the result of our spiritual travail, as the result of our spiritual life passed on? Or are we just alone, just individuals, trying to be Christians on our own? That is not God's thought. Re-

production cannot be in that way. The word at the beginning was: "replenish the earth"; and God knows it needs replenishing with children of God after this kind—the kind of this Man.

(d) GOD-BLESSED AND A BLESSING

Finally, for the present: "And God blessed them" (Gen. i. 28). They were not only to be blessed but to be a blessing. Very simple in terms, but how wonderful. This world does not know what a blessing the Church is to it in its midst. It will be a sorry day for the world when the Church has gone. Just as truly as Joseph was a blessing in the house of Pharaoh, so the Church is a blessing in this world, if the world only knew it. But it must not only be so in that unrecognised way. God forgive us that we are not the blessing in the world and to the world that we ought to be; that is, that the world has a good deal of reason to feel that the Church is not worth very much. But we will leave that. It must also be that our presence here is a blessing to others. This is a real test. Are we a blessing? Is the blessing of the Lord resting upon us so that we are made a blessing? I think it is one of the loveliest things that we come across in our Christian fellowship, when we are able to hear someone say, 'So-and-so is a blessing to me.' That is how it ought to be: we ought to be a blessing to people. Very often we are a bother to one another! Yes, "God blessed them: and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply": that is to say, reproduce a blessed people, be a blessing unto multiplication.

GOD'S STANDARD OF JUDGMENT

Well, these are the things which are governing the judgment of the Church at all times right on to the end—likeness to the Lord, spiritual government, reproduction in Christ, growth and a blessing, and you can apply that to these seven churches. 'Now then, with all that you have and all you are doing and all your profession, what is the measure of your revelation of what God is like? What is the measure of your absolute dominion over evil forces?' We collapse in so many instances before the evil forces which have got inside. 'What is the measure of your increase, your spiritual reproduction?' May that not touch the very point of first love with Ephesus? What a centre Ephesus was as a church at the beginning, radiating blessing to all in Asia! What increase came through Ephesus! May it not be perhaps that Ephesus had become something in itself, turned in upon itself—occupied with itself, its own

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works, its own profession and reputation? 'And how is it with you in being a real blessing where you are, to all near and far—a real blessing?' It is that to which the Lord is really challenging and with which He is concerned.

So this Man, who is the image, who has the dominion, who shall see His seed, who has brought so many children to birth, who has been such a blessing in this world, says, 'I want that it shall be like that with the corporate new man—just like that. That is what you are called unto. That is the meaning of your existence.' Now you do recognise that that is not just Bible exposition? It is a real spiritual challenge to us, it really is. You are going to meet this—we are all going to come up against

this. 'Was that like the Lord? Was that Christ-like?' Very simple; but you see it is an ultimate thing. 'Has the enemy got the upper hand there, or have you stood and withstood and kept him from his objective, reigned in life, kept on top, maintained your position?' We are found out. 'How much result is there of our spiritual life in reproduction?' It is a challenge. 'How much a blessing are we?' Oh, if only we measured up to that last point alone, if every one of us were a blessing in the Church, where we are, a blessing on this earth, what a difference it would make!

May the Lord truly conform to the image of His Son.

T. A-S.

GOD'S FINAL MOVEMENT

GOD has always been moving. He is the God of an undeviating purpose. God has always been moving unswervingly toward His end, and the question that should exercise our hearts is—What is God doing now, as the end draws near?

Well, there are signs of His activity in many ways. We are very conscious of dark things active in the world, but God also is on the move. There is much activity of the Holy Spirit. But amid all the many parts of these movings of God, there is something that is the key to everything, something which God is supremely doing; and unless we find what that is, we shall be caught up into manifold and perhaps inconsequent activities. It is very easy to be taken up with a part of something, and to miss the main issue altogether. It is one of the characteristics of our human nature that we run off after secondary things. God is concerned with one consuming issue, and that issue is the key to everything else at the time of the end. Surely, if we get a glimpse of what matters most to the Lord, our hearts will be stirred to respond to that, and say, 'Lord, that is the thing to which we give ourselves.'

And God has, after all, been supremely occupied with one matter right from the beginning, and the time of the end is but the time of the intensification and acceleration of God's activity. It is good to know that the Lord is going to move quickly and finish the thing that is waiting to be finished.

THE KEY TO THE FINAL PHASE OF
GOD'S MOVEMENT

Now, what is this that is supremely doing? What is the key to the final phase? God is *building*. The

key to the end is what the Scripture speaks of as the House of God. In the Old Testament, God had a redeemed people—He had Israel. They were His own people, redeemed out of Egypt. But was that all that God desired? Did He stop at that and say, 'Now that I have a people, I have achieved My aim'? By no means. If that were so, then most of the Old Testament would be quite meaningless. For the burden of the Old Testament is for something *in* the people of God, something at the *heart* of the people of God, which He longed to have and which was invariably missing. It was either something future, toward which the people were moving, or, if for a very short time there was a realisation, it quickly faded away, leaving only regret that the Lord no longer had that which really mattered.

Come over to the New Testament, and the same thing prevails. The whole New Testament is written to redeem, saved people. The burden of the New Testament is not 'Be saved'. God is after something in His people, which He finds terribly lacking. What is that? It is what is represented by the *House of God*—God's building. For God is not satisfied with a mere beginning, something incomplete. God is set upon fulness and realisation: something which brings Him complete satisfaction.

Now of course, in the Old Testament type the Temple, that great house of God, was the objective, God desired to dwell in a glorious sanctuary in the midst of His people. He longed to have a place where He was everything, where His glory was manifested. That type was pointing to the reality: to the fact that God is not satisfied to have His Son merely in some very small and insignificant measure in His people. God's desire is that His people should be a full expression of His Son.

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CHRIST GOD'S ONLY OBJECT

That brings us to the basic fact that God's only object is Christ, that God has no goal, no objective, ultimately, but a Person, God brought this universe into existence in order to glorify a Person, to make it the expression of a kind of person that wholly satisfied Him. "His good pleasure which he purposed in him . . . to sum up (gather together) all things in Christ" (Eph. i. 9, 10). It is as though God says, 'My Son is so altogether what I desire that I want nothing else. Anything that does not come up to that likeness, that standard of perfection, I am going to blot out of existence. Everything must be according to My Son.' And of course, the likeness of that Son, who is the image of God, is glory and beauty. That is the very nature and character of God Himself. God wants to fill the whole universe with a glory that is not an external glory, but a moral glory, a glory of character and nature.

You say, 'How does that affect merely created things? How does that affect material existence?' God has so ordered His universe that material things, outward things, do take character from the moral forces behind them. From the quality of the spiritual nature that governs, the rest follows. Take a simple illustration from the fact that, when a person is inwardly full of Christ, the whole being begins as it were to radiate something of His glory. And not only does it radiate the inner personality, but it affects the surroundings. Is not a home constantly taking shape from the kind of people who inhabit it? Carry that to its extreme, and you have a whole universe utterly subdued and conformed to the glory of the Son of God. The Old Testament speaks of the trees of the field clapping their hands, and we sing about 'heaven above being softer blue'. When Christ is enthroned, everything becomes irradiated with the glory of God.

Even the Millennium will only be a foretaste, because a thousand years, after all, is but a drop in the bucket of eternity, when there will be that ultimate filling of everything with His glory. One day everything is going to give way before the flood of the glory of His Person, and then all the cruelty and all the enmity will have gone out even from the created world. We remember the word that says that 'the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea' (Is. xi. 9; Hab. ii. 14). Sometimes we get a touch of glory inwardly, when everything is released, and our heart leaps—it is just a touch of Heaven. Now imagine if that were the normal state of everyone you met as you went down the street. Well, I think

the trees of the field would start clapping! God is not satisfied with anything less than that, anything which has the mark of defeat and dullness and death on it. And there is something in us answer- to this, which is all the time, like an imprisoned bird, wanting to be out in the full release of glory. Surely it is this that Paul meant when he spoke of "Christ in you, the hope of glory"—the expectation of glory.

CHRIST'S FULNESS TO BE EMBODIED
IN A PEOPLE

Now God is set upon His Son being everything, and so He is not satisfied until He has that, but that fulness of Christ has to be embodied first of all in a people. The Church is to be the embodiment of the glory of Christ. God has brought us into existence that we may be a full expression of His beloved Son, not in a personal, isolated, unrelated way, but by becoming literally a unity, a complete whole that is according to Christ. Now, the full *expression* of His Son—not just Christ resident in us, but Christ everything, His presence, His government, His power—is only possible where there is building. The Lord Jesus did not merely say, 'I will have My Church'; He said: "I will *build* my church" (Matt. xvi. 18). However many Christians you may have, they do not constitute a building for the dwelling of God until there is an actual relatedness, an actual building *together*; and it is the most difficult thing in the world to build together even two saints! A lot of bricks, a lot of stones, but where is the building, where is the place for the Lord to dwell? Any amount of material, all kinds of material, people rushing hither and thither to gather material, and yet not a place where the glory can be resident, because the House has to be "fitly framed together . . . for a habitation of God in the Spirit" (Eph. ii. 21, 22). The House, as David says, has to be "exceeding magnificent, of fame and glory throughout all countries" (I Chron. xxii. 5), because it is "not for man but for the Lord" (xxix. 1). The Lord must have a glorious House.

But what do we find amongst Christians to-day? In the main there is little unity, little integration. There is a desire for oneness; there is a general sense that we are the Lord's, and it is good to be together; but in the main there is separation, there is isolation. Nearly everyone is a unit—a 'freelance'. No wonder that Isaiah said: "Thy holy cities are become a wilderness, . . . Jerusalem a desolation, Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned with fire;

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and all our pleasant things are laid waste" (Isa. lxiv. 10, 11). There is practically nothing that truly represents the presence of the Lord in the midst of a united people.

What about individual Christians? Many Christian men to-day are floundering. You may meet a man seeking to serve God in some sort of ministry, but he has no spiritual home, he has no background. Perhaps he is ekeing out a precarious existence by having to keep preaching, wondering how the next opening can be arranged in order to provide him with the means of livelihood. He is an isolated unit, self-supporting, with perhaps a few kind friends trying to be 'behind', as they call it. But that is not the Church. The Church is a mighty organic unity, and everything, when God has that, is a matter in which we are related one to another, and nothing is purely personal.

Take the word in Hebrews xiii. Three times the Apostle speaks of "them that have the rule over you". What does this mean? It means that in the House of God there is responsibility, there is government of a spiritual kind. If we were to ask one another, 'Where have you the House of God, and who are they that have the rule over you?', perhaps most would say, 'I am not going to have anyone ruling over me!' Well, until we have learned to be under rule, we shall never be able to rule. Until we have had *no* ministry, we shall never have any real ministry. With God ministry is never ready-made. It comes out from the very bottom when we have learned to live in the House of God without it. The House of God is not a free-lance individual thing at all. It is the shattering of all that, and the breaking of us together into one organic unity.

THE OUTCOME OF THE CHURCH IN EXPRESSION

It is a very solemn thing to reflect how much depends upon the Church being found in expression and realisation.

(a) THE GLORY OF GOD

First of all, the glory of God. Where is the glory? When the Temple was set up according to pattern, we are told: "the glory of the Lord filled the house" (I Kings viii. 11). But there is only glory where Christ is everything. Where man is anything at all, there is no glory. The Lord has to do something in a people to get all the glory for Himself.

The only adequate fruit of redemption is the House of God—a people truly knit together in

Christ and full of Him. That is the only adequate fruit of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus on the Cross. When He died on the Cross, He took away the awful barrier between us and God. "We were reconciled to God through the death of his Son" (Rom. v. 10). That barrier has gone, there is nothing between. But is that sufficient, when all the barriers between one another are left standing, so that we can only get fellowship upwards? No, that is not the only fruit of redemption. We are told that He "brake down the middle wall of partition" (Eph. ii, 14), so that the Jew and the Greek through the Cross have been ruled right out, and there is "one new man". There is only one way we can ever be one, and that is by the Cross. The Cross is the way through.

And the Cross is the only way of building: because God is not going to build us—He is going to get rid of us and build His Son. Every time we come into view in any way, it is as though the building goes down: every time we go down, the building goes up! What an immense thing the Lord Jesus did at the Cross when He 'slew the enmity'. He slew the antagonism between us, and we died as to what we think about one another. There in His mighty death we died to our own traditions, opinions, likes, preferences, prospects—everything. There is nothing left at all. This is not a theory; it is a tremendous reality. When you meet brethren who know something of the Cross, you find that none of them really has anything to fight about. You try and hit someone, and they are not there! Yes, none of us ought to be there, and it is only then that you will find Christ is there.

(b) THE MEETING OF NEED IN GOD'S PEOPLE

And then the need of the people of God depends the existence of the House of God. When there is even a small expression of the House of God, you have a blessing every time. I knew a brother who used to come to a place where the Lord was really building His House. The Cross had been working; there was unity there; but it was not always easy. There were some battles on. I remember this brother saying dourly: 'I would rather have a bad time here than a good time anywhere else!' And it is not only a case of a good time, but the Word says: "We shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house" (Psa. lxxv. 4). We all have complex needs, but how wonderful when the Lord is filling the House. Your need is just touched in a moment. If the Lord is present in fulness, we ought to be getting the answer to difficulties and problems. The answer may be that you have got to put something right; or the answer may be a comforting one, and

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you will go away comforted. There is no lack at all where the House of God is.

(c) A TESTIMONY TO THE WORLD

And without the House of God, where is the testimony to the world in the face of the world's need? The Church to-day is largely paralysed. We ought to be people who are rejoicing because we know we have the answer. We ought to be, as the Church, a testimony in the earth that can be pointed to. But the testimony to the world is not a lot of isolated Christians trying to witness. The testimony to the world is the Church. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John xiii. 35). If we are right in the sight of the Lord, not only with Him but with one another, there is an influence radiated that is felt. There are quite enough of us, quite enough saved people, for the Lord to have a mighty testimony in these days. If only there were that gravitating together in Christ that He is after, a light would begin to shine in many places. The Lord does not want the Church as an ideal, but as a mighty expression: something in the earth that radiates His glory, and of which we can be unashamed.

It is a glorious thing when there is a testimony that Christ is everything. There is real power in the life of every individual who is part of it. You can hold up your head; you have a testimony, you are unafraid. But let us have questions about our spiritual home-background, about what is happening in our corporate life, and our testimony is undermined. We are slinking about conscious that it is all very well talking, but we know it does not work in the background. It is no use talking to unsaved people when we feel like that, because they know it before we start. It is better not to say anything—just set about putting our own house in order, and fight and fight until it is in order. But get it in order, and then, without any effort, as you move out you have a ringing testimony, and if people say, 'Oh, but, you see, it doesn't work', you can say, 'Yes, it does work—come and see!'

EVANGELISM NOT AN END IN ITSELF

Yes, God is moving, and we thank Him and praise Him for all His movements, but they are only partial, they are not the end. Now evangelism, the preaching of the Gospel, and the saving of souls, is a mighty thing. We are seeing it in our days, and we rejoice. Yes, but that has potentialities for nothing short of tragedy, but for the mercy and grace of the Lord. Why? Because evangelism

is God's way of bringing in the material for the *building*, that there may be a glorious House—the Church—Christ in expression. Miss out the Church, and you are going to get breakdown, or, at the best, only very partial fruit for the Lord. Only Christ in full expression provides adequate pasture ground for souls that are being saved. When new-born souls come into a living church, a place where Christ is Head, where the Spirit is Lord, they grow very quickly. In a very short time young people come to know the Lord as well as some who have been on the road for years—perhaps even better. It is when God has His House that all this happens.

REVIVAL NOT AN END IN ITSELF

Now, many people are concerned about revival. Revival is a stage further than evangelism: it is nothing less than God breaking right in in power, so that everything just gives way before the burning presence of God Himself. And true revival is a thing that comes to *God's* people. There is always an accompaniment of salvation for others, but it is primarily a touching of the state of things in the Church.

I was reading recently of Jonathan Goforth in Manchuria. In one town, the Spirit of God broke into a church that was gathered and praying. The power was so tremendous that one of the elders got up and confessed to a terrible sin which he had committed secretly: and it was just as though everything was smitten. One after another all the elders got up and resigned, because in that one moment they knew that they were not fit to be in any position of responsibility. And as Jonathan Goforth looked round, he found that the deacons too had stood up and had resigned *en bloc*, and then the pastor himself stood up and resigned also. But it was no cold-blooded resignation. They were just shattered, and they knew they were out of it. In the presence of the Holy Spirit, those in responsibility saw that they were not fit for anything at all. When God turns the light on, in effect everybody finds they are not fit, that they are utterly unsuited for God in any form. It shows up the stark truth.

Revival is a tremendous reality, but revival can end in tragedy—that is the point. Without the House of God as the establishment of everything, as with evangelism, there will be tragic declension and backsliding and breakdown, and in a few years there may be nothing standing. Why? Because the only thing that can stand is the House of God. It is the building of *Christ*, the constituting of *Christ* in

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lives, to go through with the Cross, which alone is going to stand.

IDENTIFICATION WITH GOD'S OBJECT

God is set upon His Son being everything in the saints. Now that is a glorious vision, but are we personally with Him for its realisation where we are—that there should be an actual building of the House of God just where we are? Not the constituting of some little New Testament pattern. Patterns are useless. You can set up something according to a book of words, and it does not work at all. It must be the reality itself: that is to say, a spiritual relatedness, wrought by God in some saints who have been so broken up that they have become one.

This is something that God is willing to do in every situation where He has placed us. There are people who say, 'There is nothing where I live—it is so dead. I have to come up to conferences occasionally to get a breath of fresh air.' God is wherever you are, and every one of us should be standing with the Lord to do the thing in the place where He has put us. We certainly need the help of one another; we may need the help of ministry; but I think we have yet to find out what God is willing to do in the place He has put us. Some people have never really travailed in that place. They have merely endured, and perhaps murmured and grumbled. I believe we have got to change our tune, and say: 'Lord, get through in this place—build Your Church here!' All Hell says, 'It cannot be.' We reply: 'It can be done. Now, Lord, we are with You to do it!'

And as sure as God is faithful, He will act. He will have you in full relatedness to the House of God. If He is not going to have it where you are, He may move you to another place; but the point is, He will have it somewhere. Once we have seen what that glorious House is, of which we are a part in Christ, and we are with Him to make it a living reality, we lose all our loneliness, because we become part of one another. We are part of the building, we are related to the one family, the one Body, the one House that God is building.

A STIRRED SPIRIT

How is all this to be? In the Old Testament God's final movement was to recover His House. The people were in Babylon, and God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus and he gave an edict that the house of God was to be rebuilt at Jerusalem—a mighty sovereign movement of God; and then all

those whose spirit God had stirred began to move away from Babylon back to Jerusalem (Ezra i. 1, 5). A stirred spirit. That is our first need. We need a spirit, indeed, of indignation, recognising that God is not satisfied with things as they are—that He is only concerned with a spiritual House, with living stones built together.

Where were God's people at that time? They were in the world, and moreover in Babylon, which was the wrong realm for God's people. In Babylon they had priests and they had elders; in fact, they had a whole outfit; but, you see, it was in the wrong place. It was not in Jerusalem. And then God's Spirit moved them, and they left that wrong ground, left Babylon, and went back to their cities, back to Jerusalem, back to their true heavenly ground. Now 'Christianity' is the wrong ground. 'Christendom' is the wrong place. God's ground is entirely heavenly. "The Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother" (Gal. iv. 26). Jerusalem means the city of God. That is heavenly ground. In Christ there is one Body and one Spirit. We are seated together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, a new realm altogether, Jerusalem typifies that—a new and a heavenly city where we belong.

And so these people of God—a remnant, a few—packed their luggage and moved back to Jerusalem. God is wanting with us first of all a stirred spirit that moves with Him from the wrong realm.

THE ESTABLISHING OF THE PRINCIPLE OF THE CROSS

Not only did this remnant move, but when they arrived, we are told, the very first thing that happened was that the altar was set on its base (Ezra iii. 3). Before they had a house, before they had a building, they set up an altar; and on that altar they offered the continual burnt-offering morning and evening, they had the set feasts of the Lord. You say, 'But how strange to do all that before there was a house!' Not at all. The first principle that has to be established is the principle of the Cross. The Cross is the way to everything else. We are told that "the foundation of the house of the Lord was not yet laid" (vs. 6). Before God builds at all, the Cross must be everything. At the Cross every element of what we are naturally has to be ruled out. The Cross is the very basis of the Church. The Cross is where the ground is cleared for God to build what is of Himself.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE BUILDING

And then, finally, we read that the foundation was laid, and there was great rejoicing. What is

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the foundation of this building? "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Cor. iii, 11). The foundation upon which God will build His House is an altogether new position in Christ. We have to say: "Lord, I have left Babylon—I am no longer a part of this earthly order. I am a heavenly person, and Christ is my position and my life—I am "in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus"."

TOGETHER IN THE HEAVENLIES

One word more, and that word is 'together'. We cannot be in Christ in the heavenlies by ourselves. This is an utterly related thing. We belong in Him, we share one life. What a relief that all the barriers and divisions, that are so natural—all our ideas, what we think, what we belong to—are miles beneath our feet if we are in the heaven-

lies. They do not operate at all up there. It is from that exalted position that God builds. He does not build 'on the ground', as it were—He builds from a spiritual position; and as we come to God's position, He will build us together in Christ. He wants each one of us to be a vital part of His building, wherever He has put us, and in relation to all saints, built together for His glory. He calls us into battle with Himself, not only for the gathering of the material, but for the obtaining of a true expression of His glory in these days. That is what God is set upon at the end-time.

Do you think He can do that where you live? I believe He is doing it in every place where He finds hearts with Him. Let us commit ourselves to Him to make us, not only a vital part of the building, but workers together with Him in the building of the House. May He stir our hearts and find us willing and obedient.

C. J. B. H.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF AN EXEMPLARY CHRISTIAN LIFE

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

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

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

And then we find that the Apostle is defining the Gospel that he preached, which produced such Christians. He uses the word 'our' Gospel, 'the gospel which we preach', speaking about 'his' Gospel; and then he gives us an epitome of his Gospel, his great Gospel, in a few concise statements. It is a good thing to be able to have the whole wonderful Gospel, in all its great range and

content and potentiality, gathered into the compass of about four clauses. It needs a master hand to do that. We are going to look at them quite simply and briefly. They occur, as you see, at the end of the first chapter.

TURNING TO GOD FROM IDOLS

"Ye turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God". That is the first stage of the Christian life. Now, although they were pagans formerly, in a pagan world with all its system of idol worship, and you might think that it is not quite right and hardly fair to compare people of a 'Christian' country with those pagans and to class them all together, I want to point out that in principle and in fact the classing of all unsaved people with those pagans is quite right. "Ye turned unto God from idols to serve"—or "to worship", for that is what the word here means—"a living and true God". Now, the principle here, a principle which has many forms in many different times and ages and parts of the world, is just the same. These people had been giving the 'worth-ship'—for that is the meaning of worship—of their lives to other objects than God. Who is getting the worth-ship of your life—God, or . . . whatever else it might be? If you are not giving it to God, then you are giving it somewhere else, to something else, and that is idolatry. So the first stage of a true Christian life is this—the realisation and recognition that

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God is worth your giving everything to Him. He is worthy of having the worth-ship of your life, of having laid at His feet all that you have and are.

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

‘Marvel not that Christ in glory
All my inmost heart hath won’.

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

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

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

And so it all comes back—I was going to say, to the simple question, but it is not a very simple question sometimes—Has He got us, has He got

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

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

“A living and true God”. That is only a little qualification or characterization. After all, if we give our lives and pour them out in any other direction than for God, we are pouring our lives into the sand. There is going to be no return. It is death, from which there is no coming back. It is an end. Sooner or later we shall find that out, that that kind of thing leads nowhere but to a dead end. We shall see something more of the meaning of that in a moment, “The living and true God”. That is the appraisal of God. He is the *living* and the *true* God, and everything else to which we might give our lives is false—it will prove itself to be empty. He is the living God, He is the true God, and we shall find that to be so. If there is one thing about true Christian life, it is the absolute reality of God. Sometimes that reality is not a pleasant thing to come up against, but it is at least reality, and we would sooner come up against God, in reality, in an unpleasant way, than not know where God is or is not. Far better to have a living God who checks you up, who deals with

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you and chastens, than to have no God at all, or to be in question or doubt as to whether God takes any notice. No, to a true Christian, God is very living and very true, very real.

WAITING FOR HIS SON FROM HEAVEN

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

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

That is fundamental. Let us get it settled right at the beginning—not as something further on in the Christian life, and not as merely the study of prophecy about the Second Coming of the Lord

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

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

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

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

FAITH IN CHRIST RAISED FROM THE DEAD

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

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

What awful devastation these evil forces make when we let them have ground. What is the result? Ours is a very jerky kind of Christian life. We go on for a little while perhaps fairly well, and then down we go. We come up and go on. A little further on, down we go again under some further condemnation, because of some fault, real or

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

DELIVERED FROM THE WRATH TO COME

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

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

Now, the number of those in this world who would deliberately claim to be Satan-worshippers

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

Now, for that one, be he the horned, tailed monster, the awful dragon, or be he the angel of light—he is the same being, the same person—for him, and for all his hosts who are with him in his foul work, God has stored up wrath, the day of wrath. If that one is receiving our 'worth-ship' and not God, then the day of wrath will find us, will include us. That is the terror of the Gospel. God never meant it for us. For this is the wonderful, wonderful fact: that every man, woman and child in God's creation is redeemed—not has got to be redeemed, but *is* redeemed. *You* are redeemed. You may not have accepted your redemption, you may not have entered into the blessings of your redemption; but Christ's work on the Cross was for all men, His redemption was for all. God has

not got to redeem you, He has not got to do anything more for your redemption; He has done it all and offered it to you. But if you spurn it, do not accept it, refuse what God has done, you are tacitly taking sides with the other one, you are involved with him and with his object of not giving God his place. And so the day of wrath will overtake us—not only Satan and his angels, but us—unless we have come to this One, Jesus, God's Son, "who delivereth us from the wrath to come".

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

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

T. A-S.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

FINDING HIS WINGS

THE trouble with him was that he had no faith. There he stood, perched on the edge of his neat little nest, a puzzled and scared baby hummingbird who dared not trust his wings. It was the moment for which everything had been waiting; his brother had just flown down to a nearby bush and was proudly aware of the fact that he had made his first flight; their beautiful and busy little mother was fluttering around, calling to him to spread his wings and take the plunge. He knew

that he ought to; he knew that others had done it quite safely; but he just couldn't pluck up the courage to follow. The world around seemed so big, and he felt so very small and weak.

It was a pity to fail his mother after all the trouble she had taken. Flying to and fro with little wisps and threads, weaving and packing them together as she hovered around like a helicopter, as only hummingbirds can, she had built the most trim and compact little nest you ever saw. It had

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

been carefully planned, too, for it was placed so that a few leaves on the branch above acted like an umbrella to keep off the rain.

The next thing she did was to lay the two eggs and then sit patiently on them to keep them warm, till in due time they were hatched and the broken pieces of shell on the ground showed that two baby humming-birds were snuggled together in their safe little home. Then began the constant search for food, as she flew backwards and forwards to find tiny insects and drop them into those two open little beaks which were always crying out to be fed. Fed they were, thanks to the brave little mother, so that the baby birds began to get bigger and to grow their feathers, getting nearer and nearer to the day when they were to find their wings and fly from the nest. That day had now come, and all was now ready. The young bird had his wings; all that was needed was that he should spread them and jump out into the air. His mother urged him to try—just to try—but he couldn't; it was sad to fail her after all her love and care, but he just couldn't.

It was at this point that a noisy bumble-bee came zooming idly around. It had nowhere special to go, and it had never done anybody any harm, but to the young humming-bird, looking out for the first time on the great world around, it must have seemed like some angry enemy coming to attack him. He turned his head in alarm, swaying to and fro dizzily on the edge of his nest, while all the time the buzzing grew louder and louder. He had been afraid to fly, but he was still more afraid of this strange foe. It seemed to be coming straight for him, so with one despairing lurch he toppled off the tree, flapping his little wings as hard as he could, and finally came to rest on the ground, some

distance away, breathless and frightened but quite unhurt.

I know all this because I saw it happen, and I walked over to pick the little fellow up and put him back in his nest where he seemed safer. But did he stay? Not he! He had found his wings at last, and was soon off again to join his brother and the proud and happy mother bird.

God provided the little bird with wings, but he was afraid to trust them. He heard his mother's calls to follow her and he saw his brother take the plunge, but he was still afraid. What a good thing it was, in a way, that the bumble-bee happened to come along and make him feel that he just must use his wings, for when he did so all was well.

Many boys and girls are like the little bird. They have been told about the Lord Jesus by their parents or others, who are doing their best to urge them to trust Him for themselves; they see others doing so, and yet they are still wondering and waiting, afraid to spread the wings of faith and commit their lives to the Lord.

That is why God sometimes allows difficulties or trials to come into their lives. He is a God of love and would do nothing to harm them, but perhaps they need something severe to shake them off their perch of unbelief or unwillingness to trust Him. The bumble-bee came just at the right time, for it made the little bird trust to his wings and launch out in faith. It may be that the Lord is having to use hard things to urge us to trust in Him. Fears, sorrows or disappointments come to us, not because He has forgotten us, but as His means of helping us to spread the wings of faith and commit our whole lives in a new way to the Lord Jesus. It was Jesus Himself who said, "Fear not: only believe" (Luke 8. 50).

H. F.

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WE BEHELD HIS GLORY

A RETROSPECT

WE have now come to the end of these brief meditations in the Gospel by John. Nothing academic has been attempted. All technical questions have been avoided. The spiritual message and value has been the sole object.

Throwing a look back over this record, one thing may be taken up profitably for notice and re-emphasis. With all the beauty and wonder of what is gathered into this account, it is not possible to avoid the realisation that from beginning to end the writer was up against something. Both in what he himself said about Jesus, and in all the scenes, incidents, and utterances recorded of Jesus, there is a *strenuous* element, which varies from controversy, reserve, antagonism, and question, to lack of capacity to appreciate, understand, or believe.

This (either positive or negative) difficulty covers the religious leaders, the people in view generally, and particularly disciples and friends. There is something to be overcome, to be broken down, or to be changed. Jesus is a mystery; that is what it amounts to. He is other, different—an enigma. He cannot be interpreted in any of the standard terms of either human nature or religion, as generally known and accepted. He is a stranger, an outsider, and the easiest thing is to be against and not with Him. Indeed, it is difficult not to be offended with Him, even in the case of the closest

friends. All this in spite of the great amount said as to His love.

What, then, does it all amount to? Is there something in this which is as much the message of the book as anything particularly recorded in it? I think there is, and it is this. There are two realms which, while at times and in certain cases seeming to be nearer than at others, never do actually meet or overlap. They are two separate realms, and not two shades or degrees of one. The one never does or can fully understand, appreciate, or comprehend the other, and religion—traditional religion—gives no great advantage, if indeed any, in this matter.

It is just the wide and unbridgeable difference between the spiritual, on the one hand, and the natural—even though devoutly religious—on the other. The gap remains, and that is the reason for so much of the difficulty, the trouble, the perplexity! It explains the aloneness and loneliness of Jesus. Paul drank deeply of this cup. The way of the Spirit and spirituality is a lonely way, a misunderstood way, and often an antagonized way. Adjust everything to the reason of man and the traditions of men, and this element of hard going will be eliminated. Walk by the Spirit, and you are with a minority.

T. A-S.

THE OBLIGATIONS OF LOVE

“The little phrase ‘believeth all things’ (I Corinthians xiii. 7) certainly has in it a challenging element. I think, however, that must be interpreted by the preceding and following phrases. The apostle has been saying that ‘love taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things’, and presently proceeds to say ‘hopeth all things, endureth all things’. These surrounding phrases make it practically certain that the phrase ‘believeth all things’ means believes all the best things. This surely is the attitude of love. It refuses to give credit to rumours or reports of evil things, and holds on to belief in the best.”

SELECTED.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

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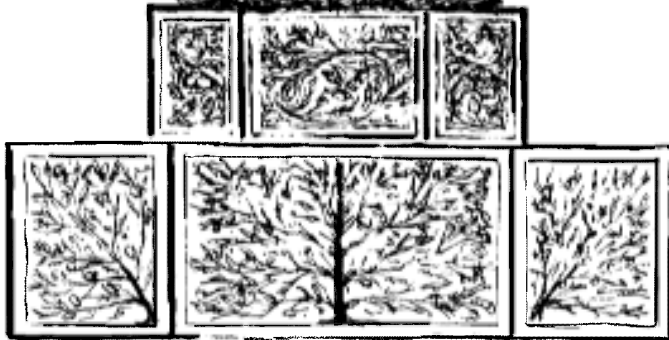
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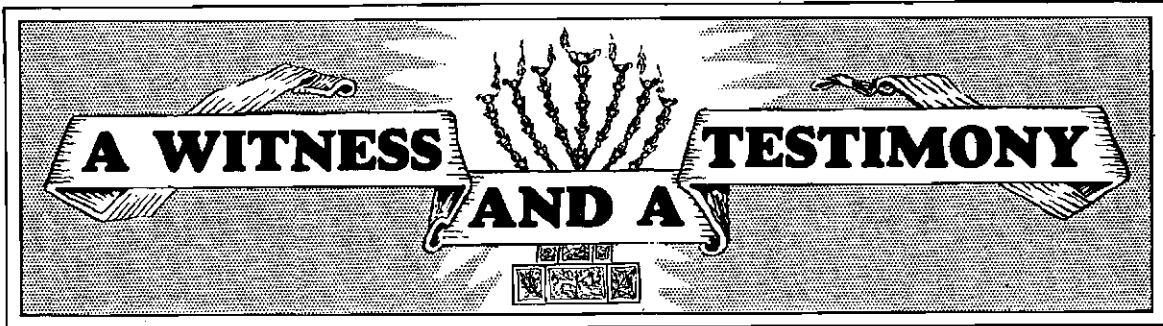
THIS MINISTRY

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

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

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

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



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THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF SERVICE

IV. THE BLUE OF HEAVEN

I would ask you to turn to God's picture book, the Old Testament, in two places:

"And thou shalt make the robe of the ephod all of blue" (Exodus xxviii. 31).

"Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of each border a cord of blue" (Numbers xv. 38).

Now let us turn over to that part of the Word of which those passages are the illustrations.

"Having then a great high priest, who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews iv. 14, 15).

"... else must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once at the end of the ages hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews ix. 26).

I referred to the Old Testament as 'God's picture book', for indeed it is full of pictures, illustrations, representations of all kinds, of Divine, spiritual, heavenly realities. The illustrations pass, but that which they illustrate remains. God took hold of the picturesque Oriental mind, that kind

of mentality which just must have pictures and illustrations and figures of speech, and turned it to very great account in setting forth the eternal realities which are the interpretation of them. So we have in the Old Testament a great number of things—names, people, places, colours, and so on—all used to illustrate some Divine, eternal truth; and, in the midst of that galaxy of symbolism, we find this one, in its two aspects. "And thou shalt make . . . the ephod all of blue" (the ephod was the high priest's main garment); and then: 'Speak to the children of Israel, that throughout their generations they make them fringes upon their garments, and a cord of blue.'

So that here you have a reflection, in every individual comprising the people of God, of what was true of the high priest's main garment. You look at his robe, the robe of the ephod, as it is called, and you see that it is of blue throughout, and you look at every man, woman and child of the people of God, and you find they all have as it were a bit of the priest's robe somewhere on their garment. It all corresponds.

BLUE A SYMBOL OF HEAVEN

Now, blue has quite a large place in the Old Testament. Blue is a symbol of that which belongs to Heaven. There are two or three places where that is made quite clear. For instance, in Exodus

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xxiv, we read that Moses and Aaron and seventy of the elders of Israel went up into the mountain where God was, "and they saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone" (vs. 10). Sapphire, of course, is blue. And then we come to the prophecies of Ezekiel. In the very first chapter, the same thing is said again. The prophet had a vision of the throne in Heaven, "as the appearance of a sapphire stone" (vs. 26). We find the sapphire mentioned again right at the end of the New Testament, in the twenty-first chapter of the Revelation. Blue, then, sets forth what is of Heaven, what is heavenly. So that this high priest, with his robe all of blue, is meant, in the thought of God, to point to that One of whom we read later—Jesus Christ, who is our "great high priest, who has passed through the heavens" (Heb. iv. 14)—our heavenly High Priest, who is in Heaven.

And He has entered there on the ground, and only on the ground, that He has made a complete and full atonement. The high priest in the Old Testament could never go into the Most Holy Place except on the Day of Atonement with the precious blood of atonement, and that is a figure. The Lord Jesus made a full atonement by His Cross for all sin and sins, and has passed into the very presence of God: not into a symbolic presence, as in the Old Testament, but into the real presence, the actual presence, of God; and there, as this letter to the Hebrews says, "he ever liveth to make intercession" (Heb. vii. 25). He is fulfilling His high-priestly work there on our behalf. Aaron, then, the high priest of old, was a type or figure of Christ, our High Priest who is now in Heaven. The emphasis is upon the heavenly nature and heavenly work of the Lord Jesus now.

Let us consider this robe all of blue.

A PEOPLE IN HARMONY WITH HEAVEN

First of all, this correspondence that we have noted between the robe of the high priest, and the cord on the people's garments, set forth the glorious fact that they were in harmony with Heaven, that there was a harmoniousness between them and Heaven; and that is something. It is a wonderful thing to have no discord with Heaven, and for Heaven to have no discord with you. That is not our natural state; we know it right well. That is not the state of men who have not entered into the wonderful, redeeming, atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ by His Cross. They know, as we all knew at one time, that they have no harmony with Heaven. Indeed, the one quest, the one

longing and craving, the one thing disturbing their peace all the time, is this—How can we get into harmony with Heaven? How can we be so adjusted to God, to Heaven, and to all that belongs there, that the discord and strain in life ceases? Oh, to be freed from this state of strain and unrest and conflict, this disappointment and dissatisfaction and discontent! There is something wrong somewhere; things are out of joint. But here, you see, is set forth a wonderful harmony with Heaven. If the high priest represents Jesus Christ in Heaven, this touch of blue on the garments signifies that all the people are participating in that. That is the very first fruit and value of the great high-priestly work of the Lord Jesus in offering Himself for our sins.

Now we know that, when we come by simple, precise faith, to accept the atoning, redemptive work of the Lord Jesus by His Cross, the discord in our hearts ceases. The strain has gone out; something has happened that has adjusted us to Heaven. Beautiful harmony has come about between us and God. This is put in many different ways in the Bible. One of them is this: "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. v. 1). Or again: "having made peace through the blood of his cross" (Col. i. 20). It is a wonderful inheritance, an inheritance to which multitudes can testify. There came a crisis in our lives—something happened—and it was just as though bones that had been out of joint were suddenly put right—they clicked together, and the ache has gone. Oh, how wonderful! Have you ever suffered the ache of a dislocated joint, that has bothered you night and day, disturbed your rest, robbed you of sleep, a constant nagging pain—and then you have got it put right? How you breathe again—life is worth living now!

That is exactly what happens to the sinner who by faith accepts Jesus as Saviour. Things click into joint; harmony takes the place of discord. Why? Simply because all the cause of, and reason for, the discord has been dealt with. What is the cause? What is the reason? In the words of a prophet: "your iniquities have separated between you and your God" (Is. lix. 2). Sin is at the bottom of it. I am not talking about *sins*; I am talking about *sin*. Sin is a thing which is native to every child of Adam. It is our nature—it is what we are. You know that. Try to stop doing certain things, and you find you have got to stop living in order to stop doing them. Somehow or other you have got to get rid of yourself in order to get rid of that. Sin is in our very nature. The Lord Jesus in His Cross took on Himself our sin and our sinfulness

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and dealt with it—dealt with the cause of all the discord and the trouble; and because the cause is dealt with, the effect follows quite naturally.

A little girl once heard read that passage from the book of the Revelation: "God . . . shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, any more" (Rev. xxi. 3, 4); and she said, 'God must have a very big handkerchief!' Well, that is a childish way of putting it. But you see, when God wipes away tears, He does not use a handkerchief. He gets behind the tears to *why* you cry, to the cause of the tears, and deals with the thing right at its source. All our trouble is dealt with at its source by the Lord Jesus. "Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf" (II Cor. v. 21). "He bare our sins in his body upon the tree" (I Pet. ii. 24).

And so, having dealt with the source and root of the trouble, He brings us into union with Himself as the Redeemer, the great Atoner, the great Saviour, and we participate in His heavenly blue. Speaking now illustratively, if He is there wearing this robe all of blue, and we are here with a bit of that blue on us, it means not only that we are related to Him, but that our place in Heaven is secured. If you ask an unsaved person if they are going to Heaven, the answer, more often than not, is, 'Well, I hope so.' Now, it may happen that there is one reading these lines to whom that question might be addressed: 'Are you going to Heaven? are you expecting to go to Heaven?' You might in some uncertainty reply: 'Well, I want to', or 'I hope so.' I want to tell you that there is a way provided by God, whereby you need have no question about it: that there can come right into your life the witness of Heaven, you can now share what is true of the Lord Jesus in Heaven, and you can have your place secured in Heaven here and now, all on the ground of the work which Christ has done for you. We will come back to that again in another way in a minute.

Let us go further with this gospel, this good news, of the heavenly blue. What does this mean for Christians, when once they are the Lord's, this blue cord on the garment of the Lord's people?

A PEOPLE DISTINCT FROM ALL OTHERS

First of all, it marks them off as different and distinct from all other people. I expect that if the other nations round about Israel knew about this, and if ever an Israelite went out amongst them, they would say, 'Oh, we know where you come from! That bit of blue gives you away, that marks

you off from everybody, that distinguishes you from everyone else.' A true Christian is something different and something distinct from all others, and the feature which makes him so is that there is in him another life, which is a heavenly life. Jesus said, 'I am come down from heaven for the life of the world' (John vi. 33). "I am the living bread which came down out of heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever" (John vi. 51). Here is another life, a heavenly life, in Jesus Christ, which those who receive Him receive in Him.

This is a test of our Christianity, but it is also a testimony to its reality. We know, when we have come on to this ground of Christ's atoning, redemptive work, that we have received into our very being another life, a different life. And this new life always gravitates back to its source in Heaven, that is, it is always pulling us up out of this world, it is always drawing us upward. It is a life of elevation, of uplift, a life which gravitates towards Heaven, like water in a pipe from a reservoir, always seeking its own level. Paul put it in this way. "If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is" (Col. iii. 1). The great characteristic of a true Christian is that he is living in touch with Heaven, in the light of Heaven, in communion with Heaven, and always feeling the mighty magnetism of Christ in Heaven.

Our natural life always gravitates downwards. It does not matter what you do: leave it for a minute, and down it goes. Take restraints away, and down it goes. Remove the props, and down it goes. Its whole gravitation is downward. It does not matter how far you advance in developments—intellectual, social, and so on. Take people out of their wretched hovels, and put them into nice new dwellings: after a time you will see deterioration setting in, and soon it will be another slum district. You cannot stop it. That is the way of things. It is true of everything in this life and in this world.

But here is something that comes in and counteracts, takes another course. It is a wonderful thing. When a man or woman accepts Christ and becomes possessed of this heavenly life, they begin spontaneously, without any instruction, to change their behaviour. From uncouth, they become polite. From being careless in their manner and dress and so on, they become conscious of something. They change, and it goes on like that. I am afraid it must be said that some Christians have forgotten. Something has happened to check the life of Christ, the heavenly life, and they have be-

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come careless, slovenly, indifferent, unwatchful as to behaviour, as to courtesy, and so on. But when this life is not hindered by wilfulness, it is a transforming life, and that is the great distinguishing mark of a Christian.

PEOPLE BELONGING TO ANOTHER WORLD

Christians have got another world. It goes by the name of Heaven. I do not know where Heaven is, but I know what Heaven is. It does not matter so very much where it is, so long as we know what it is, and I am content to know that Heaven is a state. Christians are marked off as belonging to another world. This world knows quite well that, as soon as a man or a woman becomes a Christian, it has lost a citizen. They are lost to the world. Yes, we have got another world. It is a very much better one, a much more wonderful one, an entirely new world.

PEOPLE WITH ANOTHER GOAL

And we have another goal. This is true to the illustration of the Old Testament. Israel in the wilderness was not limited to the resources of the wilderness. A wilderness is no place in which to try to live by the produce of the land, and yet they went forty years in the wilderness without starving. They had heavenly resources when there were none in their surroundings. They drew everything from another world. It is an illustration again. The survival of Christians under pressure, under trial, under suffering—the *triumph* of Christians through all sorts of adversities—is a testimony to the fact that they have another world from which they are drawing their resources. Thank God, this ‘wilderness’ is not the end for the Christian. We have another goal; we are people with an objective, people for whom there is something ahead. Death is not our goal; the grave is not our goal. All that this world may offer of prizes is not our goal. The goal of the Christian is something very much better and more glorious.

THE UNITY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Let us note one other thing about these people. It is quite obvious that the blue cord on their garments, corresponding with the high priest’s, indicates the unity of the people of God, not only with Christ as the High Priest in Heaven, but with one another. There was something about every one of them, as those who belonged to the Lord, which

was the same, something about them that united them. They were not all the colours of the rainbow, as Christendom is now. No, there was one conspicuous mark about them which made them all alike, all one. There was a unity of the people of God amongst themselves.

THE FACT OF UNITY

Now, first of all, that is factual. We have got to realise this and stand upon it deliberately and persistently, that everyone who is truly a child of God is our brother, our sister, belongs to our family; we have the one life shared amongst us. That is the *fact* of the unity of Christians, of children of God. Our unity rests in the first place upon nothing but the oneness of life which we share in Christ. The approximation to that in expression may vary, but that depends upon how far God’s people live upon the fact of another life. Its expression will never come about by our trying to bring together all the sects, denominations, churches, departments, and so on, and setting up a unity. It will not happen. It will always prove in the long run to be like the tower of Babel. Something will happen, and it will all go wrong again.

But if only we would live upon the great fact that we have received, through faith in Jesus Christ, His own life, that is the basis upon which we are to proceed. I meet you, not upon any mechanical ground, but upon the ground that you belong to the same Lord, you share the same life. Let us forget the other things as far as we can. Let us not allow the other things that divide to affect us more than we can possibly help. Let us cling to this, that, if you and I are truly children of God, born from Heaven, we have one life. It is a fact upon which we need persistently to live, and for which we must fight.

A UNITY OF INTEREST

And then it means that we have a unity of interest. The real people of God have only one interest, and they are a unity because of this particular interest. What is the interest of Christians? Paul put it in this way: “To me to live is Christ” (Phil. i. 21). ‘My sole interest in life is the furtherance of the interests of Jesus Christ, the glory of Jesus Christ.’ That Apostle sought unceasingly to further the interests of Jesus Christ and to make Him glorious wherever he went. We have one interest, and we put it in that one word—Christ. That is the unifying factor. If we have other things—private things, personal things, things in this

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world—upon which our hearts are mainly set; if we have sectarian interests: very well, we shall not be one. We are one by this all-captivating passion—Jesus Christ.

And that springs up immediately this great thing happens in us. Is it not true, that as soon as we receive the Lord Jesus in virtue of His saving work for us, immediately we want to tell people about Him, we want to talk about Jesus Christ? You cannot keep us quiet on this matter. We *must* be talking about Christ. He has become the one all-absorbing interest for us, in our very being. It comes out in business, it comes out in our social circle, it comes out everywhere: we are miserable if we cannot talk about Jesus Christ, if there is no place for Him. That is our unity, a unity of interest.

Now I go back where we began. Do you belong to the people of God? Have you received this Divine life? Do you know harmony with Heaven, or do you go on hoping, maybe praying, maybe longing, but . . . you are not sure? Heaven is something that makes you long, but you do not know. I want to say to anyone who has not peace with God, who has not perfect assurance that it is well between themselves and Him, that God has nothing more to do to provide you with the ground for it. God has done everything—everything that God Almighty could do—to bring you into that blessed experience of peace with Himself, harmony with Heaven; to give you another life than the one that you have, as a power drawing you upward, drawing you onward, giving you a great motive, a great interest, altogether beyond this poor world. Here it is all available.

What then? It rests with you. You have not got to work for it, or work it out; you have not got to

try and fit yourself for it, by trying to be better than you are. You are only prolonging the misery if you say, 'Oh, it is not for me, I am not good enough for that.' What about Israel—what kind of people were they, as to themselves? Well, the Bible story of Israel is not a very pleasant one, as to the people, but I believe it was written for the very purpose of showing up what kind of people they were. If ever there was a difficult people on this earth, it was Israel! Yet that did not prevent them from coming into what God had provided for them. It is not what we are—good, bad or indifferent. God will no more accept the good person than the bad person. God is not waiting for you to change anything in your manner of life. Everything has been done in Christ, and all He says now is: 'Look, I have made a full provision—I ask nothing from you but that you believe it and accept it. Recognise your need, bow before Me, and say: "I am one in need: You have the provision. By faith I receive all Your provision in Christ."' "

Does that sound far too easy and too simple? If it does, remember that, while we get it so simply, like that, it cost God and His Son infinitely to provide it. The greatest suffering and sacrifice that this universe has ever witnessed was the cost of your salvation and mine. If we say, 'Only believe and receive by faith', that does not mean that it is cheap. It is very, very costly to God. But He waits for you. You think you are waiting for something—perhaps for Him, or for a change in yourself. You will wait. God has done it all. Christ is now in Heaven, the seal of the fact that the work on earth for men is done. In the words of the great Apostle: "We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God" (II Cor. v. 20).

T. A-S.

PRAYING IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

Reading: Acts iv. 23-31.

"Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession" (Psalm ii. 8).

"I will build my church". While still here on earth the Lord Jesus made this positive promise to His disciples, and at the same time threw down a definite challenge to all His enemies. We must remember that, while apostles and prophets were taken up and used by the Lord for the fulfilment of this work, it is supremely He Himself, and in a sense He alone, who is the great Church Builder. So this book, which is now called the Acts of the

Apostles, is really the account of how the Lord Jesus set about this great task. It is an interesting and most profitable study to read the early chapters of the book with this thought in mind. How did the Lord Jesus proceed with His work of building His Church? The various happenings are full of instruction, and none more so than this first account of a church prayer meeting. If we regard these first events as setting forth spiritual principles, we must be impressed with the importance of united prayer. That in itself is worthy of great emphasis. The Lord seems to need such prayer if He is to build His Church. In this case we are given the theme or essential appeal of the united prayer, and it is most significant.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

PRAYER ON RESURRECTION GROUND

The main points of Psalm ii, on which the prayer was based, are very clear. Firstly, there is a recognition of the universal hostility to the absolute rule of God's Christ. Among the various groups, there may be varying degrees of tolerance and even of appreciation of the life and teaching of the Son of God. If, however, there is a proclamation of His absolute Lordship, an insistence on His crown rights, and if it is made by men who truly live what they preach, then all the world will rise up in opposition to them. This is due to the fact that the world is deceived and driven on by satanic powers who know that for them the coming of Christ's kingdom will mean full and final destruction. The disciples found this truth set forth in the psalm, but now they themselves had become vitally involved in it. Since Jesus was exalted to the right hand of the Father, where neither men nor devils could reach Him, it was the Church that bore His Name which now became the focus of this bitter and hellish hatred.

The second point made by the psalmist sets forth God's reaction to all the opposition. It reveals the sure ground which His people may have for absolute confidence in Him. For there is not the slightest cause for doubt as to the outcome of this age-long battle: the kingdom and the power and the glory are secured for Jesus Christ. If you are true to the Name of Jesus, all Hell may be against you, but all Heaven is for you. God's derision will frustrate and His wrath will destroy all that is against His Son. He is not worried about the issue, so why should we be?

The third section of the psalm contains an invitation from the Father to the Son. "Ask of me, and I will give thee . . ." This part is not quoted by Luke in his report of the prayer, so we do not know whether or not the disciples actually used these words. We may be quite certain, though, that it represents the true theme of their praying, for it was both the crux of the psalm and the chief concern of all their hearts. We know that they prayed. We also know what they prayed. They made their claim upon the Father that the Son might fully possess His rights in the lives of redeemed men, even to the uttermost parts. They found themselves involved in the antagonism; they rejoiced to have a place in the Divine purpose for the exaltation of Christ; it seemed right, therefore, to take their part in responding to the Divine invitation to "ask" for His inheritance in the nations, knowing that in so doing they were co-operating with the Son of God in the glory.

PRAYER IN CO-OPERATION WITH THE SON

"Ask of me". The words were spoken by the Father to the Son on the occasion of His resurrection. The Lord Jesus was no stranger to prayer. Here on earth and as a Man, He had often asked His Father for help, for strength, for grace, for wisdom; He had been accustomed to ask, and His prayers were always answered. There was something different, though, about this request. It was made on resurrection ground. The Lord Jesus had emerged triumphant from His testing and from His great work of atonement. He had been raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. It was then that the psalmist, speaking prophetically, made Him declare: "The LORD said unto me, Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me . . ." "*This day*", the day of resurrection and of exaltation, *this day* there is something more to ask. There is indeed. Now on the basis of Calvary, the Father is prepared to make over to the Son, for His actual possession, all that has been purchased by His sacrifice on the Cross.

The disciples, too, were no strangers to prayer. Yet it seems that Pentecost brought them into a new partnership with the Son in this work of intercession. Is there, perhaps, some connection between the "this day" of Psalm ii and the day referred to by the Lord when He said to His disciples: "In that day ye shall ask me nothing" (or, "no question"). "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you in my name" (John xvi, 23)? Evidently a new experience of prayer was to be theirs "in *that day*". There are many prayers which are personal prayers, and of course they are necessary; prayers for help, prayers for grace and prayers for deliverance. In our case, unlike that of the Lord Jesus, there have also to be prayers for forgiveness, for healing and for cleansing. Nevertheless, there is for us, too, a realm of praying where we rise above all that is personal and incidental in our own lives, in order that in fellowship with the Risen Christ we may co-operate with Him in the obtaining of His full inheritance among men. Surely this is the supreme purpose of corporate, executive prayer. Alas! that so much of our prayer is taken up with what concerns ourselves, and so little of the Church's praying is of the kind described here.

PRAYER WHICH MOVES HEAVEN

The disciples were not permitted just to talk about the Scriptures, but were forced by circum-

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stances to enter into the experiences of which they spoke. They were not merely discussing the fight; they were in it. To them it was no mere theory, for some of their own number had already been involved in the conflict, and the shadow of it hung over them all. For them Psalm ii was not just subject matter for a Bible study, but God's own explanation of what was happening to them. Realising this, they sought by faith to step right into the reality of the psalm, believing that for them also there was the Divine invitation to ask big things in prayer—to ask, and to expect the answer. We know that the Father issued this invitation because He was already determined to give to His Son "the uttermost parts of the earth" for His possession. He wanted the request, for He wanted to respond to it. Similarly He wanted the Church to pray, in spite of the limitations and threats which surrounded it: He wanted it to pray because He wanted to give the answer.

The rest of the book of the Acts is the unfolding story of how wonderfully God answered that one united Church prayer. He did not give them much respite from trial and persecution. They had not asked for that anyhow. He did not at that time show them how their prayer would be fulfilled, for, so far as information or ability to plan were concerned, they were no wiser after they had prayed it. But He gave them what they asked for, and kept giving it so long as they were ready to receive: grace to maintain their witness in strength, and signs, in the form of transformed lives, to substantiate that witness.

This great Church prayer-meeting was sealed in the one way which really matters—they had Heaven's 'Amen!' Whether the men who actually voiced the prayer were conscious of the Church's Amen we do not know. That is good. It is good, when you are praying, to find a response among the rest, to know that you have people backing you up, that your petitions are not just your own wishes or attempts to tell others how you feel or what you think, but a real expression of the Spirit's desire in every heart. Corporate prayer should be truly united prayer. There is great value in the Church's Amen. How much more important it is, though, to have an Amen from Heaven. That is what happened on this occasion. They were left in no doubt as to whether they had asked aright, or as to whether the Father intended to answer the prayer. God shook the place. He filled them all with the Holy Spirit. In this way He seemed to give them a miraculous intimation that the power of Heaven was available for the answer of that prayer, and that in praying it they had come so

into line with the Spirit's purpose that He could commit Himself to them in a new fulness. Is not this the great need of the Church of our day? To pray in faith: to pray for the one great purpose of the Father's heart: to come right into line with the Spirit—to pray in the Holy Spirit. Such prayer, even if it may sound simple, will surely bring a mighty Amen from Heaven.

PRACTICAL RESULTS FROM PRAYER

In some ways it was a simple prayer—at least there was nothing complicated in its terms or phrases: yet it dealt with the most important issue of the ages, the full inheritance of Christ in the lives of men. There was nothing vague or unpractical about it, nothing of mere ideas or theories. In the first place it dealt with their own sphere of witness—"in this city". It is sometimes easier to pray for the uttermost parts of the earth than it is to take responsibility for our actual present location. "In this city" the battle is on, and "in this city" we may expect to see God answering His enemies and glorifying His Son. There are too many theorists among Christians to-day, too many whose talk or teaching or prayers seem so remote from what is happening in their own circumstances. There is nothing vague or theoretical about Satan. He knows what he is out to do—to rob Christ of His full place in the lives of men. He comes right into the midst of any situation where there seems the slightest possibility of an increase of glory for God's Son, and uses all his resources to prevent it. We must be equally practical, and believe that God is willing to come right into any such situation and show the superiority of His resources to secure the inheritance for His Son.

While they were ready to give their testimony and fearlessly to obey their Lord, they knew very well that if the Church was to be built He must do it. It would be futile, and worse, for them to get busy trying to build it for Him. And, as events were to prove, the Risen Lord kept things very much in His own hands. He showed His servants what He intended to do, but He did not leave them to take the initiative. In those days the initiative was with the Holy Spirit, while the apostles and others had all that they could do to keep up with Him.

Take the matter of the spread of the Gospel to Samaria. Stephen seems to have been the one clearly to perceive and as clearly to proclaim the universal power of the Gospel of Christ, yet the apostles did not and he could not

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take any action to spread it even to Samaria. It was when Philip was forced to flee from persecution and sought safety in Samaria that he found how wonderfully the Holy Spirit was ready to seal his testimony. The first advance of the Church was not planned or initiated by men; it was altogether a work of the Risen Christ, though Philip had a vital part to play by his preaching. Peter and John came down from Jerusalem not to found a church, but to recognise that the Lord had already founded one. Their prayer was being answered.

The next great geographical advance was preceded by the vision given to Peter, and by the mighty seal of the Spirit on his message in the house of Cornelius. But although he, and subsequently the remainder of those at Jerusalem, now accepted in principle that the Gentiles had an equal place in the Church with them, it was not through them at all that the church at Antioch came into being. This was another sovereign act of the Risen Lord, similar to that done through Philip at Samaria, but on a bigger scale and through the agency of unnamed disciples. "Ask of me": "Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts i. 8). And so the story goes on, showing how wonderfully these men were caught up in a stream of Divine activity—an activity which seems to have taken on a new impetus as a result of the Holy Ghost prayer-meeting at Jerusalem.

BELIEVING PRAYER

There was no strain or panic in their praying, no perplexity about their own sufferings, no hidden fear that perhaps Satan might prove too much for the Lord. They made it clear that the Lord who began time with the whole world in His hand had not relinquished His grip, for at Calvary He had given an up-to-date proof of His complete sovereignty, forcing all the efforts of His enemies to fulfil that which He had already planned should happen. That is the One to whom we pray. They did not pray as to One who was far away; on resurrection ground they were very near to Him, and He was near to them. "And now, Lord", they said, "look upon their threatenings"—just as though they felt the Lord was just behind them, as it were looking over their shoulder to see what it was all about. When they asked Him to work, they did not describe it as the reaching out of His arm, but only as the stretching forth of His hand. He was as near as that. What great blessedness it is, to be aware that we are in vital touch with Heaven,

not appealing to God from a distance, but knowing Him to be close at hand!

UNITED PRAYER

The Father's offer to fulfil the Son's request was made, as we have seen, on resurrection ground. It is only on that ground that the Church can pray in the Holy Spirit, for under no other conditions is it possible for there to be true unity. When this people prayed, they did so by 'lifting up their voice to God with one accord', and when they had finished praying "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul: and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common" (iv. 32). They were united in prayer because they were united in life. We do not get unity in prayer by praying for it; sometimes we only exaggerate or aggravate disunity if we are always telling the Lord about it. What produced this marvellous unity of spirit? Surely it was that on resurrection ground they had forsaken all that was personal or natural, to concentrate on the one supreme issue of the glory of the Son of God.

We read nothing of attempts on their part to produce unity, nothing of mutual confessions or apologies, of adjustments or concessions one to another. The secret of their one accord seems to have been the objective which they all had in view, the same objective as that which the Spirit Himself maintains, which is the absolute sovereignty of God's Son, without any qualifications or reservations. They had just seen five thousand men turn to Christ. Though this was very wonderful they could not be satisfied, for there were farther ranges into which His sovereignty must penetrate; they could never rest, nor allow the Lord to rest, until the "uttermost parts" had become His possessions. There are still more to be won to the Saviour. And in the lives of those who are His, so often there are still "uttermost parts" which have not been fully subdued to Him. God's decree is that His Son should be enthroned—enthroned in lives, enthroned in homes, enthroned in local churches, enthroned in His Church everywhere. One has the impression that this was the only thing which mattered to these men who were praying. That was why they were praying in the Holy Spirit, and that was why Heaven was moved in answer to their prayer.

This, then, is one of the fundamental features of true Church building: the united prayer of faith of men who are on resurrection ground. Utterly unconscious of self, not caring what happened to

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them, seeking only the inheritance of God's Son, praying in the Holy Spirit, they were building themselves up even as they prayed, and they were

reaching far beyond themselves, sharing with their Lord in the great work of building the Church.
H. F.

THE MAN GOD HAS ORDAINED

VII. THE BRIDE

"And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. xxi. 2).

"Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory unto him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And it was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they that are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. xix. 7-9).

"The Spirit and the bride say, Come" (Rev. xxii. 17).

"Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the saviour of the body . . . the church is subject to Christ . . . Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish . . . we are members of his body. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church" (Eph. v. 23, 25-27, 30-32).

IT would be good for us, as we approach this subject, to do a little forgetting: to forget, for the time being, any theories that we may have heard or accepted under the designation of the bride of Christ. There are crystallized theories on this matter. There are those who believe the bride is Israel. There are others who believe that the Church is not the bride and the bride is not the Church—they are two distinct and different entities; and so on. Will you kindly order them out for the time being—not in order to accept a new theory, but in order to be open for anything that the Lord may have to say at this time. Please give the Lord the benefit of an open heart and mind.

It would also be good for us to try to get away

from the symbolism of this book of the Revelation: a very difficult thing to do, because it is a book that is just full of symbols and symbolisms. But let us try to forget the symbols—even the symbol of the bride, in that actual word—and let us seek earnestly to get to the meaning. It is easy to be so occupied with the symbol that we miss the meaning.

THREE MAIN MINISTRIES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

To begin with, let me remind you that in the New Testament there are three main phases, or ministries.

There is the phase of what we may call *initiation*: that is, the gathering of the material for the House of God. That is a very prominent phase in the book of the Acts—the reaching out to, and laying hold of, those who are to compose and constitute the Church.

Then there is the second phase or ministry of the *building* of that material: the building up, to use Paul's phrase, of the Body of Christ; and that is wrapped up with Paul's letters—the teaching ministry which follows the gathering. The building up proceeds after the material has been secured and as it is being brought in.

But then there is a third phase, a third ministry. It is that which comes in with the last parts of the New Testament, and mainly through the ministry of John—though not altogether, for Jude was engaged in this, and James to some extent; but mainly in John's letters, and pre-eminently in the book of the Revelation—the ministry of *measuring up*, measuring up to all that has been given; a *re-call* ministry, where there has been loss, falling away, departure, declension; and a ministry of *judgment*—judgment not in the sense of passing judgment only, but judgment in the sense of making clear where things have gone wrong, and warning concerning the delinquent state.

These, then, are the three phases of the ministry of the New Testament, and there is the sovereignty of the Lord marking each one of them.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE LORD IN
RELATION TO THE MINISTRIES

We saw previously the sovereign activities of the Spirit of Jesus in laying hold, apprehending, the material for the House of God. We saw a wonderful combination of heavenly, angelic forces, and the Holy Spirit, in sovereign activities to secure the material of which the Church is made. There is no mistaking the sovereignty at work in that phase of the New Testament.

There is likewise a sovereignty observable and very patent in connection with the second part—that is, the securing, raising up, equipping, endowing of those who are to fulfil the ministry of building up the Body of Christ—personal gifts of the ascended Lord in sovereign action, qualification by the Holy Spirit unto the many-sided ministry by which the Church should be brought to full growth.

But the sovereignty is very much in evidence, too, in the third phase. It is evident in the statements at the beginning of the book of the Revelation. "I John, . . . was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (i. 9). And what happened? He says that things that were given to Jesus by the Father, "the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him", were sent, were brought by an angel, by a special messenger, and "signified . . . unto his servant John" (i. 1). If that is not sovereign action, what is? That is Heaven moving, and it is related to this ministry of measuring up, re-call, judgment.

Note, moreover, that it was measuring up to the full revelation that God had given. These messages were addressed in the first place to the seven churches in Asia, and it was to the churches in Asia that the fullest revelation through the Apostle Paul was given. Ephesus, Laodicea, and the rest, were the churches which were brought into being through this very Apostle, who was so sovereignly raised up and equipped for the fullest unveiling of eternal counsels that we have in the Bible. It was concerning that fulness of unveiled Divine thought that the book of the Revelation was brought in, sovereignly to recall to that, to judge concerning that; to deal with the Lord's people in the light, not of some partial truth, but of the whole revelation of God's mind.

My point is that it was sovereignly done; and God, who is sovereign, does determine the ministry that is to be fulfilled and by whom it is to be fulfilled, and there is a place in the sovereign purposes and activities of God for a ministry that

is a re-call ministry. This is a ministry of measuring up, and that particularly characterizes the end-times, as is clearly seen here.

THE BRIDE EXPRESSES
THE FULLEST THOUGHT OF GOD
CONCERNING HIS SON

Now, as we said in our previous meditation, there are seen, in the book of the Revelation, distinctive and particular companies who represent something very much more of the Lord than the rest, and of those various companies, or those various titles which we mentioned—overcomers, the hundred and forty-four thousand, first-fruits, man-child, and so on—of all these titles, it seems to me that the one that gets nearest to the heart of God is that which is called "the bride". The bride undoubtedly, from every description and presentation and implication, embodies and expresses the fullest thought of the Father concerning the Son. We could gather a very great deal into that—Old Testament type and figure—as to the Father's concern for His Son's bride. You will recall, for instance, the story of Abraham, Isaac and Rebekah. But we cannot stay for details. We just make the statement, which you can verify, that, out of all the titles mentioned, it is the bride who embodies and expresses the fullest thought of the Father for the Son.

That which is signified by the bride is, indeed, the first and the governing idea of the entire Trinity—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The Father, for the Son, is governed by this thought supremely—to provide His Son with a bride. What was true in the first creation, humanly, literally, is transcendently true in the new creation, the Heavenly Man. God says that it is not good for Him to be alone. To provide Him with a bride is the Father's greatest interest in the Son.

The concern of the Son for His bride, the Church, is self-evident; we shall see more concerning that presently.

As to the Holy Spirit, that is His very work in this dispensation. We were speaking earlier of this being the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. He has come to secure that bride for the Son, and is pursuing that purpose, and in this sevenfold reiteration, "what the Spirit saith to the churches", you have implicit His concern to get the Church on bridal terms with the Son. The active operations in the book of the Revelation begin with that sevenfold word: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." It is reiterated seven times—"what the Spirit saith". And

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the last thing in the book is: "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." Everything between, so far as the people of God are concerned, is the Spirit's mighty working to secure this bride for the Son. In that last word, which we shall consider later, is found the great joy of the Spirit at the end. 'All is ready for you! The work is done; the object is secured. Come!'

CHRIST'S LOVE, AND GIVING OF HIMSELF, FOR THE CHURCH

This object is found in a specific way in the Cross of the Lord Jesus. The Cross of the Lord Jesus is a very comprehensive thing and has many sides in its value and function. It has to do with sin, sin's judgment, sin's remission. It has to do with death and death's annihilation for the Church. It has to do with Satan, the prince of the world, and his casting out. It has to do with redemption, atonement, justification, and all sides of salvation. They are all in the Cross. Then the Apostle put his finger upon a specific meaning of the Cross when he said: "Christ loved the church and gave himself for it". When Christ went to the Cross, while all these other things were being effected and were included, this central thing was being secured. He gave Himself for the Church.

This throws us back to some of His own parables. We recall the parable of the treasure in the field, when the whole field was purchased to secure that treasure. Or we think of the parable of the pearl of great price, and the merchant who makes everything that he has subservient to securing that pearl. I once went through the narrow streets of Basrah, on the Persian Gulf, looking into the shops of the pearl merchants, and I saw there, behind glass and bars, some wonderful, marvellous pearls. I was fascinated with them. And from those narrow streets you could look away to the sea, and see the pearl fishers at work in their frail vessels—perilous work, costly work. Then a pearl merchant from Basrah came and travelled with me the rest of the journey to India. He was a solemn man, and you should have seen how he watched over and guarded his box containing the pearls. It was a reinforced box, with two heavy padlocks, and it was never out of his sight—never even out of his hands. He arrived at the other end, and the Customs wanted to have a look—but oh, the concern of this man, all the time watching, alert, to see if anybody else was looking. A pearl represented his very life, his subsistence. All his being was concentrated into the pearl—it was everything to him.

And as I saw it and noted it, how I was taken back to this parable. That is what the Lord knew. We shall come back to that presently. A "pearl of great price": this is a figure of His Church, this is a figure of His bride—the Church in the terms of a bride. "Great price": He gave Himself; the Cross and all that that Cross meant was centred in the pearl, was centred in the bride. "Christ . . . loved the church, and gave himself up for it".

Again, we said that this is the primary interest of the Holy Spirit; that, in this dispensation, this is the one thing that the Holy Spirit is after. By every method, by every means, along every line, through every ministry, the end that He has in view is the securing of this bride. Would that all the Lord's servants would keep that always before them—that the end is not just to get individuals saved, important as that is; the end is not just to have so many Christians in the world, important as that is. The end is a corporate vessel called "the bride". The Holy Spirit is dominated by that, He is governed by that in all His activities.

We said, too, that the bride is the consummate, the ultimate, full embodiment of the eternal counsels and purposes of God concerning His Son. This reaches right back to the past eternity into those counsels of the Godhead. God determined everything concerning His Son, in His Son, for His Son: everything was for the Son; and at the heart of everything is the bride, the Church, His chosen bride, the elect.

THE LORD'S QUEST FOR BRIDAL CHARACTERISTICS

We come now to this second phase. All the judgments and dealings of the Lord with His people are governed by this object. This is the object of the Lord's dealings with us—with the Church, with the churches, with individuals—and we must view these messages to the churches in the book of the Revelation in the light of the bride. What is it that this Lord, the Bridegroom, this Son of man, is seeking? What is it that He has in His mind in these messages to the churches? He is after bridal characteristics. So He sits and summarises. There are many things which He commends. These are features of the bride. "I know thy works"—all right, quite good; "thy labours"—all right; "thy patience", yes, very good; 'thy conscientiousness'—"thou didst try them that call themselves apostles, and they are not"—'you have a sense of right and wrong, conscientiousness'—yes, very good, the bride must

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certainly be like that ; ‘ you are honest, you will not tolerate false apostles and false teachers ’— yes, very good, the bride will certainly be like that ; “ thou holdest fast my name ”—that is all right, that is good ; thou “ didst not deny my faith ”— yes, it must be like that, people who comprise this company must certainly be like that. Thy charity, thy service, thy faith, and still more works, more than at the beginning—all right, all good.

Yes, these are features of the bride, but there is a longer list of things that the bride must not express—features which are not bridal features and which must go. Lost first love—that will not do ; the bride must be characterized at the end by that which was at the beginning, by an utterness and freshness of devotion to the Lord Himself. ‘ Thou hast there the doctrine of Balaam, and those that teach the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.’ We may not understand what that was altogether. I do not pretend to be able to tell you, but I think I can tell you exactly what it *means*. In both these cases, the doctrine of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans, it was a teaching which had come in, purporting to be something superior to the Scriptures, to what God had said. What had God said to Israel, and what had God made Balaam say about Israel? But then, for the gain of unrighteousness, Balaam went right back on his words and brought in a teaching to Israel which in effect said, ‘ Look here, you can do this, you are allowed to do that : God will not take any notice of it, God will not bring you into judgment for that.’ And the other teaching had the same effect—a life and a practice which had the Word of God against it, being excused on some theory introduced.

This is not strange to our own day. There are many people who are superior to the Scripture. There is the Scripture plain and clear on certain things, and yet they are above the Scripture : they even claim that the Lord has shown them that a certain course is right, when the Scripture is as glaringly against it as anything could be. If it were necessary, I could begin to take a whole handful of Scriptures and show how they are violated and a theory is gathered around them which excuses from the precision of God’s mind as revealed in His own Word. Satan used Scripture to try to seduce the Lord Jesus into complicity with himself—spiritual fornication. “ It is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee . . . ” (Matt. iv. 6). But the Lord Jesus saw through his suggestion, saw what it would lead to, what it implied, saw that the result of following Satan’s course would be something contrary to the revealed mind of God. It is easy to use Scripture to

support us in a way that we would like to go.

Now the Word of God gets down to motives, and here were two teachings which resulted in a practice and a life which was contrary to, and claimed to be superior to, the Word of God—fornication, things sacrificed to idols, and so on. Yet there is another teaching that undercuts even that, and results in another sin, well-known in those early times, that it does not matter how you behave : you are saved and you will never be lost ; rest upon the eternal security of the believer and behave as you like—an iniquitous thing ; and it was that kind of thing the Lord was up against. It may be in very gross forms and it may be in very simple forms, but the point is—this will not do for the bride. The bride must be transparent, pure in motive, doing nothing to gratify personal ends, having no arguments to support personal interests.

“ Thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead.” Profession without reality. That will not do for the bride, by any means. “ Thou art neither cold nor hot ”. Indefiniteness, an absence of real character ; not clearly defined and unmistakable as to your life and position, so that everybody knows exactly where you are and what you are, and there is no mistaking it. The bride must be like that.

Perhaps enough has been said to indicate that what is in view here, in these messages to the churches and to us, is the quest for bridal conditions, summed up in those words : “ Christ . . . loved the church, and gave himself up for it ; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing ”. That is the heart of chapters ii and iii of the book of the Revelation ; that is the bride. The Son’s satisfaction, the Father’s satisfaction, and the answer to all the Holy Spirit’s activities, is found in a people after this kind.

THE CALLING OF THE WHOLE CHURCH

Now, we must dismiss another thing : the idea that the bride is a select company, chosen and appointed to be like this. We must make no such distinction and discrimination between the Church as a whole and the bride. The whole Church is called to this—that is the revelation of the New Testament ; not only some, but the whole Church. Whether the whole Church will arrive, or arrive at the same time, is an open question, but we are all called to it, every one. This is incumbent upon

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us all, not merely upon some called 'overcomers', a 'bride', 'first-fruits', and so on. This is the Church in view. There may be those who move ahead of others, who go on more rapidly than others, who satisfy the Lord more quickly than others; the others may lag behind and come on afterward; but whether all attain unto the same glory or not, this is what we are all called to. None of us is excused by any provision made by the Lord. The Lord has not got pigeon-holes all ready fixed, saying, 'We put first-class Christians in there and second-class Christians in there, and provide for them accordingly.' He has only one pigeon-hole in view. If you do not come into it He has not provided a place for you anywhere else, and He has told you that you will lose very much. It is a very serious thing not to answer to Him in the primary way.

THE BRIDE, THE WIFE OF THE LAMB

"The bride, the Lamb's wife." Do not ask the mechanical question, Who will be in the bridal party? Who will comprise the bride? There again you are mentally dividing things up. I can tell you at once who will be the bride. Not a certain number of people who are called to be the bride, as different from others, but those who come to the bridal position spiritually. They will be the bride, and that is open to everyone. The bride is not a technical term belonging to a certain class, order and section of Christians. It is a spiritual term belonging to a condition, a spiritual state.

"The bride, the Lamb's wife", is the term here. "The Lamb's wife"—what does that mean? The Lamb was one who suffered in meekness. "As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth" (Is. liii. 7). The Lamb went that way: the bride will know the fellowship of His sufferings, and must be of the same spirit of meekness. No standing for her own rights, upon her own dignity, asserting her own interests, but letting go to the Lord, in self-emptying and meekness. That is the Lamb, and that is the bride, the Lamb's wife, taking her character from Him.

THE LAMB IN THE MIDST OF THE THRONE

Ah, but there is the other side. There is a Lamb in the midst of the throne. There is the wrath of the Lamb—the Lamb shall make war. The mighty "beast" rears himself—what a terrific force is represented by the "beast" here. He is let loose

in all his ferocity and malignity and evil and mighty power. And then the Lamb makes war and smashes the beast, destroys him. The *Lamb* does it. There is a mighty power bound up in this weakness. Oh, we have not yet learned the strength of weakness, the strength of emptiness, which means that there is nothing in ourselves but everything in the Lord. When the Lord gets people there, the enemy is afraid; something is going to happen. We can never overcome the enemy while we are standing up for our own rights, while we are in any way defending our own interests, looking after our own name, being something or trying to be something or hold on to something. The enemy laughs at us, breaks us. When we know that meekness of the Lamb, the meekness of Jesus Christ, then the enemy's power is going to be weakened and destroyed. These are principles in the book.

The wife of the Lamb is going to be with Him in His throne. Let us dismiss the symbolism and grasp the principle and the spiritual meaning. It is absolute ascendancy in Heaven over all the forces of the earth and hell, vested in the Lamb, and conferred upon His bride, the Lamb's wife. It is the mighty power of a yielded life, the mighty power of weakness of the right kind—that is, of dependence, conscious dependence upon the Lord.

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

In conclusion, I want to come back for a few moments to the matter of the pearl. It is a remarkable thing, the place that the pearl has in the New Testament. If you look in the Old Testament, you will not find it anywhere. When precious stones are mentioned in the Old Testament, the pearl is never included. It was something upon which the Jews set no special value. They had great ideas of the sapphire and the beryl and the onyx and all the other precious stones, but the pearl they despised. It was therefore almost a shock to them when the Lord Jesus began to speak about the merchantman and a precious pearl. It was an entirely new idea, investing the pearl with a value and preciousness which was strange to them, new to them. In the New Testament the pearl has a significant place. Right at the end, we find that the very gates of the city are pearls. We know the pearl is formed through suffering—therein lies its preciousness—and the suffering leads to beauty and glory.

Now the bride is to know "the fellowship of His sufferings". "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him" (II Tim. ii. 12, A.V.). There is an 'if' there, a governing 'if'. It does not say, 'If we are saved,

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we shall reign', 'If we become believers in the Lord Jesus, we shall reign.' It does not say that in the Scriptures. It says: "If" (and only 'if') "we suffer, we shall reign with him". It is a very constituent of the bride that she shares His sufferings, pours out her very life-blood—it may be in a spiritual way, it may sometimes be in a literal way—for her Lord. Her life goes for Him as His life went for her. There is such a moving together that one life is given for the other, and *vice versa*. That is the bride.

Now are you, apart from all the words and ideas, seeing God's point? Why do we gather for 'conferences'? If you were to come here between conferences, you would find that the threefold ministry of the New Testament was going on: the seeking of the material, the bringing of souls to be material for the House of God; the building-up ministry; and this ministry of bringing into view the full thought of God, God's requirements as to the utter revelation of His mind. It is this last that is the object of these conferences. These are not 'material-gathering' meetings, evangelistic meet-

ings, much as we are concerned for the unsaved, very truly so; and these are not just 'building-up' meetings, for teaching and instruction—though they are that. But they are not *just* that. The crown of the ministry is to keep before the Lord's people the fulness of His intention in the Church; to measure up, to call back, to make adjustment, to judge of things; and to satisfy our Lord's heart in the ultimate, consummate sense of His desire, as expressed in the bride.

It will involve in sufferings, in the wrath of the enemy. It will mean that we are not let off with our flaws and failures. The Lord comes again and says, 'There are many good things, but I am not accepting anything less than My standard.' He must do that—we are involved in that. But oh, it is a great destiny, the destiny of the bride—no less than His throne, nothing short of His throne: to be with Him in the administering of His great universal kingdom through the ages of the ages. May the Lord bring His call and challenge to our hearts.

T. A-S.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

ON EAGLES' WINGS

LONG ago, the wren was chosen in Scotland to be the royal bird. This may surprise you, if you know how small a wren is. But there was a reason for the choice. It was all due to an old story, or legend.

Once upon a time, so the story goes, all the birds met to choose themselves a king. They found it very hard to agree; so, after much chirping and cawing, with some crowing, too, and clucking, they decided that next day they would see which of them could fly the highest. The bird which could fly up above all the rest was to be accepted as the royal bird. The eagle said nothing, for eagles do not crow; but he felt sure that he would win. The pigeon, who, as you know, is rather conceited, cooed with confidence that he would surely be the royal bird. The lark, who so enjoys flying that he only sings while up in the sky, could hardly wait for the next day to come, for he was full of hope. Some of the other birds also began to chatter about their chances, but the whole bird chorus cackled with scornful laughter when the tiny wren announced, in his perky little way, that he, too, would compete, and that he had high hopes of being crowned.

Next day the birds all met for their great con-

test: or rather, they seemed all to be there, until the moment for starting came, when one of them noticed that the wren was missing. This made them all cackle again; they thought that he had been afraid to show his weakness and to have to confess how foolish he had been even to think of flying high.

At the word 'Go!' they all began to fly. Some shot up quickly, but did not get very far. Others started off with more care, but slowly began to mount higher and higher. Then one by one they began to drop out of the race, until only a few were left. The eagle, of course, was among these few, for he can fly higher than all the others, and—so they say—can even look full into the face of the sun while he is in flight. Well, the few became fewer, till there were only three, then two, and finally only one—the eagle. He got right above the rest, as he had felt sure he would, and had no doubt that he would be the king. It seemed impossible that any other bird could now fly above him. However, even eagles grow tired, and so at last his highest point was reached, and with one last flap of the wings he reached his limit.

He had been so sure that he would be the one to be crowned that he could hardly believe it when

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he heard a triumphant call from a bird above him. Above *him*—the eagle! He could hear, too, that it was only a little bird, and on looking up he was amazed to find that it was the little wren. He had not stayed away after all, and he had beaten every one of them. The eagle remembered, now he came to think of it, that he had felt a little weight on his back, but it had not seemed to matter, for he was a big, strong eagle, and the extra weight had made no difference to him. But it had made all the difference to the wren, for it was he who, all unseen by the other birds, had perched on the eagle's back and hidden there. He waited until the eagle was tired out, and then with one little effort he jumped off his back and fluttered above his head, so rising higher than all the others and becoming the royal bird.

Of course this is not a true story, but it is a famous one, as you will see if you look at a farthing. There he is, trim and perky—the royal wren! He was given a place in our coinage in honour of Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, who, as you know, comes from Scotland.

When the Lord saved the Israelites from Egypt,

it was such a wonderful flight that He called it 'bearing them up on eagles' wings'. "I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself" (Exodus 19. 4). Like the wren, they were small and insignificant. Like him, they had no hope of rising or being carried by their own strength. They did not have to use a trick, like the wren, for the Lord Himself gladly offered to lift them and carry them out of their slavery and sorrow into His liberty and blessing. How hopeless they would have been without Him! How foolish, if they had tried to rise in their own strength! We, too, must realise how hopeless and foolish it is to try to be saved by our own efforts. We need the mighty wings of the Saviour to lift us and carry us all through life, that He may bring us safely to Himself in the glory. Our learning will not save us. Our efforts to be good will never be enough. We shall always stay down in the shadows and sin of this world unless we put all our faith in the Lord Jesus, and so are able to say:

'When no one but Christ could save,
Love lifted me.'

H.F.

THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

THE KEY TO FULNESS

Reading : Acts ii. 23 - 25, 34 - 36, 41 ; iii. 13 - 15 ; iv. 8 - 12 ; v. 30 - 32 ; ix. 4 - 6 ; x. 36.

AS we read these passages, we cannot fail to see that one note runs through them all—one triumphant note ringing in unmistakable clearness. I think it is gathered up in the most concise and direct form in the last passage: "He is Lord of all". The Lordship of Jesus Christ—that is the note. That was the great declaration at the beginning, and that was the explanation of everything. There is no doubt but that, in those first days, there was a great fulness of life; everything was marked by fulness. We could say concerning that time that 'the river of God was full of water' (Ps. lxxv. 9). Everything was full: the gathering in was full, the going on was full, the testimony was full. Everywhere you looked, you saw the fulness of the Lord in individuals and in companies, and the secret and explanation was just this—the Lordship of Christ.

ABSENCE OF FULNESS TO-DAY

The one thing that we are having to deplore to-day is the absence of that fulness. We do not see

those who are being brought to the Lord led into fulness. They get so far, but they very soon come to a standstill. Their spiritual life does not increase and grow with the fulness of Christ. Those who are the Lord's—I am speaking generally—do not bear the marks of having gone on into the greater fulnesses of Christ. Multitudes are still at the beginning. The one thing and the only thing that they say about their relationship to the Lord is that at a certain time in a certain place they came to the Lord, they found the Lord, they were saved—and that may be twenty, thirty, forty years ago. They may have a testimony to having been kept by the power of God during that time: that is, that they are still with the Lord, they are not back on the other side of their conversion; but they are not characterized by real spiritual fulness, having grown and made increase.

A very great many of the Lord's people are deeply concerned and burdened about this spiritual state to-day; and, in an attempt to meet it, through the last fifty years in particular, a great many movements have sprung up, so that over the Christian world, at regular and frequent intervals, conventions and conferences are held for what is

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called 'the deepening of the spiritual life'. This is to meet the situation which is recognised as being so far-reaching and widespread—a poor spiritual state amongst Christians; a weak and defective condition of the spiritual life—and this thing grows and grows, but is not meeting the situation at all. The demand for it increases rather than lessens, proving that the need is not really vitally touched and overcome.

THE REMEDY

Well, what is the remedy? Why was it that at the beginning they had such virile converts, marked from the outset by such a large measure of Christ? Why was it that then things happened on such a large and effective scale within the compass of a few days? Why was it that the churches grew and the Lord added unto them those who were being saved? Why could it be that in one day three thousand, and soon after as many again, were added? Why, in the course of one man's lifetime, could the greater part of the then known world be evangelized and churches be established everywhere, and that upon a large measure of spiritual light and life? Why?

If you think about it, I am quite sure that you will be convinced that the answer is to be found in the testimony—the declaration born out of something which had happened—and that testimony was to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. They proclaimed Him as Lord. "He is Lord of all." The Lordship of Jesus Christ is the secret of fulness, and we never really move into the fulness of Christ until He is Lord.

Now, perhaps you are saying that that is very simple. Who, after all, does not believe in the Lordship of Jesus Christ? Well, it is very much deeper than that. The Lordship of Jesus Christ is not only an objective fact. I suppose almost any Christian, any really born-again child of God, would be willing to subscribe to the objective fact and say, "Jesus Christ is Lord"! But why, then, this state of things? Either what I am saying is entirely untrue, and the Lordship of Christ does not lead to His fulness, or else it means something more than objective truth; and I think the latter is the case. The real trouble is that in so many of His own He is not Lord. He may be Saviour, but He is not Lord. The Lordship of Christ means in us a very deep and very drastic work. It means the overthrowing of every other lordship.

But the other lordships may not be in the form of outward things. The other lordships may be in our own wills. Just that strong-mindedness of ours

may be the thing which occupies the throne in the place of Christ. The Lord Jesus is kept out of His place as Lord in us because of the very strength of our own natures, our desires, our affections, our likes and our dislikes, and all that realm of our human feelings. There may be that in our make-up which is thwarting and frustrating His Lordship and in so doing is just keeping us out of His fulness.

It may be the enthronement of that reasoning power of ours—we will not call it 'intellect', that would be too presumptuous—but the working of our minds, reasoning and arguing and thinking that our judgment about things is right, is certain, is conclusive. Our convictions, at which we have arrived after weighing up the pros and cons, are the things by which we are to be governed and, perhaps, others are to be governed. The strength of our minds, our reason—if you like, our intellect—may just be in the way of His Lordship, and you will find all those things in the Apostles before Pentecost. You will find them arguing against the Lord on affectional grounds, on rational grounds, on preferential grounds; mind, heart and will all obstructing His absolute Lordship, occupying the throne. Not until that was entirely and completely broken and smashed in the day of the Cross was a way made for His Lordship. Yes, the other lords may be inside our own constitution, our own make-up, our own disposition. Whatever they may be, wherever they may be, the truth is this, that the way to the fulness of Christ is by His absolute Lordship in our lives.

Now, the whole Bible bears it out. Wherever you look, you will find this is the underlying truth. You look at Israel's history. While in the wilderness for the forty years, the one thing that was the issue being fought out was the Lordship of God: they were fighting with that matter of absolute submission and subjection to Him in their own hearts, their own minds, their own wills. For forty years that battle went on; and it was not until the Jordan made the great divide between that kind of thing and the coming of the Captain of the Lord's host into His place—the representative of the people gathering them all up into his own person, taking the shoes from off his feet, bowing with his face to the ground and handing up the lordship to the Lord, the Captain of the Lord's host—it was not until then that they moved on into the great fulness which God had intended for them. The inheritance was altogether frustrated while the battle of lordship went on. The inheritance was entered upon so soon as that lordship was established. In the later chapter of Israel's history under the

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Judges, it is quite clear. What is it?—limitation, defeat, bondage, captivity; everything frustrated and thwarted and spoiled. When David comes into his place as king, then Israel is delivered, moving later into the fulness of the glory under David and Solomon. Lordship is the key to fulness.

In the New Testament, it is just the same. Here you have it in the case of the Apostles, the twelve. You can see their defeat and their weakness and their failure and their poverty—until Christ becomes Lord, absolute Lord; the Holy Ghost making Him Lord in them as He was Lord in Heaven—and then they come into fulness! Pentecost—“Jesus Christ is Lord”—and then fulness!

Take Peter. You remember, Peter had to have a special battle over this. I think he had more than one battle; perhaps we all have more than one battle. Fulness is a progressive thing. We do not enter upon it all at once, and every fresh measure of that fulness is preceded by some fresh conflict as to the Lordship of Christ, and Peter had several. But you remember Caesarea and you remember the house of Cornelius. What preceded it? Peter in Joppa on the housetop, and the vision, a sheet let down from Heaven in which were all manner of four-footed creatures, reptiles, unclean beasts, and the voice saying, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” ‘Not so, Lord; nothing unclean has ever passed my lips.’ And the thing was done thrice, the Lord was insistent; and Peter was wondering what the vision meant, when the messengers of Cornelius arrived from Caesarea. Peter was invited to go to the house of a Gentile with the word of the Lord, to the house of the unclean. And what was his note there? Well, his note was: “He is Lord of all”. What happened? Peter entered into something bigger than he had ever had before; that is, he found a bigger Christ than he had known before. In recounting what happened, he says: ‘Who was I to withstand God?’ ‘Who was I? The Lord took this thing in hand and showed Himself far bigger than myself and my tradition—He simply lifted me right out of my old bondages and limitations and landed me out of my depths altogether!’ The house of Cornelius came into fulness. It was all upon that one inward triumph, the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Take Paul. Paul is a wonderful case of spiritual growth, of swift movement on into spiritual fulness. How quickly Paul moved on with the Lord! What a wealth we have in him! Why? Because he was such an exceptional man? Not necessarily. Spiritual growth may have nothing whatever to do with what we are naturally. Nothing at all. Oh, we meet so many of those who have the natural

intelligence and the advantages of training, all the academic advantages, but who in spiritual things cannot see, cannot grasp. At the same time so often there are those who have had no such advantages, who are altogether without that natural basis which might be expected to be necessary for understanding, and yet somehow these leap into things, and on they go. No, it may have nothing whatever to do with what we are naturally. Why was it that Paul made such swift progress and grew so rapidly? You notice, at the end of the ninth chapter of Acts, how, after he had been received at Damascus, had recovered his sight and had been baptized, it says that he was with the disciples certain days, and he at once in the synagogue began his witness and his ministry, and mightily refuted the Jews, openly testifying that Jesus was the Son of God. He grew. Well, where is the secret? “Who art thou, Lord?” “What wilt thou have me to do, Lord?” That is it. From the beginning with him Jesus was Lord.

Now, let me say it again. It has been said many times. In the book of the Acts, they did not first of all preach Jesus as Saviour. They preached Him as Lord. You see, that carried with it of necessity the Saviourhood. Acknowledge Jesus to be Lord, in those days, and see what it involved. If that One who so recently has been crucified and buried is really to-day the living Lord, then that crucifixion and burial was no ordinary thing. That could not have been just a man being killed, martyred, for his beliefs. He could not be classed amongst those who have died for their fanatical views or for trying to set up a movement against the powers that be. If this is the *Lord*, then it is something more than that. He must be the Christ, He must be the Saviour, He must be the Son of God. All *that* is involved if He is Lord now; and if they accepted and acknowledged Him as Lord, well, that included His Saviourhood, but the Saviourhood was something subsidiary to the Lordship.

After all, the Saviourhood of Christ is but a recovering thing in relation to His Lordship. The Lordship was the eternal intention of God concerning Him. The Saviourhood is in order to get back to the Lordship, to lead on to the recovery of the Lordship. He can never be actually Lord until He has saved the inheritance of which He is the eternally designated Lord; but when He is Lord, it means that He *is* Saviour, He *has* redeemed. The Lordship is more than the Saviourhood. And so, when you come on to God's *supreme* ground—“hath made him a Prince and a Saviour”—then the way is open for God to take you right on, beyond conversion, beyond the in-

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fant stage of just being born again, on to 'growing up into Him in all things', on to the fulness of Christ. So they put the full testimony there, where all the rest was included, and thus there was a wide open way for all God's intention. Wherever you look in the Scriptures, you find that it is Lordship which is the secret of fulness.

GOD'S DEALING WITH THE INDIVIDUAL

Now, this is something which God, by every means, seeks to make good in every one of us. All the dealings of the Lord with us are not just to get us saved, but to make the Lordship of Christ real in us. Yes, all His dealings with us are to that end, and His dealings with us are personal dealings. Everything is going to be very personal in this matter. You and I, no matter who we may be, if we really come into the Lord's hands, are going to be dealt with in such a way as to bring us to the place where Christ is Lord in our lives. It is going to be personal: for, after all, while the end is corporate and collective, it must of necessity be an individual thing between us and the Lord, so that we know, within our own hearts and experiences, that God is working at a very *real* thing in this matter of making His Son Lord. It is going to be as personal with us as it was with Paul. It may not be in exactly the same way, but it will be just as personal. "When we were all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking unto *me* in the Hebrew language"—I, me, and my own language, and by name—"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts xxvi. 14). It is going to be as personal as that with us; we are not going to pass in the crowd. You say, 'Oh, Paul was an exceptional man, an exceptional case, outstanding; it can never be like that with me!' Well, it is going to be. We may not go on a Damascus road and see a light from Heaven at noontide brighter than the sun. But it is going to be as personal.

I was once staying with a sea captain, and as we talked about ships, and work amongst men on the ships, and so on, he told me an incident in the life of a Captain of one of the Union Castle liners. When he was Chief Officer, he was always seeking an opportunity for leading men to Christ, and he asked the Captain one day if he could have a service for the crew in the evening. Although he received permission, he said nothing during the day. He said nothing to anybody; he was letting it go. Late in the afternoon someone, one of the crew, said, 'Oh, you are having a service to-night, I hear, and quite a few of the men are coming!' 'Oh', said the Chief Officer, 'I have not said any-

thing about it: where did you get that from?' 'I think it originated with the cook!' was the reply. So the Chief Officer went along to the cook and said, 'Who told you I was having a service to-night?' 'Oh', said the cook, 'it was only a joke!'

The Chief Officer felt that the Lord had tied him up to it and that he had to have a service. Amongst the men who came was one who was brought under deep conviction of sin. He had been greatly concerned about this man, and had been praying very much for him. But he did not come through to the Lord. They arrived in port, and he and another fellow went off 'on the spree', and they took the voyage back without them. This fellow spent all his money, got into no end of trouble and then quarrelled with the other man, and they parted and he was left stranded and in a deplorable state. He went to the British Consul to ask for help. The Consul got into touch with a shipping agent, to get him a job on a ship, so as to get him back to his own country, and he was told to report at a certain yard on a certain day to go aboard and take a job. When he got there, because of past history he was given a very menial job down in the stoke-hole, looking after the fires.

Some days later they were in mid-ocean. There was terrible heat outside and inside, and he staggered up on deck to get a breath of air. Dazed and half senseless, he perched himself on the ship's rail, lost his balance and went over. For a time he was not missed. Presently he was enquired after and could not be found. A search of the ship was made, and the roll-call was held. Three-quarters of an hour passed, and they reported to the Captain that he must be overboard. The Captain ordered the ship to turn round on its course (and it takes three-quarters of a mile to turn a ship like that round), and back they went for three-quarters of an hour. No one ever expected to find him, but at sea every effort has to be made to recover a man, not just leave him. Three-quarters of an hour back on that course: everybody looking out in every direction, listening.

Suddenly a man said, 'I thought I heard something!' All looked—there was a black spot in the sea! A boat was lowered, the man picked up, brought aboard. Asked what had happened, he explained, and said: 'I saw the ship going, going, going! I kept myself afloat, and struck out to follow the ship's course so far as I could, though I knew it was a hopeless thing. She went on and on, almost out of sight. And then I saw her turn round, gradually come nearer, and as you got near I decided on one last shout for help—and that was the shout you heard!'

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Well, you are not surprised, are you, that that man came to the Lord? That was the outcome of this true story. His last shout, as he explained, was not just a shout to the ship. It was a shout from his heart, higher than the ship—it was the last cry of a man to God. But he is a representative case. Poor fellow, he is not a Paul by any means, is he?—a ship's stoker who has been touched by the Spirit of God, who has kicked against the pricks, who has fought and gone off, but who has been so marvellously singled out—saved by what might be regarded as a millionth chance naturally. Yes, the Lord had His eye on him.

Yes, the Lord's dealings with us will be as personal as that. They may not take the same form, but the matter is going to be as personal as that with every one of us. The Lord is going to hedge us up to this. If we are really going through into all the Lord's purpose, we are going to be faced with this matter of His absolute Lordship, and our destiny is going to be determined entirely on the basis of His Lordship. We may be saved, but that

is not the end of the destiny which God has fixed for us. Salvation is the first step in God's purpose. We can be saved, and still lose the great purpose of God in salvation—the fulness of Christ. That is the destiny toward which salvation is the first great step. But the fulness of Christ demands the Lordship of Christ. If you want to go right on, to go right through, not to miss anything—as Israel, that first generation, missed the Lord's purpose—if you do not wish to miss what He is after, do not be content with just being saved. For, after all, to have Christ as Saviour means that the benefits are ours; but to have Him as Lord means that everything is for Him. Which is the higher—what we get or what He gets? Surely our hearts respond to this! While we are deeply, we are profoundly grateful for all the blessings of redemption, of salvation, nevertheless it is unto Him and not unto ourselves that we want the satisfaction to come, and He is only really satisfied with the glory that issues from His own acknowledged Lordship.

T. A-S.

THE ABIDING MESSAGE OF PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

WHEN we turn to the Letter to the Galatians, we are immediately conscious of an atmosphere of conflict. This Letter is a battle-cry from the heart of the Apostle Paul, intended on the one hand to rally the faithful to the banner of Christ, and on the other to strike dismay into the heart of the enemy. There must obviously be something momentous bound up with the result of this conflict to account for a letter so fervent and so urgent; and when we consider that, in the present arrangement of the New Testament in the sovereign ordering of the Lord, Galatians immediately precedes Ephesians and Ephesians has much to say of the vast purposes of God which are focussed in the Church, we shall not be wrong in concluding that the battle which rages in Galatians has much to do with the realisation of the purpose of God unfolded in Ephesians. Paul saw that the very purpose of God in and through the Church was endangered by the peril threatening to envelop the Galatian Christians.

Let us then go straight to the heart of the message of the Letter. It is an impassioned appeal to *abide in Christ*. Written in letters of fire over this letter are those so simple, so profound words of the Lord Jesus: "ABIDE IN ME, AND I IN YOU" (John xv. 4). The Christians in Galatia were in grave danger of succumbing to the peril which has always persistently pursued both the individual

Christian and the Church. What is this peril? It is the dangerous tendency to move away from Christ: from all that *He* is, from all that *He* has accomplished, from *Him* as the Alpha and Omega of the Christian life; and to go back to ourselves, to what we are, to what we can do—to any position where Christ is less than *everything*.

Now Paul knew that God has only one answer to every need of man and every wile of Satan, and that is "Christ Crucified". So we are not surprised to find this Letter just full of CHRIST. Paul had seen that everything for the Christian and for the Church was "in Christ", and so we find that over forty times he here makes immediate reference to Christ. But why is Paul so concerned and so strong in his appeal in this Letter?

THE GREAT CONTRAST BETWEEN TRUE AND FALSE CHRISTIANITY

It will be well for us to remind ourselves that, from the Church's earliest days, throughout the long centuries and right up to the present day, there has been in this world a True and a False version of Christianity. Paul was acutely aware of the encroachment of an utterly false Christianity in Galatia, and it is this which accounts for the urgency of his appeal. This Letter is right in the thick of the battle for the True against the False.

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Perhaps we could say that in no other part of the New Testament is the great contrast between True and False Christianity so clear and so complete, within so few pages. 'Galatians' has always been in the front line of this conflict. Luther wielded this letter as a veritable battle-axe at the time of the Reformation.

But let us pause for a moment to make one further point as to the message of this Letter. It is quite generally thought that 'Galatians' is occupied simply and solely with the great doctrine of 'Justification by faith.' Of course, it does have much to say on this vital truth, this foundation truth, but 'Galatians' has much more to say than this, and this larger message has generally been missed. Nothing less than the whole Christian life, in time and into eternity, is involved here. 'Justification by faith' is only a part of a much larger message.

We have said that 'Galatians' is the Letter of a Great Contrast. This great contrast between True and False Christianity is the sum total of many contrasts which are to be found throughout the Letter. Here indeed is a profitable field for meditation! There are well over twenty contrasts in this short Letter, but we can only mention some by way of indication. Here we find: (i) the contrast between "the Spirit" and "the flesh", iii. 3; (ii) the contrast between being "led by the Spirit" and being "under the law", v. 18; (iii) the contrast between "the truth of the Gospel of Christ" and "a different gospel", i. 6, 7; ii. 14; (iv) the contrast between "our liberty . . . in Christ Jesus" and "bondage", ii. 4; (v) the contrast between "the Jerusalem that is above" and "the Jerusalem that now is", iv. 25, 26; (vi) the contrast between "the hearing of faith" and "the works of the law", iii. 2; (vii) the contrast between "revelation of Jesus Christ" and "the tradition of my fathers", i. 12, 14; (viii) the contrast between 'glorying in the Cross' and glorying in the flesh', vi. 13, 14; (ix) the contrast between the true "servant of Christ" and "the false brethren", the trouble-makers, i. 10; ii. 4; v. 10, 12; (x) the contrast between Christians holding fast to the fact, "ye all are one man in Christ Jesus", and Christians 'biting and devouring one another', iii. 28; v. 15.

It is a startling and far-reaching contrast that is here disclosed, and between the True and the False at every point we find the Cross standing. To a closer consideration of some of the essential characteristics of True Christianity we shall return presently, but for the moment we must turn to consider the exact nature of the peril threatening the Galatian Christians and its significance for all time.

THE INSIDIOUS PERIL
ENCIRCLING THE GALATIANS

The story of the churches in Galatia is briefly outlined in the Letter. Paul visited Galatia at the first in great personal need and there proclaimed the gospel of "Christ crucified". He received a warm welcome; the Galatians opened their hearts to the Lord and "by the hearing of faith" "received . . . the Spirit" (iv. 12-15; iii. 1-3). The Galatians, therefore, made a good and true beginning. They were "born again" believers. But hard on the heels of Paul came certain men, variously described as "the false brethren" (ii. 4), "he that troubleth you" (v. 10), "they that unsettle you" (v. 12), and because of these trouble-makers the whole future of the Galatian Christians was in danger. Who were these people? What do they represent?

They were Jewish Christians. Now, of course, there is really no such person as a *Jewish Christian*, for in Christ "there can be neither Jew nor Greek" (iii. 28). But we must realise that in New Testament times there were a large number of Christians who were living contradictions, Christians who were trying to live in two dispensations at the same time. In Acts xxi, 17-21 we read that there were thousands of believers from among the Jews who were still "zealous for the law" and walking after the Jewish "customs". And, mark you, this was no more than about twenty-five years after Pentecost! *Comparatively few Christians, converted Jews, seem to have realised that Christianity was not an extension of Judaism but something* ALTOGETHER NEW, *the Reality, of which Judaism was but the shadow. And it is just this failure to understand the essential nature of True Christianity which accounts for the terrible tragedy traced out in the history of the Church through the centuries right up to the present day.*

In the New Testament there are three 'groups' of Christians discernible.

First we mention those to whom we have referred as 'the trouble-makers', who insisted that all Gentile Christians accept the Jewish religion as well. It is doubtful whether these were true Christians at all (i. 6-9).

Then, there were those who recognised the freedom of Gentile believers, but, as Jews themselves, still lived as Jews (see Acts xv). Clearly among these there must have been various 'degrees of emancipation' from the old dispensation. (The position of Peter and James is worthy of the most careful consideration). If only these had seen the folly of putting new wine into old skins, as fore-

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told by the Lord Jesus! If only Peter had learnt his lesson on the Mount of Transfiguration, he could never have behaved as he did at Antioch (ii. 11ff). There on the Mount he had placed Moses and Elijah on a level with the Lord Jesus, and the Father had at once stepped in, removing these two and directing the gaze of the disciples to HIS SON ALONE, so that they saw no man but "Jesus only". In True Christianity CHRIST IS EVERYTHING. He fulfilled all for which Moses stood.

Then, thirdly, there were those who saw the heavenly character of True Christianity, and, while not despising the past, saw clearly its true place and significance. Such were Stephen and Paul and many others.

At this point we will pause to note two things. Firstly, the bitter opposition with which Paul and those with him met. Throughout his life and long after he had gone to glory, Paul and all that he stood for were bitterly assailed, not by the world but by Christians who would not and could not see the nature and the implications of "the truth of the gospel". It has ever been the case. Think of the bitter opposition with which Luther met from professing Christians. It is just the same to-day (iv. 28, 29).

The second thing we must note is Paul's attitude to those who were more or less involved in a contradictory position—the second group. Fearless in denouncing the enemies of the truth, he would come alongside of these, bearing with them, and *identifying himself with them, so long as the truth of the gospel was not compromised* (I Cor. ix. 19–22). How like the Lord Jesus! But only the Holy Spirit can lead us in this difficult, this delicate path of uncompromising love. Otherwise we shall either compromise the truth or compromise the love of God.

Now, to return to the immediate situation in Galatia. It was, of course, the trouble-making Jewish Christians who were responsible for unsettling the Galatians. They arrived and said in effect, 'You cannot be a true Christian without being a Jew as well; you will make no progress without the assistance of the Jewish religion.' What they said involved two things: accepting the rites of Judaism, especially circumcision, and returning to the path of 'self-effort'. The Judaizers were saying, in so many words, 'Christ is not sufficient; you must have Moses as well'. They gave the Lord Jesus a place, but set Moses alongside of Him. We must, of course, be clear that there was nothing wrong with Moses or with the Law. Both the Ceremonial Law and the Moral Law were right, for they came from God, but *both were fulfilled in*

Christ (Matt. v. 17). The whole Jewish religion with all its outward rites and ceremonies was fulfilled in Christ. The whole Moral Law, revealing the Will of God, of which the Jews were the chief custodians, was fulfilled in Christ. Having Christ you have ALL! How foolish, then, to go back to the 'copies and shadows of the heavenly things'! (Heb. viii. 5). And how disastrous to rely for salvation or holiness upon the performance of ceremonies or the attempt to keep the moral law, for neither has any power to help sinful man (Rom. viii. 3, 4).

THE PERSISTENT PERIL THREATENING THE CHRISTIAN AND THE CHURCH

As the particular form of the peril which threatened the Galatians may seem somewhat remote from us, it will help us to look behind it, to its abiding significance. As we do so, two dangers stand out:

(i) *The danger of confidence in or dependence upon the external and visible in religion.* How much there is of the external and visible in Christendom; countless Churches, innumerable services, a great variety of religious orders, and so on. How great a dependence there is on these things. We simply observe the fact. In order to bring the implication of this home to us and to discover how much of real Christianity we possess, let us assume that the Church has been driven underground as in her early history. All Church buildings have been closed or destroyed; all conventions and public meetings prohibited; there are no ministers; there are no Christian periodicals or literature; there are no religious broadcasts; it is now a crime to be a Christian and we are fortunate indeed if we possess a Bible and know a few Christians in our locality. *Everything has gone but THE LORD. What we then have is what we really have!* True Christianity is essentially inward, invisible, heavenly. While, of course, it expresses itself in ways that can be seen, it is completely independent of anything whatsoever of this world.

(ii) *The danger of any kind of self-reliance or self-effort.* All the religions of this world are founded upon these false foundations, and it is very often wrongly thought and taught that being a Christian is a matter of our trying to live up to the standard of Christ. It is true that God has made known His Will to man, and that in four ways: through conscience (Rom. ii. 15); through nature, through creation (Rom. i. 20; ii. 14; I Cor. xi. 14); through the Law as given through Moses; and supremely in Christ. But it is vital that we should

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understand the exact nature of the response that God requires from us. *He does not now require any effort on our part to keep His Law or to do His Will. Never TRY to keep God's Law! Never TRY to do God's Will!* This is the surest way to fail. But do not misunderstand. God requires, and must have, not our *effort*, but a *heart attitude*. This heart attitude and response Paul speaks of as "the hearing of faith" (iii. 2), and the "obedience of faith" (Rom. i. 5; xvi. 26).

The Lord must have our full co-operation, but He does not require any contribution of effort from our side at any stage of Christian experience. It is for us to receive, to work with, to lay hold of the abundance of grace that is in Christ. God has provided everything in His Son; whenever we try to provide something we not only reveal our folly, but dishonour Him. Thus, whenever the Lord speaks to us, whenever He shows us His will, we must refuse to attempt it ourselves and must say to Him, 'Lord, I want what You want; I commit myself to what You have shown me; but You must do it.' If, of course, some immediate practical issue is involved, then grace is available for immediate obedience and adjustment. The true Christian life is not one of limp inactivity, of leaving everything to the Lord to do, but of *holy activity on the right basis of GRACE*. When Paul says that we are saved "by grace . . . through faith . . . not of ourselves . . . not of works" (Eph. ii. 4-10), he is indicating the true basis of the Christian life *from beginning to end*.

WATCH YOUR TEMPERAMENT!

In considering the persistent peril that threatens us, the peril of moving away from Christ, of drifting from True to False Christianity, there is one matter that comes to light which we must mention: It is this, that the enemy often finds a ready ally in our temperaments, that is, our natural 'make-up', the way we are made. The fact is that we are all abnormal, with sin-sick temperaments. 'The way we are made' is often our greatest problem.

Take the case of the Galatians. The internal evidence alone is sufficient to prove that by nature, temperamentally, they were fickle, inconstant, changeable and easily moved (i. 6; iii. 1; iv. 14, 15). Their ready response to the gospel was followed by an equally ready dissimulation. They were like the "rocky ground" in the parable of the sower.

Take the case of Peter. How are we to account for his fervent avowal of loyalty to the Lord and

then his almost categorical denial? How are we to account for his behaviour at Antioch (ii. 11ff.) after his experience at the house of Cornelius, and the position he had taken at Jerusalem? Must we not call it 'moral cowardice'? We are not criticizing Peter but simply trying to instruct ourselves. Peter was warm-hearted and impulsive by nature, and probably the kind of man who hates the distressing controversy which faithfulness to the Lord sometimes involves. It is clear at any rate that Peter's temperament was one of his great problems.

How much more might be said! The history of the Church abounds in tragedies due to human temperament usurping (perhaps unwittingly) the place of the Holy Spirit. What a variety of human and national temperaments there are! And every one of them is a potential menace to the spiritual life, because of the devastating effects of sin.

CHRIST MUST BE ALL

We have said that the crux of the situation in Galatia was whether Christ should have a place or be everything. Now some very solemn things are decided by whether a Christian or a church is centred on Christ or not, and by whether HE, through the Holy Spirit, is really in control. We can only hint at these, but they are clearly in Paul's mind as he writes. He knows that tremendous issues are at stake. If Christ is not ALL, spiritual progress will be arrested (iv. 19). Only if we abide in Him, as our Lord and our Life and our All, will there be spiritual development. If Christ is not ALL, our inheritance will be in danger (iv. 30). Our destiny as God's children is bound up with God's Son, and if He is not ALL, our whole future will be affected. If Christ is not ALL, we run the risk of shipwreck (v. 4; John xv. 2, 6). Only as we are centred on Him, cleaving to Him alone, are we safe from disaster. The Galatians were Christians, but Paul knew that it was possible to be a saved soul through a basic faith in Christ and still lose everything else of God's intention. Christ is All; therefore only in so far as we enter into the meaning of this fact are we in the way of God's purpose.

FIVE ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUE CHRISTIANITY

Finally, let us consider five essential characteristics of True Christianity, for our best safeguard against the False is to know and cleave to the True.

I. THE SUPREMACY OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD'S SON

The Holy Spirit has a very big place in this Letter of the Great Contrast. We see Him as the

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One who begins everything, the great Originator (iv. 29 ; iii. 3). Every true Christian is born of the Spirit ; the Church was born of the Spirit. In True Christianity the Holy Spirit starts everything and sustains everything. By "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" God supplies the continuous day-by-day need of His children (iii. 5 ; Phil. i. 19). Again, we are to "walk by the Spirit", and to be "led by the Spirit", and to "sow to the Spirit", by which we understand that the Holy Spirit is to have complete control in the Christian and in the Church, and we are to co-operate fully with Him (v. 16, 18 ; vi. 8). We also read of "the fruit of the Spirit" (v. 22, 23), so that the formation of the character of Christ in us is all the work of the Spirit. Indeed, He is called here "the Spirit of His Son", so that the whole great task of making us true sons and heirs of God, in union with Christ, is in the hands of the Holy Spirit (iv. 6). True Christianity is marked by the real government and activity of the Spirit ; that which is false is marked by the control and activity of man.

II. THE SIMPLICITY OF FAITH'S RESPONSE TO GOD

It is hardly necessary to say that Paul has much to say in 'Galatians' about faith! We have already stressed the simplicity of that which God requires of us. Our part is to enter into God's complete provision in His Son by the hearing and obedience of faith. Through His Word God presents and offers His Son to us, and with Him "all things" ; it is for us to respond, to receive and to enter in. Paul could say, "I live in faith" (ii. 20). "*Faith working through love*" (v. 6) is the mainspring of the spiritual life. False Christianity is marked by man's best efforts and man's presumed ability to please God, because the way of faith leaves no room for man's pride.

III. THE HEAVENLY CHARACTER, ORIGIN AND DESTINATION OF THE CHURCH

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of a right understanding of the true nature of the Church. The fundamental fact to be grasped is that the Church is "*not of this world*", even as Christ is not of this world (John xvii. 16). Even as the Lord Jesus was distinguished upon earth by a certain quality of life as belonging to Heaven, so the Church should be clearly marked out. Even as the Lord Jesus came down out of Heaven, so with the True Church. The Church is not something built by men upon the earth, but a spiritual building under construction by the activities of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and lives of men. Even as the Lord Jesus returned to Heaven, this is the

Church's destination. See what Paul has to say here about "the Jerusalem that is above" (iv. 26 ; note also Heb. xii. 22ff.) and about our need of deliverance from this world with its ways, ideas and religion (i. 4 ; iv. 3, 8 - 10 ; vi. 14).

IV. THE DISCOVERY OF THE LIVING CHRIST

Up to the time of his encounter with the Living Christ on the way to Damascus Paul's whole life had been governed by "the traditions of my fathers", by what had been handed down to him by others from the past ; but from that momentous moment his life as a Christian was one of the growing discovery of Christ. The contrast he makes between the "revelation of Jesus Christ" and "the traditions of my fathers" is a vital one, for it shows that everything for a Christian should be a matter of first-hand experience (i. 12, 14). We shall be in a false position if in anything we are following men or if we are governed by tradition. Even if a thing is true we must receive it fresh from the Lord for ourselves. Of course, we shall come to this first-hand knowledge of the Lord and His will, through His Word, read and ministered, and through fellowship ; but it is vital that we should be able to say, about everything that we believe and do, 'The Lord has shown me His will about this.' Needless to say, this confidence is wedded to humility. Luther's experience finely illustrates our point. Groaning under the intolerable burden of mediaeval, traditional, false Christianity, he was freed in a moment by the discovery of the Living Christ as his Righteousness. The way of salvation from beginning to end is just the discovery of Christ.

V. A GLORYING IN THE CROSS

We sometimes sing, 'The Lamb is *all* the glory of Immanuel's land', and it is true. Every true Christian glories in the Cross, whereas the Cross is always set aside or made little of in false Christianity. As Paul writes to the Galatians he has much to say of the Cross—the Cross where we were 'delivered out of this present evil world', where we died to sin and to ourselves, where we died to a life of hopeless self-effort under the law, and where the Son of God 'loved us and gave himself up for us' (i. 4 ; ii. 19, 20 ; vi. 14). Paul had no eyes for any save 'Christ, and Him crucified.' Everything else fades from sight in the light of the 'wondrous cross'. It is by His Cross and Resurrection that the Lord Jesus has opened up for us such a wonderful future.

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?" The conflict of

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

the centuries is still on! The perils that threaten us are still real! But the Lord Himself is our great Safeguard. For us the issue is clear. Let us main-

tain the position that "CHRIST IS ALL, AND IN ALL"; let us "ABIDE IN HIM"; let us keep steadfastly "looking unto Jesus"—JESUS ONLY!

T.L.M.

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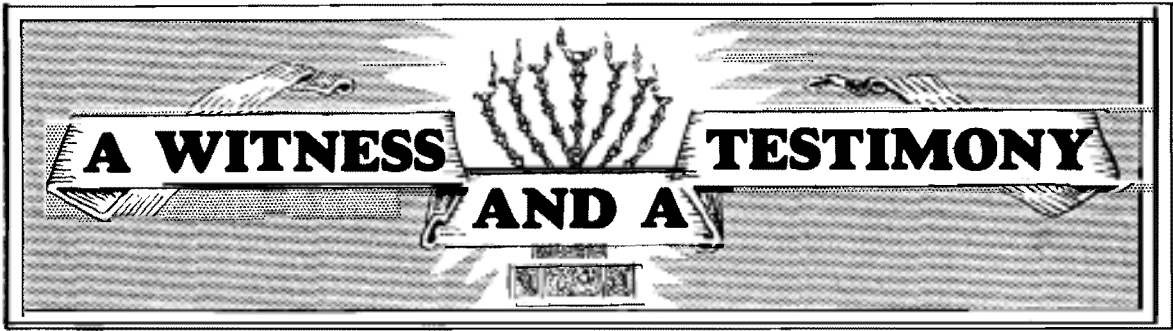
THIS MINISTRY

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

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

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

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



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THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF SERVICE

V. A SPECIAL VOCATION

“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 . . . But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (I Pet. ii. 5, 9).

THE LORD'S PEOPLE
DIVIDED INTO THREE REALMS

AT the beginning of the nationally constituted life of Israel, after they had come out of Egypt and crossed the Red Sea and arrived at Sinai, and the Lord had given instructions concerning the tabernacle and all its materials and its order, and the people were now gathered around the completed tabernacle which had been set up, we find that they were divided into three main realms.

There was, on the circumference, shall we say, the main body of Israel ; it was a very large body. We will call them the general company of the people of God.

Then, within them, as a kind of ‘Israel within Israel’, as it has been expressed, we have the tribe of Levi. For the purposes of the service and the journeys of the people and the tabernacle they are

subsequently divided into three, the three families of the sons of Aaron. Their respective functions and ministry were, briefly: (1) the charge and care of the holy vessels—that went to one section of the priestly family ; (2) the charge and care of the boards and the bars of the tabernacle, committed to another definite section of the priestly family ; and (3) the curtains, the fabric, and all that had to do with the coverings, committed to the third section. Later a fourth function was entrusted to the Levites, namely, the teaching ministry. This was their scope. But there were also limitations imposed upon them. For instance, they were not allowed to slay the offerings, and they were not allowed to offer incense. These things belonged to the priests.

Then, within this second realm, we find at the heart and centre of things Moses and Aaron : Moses, who is the prophet, that is, the one who receives the mind of God for His people ; Aaron, the priest, whose function it is to deal with all that has to do with the presence of God in the midst of His people, and with man's approach to God, as present.

That, very briefly, as Bible students know, is a very, very condensed outline, covering an immense amount of detail. But it is sufficient for our present purpose.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Let us now consider the meaning of these three realms of the people of God. We shall actually confine ourselves mainly to the two outer realms, not thinking specially of Moses and Aaron just now, for we need very little further instruction about them. We all know of what we might term the dual value of the ministry of the Lord Jesus, as God's Prophet and High Priest: as the One in whom is revealed all the mind of God for His people, and by whom all the ground is provided for the presence of God in the midst of His people, and all the means available for the approach of God's people to Him. We are not going to dwell upon that just at present. It is the other two that concern us—the general and the more inward.

DIVISIONS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT OFFICIAL

Now, in the Old Testament, the differences and the divisions which we have mentioned were official; they were 'ecclesiastical', they were formal. We see that clearly set forth in the sharply defined companies or bodies of people in different positions, performing different functions. There is the general mass, and there is the more particular company called the Levites; and they are objectively distinguishable. You can see them. Anybody who has seen a picture or model of the tabernacle in the wilderness, with the tribes arranged, can see quite clearly that here are distinct and definite divisions. That is how it is in the Old Testament: it is something official.

DIVISIONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT SPIRITUAL

In the New Testament it is not like that, and I ask you to follow me here very closely, for so much depends upon the real grasp of this fact. *In the New Testament the same differences are seen, but they are not official, formal, or ecclesiastical. They are spiritual.* You can see them, but you can only see them in a spiritual way, for they are only present spiritually. One great danger, with which many other perils are connected, is that of recognising distinctions and differences on a basis other than a spiritual one. The whole system of Christianity has gone astray on this very point, with disastrous consequences, and there is no end to it. Even amongst quite spiritual and evangelical people there is a very great deal of this Old Testament mentality, and in so far as that is true, it is loss, it is confusion—it means limitation in almost every spiritual direction. I do want you to grasp this, that

the distinctions which are made in the Old Testament are present also in the New Testament, but in an altogether different realm. Here they are spiritual, whereas there they are temporal. Let us then examine these distinctions, keeping in mind the governing law that they are essentially, fundamentally, predominantly, spiritual and not official.

THE GENERAL MASS OF THE LORD'S PEOPLE: AN OBJECTIVE REALM

The general mass of the Lord's people—the whole body as represented by all those gathered around the tabernacle to the uttermost bound of the camp—all stood in the value of the high priest's work. By reason of the priestly work of the high priest, they were the Lord's own people. They were in covenant relationship with the Lord, in virtue of shed blood. They were in the good of the presence of the Lord in the midst. All that was true right at the heart of things, with Moses and Aaron, the great altar and the sanctuary, went out to them, reached out to them, embraced them; they were their common property and heritage as the people of God. In that they were no different from other Israelites. There was no difference between them and Levites and priests on that ground. In virtue of the sacrifice and the blood, the atonement and the intercession, this was common ground for all the people of God. They were in the values of the work of the Levites, because the Levites were, after all, as we said previously, only their representatives, and not apart from them.

Now if we apply this up-to-date, we recognise that all who are on the ground of the one great offering, Jesus Christ, on the ground of the precious shed and sprinkled Blood, on the ground of the great atonement made, on the ground of the Holy Spirit as given, on the ground of the High Priestly intercession of the greater than Aaron—all who are on that ground inherit, enjoy, come into, the common benefits of salvation, and all that that means. Well, we accept that, that we are all one in Christ Jesus, and that there is no difference between us.

But note—that their good, their position and their realm, were matters of what was provided for them outwardly, objectively, and of what they believed to be for them—what they appreciated as being for them, and what they accepted as theirs. It was all something presented to them, of which they had an appreciation, which they believed to be theirs by God's mercy, and which they accepted as God's gift. That is the general or comprehensive realm of the Lord's people.

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THE LEVITE REALM

But then you come to the second realm, the Levite realm, and you find a difference. There must, of course, be a difference between the Levites and the general company, otherwise they would not exist. And there are indeed many fundamental differences. Many things obtained in the case of the Levites which were specific and particular. They were there as a separate tribe, different from all the other tribes in respects which we may see later on. They were in another realm.

Now you will faithfully cling to what I said a little while ago, that I am *not* now, in this dispensation, in this New Testament day, distinguishing *officially* between these realms: that is, I am *not* putting some people into one specific category, as a people by themselves, and calling them the general mass, and other people into another category, and saying they belong to another order of Christians. Underline that as many times as you like, because there is a good deal of misapprehension and distortion about what we teach on this very thing. We are not talking about Christians in general, on the one hand, and then of an inclusive company of a different order altogether, on the other. We are talking about *spiritual* realms, not personal. But here, in both Testaments, whether it is in the Old as temporal, or in the New as spiritual, there is a distinction discernible, and the distinction is marked by certain basic things.

SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE

First of all, the Levites were those who personally saw and handled and tasted and knew of those things which were available to all the Lord's people—which the Lord's people in general had as their own inheritance, but were only enjoying objectively, and therefore in a very limited way. The Levites were those who had come into all that more inwardly, more experimentally, and it was just that, was it not, that was the point at which they were distinguished. In Exodus xxxii they were distinguished by the fact that the object and purpose for which Israel as a whole was called and meant to exist had entered into them in a deep way. We can only speak, of course, in type, but the type contains the spiritual principle. The difference here between the great mass and this 'Israel within Israel' is that the one, the great bulk, were standing in the good of what was objective, and the others were standing in the experience of that made subjective; and that is a very great difference.

We can be the Lord's people; we can know the values of the High Priestly work of the Lord Jesus; we can know what He means as our Prophet, as having brought to us the revelation of God's mind for man: that, and all these other things, may be our inheritance as Christians. But they may yet, while of *unspeakable value*—and never for one moment let their importance be minimised—they may yet be but objective things that leave our inner life still wanting, still lacking in many respects. I have no hesitation in affirming, though I may expose myself to much misunderstanding, that that is a distinguishing mark amongst the Lord's people to-day: many standing in the objective good of all that Christ has done, knowing themselves to be the Lord's, and rejoicing in it, but amongst them comparatively few in whom all that has become a powerful, working reality, so that it is in their very being.

The second thing about the Levites is that, because of this realm in which they are found, of the inwardness of things as extra to the objective nature of things, they are in a position to minister to all the others. They are in a place of positive ministry, in the sense that they have a living, fuller and more inward understanding of Christ. That is the basis of ministry. It is the ministry of Israel that is bound up with these people. Now, in our systematized Christianity, we have made ministers into a class; we distinguish them from the 'laity' as the 'clergy'—the ministry and the laity; and these are classes, official, ecclesiastical classes—an utterly false apprehension of Divine truth. Ministry is not based upon anything of that kind at all—upon anything that is external. Ministry is based upon an inward knowledge of the Lord, and no one has a right to enter into any kind of ministry—much less take upon them the title of 'minister'—except in so far as they have a personal, inward, powerful knowledge of the Lord. The other is merely formal and ecclesiastical. Ministry is not official or hierarchical, but spiritual. It is a matter of spiritual measure, and spiritual measure is just the measure of Christ within. Christ is our measure. There is no other measure with God but Christ, and we can only minister according to our inward measure of Christ.

You see the difference, then, between these two great realms. I am not saying that one is the Lord's people and the others are not, I am saying that there are many dear, saved, believing children of God, who know that their eternal hope rests upon Christ's shed Blood, His atoning work, His redeeming activity, and who rest upon His continuous, High Priestly intercession, but with whom

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

you cannot enjoy any deep spiritual fellowship in the things of the Lord. If you try to do so, they do not know what you are talking about; you are talking another language. With them everything is objective, as it was with the main mass of the Israelites. Everything was brought to them as a congregation, ready-made; they were told what they should do by others, and they did as they were told. They just conformed, because that was the thing that was done in Israel, it was the thing that was believed in Israel. 'God has made known this as His will for His people, so we do it.' In just the same way, many true children of God would say: 'This is how we are told to behave, this is what we are told to believe. We do as we are told by our ministers and our teachers. We simply conform to the established order of Christian doctrine, of Christian practice. The Church believes this, and

so—well, we conform to that and accept it.'

But when you come to the Levites, it was not like that. The thing had entered right into themselves, and they were those who had a first-hand, personal, inward knowledge of the mind of the Lord. They did not get anything secondhand. A vast amount of Christianity to-day is just second-hand. You are not surprised that the mass of Israel could not stand up to the crucial test which came sooner or later. It is a very, very urgent thing that the Lord's people, the Lord's own dear people, should be able to stand up to the severe, fiery tests and trials which come and are coming; but it will only be as they move from the merely objective realm, important and precious though that is, to the realm where they have the root of the matter in themselves.

T. A-S.

THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCHES

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches" (Revelation ii. 7).

WHATEVER apostleship may have meant to John during his long life and ministry, the only thing which seemed to matter at the end was that he should convey a message from the Risen Lord to the churches. It was a message for dark days. The use of the description "lampstands" draws attention to the prevailing darkness all around, while the fact that the angels of the churches are likened to stars seems also to remind us that they were shining in the night. It was a dark time, and the darkness was to get worse and worse as the world moved swiftly on to judgment. At such a time the churches needed a message, and they were not left without one. God had His man ready, a man who could see and hear and then communicate what he had seen. In our own days world events are moving towards a climax at terrifying speed. What a need, then, that the churches should not be left without a message from their Lord!

PERILS ASSOCIATED WITH MERE
BIBLE STUDY

A particular feature of this book of the Revelation is that probably its readers had the bulk of New Testament already. In that they were better placed than the earlier disciples, who had only the Old Testament and those special teachings and traditions that had been passed on through the apostles and prophets. The churches of Asia did not need more doctrinal epistles, more instruction

in Christian truths, but they did need a living message for the hour. It may be that this rich heritage of the Word of God brought its own perils with it—for, strange as it may seem, there are dangers associated with familiarity with the Word of God.

(a) REMOTENESS FROM THE LORD

It is undoubtedly, if paradoxically, true that those who possess and read their Bibles may yet be out of touch with the Living Lord. Was it not for this very reason that those Asian churches needed this new message? In earlier times, days of the personal authority and inspiration of apostles and prophets, the churches were made vividly aware of the fact that, through these men, the Lord Himself was present among them and speaking to them. The Word of the Lord handled them. Now that they possessed it in written form, there was a danger of *their* handling it. The student may take hold of this Book, and then pass to books about the Book, and even to books about those books, thus getting into a realm in which there is little or no awareness of the mighty Presence of the Lord in the midst. John's message left the churches in no doubt as to the nearness of the Risen Lord or as to the fact that He had something very personal and vital to say to *them*. What a need for such messages to-day!

(b) STALENESS THROUGH FAMILIARITY

It may be that the epistle to the Ephesians had become so familiar to the believers in Asia that it

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had lost its point and challenge. They may have known its thoughts and phrases so well as to imagine that they were therefore in the good of the spiritual truths set out there. In any case this is all too possible for believers to-day. Have they an ear to hear what the Spirit is saying to them? Everything depends upon this. It seems that the peculiar presentation and form of this message was intended to make it personal and fresh and to impress them with its vital importance. How essential it is that we should not sit back to listen to an exposition of well-known Scripture as though we knew it all, but should listen intently to what the Lord is seeking to say to us.

(c) EVASIVENESS BY SELECTION

There is another danger associated with the way in which we handle the Word of God, and that is to yield to the temptation of being selective: of choosing only the passages which suit us, and so by our selectiveness evading or ignoring the true challenge of the Word. These seven letters are very brief, yet each one of them seems to have a full-orbed message from the Lord. There is a promise, yes, but there is a challenge too. There is something about the Lord; but there is also something about us. A prospect of possible heavenly glories, but with it the present challenge in the light of that heavenly prospect.

(d) LACK OF UP-TO-DATE APPLICATION

What we all need is to meet the Lord in a new way. It is not enough for the churches to be merely studying their Bible, going over the old things or even acquiring new information. For that very reason it was as though the heavens opened to John, so that through him might come the mighty impact of an up-to-date, burning message from the Risen Lord Himself. The challenge is not so much that they should hear what the Spirit *has said* to the churches of the past, but what He *is now saying* to the churches at this very time.

May we not believe, must we not believe, that the Lord has vital things to say to His people in our day? It will not be by extra epistles, like those which John wrote, for the Scriptures are complete and the Lord will only speak through them. But it does not need much spiritual intelligence to discern the difference between talks that men can give about the Word of God and living messages which make the Scriptures speak to the heart. How sorely the churches of our day need messengers! What a need there is for us to pray about this—to pray

earnestly that the voice of the Risen Lord should be heard in clarity and power in the churches!

THE MESSAGE
BRINGS CHRIST INTO VIEW

The message is about Himself. This is made clear in every one of the seven letters. Whatever else is dealt with in them, the first effect which they were meant to produce was a new awareness of Who it was who was speaking to them.

(a) HIS MAJESTY

The people of God were meant to bow very low, as John himself had done, to be prostrate with awe and unquestioning submission before the glorious Son of God. "His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength" (Rev. i. 16). Here was a Light which eclipsed all the stars and outshone all the lampstands, the blinding light of a Sun which was not far away in the distant heavens but right in their very midst. The churches did not have to walk in the light of their own lampstands, nor in that of the stars, but in the light of the glory of the Living Christ. How great He is! Yes, and how petty are His people, if we may judge by what is found in most of the letters. When the Lord draws near in power and glory, we are so often ashamed at our own littleness, at the petty spirit which marks our thoughts and ways in our service and life for Him. We are so often governed by considerations which are mean, influenced by fears which are altogether unworthy, inflated by ideas which are pitifully small and selfish. The Lord wants to come to us anew, to shame our pettiness by His greatness, to give us true perspective, that we may see light in His light.

(b) HIS FAITHFULNESS

"These things saith the first and the last" (Rev. ii. 8); "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness" (Rev. iii. 14). The people of God lose grip of themselves and grow spiritually feeble if they are in any doubts about the utter faithfulness of the Lord. He was "the first" in those early days of the Church, and what days they were! In some senses they were wonderful, but they were far from easy. The churches were no sooner born than they were precipitated into terrific conflicts, beset on every hand by every form of opposition, injustice, and cruelty. Before long many of them were almost rent asunder by cross-currents within, and by new problems for which

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they had no experience or wisdom. But they survived—indeed they grew and prospered, in spite of it all. There was only one explanation of this, and that was the ever-near Presence and unchanging faithfulness of their Lord. We, however, are not in the first days but in the last. The conflict is just as great; it is no easier at the end—in fact it often seems much harder. But the Lord Jesus is “the last” as well as “the first”. He is ready to be to us all that He was to them, if we will trust Him as they did. Let us go right on, counting on the absolute faithfulness of the One who is not only the first but the last also.

He has the sharp two-edged sword in His mouth. This is but another feature of His faithfulness. When the Lord comes in power among His people it does not always result in their feeling soothed and comforted. The sharp sword may have to penetrate deeply into us, laying bare unsuspected motives and unsafe intents or tendencies. He may be bringing us through experiences which deeply wound us, or allowing very real disappointments. All this is His faithfulness, though it may seem a very painful kind of faithfulness, and it calls for our submission and co-operation.

(c) HIS SUFFICIENCY

On each occasion, before the Lord begins to show what is wrong, before He begins to set forth the way of His will, before He says anything else to the churches, He draws attention to Himself. The Lord who speaks is Himself the full answer to every need, the absolute sufficiency for every demand. Even Laodicea, the worst church of all, is reminded that it can find recovery and riches if it will only turn to the true source of these in Christ, “I counsel thee to buy of me . . .” Our failure is really failure to appropriate Christ. The Lord condemns His people, not because of their poverty or blindness or nakedness, but only because they *could* find the answer in Him but do not do so.

This, then, is the message for the churches, a message which brings home the challenge of Christ and communicates the sufficiency of Christ.

A REMINDER OF GOD'S OBJECTIVE

What are the messages aiming to produce? what are they meant for? They are sent to call God's people to realise anew the true objective of their salvation. There are seven letters, but there are not seven different objectives. The calls to the overcomers present a seven-fold reminder of the goal

of the Christian life. They were but a reminder, because they did not set forth anything new as to the will of God for His people. The promises to the overcomers were never meant to suggest alternatives or optional ‘extras’ to the calling of the saints. They are, in point of fact, a re-emphasis of what is revealed in the whole of the New Testament. They set forth the abiding thought of the Lord, but that which has been largely lost sight of by the saints, who are apt to think that, so long as they have a prosperous church, with plenty of people in attendance and a great deal of work going on, this is all that the Lord wants—that this is, as it were, an end in itself. The Lord has to step into the midst of the churches with the message which reminded them that these things were only all right if, in the midst of them, His people were moving on with Him to the Divine objective, to the spiritual end which means so much to Him.

Such spiritual growth and movement involves a real battle: it calls for ‘overcomers’. This is particularly so because of the supreme importance to the Lord of His people going on to the Throne. There is an air of urgency about this message, very far removed from any idea that it treats of ‘extras’ for those would-be spiritual Christians who care to go in for them. The urgency and concern are not ours, but His: it matters to *the Lord*, and it matters very much indeed, that His people should not be hindered from reaching the Divine objective. It is not just that He is offering them a petty little throne of their own. No, His call is: “He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down *with me in my throne*” (iii. 21). What a loss to the Lord when His people are losing out! What a cry from His heart which appeals: “I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown” (iii. 11)! Surely no one can afford to be slack or indifferent to that which obviously matters so much to the Lord.

Sometimes these promises are spoken of as ‘rewards’ to the overcomers, but in fact this only sets forth in graphic imagery that which in all the New Testament is shown to be the Lord's purpose for the saved. “A crown of life”, “authority over the nations”, a place with Christ in His throne: these are the end which the Lord has had in view from the beginning—they do not treat of a special kind of Christian. Nothing, however, can be taken for granted. It is for this very reason that the message was needed. The goal may be lost sight of, may seem unimportant, may be crowded out by other things. “Be thou watchful, and establish the things that remain, which were ready to die” (iii. 2).

If the Lord sends a message, it is because He

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expects an answer. It is not enough to get new ideas about the Lord, nor even new ideas about the Christian calling. "He that hath an ear, let him hear . . ."

THE LORD'S MESSENGER

When the Lord wanted to send a message to the churches He had to find a suitable messenger. He found one in the person of John. Through the early years of the Church's history there is very little record of John's ministry. When he is spoken of it is merely as an associate of Peter. No doubt the years of his long life had been filled with fruitful ministry. It seems, however, that the Lord had kept him specially for the time of the end of that age. There is a close relatedness between his Gospel, his Epistles and the Revelation; in a sense they form one great message to the people of God. The churches greatly needed such a message, and God sent it through John. Surely the churches of to-day need such a message even more urgently. Where are the messengers?

Surely this represents a call for earnest and travailing prayer. We, perhaps, cannot be the messengers, but we can share in the sounding forth of the message. The supreme need of the churches in all the world to-day is that the Lord should find means whereby He Himself can come into their midst and tell them what is on His own heart. These epistles were written by a man who was having first-hand dealings with the Lord Him-

self, who wrote as though in the Lord's presence and at the Lord's dictation. It was not so much that he was passing on what the Lord had said, still less that he was repeating what others had said about the Lord, but rather that through him the Lord Himself came into view and the churches found themselves face to face with Him. As one reads the letters one is conscious not of John but only of the Lord. It should be like that.

In the measure in which the churches were conscious of the human vessel, it was not of the great and important survivor of the apostolic band, but only of a simple loving fellow-Christian—"I John, your brother and partaker with you . . ." (i. 9). This kind of message can only come with power through such a messenger. "Your brother"! Brother to the suffering saints, brother to the erring saints, always and in every way a true brother. When he wrote of the Lord's sufficiency, there was power in his message, because he was proving it for himself. When he wrote of being cast on the faithfulness of God, he was speaking of his own experiences through deep and perplexing need. When he brought to them the sense of the overpowering glory of the Risen Christ it was because he had himself fallen at the feet of the Lord "as one dead."

The greatest need of the churches to-day is for such a message, and the greatest service which we can give to them and to our Lord is surely to pray earnestly and in faith that that message may come.

H.F.

THE MAN GOD HAS ORDAINED

VIII. THE MAN WHO IS ALIVE

Reading: Revelation iv, v.

WHEN we commenced this series of studies with the first chapter of the book of the Revelation, we said that the book of Genesis and the book of the Revelation bound the whole history of this world: one the beginning, the other the ending. The very first phase of that history is governed by man and the tree of life. The book of the Revelation opens not with that man, but with *the MAN*—the new creation Man—and brings us to the tree of life. These two things underlie the whole of the history from the beginning to the end, from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation—man and the tree of life. In other words, the overruling factor throughout the whole of history is this matter of life in a man, or life in *man*. That is the great issue. Around that, in relation to that, concerning that, everything goes on.

THE DOMINANT FACTOR OF LIFE

Here, in this book of the Revelation, you can see how this is prominent and dominant. In the first chapter, we have seen the presentation of the Man living, the living Man, the Man of the new creation, the Son of Man, as He is there called, who announces concerning Himself: "I am . . . the Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore". That governs all that will follow.

We come to chapter iv, and here the great factor, nearest to the throne, the very centre and heart of the universe, is that which is symbolized in the four cherubim, or "living ones". ("Beasts", in the Authorised Version, and "creatures", in the Revised Version, are misleading. It is simply "living ones", or "living things".) Here, right at the heart of things, next to the throne, is a symbolic embodiment of *life*, and the ascendent feature of

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that fourfold symbolism is *man*. We see elsewhere in the Scriptures how, with the cherubim, the man feature dominates the whole.

Passing into chapter v, we find the creation brought into view in this symbolic representation. The whole creation—the lion, the ox, the eagle, the man—creation four-fold is represented there, in a *living* state. Here it is the whole question of redemption, the redemption of the creation. You will notice that it is again summed up in the matter of *life*: the whole creation redeemed unto life, found now through redemption in a state of life, in virtue of the work of the Lamb slain.

And later, as the book begins to come to its end and to sum things up, we are introduced to the tree of life, with its universal benefit; and then the “river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb” (xxii. 1), and everything living where the river of life comes. And the last glorious sound and voice in the book of the Revelation is: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come . . . And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely” (xxii. 17).

So we see: the first thing in Genesis—life; the last thing in Revelation—life. That is a very brief and imperfect summary, in order to indicate how dominating is this matter of life.

“I AM HE THAT LIVETH”

Let us for a minute go back to the beginning of this book of the Revelation—because it is the summation of history from beginning to end—and look at the language used here by the Son of man. “*I am . . . he that liveth*”, “*the Living one*” (Rev. i. 17, 19). That is a discriminating statement. It quite obviously suggests that He is unique. If I were to say to you, ‘I am alive!’, you would reply, ‘And so am I! You are not so very different from me!’ Ah, but, you see, when the Lord Jesus here makes this announcement, no one can say in the same way, ‘I am alive.’ As the beginning, as the first and the last, as the firstborn of the dead, as the representation of God’s thought, He stands alone. “I am he that liveth”. He is evidently distinguished by a life not elsewhere possessed. “In him was life”, says the same writer (John i. 4). “I am he that liveth.” How much is contained in that word ‘liveth’! If you want to see the content of that word as used by John—what this life means, what its potency is, its tremendous effectiveness, its rich potentialities—you should go right through the book of the Revelation. This life gets right to the very throne of the universe and is there in the place of government.

“I am he that liveth; . . . *I became dead*”. What is the significance of that? Oh, wonder!—it is this. ‘When I accepted, yielded to, went into death—when I “became dead”—I did so in order that I might take on, as a wrestler, a boxer, a fighter takes on an opponent, the full force of death, and enter into a mighty conflict with death. It was not just that I passively died, that I was crucified here, but I deliberately *became dead*.’ In the other words of John: “No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself . . . This commandment received I from my Father” (John x. 18). ‘I laid down My life, Deliberately, consciously, knowing exactly what I was doing, with full intelligence and meaning, I became dead, in order to take up this mighty, terrible enemy, to take him on and to rend him, to break his power and subject him entirely to Myself.’

“I became dead, and behold, I am alive unto the ages of the ages”. This is a life which will never see death again; this is a life which has no death ending; this is a life which will never, never again come under the power of death. “I am alive unto the ages of the ages, and I have the keys” (the symbols of authority) “of death and of Hades.”

“THE FIRSTBORN AMONG MANY BRETHREN”

Well, if that were all, that would be something—that would be a great deal for us: for all that is truly for us, on our behalf—not on His own behalf, but on ours—and all that is gathered into Him for us to possess through faith. But then we come to the next phase, a further phase, of this matter. For He as the new creation Man is not alone: He is “the firstborn from the dead” (Col. i. 18), “the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. viii. 29). He is the Head of a Body, and so now what has been true in His case has to be made true—not theoretically and doctrinally, but actually true—in the whole of this new creation man, collectively and corporately; and that is what lies behind these messages to the seven churches. In effect it amounts to this: ‘Through faith in Me, through faith in the meaning of My death and resurrection, you become possessors of My life—of that very life which in Me has overcome death. I gave you that life, eternal life, and you, possessing that life, have been subjected, like Me, to the ordeal of testing, the testing out of that life as to its quality, its potency. What has happened to you? what has happened to the testimony of that life in you?’

Well, we find that in the majority of the church

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ches, as representing the whole history of the Church, the greater part has not lost its life, but has allowed its life, in differing measures, to succumb to the power, the onslaught of death. It has not been proved, through the faith and the attitude and the stand taken, to be what it is. The testimony of Jesus *is* this, but the testimony, in terms of life absolutely, unreservedly triumphant over death, has been in measure lost. For various reasons, on differing grounds, the life has not been made to manifest itself in its mighty qualities of holiness and purity and in its tremendous power and energy.

The Risen Christ is saying: 'You have been put to the test in the presence of death, as I was.' Not, of course, in the sense of redemption, atonement; that does not apply to us. There were other aspects of the meaning of the Cross, but its innermost meaning was this, that He met the full force and range of spiritual death in this universe and destroyed it, in Himself—a Man for man. 'Now', He says, 'I pass on that life to you, and with it I pass on the testimony, My testimony—"the testimony of Jesus"'. You are in this world, placed in this world, not guarded, kept, from the assaults of spiritual death, but subjected to it in numerous, almost countless, forms and ways. This force of death is allowed still to remain and to assail you—whether openly or secretly, manifestly or hiddenly. In every conceivable way, and many inconceivable ways, this one thing is at work, this power of death; and you are there to prove that I became dead and am alive for evermore, that I destroyed death and am henceforth alive in the power of an indissoluble, eternally deathless, life.'

THE CERTAINTY OF THE ULTIMATE TRIUMPH OF LIFE

As we know, the churches, and the Church which they represented, largely failed. But then suddenly we leave the failure of earth conditions, all that is going on down here, and the voice calls us up higher. "Come up hither, and I will show thee . . .", and in the Spirit we are caught right away from the earth. We see a Throne; and, immediately encircling the Throne, in touch with the Throne, we find these living ones—a representation in the presence of God of life absolutely regnant, triumphant; life reigning. 'Throne' is the great word here—a Throne, and thrones—and that which pre-eminently characterizes them is life. The Throne is exercising its great authority and dominion in terms of life, because there is a Lamb there who has abolished death and is alive for evermore.

Because God has that testimony right there in the Throne, in His very presence, there is going to be an ultimate triumph, an ultimate glorious triumph. The churches may fail in part, the individuals that make up the churches or the Church may lose their testimony, may stumble along the way, may go down before death again and again; but the end of the story is a tree of life and a river of water of life. It is life absolutely triumphant at the end, because it is secured in Him who is the beginning.

ETERNAL LIFE THE OCCASION OF SATANIC OPPOSITION

What is the value of this? To begin with, it says to us that this life, this eternal life that we have received, is the very occasion of all that we experience of Satanic opposition. For it is the saints, it is believers, who know so much more of this than anyone else. All that we are allowed to undergo of opposition, of suffering, of knowing spiritual death—what is the explanation of it all? Physical death, of course, is universal; but this spiritual hostility in terms of death, to kill you, to kill your testimony, to destroy your note of triumph, to do anything that covers, hides, beclouds or eclipses this life—the very life itself is the occasion of it.

Do understand this: that, if you had not got the life, the enemy would not be after you as he is. Our possessing the life is the continuation of the testimony of Jesus that He has conquered death, and it is that testimony that the enemy is after. We compose the Church, and it is the Church which is His Body, which is the vessel of the testimony of Jesus—and the testimony of Jesus is that He became dead and is alive for evermore, and all that that means—it is the Church which is the object of terrible hatred, animosity, vindictiveness, on the part of the enemy, to destroy that testimony of Jesus. This is no new truth to many, but may the Lord bring it home to us both as a challenge and as an explanation. It is not that the enemy does not like you or me. It is that life—the regnancy of that life, and the testimony of its mighty victory—that he is after. It is the life which is the occasion of all the trouble, the explanation of all our strange experiences.

But then, blessed be God, the message here is also that, though we may fail many times and grievously, our testimony may for a time become eclipsed, we may know the overflowing of death in spirit or in other ways, the end is a picture of complete deliverance from death, the end is the full triumph of life. And that is not something said as of a future thing. Thank God, many have

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enough proof of this in their spiritual history. There are many who know that they have more than once seemed to 'touch bottom'. Again and again, in our spiritual history, we have got down so low that it seemed no recovery was possible. We have just come to despair, come to the place of giving it all up: it seems so impossible and hopeless, we are such a failure. But the Lord has given us an experience of life again and again. We have come up, have we not? We have just been amazed that it was ever possible that we should have come up again, but we have. It was not that we struggled out of the mire, it was not that by some tremendous effort of ours we got ourselves clear. No, no effort was possible, but we had the life, and although for the time being we seemed to be crushed, almost buried, and we did not feel that we had any Divine life at all, nevertheless the Lord has borne with us and has done this very thing.

Oh, yes, we are responsible very often: if we had been more watchful, if we had stood our ground, if we had laid hold of the Lord more continually, very often it need not have been. But there are experiences where, in spite of ourselves, we seem to be encompassed and overwhelmed by death; in spite of all our laying hold of the Lord, we have gone into an experience of terrible darkness; everything seems to have gone. And then, apart from ourselves—save that, in some weak, very weak way, we have still hoped in the Lord, still looked to the Lord, still feebly trusted the Lord—the Lord has sovereignly come in and we have been raised up again. And as we look back upon it (apart from those times when it was due to some sin on our part), we look back upon many experiences where we cannot say definitely that it was because of this or that—it just happened, it came on us, we found ourselves in an awful conflict with death—and we have to say: Evidently the Lord was allowing us to know death in order that we might know life again, that this thing should not be something we talk about, a theory of ours, a teaching, but that it should become really living in us, that we should be the living embodiment of the truth.

THE EMBODIMENT OF LIFE IN A MAN

This brings us to the very point that we are trying to stress all through: that this testimony has got to be *in* man, it has got to be *the man himself*—not merely something to teach. As truly as it was in His case, the Son of man, so it has to be made in our case, as in the Son of man. This matter of life has got to be expressed in man-terms, it

has to be a man-way of expression and manifestation. Life is assailed; yet marvellously, and often strangely beyond our understanding and comprehension, causing us to be wonders to ourselves, resurrection has taken place. It will be like that to the end. Many people have the idea that if they have eternal life they are going to have a glorious time. It is all going to be so wonderful—life, wonderful life, life more abundant—they are going to be on top always. No, you are not! The very fact that you have that life will mean that it will be tested to the utmost, in order that it may be proved in people, in human beings, that there is One who has conquered death and all that death means.

And it does not stay there. In the beginning, when man sinned and the sentence of death was passed upon him through his sin—"in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die", and he did die, for death is severance of relationship with God—then the creation was placed under the curse because of the man. But here you have the Man—the new Man, the new-creation Man—perfected, established; and then the whole creation is seen to come into redemption of life, as Paul says in Romans viii. But before the creation can come into its life, the sons of life have got to be manifested, and this life has got to be made manifest in them as triumphant over death.

When you come into the realm of resurrection life, of Divine fulness, the river flows and flows and flows. We are not just containers given a supply for the day—we are channels. It begins somewhere else high up in the Man in the glory, and comes flowing down as a river, and it will go on and on. This is life! The testimony of Jesus is the testimony of life. When we really touch the Lord Jesus, we touch life, and if He is present in His Body, the Church, in even a small representation, there ought to be a testimony of life. It is not a matter of so much light and truth, but of life, growing life.

The rest of the book of the Revelation, from chapter vi onwards, deals with all that stands in the way of life. The Church having been brought to account on the question of this testimony of life in Christ, the Lord then takes up the judgment of this world, as to that which gives ground for death, and deals with it and progressively passes it out, until it is all judged and put away and a new creation in life is established.

Now, if you have lost heart, take heart! If you have come near to giving up, do not give up yet. *He* is not dead yet! Your Lord has gone up, and there is still a testimony up there governing. The Throne, that Throne, governs, and the end is going

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to be life. Let us stand for it—you stand for it! Do not accept death. The enemy is all the time wanting us to accept death, he is holding it out to us in one form or another and wanting us to take

it, whereas the Word says, 'Take life!', 'Lay hold on life!'

The Lord help us, so that He may have in us an unbroken testimony right to the end. T.A.S.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

A LESSON IN LOVE

'POOR bird! it has a broken wing!' In their surprise and pity both the children cried out together, and they both rushed forward to pick up the sick bird. Godfrey and Wendy were not country children, for their home was in London, but they were down on a visit to their uncle's farm. Everything was new and exciting for them, and the long days seemed all too short. Just now they were out in the fields, running to and fro, enjoying every moment, until suddenly they saw the poor bird crouching on the ground in front of them, with its outstretched broken wing.

As they darted forward to pick it up, the bird somehow managed to move further away from them. So it wasn't so badly hurt after all! Yet there it lay, a pitiful object, half on one side with one wing looking very crooked. Wendy ran forward again to try to help it, but once more it moved on a little further and got out of her grasp. Again they went after it, with the same result: the ill-looking bird, the children trying to pick it up and the scramble still further away. And then, all of a sudden, it happened! The bird spread out its wings, which were both as strong and well as ever they could be, and flew up into the sky and away. It seemed almost to be laughing at them, as though it had beaten them at a game of 'Touch'.

The two children hardly knew whether to be angry or to laugh. They waited around to see if the bird would come back again to play its little game, but it did not return, so they ran off home to the farm to tell their uncle.

'Do birds really play games?' asked Godfrey. 'Do they like to make a chap look silly?' Wendy began to ask her uncle if he thought that the bird was really sick, or could it have been just pretending. Uncle suggested that they should speak one at a time, and tell him what had been happening to them out in the fields. They told him the whole story, and when he asked them what the bird was like, Wendy said that it was medium size, light brown and rather streaky, while Godfrey added that it had a little crest on its head. 'Was it teasing us, uncle?' he asked.

No, his uncle told him, the bird was not playing, although it was certainly pretending. It was in dead earnest. It was a skylark, and without know-

ing it the two children had got too near to its nest of little ones, hidden in the grass. The lark wanted to save them, so she put herself right in the way, showing herself to the children and pretending to be ill. Each time Godfrey and Wendy ran forward she moved away, so getting them further and further away from her precious home of baby larks. As soon as she was satisfied that the children could no longer see the nest she flew away, not mocking but very thankful that all was well.

Godfrey thought that this was very clever, but Wendy added in a quiet little voice that it seemed to her that mother lark was running into great danger by doing what she did. 'Suppose that she had not been able to get away in time. Suppose she had been caught. Suppose . . . ' 'Just so', said her uncle. 'That is one of the wonderful things about mother love, even with animals and birds. They think nothing of their own peril or safety when they are intent on saving their little ones.' He added that there are many true stories of the wonderful courage of mother birds in defending their chicks.

'True love', said uncle, 'is always like that. It thinks only of the good of the loved one and not of itself.' Then he went on to tell them of the greatest love of all, the love of the Lord Jesus for each one of us. When sin would have destroyed us, He took all our sins and bore them in His own body on the Cross, dying so that we might live. When the two children came near the nest, the mother lark could have flown away at once and been safe, leaving the little chicks to their fate. But she did not think of saving herself; she thought only of them. The Lord Jesus, too, need never have been taken and killed; He could have saved Himself and left us to our fate. If He had done this, we would surely have been lost, but instead of that He drew all the judgment on Himself, and died to be our Saviour.

Uncle finished up this lesson on love by teaching the two children a text: ". . . the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me" (Galatians 2. 20), asking them to thank the Lord for His great love and to receive Him into their hearts. Have you ever thanked Him? Will you trust Him to be your Saviour?

H.F.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

THE SUPREME IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING CHRIST

Reading : John xvii. 3 ; Phil. iii. 8, 10 ; John xv. 15 ; xiv. 21.

"That they should know thee . . . and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ . . ." "That I may know him . . ." "I . . . will manifest myself unto him . . ."

THE knowledge of Christ is *the* basis of the whole of the life of the child of God, and underlies every phase and aspect of that life. That is, it underlies our very relationship with God ; it underlies all our growth in grace ; it underlies every fragment of our service. There is nothing which comes within the compass of the life of the Christian which does not depend upon the knowledge of Christ. But that knowledge is a thing which will never be exhausted here, however long we live, and however rapidly we grow. We shall never overtake the finality of that knowledge. That is why an apostle, at the end of his life, still more than at any other time in all his history, gave expression to the deepest desire and longing of his heart as being to 'know Christ' (Phil. iii. 10). We may say that for every increase in spiritual life, spiritual strength, spiritual effectiveness, spiritual usefulness to the Lord, some further measure of the knowledge of Christ is essential. We increase by this knowledge ; we progress by this knowledge ; we are more for the Lord in accordance with the living knowledge of the Lord Jesus which is coming to us.

This knowledge is essentially a spiritual thing. It is a knowledge which is altogether closed to any capacity or ability or faculty, save that of the spirit. The measure in which we represent the Divine thought and fulfil the Divine purpose, will be the measure in which we are learning Christ after the Spirit.

That may represent one of two things for different people. It may represent limitation for those who have learned Christ other than after the Spirit ; who, therefore, have to unlearn a good deal more than others, before they can learn. On the other hand, it may mean everything to those whose knowledge of the Lord is by way of an absolutely new beginning.

This kind of knowledge marks a difference between Paul and the other apostles. They had had a considerable knowledge of Christ which was

historical, which was earthly. Paul came from the beginning into his practical knowledge of Christ on a heavenly level. Right at the very commencement of his Christian life, his was a spiritual knowledge of Christ. Every fragment from that point onward was a spiritual knowledge of Christ, and he jealously saw to it that it remained so. He positively refused to go to Jerusalem to get his knowledge of Christ from those who were apostles before him. He maintained stolidly his position that Christ, having revealed Himself to him, *could* and *would* reveal Himself in the same way. Of course, the other apostles came into that spiritual knowledge later, but Paul had no other in experience.

There is all the difference between a very large knowledge *about* Christ, and the smallest measure of the knowledge *of* Christ. One may be immense in its range ; the other may be very small in its measure. And yet the small thing may count for infinitely more than the immensity of the other.

The knowledge of Christ in a spiritual way is basic to everything in our lives as the Lord's children. As we go on, and the Holy Spirit begins to unveil Christ in our hearts, then we know how true this is. We know that it is that which gives reality to the spiritual life, makes it a very real thing. It is that which establishes us, so that, while the adversities might turn us away from a creed, a doctrine, an accepted position, a profession of relationship, nothing can turn us away from a spiritual knowledge. Spiritual knowledge is a part of our being, and we can never separate ourselves from that. That is reality! And that reality is capable of carrying us through anything and everything. Nothing less than that could have accounted for Paul's going through to the end, when he saw his life's work going to pieces about him. The very assemblies for which he had so to speak poured out his life-blood, forsook him at last, when all they in Asia turned away from him. There is nothing to account for his remaining, not only loyal to the Lord, but triumphant to the last, save the fact that he knew the Lord in a spiritual way. Reality is found there. And every other virtue and value lies in the same direction. It is what Christ is, being progressively disclosed to our hearts.

The day will come when most of us will be tested on this very thing, and under given tests the one thing that will become clear will be that a very

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great deal of our knowledge of the Lord was not knowledge after the Spirit, but knowledge which we had obtained by reason perhaps of having been born and brought up in Christian families, instructed from infancy; knowledge which we had obtained by reading good books, devotional literature; knowledge perhaps by all the 'providences', as we call them. They carried us through to a right place—the providences of birth and upbringing and association. And yet, unless they go further than that, the time will come when it will be proved that they lack the essential element in our relationship to the Lord. And from time to time the Lord does allow His winds of adversity to blow. He does take His winnowing fan and throw everything up into the air, and cause the wind to pass through, just to find how much there is of solid grain that will fall and remain uninfluenced by the wind, and just how much of the chaff will be carried away.

These things are constantly happening in the spiritual experience of the Lord's children. Such things will intensify as we go on, and the Lord will see to it that we do not remain under any illusions that we have a 'spiritual life', when it is not really a spiritual life, but is one largely in our minds. Thus He tests, He tries, He proves, to make manifest to us how much of what we possess is the genuine, the real, knowledge of the Lord in our hearts, and how much is a knowledge which is not that kind of knowledge. Nothing whatever can be a substitute for that.

"THIS IS LIFE ETERNAL..."

Having made these general observations, let us get closer to the matter so far as the Word is concerned, and notice the importance which the Word gives to this knowledge of the Lord. The Lord Jesus put it in the front rank, by saying: "*This is life eternal, that they might know thee . . . and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ.*"

Eternal life is not, in the Scriptural meaning, merely an extension of life beyond time. There is nothing known amongst men which corresponds to eternal life. To say that it is but an extension of life is something which the human mind can understand as being timeless; but that is not the Scriptural meaning, and there is nothing in human language to define the Scriptural meaning of eternal life. It is not only extension; it is a quality—it is the nature of the life. It is something which does not belong to man; it is God's life, Divine life. And the Lord Jesus says that the knowledge of the Father and of Jesus Christ is *that*. It is that which is called "eternal life". It is the posses-

sion and activity of something which is of God Himself, something which conveys God to us, something which is the gift of God to us, something which is the energy of Divine qualities, which are timeless, and could not be subject to anything of corruption.

The knowledge of Christ is that. We can see how different such a knowledge is from a merely mental, or historical, or professional knowledge. You know, if you have any experience of this, that, when the Holy Spirit imparts some little further fragment of spiritual apprehension of Christ, you have become conscious of a new Divine energy at work in you, which lifts you on to another level, takes you off the merely human and earth level. You know that by that knowledge you have come on to higher ground spiritually. You have been taken out of the trivialities of earth and given a sense of vastness, greatness, eternity, wonder, glory. Every fresh apprehension of Christ spiritually has an effect upon us. It is not just a stimulus, but it has the power of a Divine energy to lift us away from one order of things into another, and we can only say we have touched God, and come into another realm.

The knowledge of the Father and the Son is "life eternal". There is nothing whatever that can stand alongside of that life, nothing that can compare with it, nothing that is a substitute for it. It is the one superlative, pre-eminent necessity for all our knowledge of and fellowship with God from the very first step to the last. When, from the moment of our being born anew, we have been carried through this life, through into the glory, and stand complete—then we shall have to attribute everything to the fact that there was a moment when life eternal was imparted to us, entered into us, and became the basis and means by which God caused all the Divine activities to proceed. God Himself can do nothing in us and through us except on that basis. There is nothing which takes the place of life eternal. And so the knowledge of 'Jesus Christ, whom God did send', occupies this position of supreme importance. It is life eternal!

It is important for us to recognise that life eternal is not just some abstract element in the universe, which creates in us, or causes in us, some sense of, shall we say, energy. Life eternal is related to spiritual energy, and life is intended to mean to us a growing knowledge of the Lord Jesus. The two work together. Life means increase in knowledge, and increase in knowledge means the increase in life. "*This is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ.*"

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THE CENTRAL ELEMENT IN THIS KNOWLEDGE: FRIENDSHIP

The central element in this knowledge is suggested to us in the fragment in John xv. 15:

"No longer do I call you servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I heard from my Father I have made known unto you."

Here is a knowledge from the Father through the Son which is based upon this element which is called 'friendship'. "I have called you friends". Surely that means that we have to come into a relationship with the Lord Jesus of a very deep, inward character—of a very confidential nature, shall we say. There is something about that relationship which speaks of understanding born of the very closest communion. Someone may say to you about a friend of yours, that they said a certain thing or that they did a certain thing, and your rejoinder would be: 'No! I am quite sure that so-and-so never said that or did that. I know them too well. I know that they would not say or do a thing like that.' There you have touched the inner meaning of friendship. It is a knowledge which understands quite well what would be expected and not expected, what could come from that direction and what could not come from that direction. But that is a knowledge which is a deep, inside knowledge. You can never get that by observation; you can never come to that position by simply listening, studying; you have to know, and when you know by communion, by living in touch with that one, you know instinctively what to expect and what not to expect.

The Lord Jesus says that He takes the disciples into that relationship with Himself, and on that basis He opens His heart; that all things that He had heard from the Father He made known unto them, because of the relationship. "I have called you friends . . ."

What is the point of saying such things? You and I are not going to get the real knowledge of Christ by listening to addresses, by attending meetings. The value lies in the fact that we go away with what is said, into the presence of the Lord, having a background relationship with Him. Things may be true, and of the greatest value as things for our spiritual help, but we have to work those things out in the secret with the Lord. Otherwise we shall be 'meeting-mongers'; we shall simply be attending meetings and getting an accumulation of knowledge. The real value will lie in the time which we spend with the Lord on these things: it will be personal communion with the

Lord in the secret place; it will be what is going on deep down in our heart, between ourselves and the Lord. This knowledge is on the ground of what the Lord Jesus calls 'friendship'.

THE EXCELLING VALUE, THE ESTIMATE AND THE COST

Notice where Paul puts this matter, as he writes to the Philippians: "Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (the word "excellency" there is the 'super-eminence' of the knowledge of Christ Jesus): "for whom I suffered the loss of all things".

The estimate of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord was far above all other things. If you look back you will see that the things he counted loss were not small things, as man values things. They represented all his inheritance, which was no mean thing; all his attainments; all his position; all his prospects; all his ambitions. He tells us elsewhere that he had gained eminence above many of his own age. It means that Saul of Tarsus had been a very promising young man, who had gained a position far ahead of most other young men. He was distinguished as quite brilliant in his realm. And now he says: 'I count it all loss for the super-eminence . . .' Was he eminent? Well, there is a *super-eminence* about the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. Was eminence his life ambition? He has come to see the *super-eminence* of the knowledge of Christ. That is his valuation of this knowledge.

There is another way of looking at it, if you want to change your angle. No doubt, although the knowledge was such a tremendous thing with the Apostle, there were times when he realised that it was costing. The cost was great, when all those amongst whom he had had recognition, place, reputation, had not only dropped off from him, or he had left them, but now they were all against him, and regarded him perhaps as a fool, and certainly as deluded. And that was not the only phase of the cost. The cost was all round; and not a small part of the cost was the fact that his own brethren in Christ did not wholly trust him, and very few understood him. For him, whatever there was to let go, and whatever there was of price to be paid, everything was regarded as refuse in comparison with the knowledge of Christ.

Here again we may not be able to enter altogether into the position of the Apostle, but these things are pointed out with a view to our seeing that there is something here in the knowledge of

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Christ, if Paul was not mistaken, which must go far, far beyond just being saved. If a man who has been saved all these years, and who has done all this amount of Christian work, and has been God's instrument to spread and establish the Gospel over such an immense area, can at the end still see in the knowledge of Christ something which draws out his whole being, so that what has been and what is is as nothing, compared with what he sees there is to attain unto in the knowledge of Christ, where are we?

That brings us to the point. I cannot tell you what that knowledge is, because I do not know it, but I can say that I see enough to make me perfectly certain that Paul was right, and to know that the one thing that we are here for is to learn Christ, and in learning Christ we have everything. It is not the kind of work we are going to do for the Lord. It is not the number of Christian activities, or the tremendous measure of energy which we put into Christian activity. That is not the measure of the value. The measure of the value is just how much we are getting out of our growing knowledge of the Lord.

Ministry (speaking now of service) is not telling out truths. A good many people have thought that ministry is preaching sermons, giving addresses, or talking Christian doctrine. That is not ministry. If that were ministry this world ought to have been turned inside-out and upside-down a thousand times over. If that were ministry, then every weekend ought to see this world revolutionised with the amount of preaching that is going on. Ministry is not talking even the most orthodox doctrine. Service is not giving out by word of mouth things which may be perfectly true about Christ. Ministry is bringing Christ and imparting Christ. It is ministering Christ. It is communicating Christ. There is all the difference between giving addresses and preaching sermons, and communicating Christ. The measure of the success of our ministry is the measure in which other people come to realise that they have had Christ ministered to them, and that they are the richer spiritually. That is not just mental gratification, intellectual satisfaction, but something deep down in the innermost being, which is Christ. The Apostle would put it this way: "As ye received Christ, so walk in him . . ." Not: "As ye heard about Christ"; but: "As ye received Christ . . ."

A ministry like that is usually costly, and when we speak about ministry let no one think that that belongs to a certain class. We are all to minister. The business of every child of God is to communicate Christ to others; and, in so far as you can, by

a simple word, communicate Christ, you are a minister of Christ. The effect of our being here on this earth as the Lord's should be that others should say: 'I received something of the Lord through that one; I came into possession of something more of Christ through such-and-such.'

THE THREEFOLD ACCOMPANIMENT

Finally, note the threefold accompaniment of this knowledge: "That I may know him . . ."

(1) THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION

You and I can only know Christ on that ground. All our knowledge of Christ will be upon the basis of the power of His resurrection. That means that the power of His resurrection will become a necessity in our experience, and, as it becomes a necessity and then a reality, we shall know the Lord on that basis. Situations will arise for our spiritual increase, in which the power of His resurrection will alone suffice. Then faith will have to reach out for the power of His resurrection, and, faith being honoured, we shall come to know Him and the power of His resurrection through an experience in which that power alone could meet our need. The knowledge of Christ is a practical thing, not a theoretical thing. The knowledge of Christ in the Word is a matter of very life, and to fail to know Him at times means death. Thus it becomes a matter of the power of His resurrection.

(2) THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS

The place of Christ's sufferings in the life of His people, as a means by which He is known. That could occupy us for a long time, but it is simply stated as a related matter of great importance. The Lord makes Himself known to us by fellowship with Himself in His sufferings. What the sufferings of Christ are we do not stay now to mention, but we may take it that the sufferings of Christ as shared by us now are always, in their essence, spiritual. That is, the background may be that of circumstances, adversity, difficulty; it may be physical; it may be in many forms; but behind the foreground expression there is a spiritual element, a spiritual factor. The sufferings, of course, always represent a spiritual background. Sometimes in our case they become purely spiritual sufferings, sometimes they work themselves out in other ways, but ultimately it is a spiritual thing; that is, some spiritual factor is bound up with it. The sufferings of Christ (to put it the other way)

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are not now only circumstantial or physical sufferings. We may suffer in body and in circumstances through our own fault, and never can we claim that those are the sufferings of Christ. But when we come into an issue which relates to the purpose of God in Christ, the interests of the Lord, then very often the foreground is a physical one or a circumstantial one, but the background is a spiritual one, with an issue of more than temporal significance.

(3) CONFORMITY TO HIS DEATH

We are familiar with the meaning of the death

of Christ. Not that aspect of it in which we are not called to share; not that atoning aspect, that vicarious aspect, which is His death in a unique sense. But that other aspect of the death into which we are baptized, the death where all that is of self, the "I", the flesh, is ruled out. Conformity to that death, where man by nature is set aside, and we have been crucified with Christ—that is a way of knowing the Lord.

May the Lord use these thoughts to bring clearly into view the supreme importance and value of knowing Christ in resurrection life.

T.A-S.

THE OUTWORKING OF A LIFE GIVEN TO THE LORD

"Thus shalt thou separate the Levites from among the children of Israel: and the Levites shall be mine . . . For they are wholly given unto me from among the children of Israel . . . From twenty and five years old and upward they shall go in to wait upon the service" (margin: "to war the warfare") "in the work of the tent of meeting" (Numbers viii. 14, 16, 24).

THE Levites were deliberately taken of God, chosen of God, for the business of the bearing of the Testimony, the setting up of the Testimony, and the maintaining of the service of the sanctuary. "They are wholly given unto me," said the Lord. They represent all those children of God, in our dispensation, our day and generation, who are in a right relationship to God. "The Levites shall be mine": they were utterly, unreservedly, the Lord's, belonging to Him by right of redemption, of purchase. They represent those, then, amongst the people of God, who are living up to their high calling, wholly committed unto God; who are really handed over to the Lord, in whom the Lordship of Christ is a basic and an established fact.

THE LORD'S SOVEREIGN PLACING

The Levites, under God and under Aaron and Moses, were required to carry that Testimony through the wilderness. When the governing cloud ceased to move, there they had to set up the Testimony. They had not to argue, not to dispute, not to look round and say, 'What an unsuitable situation this is! Fancy putting the Testimony here! What can happen here? How can things be changed or affected for God here?' That was not their business. They had to set up the tabernacle where they were told; and that in itself has its

application to our lives. We are always inclined, by our natural reasoning and sense, to want to choose for ourselves the spot for our living and our service—a congenial place, a suitable situation. But remember that this whole world is a wilderness; that, wherever we choose, though we may think it appears suitable, we shall find, as we remain there, that it is altogether unsuitable. But it is in the hands of God where He places our lives. In His own sovereignty He retains the right to put us just where He will, and to have us there as expressive of the testimony of Jesus.

The life of the Levites can be summed up in three words, and they apply equally to us. The words are: worship, work, and warfare. The governing thought is worship. The whole testimony is first of all Godward. It is the outgoing, the expression, of the life toward God. The work follows, and that is toward man; and the warfare is waged against unseen and spiritual hosts of wickedness. That sums up the life of the Levites, the whole content of Levitical service; and, if you think about it, it just compasses God's intention for your life and mine.

WORSHIP

We begin with worship. They that worship God, God who is Spirit, must worship Him in spirit (John iv. 24). Worship is called 'spiritual service' (Rom. xii. 1, R.V. mg.). It is the recognition of the worthiness, the 'worth-ship', of Christ, of the Lord, of God, and the confessing of it. We cannot compass this matter. It will fill our days and all eternity. There are some wonderful passages in the book of the Revelation which set forth in Divine language the wonder of worship: the outgoing of heart and life in adoration, in loving regard, in

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deepest appreciation of how great the Lord is. We have to have our eyes opened to see; we have to come to know before we can worship; but the moment we have seen the face of Jesus, things begin. We enter into the wonder of a glorious cycle—for it is that. The more we see, the more we worship; and the more we worship, the more we see. It is a worshipping people that have revelation of God, and it is a people that have seen the Lord who are down on their faces in adoration and worship. This is the primary, the governing part of the life of the believer who has any part in bearing the responsibility of the testimony of Jesus.

Let us stress this with a word of emphasis. Let us search our hearts and our lives as to whether and to what extent worship is governing. The constant temptation with us all is that work shall take its place. It must never do so. We must see to it that we fight strenuously for maintaining a heart and a right spirit of worship to God. Do not allow that your life should be so invaded, that you should be so driven by circumstances, by pressure of outward things, that you are robbed of time and place and condition for worship. If you miss that, all else is vain. We are here in this earth, redeemed by the precious Blood of Jesus Christ, to be worshippers of God. "The Father seeketh"—oh, it is wonderful—the thought of God going through this earth looking, looking, seeking, seeking, for worshippers (John iv. 23). And the enemy is gaining those who should be the worshippers of God, because they are unaware of the character of their holy calling in the sphere of the sanctuary of God. Worship takes first place; worship governs all else.

WORK

What is the work of God? "This is the work of God, that ye believe . . ." (John vi. 29)—a new definition of the work of God. The work of God is faith in expression and in service. No matter how much pouring out of life and word there may be, any service that is devoid of faith is not the service of God. "Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him" (Heb. xi. 6). It is not only a matter of our approach to God, that it shall be one of faith, but all that we do in the way of service and work must be the work of faith. Just what does that mean—faith in God, trusting in the Lord, dependence upon God?

Perhaps some of us need a readjustment in this matter. Have we known a paralysing in our desire to serve the Lord by reason of fear lest we should be moving or acting in our souls? We need to be

very careful of our language in this matter, and we do well to hold closely to the Word of God: for, whilst there is a line, a distinct line, between soul and spirit, I am persuaded that the line is a very, very fine one. Service to God is *faith in operation*, and let us see to it that that governs. Convinced and assured in our hearts that a given course or line of service is what the Lord wants, let us move along that line in dependence upon God, and away with all the hesitancy and tentativeness, the fearfulness and timidity, into which misinterpretation and misdirection in doctrine can take us—away with it! Let us have a positive approach, on the basis of faith in God, trusting the Lord for every step.

Ah, yes, that is where the peril comes in: for we can well start in with a faith and a trust, fearing ourselves and fearing our lack of ability to do—we can commence in that way, but by reason of familiarity with the work and the service, and the measure of success that we deem that God has given us, the thing becomes something that lacks faith. We can do it—we have done it! No faith is required! There is our peril. The service of God all through our lives has got to be just of this character—utter dependence upon God moment by moment. God will not let us off that, He will give us no alternative to that, however much we may seek it. It must be that we enter into every fresh phase, however familiar to us by reason of past experience, in humble dependence, and that we go through depending upon God, trusting moment by moment the Lord who alone is sufficient. That is the character of the service of God.

And we can gather so much into that—the many, many forms of Levitical service that we read of in the Word, almost infinite in variety. But they are all included in this, that they are done unto God, done with a trust in, a dependence upon, the energies of His Spirit, and not upon the individual ability or strength or will or conceit or pride. The work of God is just this: trust in God—the works of faith. It covers everything, even things that could be or are regarded as being quite outside of the realm of our life in God, too mundane, too domestic, too childish for us to put into the realm of the service of God. *Whatever it is*, if it is done in faith, done unto God for His glory, as the result of what He is saying and speaking in our hearts, then it is serving the glory of the Lord.

Oh, that a strong wind might blow through our minds, through all our ideas and thoughts about the service of God, and get us thoroughly freshened up—ready to do anything and everything without the reserves of our minds or our back-

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grounds, our tradition or our history ; ready to do whatever the Lord indicates as His way and His will for us, as unto the Lord ; serving the sanctuary, serving the testimony of God, in the deepest of dependence on Him.

WARFARE

Whether we like it or no, we cannot be in any way involved in, or concerned with, the testimony of God, or the worship of the Lord, without coming into spiritual conflict. It is inevitable, for, apart from the general malignancy and malevolence of the Devil, his hatred of men and of everything in the world—for hate is just issuing from his being all the time and is being cast unceasingly over all mankind—apart from that, his definite specific attention is directed to those who are in Levitical service, who are here to serve the testimony of God, here as worshippers, here as the servants of the Lord. It is to them that he directs his special attention, and if we do not know anything about the animosity, the hate, of the enemy hurled against us, there is probably something radically wrong with the nature of our worship and our service. It is a very real thing, this conflict.

But there is only one thing I want to say about the conflict, and it is this. We in our warfare are called to stand into a full and glorious victory. The moment you are fighting for a victory, you are lost. The moment you are so conscious of the power of the enemy that you have to struggle and fight against it, you are finished. He has got all he wants. The victory of Calvary was complete. It does not need that we should add anything to it. Our attempts only bring defeat to us. That stands ; it has never been revoked. It is a final and a complete thing for this whole age, and for the eternal ages to come. Christ was Victor at Calvary, and the Devil was defeated—the Devil is a defeated foe. We stand on that.

Then why all the harassed looks, the worry and the fret, the distress and the burden? How easy it is for us to get out of our proper standing and position in Levitical service! The moment the pressure and the conflict loom so large that we have lost sight of the Lord in the throne, then we are out of the testimony, we are no better than those who are in the nations round about. They

cannot look upon the tent of meeting and see the evident power of God. They are seeing a harassed soul, they are seeing a life with all the fret and the worry and the fear of ultimate defeat in it. Our warfare begins with a victory! That is a glorious thought. Nothing remains to be gained, for all has been gained. Our warfare is, no matter how great the forces against us, continually to stand right into Christ's complete and absolute triumph in the Cross.

Let us just review our own present situation or circumstances, where we are now, and our prospect, and ask ourselves—Are we really in that victory? Oh yes, we know all about the doctrine, and perhaps we have known some measure of the reality in the past. But are we in it now? Or inside our heart and mind are there reservations, are there questions? We only abide in the sanctuary, we are only carrying and bearing the testimony of God in this earth, as we are living in the glory, the joy, of the triumph of our Lord. Lift up the heart ! Let the joyousness, the glory, of this victory of our Lord come in in a new way to possess us, to grip us. We have the surest answer to all hell's activity—both the blatant activities and the subtle underground working. Stand into Christ's victory !

So here we are with the challenge as to how far our lives are really counting, how far we are those as God's Levites to-day in the carrying, the setting up, and the maintaining, just where He will have it—not our choice in the matter—of His testimony. Just where we are in the will of God, is there that which gives the heart of God the deepest satisfaction—spiritual worship? Is that emanating from our lives in ever-growing measure, as we are more and more apprehending the wonderful attributes of our Lord, seeing the preciousnesses of His life and His work? Are our lives full of that service that is entirely governed by faith unto Him and only unto Him ; not in our own strength and energy of the flesh, the soul, but unto Him in dependence, in trust—trusting Him not at the beginning only, but all the time right through ; and are we warring a warfare that is all the time bringing in His triumph, in every situation reacting to the unseen realm, bringing the power of Calvary to bear upon the works of Satan? This is the warfare of the sanctuary—the warfare of the work of the service of the sanctuary.

A.G.T.

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PRINCIPLES OF DIVINE GUIDANCE

"Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of meeting, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And when the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward, throughout all their journeys: but if the cloud was not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle by day, and there was fire therein by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys" (Ex. xl. 34-38).

LIFE MUST BE VIEWED AS A WHOLE

IN this matter of guidance, life has to be viewed as a whole. That is the first thing about it, and a very important thing. The guidance of the nation of Israel through the wilderness is always viewed from the standpoint of the end, the goal. There are such words as: "He led them safely, so that they feared not" (Psa. lxxviii. 53); "He led them also by a straight way, that they might go to a city of habitation" (Psa. cvii. 7). In the phases and the stages of the journey very often that seemed not to be true. He led them on safely? by a straight path? In neither of those matters did it always seem to be true. But in this matter of their guidance, the end was always in view from the beginning. The fact is that they got there at last, and it is the end and the verdict which covers the whole course.

It is like that with Divine guidance. We must recognise this, and settle it, that we have got to take life as a whole. If we only take it at given times and in given situations, we shall be in confusion, contradiction, in a great deal of perplexity, uncertainty, doubt, perhaps with big questions, and a feeling that there is no guidance at all in our lives—that we have just been left. But we must take the long view, and the end will prove that we were being guided, even when we thought otherwise, that the Hand was upon us when it seemed that it was not so. Divine guidance has to be viewed from the standpoint of the whole. It is life in its entirety that has to be related to the guidance of God.

When we have got that clear—and the Word of God bears it out very fully—we are able to take another step, and to see that this inclusiveness and

'conclusiveness' of Divine guidance is related to two things.

GOD'S PURPOSE OF FULNESS

Firstly, it is related to Divine purpose. His purpose is a very clearly defined thing, a very concrete and definite thing, a set and fixed object, and His guidance is completely bound up with His purpose. When His purpose is really governing, when it has become the sole interest and object of our lives, we find there is a sovereignty over everything. "To them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to His purpose" (Rom. viii. 28). That is a very comprehensive "all things". The statement is that not one of the "all things" is without some good being definitely put into it, and got out of it, by the sovereignty of God, when His purpose governs. That cannot be said of the 'all things' which compose lives which are not so governed. Their 'all things' do not work good. The guidance of God is therefore inseparable from His purpose.

This is perfectly clear in the case of Israel. The purpose of God was made known from the beginning very clearly and definitely: it was to bring them into the land. It came out most definitely and positively when they were over Jordan, and Joshua was actually about to lead them in. The Lord said to Joshua that he was to be strong and of good courage, because he was to bring the people into the land which the Lord had *sworn* to give them (Josh. i. 6). That was His purpose. We know that that is an historical figure and type of what we have in the New Testament—the heavenly country and all the riches and fulness of Christ. That land of Canaan was a land flowing with milk and honey, a land of wealth, riches, mines, and so on. We know that it was only a pale foreshadowing of what came in with Christ. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!" (Rom. xi. 33). "The unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. iii. 8). The purpose of God is the fulness of Christ, and all Divine guidance is bound up with that.

GOD'S VESSEL OF REALISATION

In the next place, Divine guidance is bound up with, and centred in, God's vessel. Here in the case of Israel it is set forth in the tabernacle. Immediately the Lord had accomplished the redemption

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of His people. He proceeded to reveal that great design which embodied His purpose—the tabernacle, His vessel. And again we know so well that the tabernacle was a twofold figure of Christ and His Church: if you like, Christ dominant, and then in corporate expression; Christ the foundation, Christ giving it its character, nature and meaning. That is the vessel of God's purpose. That was to govern—to be central or to precede, as the case might be—and all Divine guidance was related to that.

This is a point that perhaps has not been clearly recognised. This tabernacle was a far, far more important thing than we have realised. We like the pictorial aspect of it; we are very pleased with all this typology of the tabernacle; but it has been brought down to such an earthly level. Just reflect for a moment that for forty days and forty nights, in unceasing communion, God was revealing to Moses the details, the whole conception and construction of that tabernacle. Forty days and forty nights Moses was with the Lord in the mount, receiving the pattern; and then, when he had received that so meticulously and fully from the Lord, it required a definite coming in of the Holy Spirit to superintend the making of it in every part and detail. It needed men full of the Holy Ghost, with the Holy Spirit definitely in charge.

There is something here of tremendous significance and account. It is a great, heavenly order of things, a vast, heavenly system, condensed into the framework and material of a symbolic representation, but all there implicit in principle. And when it was set up, all Divine guidance was bound up with it. When the cloud rested, they could not move; the people could not move without the tabernacle. These prefigured Christ and the Church—His Body. The tabernacle was the combination of the Lord and His people, and although, in the wilderness, the people were apart from and objective to the tabernacle, in type they were one. What, then, was taught was that God moves Church-wise, and His people are governed in their movements by God's movements in the Church. It is the Church—when it is as God would have it—which governs Divine movement. God always moves in relation to His Church. He may have to stay and wait because a pause is called for in relation to the spiritual life of the Church. It may be a deeper unifying or an adjustment. It may be to deepen faith and patience. It may be unto deeper direct fellowship with Himself, which can be weakened if there is too much 'keeping on the go'. Whatever may be the occasion, God is concerned for His Church, and a supreme lesson to be learned

by His people is that their way to fulness (the Land) is a collective and corporate one.

These are very important things for progress, for guidance. You are exercised about the guidance for your life. Your guidance, if this is true, very largely, if not absolutely, rests upon these two things: God's purpose, the fulness of Christ, and God's means or vessel, His Church. It is a related matter. I know that difficulties arise, but I am only enunciating the principle.

See, then, how jealous God was for this tabernacle—jealous over every detail of it, and jealous over relationships to it. For He was not seeing a *thing* called a 'tabernacle', or the tent of meeting and all its paraphernalia. He was seeing His Son, He was seeing His Church. God always has in view, not things, but the eternal reality, that of which this is only a pattern.

THE DEMAND FOR FAITH

Do take that to heart and think about it, for it may answer some questions, or solve some problems. Now we note further that there was an element of mystery about this guidance, as there always is. God's wisdom and God's knowledge, in His ways with us, are not always revealed to us. The element of faith has always to be present. God's wisdom is a hidden wisdom, His full knowledge is a secret thing which He does not disclose to us. His 'whys' and His 'wherefores', what He is doing and why He is doing it, in this way or that, He does not explain. But there is always a meaning, as this history of Israel shows, in each stage of the Divine guidance. There is something lying within every phase of the Divine movements—or non-movements. This is not just something random, casual, inconsequential. With His purpose in view, God has a meaning in every phase and every stage of His ways with us. It is important for us to believe that, and always to look upon any particular phase or aspect of our life with God from this standpoint: What has God got in this? That is the thing that matters. Not, Let us get out of this as soon as we can, let us get past this, let us go on; but: What has this got to reveal? What has this got to teach? God has something there, and we have to discover it, because the cloud will not move until we have.

It may be that some are in the stopping place of Divine guidance, and you are all restless and hot to get on to the next phase, the next stage. You are impatient. But are you quite, quite sure that you have got your hand upon the meaning of the phase that you are in at present? Are you quite

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sure, quite clear, that you can say, ' Well, I do not know, I did not know, why the Lord brought about such a situation, such an arrest, allowed such an experience: but I have believed that He had some meaning in it, and I have definitely had this understanding with Him that I do not want to miss what He has got at this present time because it is all a part of that cumulative value which, after all, is the fulness of Christ ' ?

For the fulness of Christ is not some place to which you and I are going. It is a spiritual life which is growing now. We have to eliminate these geographical factors from an earthly representation of heavenly things, and remember that here time and distance have no place at all. They only have a place—if they have a place at all—in this, that we can proceed years in a moment, we can move miles spiritually in a step. We have only got to grasp what God means in the sense that we are determined not to move until we know that we have got what God means by our present experience. If we can only grasp it, see it, come alive to it, we have moved on years and moved on a great distance. Time is only a factor while we are failing for some reason or other either in apprehension or obedience. For instance, Israel could have got through to the land in eleven days. It took forty years. Why? Not because the Lord had appointed forty years, but because the purpose of God was not strongly enough settled in their hearts to rule out personal interests and considerations. And so it was they who made the extra time and the extra miles, not the Lord.

But let us come back to our main point. We have to make sure that we are learning what God is trying to teach us *now*, because there will be no movement until we do. The cloud will not lift and go on until we have grasped it. What has the Lord been after in all this? That is vital to the next phase and all subsequent phases. Have we got it? Are we quite sure about it? There is something hidden to be discovered and to be laid hold of in every phase and stage of the way.

DISCIPLINE

And all that is discipline. You see, the fact that God has a great purpose settled and fixed and clearly defined, and that we are called according thereto, and that there is a working of Divine sovereignty—all that never eliminates the factor of discipline, for the simple reason that God is not acting mechanically. This is not a machine just put together and wound up and started going by itself, by its own momentum. In God's purpose and in

His methods with us, there is always the element of responsibility. God never made a machine, He made man, and man has responsibility. We are responsible creatures, and therefore discipline has its place. God will not reach His end mechanically, but only along the line of our choice. *Will*, of course, is the focal point of everything. Will, will, will—that was the trouble with Israel; that is the trouble with us all. The human mind will always be baffled, very largely, but the way through is a will that is absolutely set upon God's end, whatever that may cost.

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY OVER ALL

And then, with all this element of mystery and perplexity, discipline and instruction, growing intelligence unto responsibility, there will always remain a large margin for Divine sovereignty. Think again of Paul and his journey to Rome. You remember what he says at the beginning of his letter to the Romans, long before he went to them. The opening of his letter told them of his love and his unceasing prayer for them, and then he says that he wants them to know that he would have come to them again and again, but that he was hindered. Here is a man with his heart set upon the interests of the Lord in His Church as represented at Rome. He is a man whose life is wholly and utterly abandoned to Christ and to the Church, who is longing to be able to minister Christ to them in greater fulness. And he purposes to go, and then is hindered; and purposes again and is hindered; seeks to move in their direction, and apparently is frustrated once more.

The point is, what a strength of purpose and desire for God is here—and what a mystery of hindrances, frustrations and delays! And then, at last, at long last, how did he get to Rome? Very, very differently from what he had intended, purposed and thought! He had never calculated with that last voyage and all that was in it. It seemed, on the one hand, that all hell was determined that he should not get there. On the other hand, we see God's mysterious ways. We do not know what would have happened if Paul had gone to Rome in the way in which he had gone elsewhere, if he had just paid a visit, as he had to other places; but God had some infinitely greater thought in his reaching Rome than Paul ever thought. This is the mystery of God's ways.

We know the story of the imprisonment, the voyage, the shipwreck—the way in which he did get there. But the historian just sums it all up in one clause—"and so we came to Rome" (Acts

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xxviii. 14). "*We came to Rome.*" Divine guidance has to cover everything. If Paul had settled on any one of these incidents, he would have been in very great difficulty indeed with the Lord. But he got there at last. If you and I are so governed, dominated, mastered, by God's end—the fulness of Christ—and wedded to Christ Himself; if we will allow the Lord to do things in His own way, and will seek to get hold of the meaning and value of every part of the way, then the end is sure, the end is secured. The end will be—"and so we came . . ." Sometimes it may have looked as though we should never get there. We may have known shipwreck, in many ways. It looked very much as though we would never arrive, but the fact is, we are here!

We must see the principles of Divine guidance. The first is God's purpose of fulness; the second is God's vessel of realisation, the Church. The Church is the fulness of Him, and a law of fulness is relatedness. Thirdly, there will always be enough mystery about God's ways to demand faith, which is another law of guidance. But, fourthly, sovereignty is over all; and no matter what the delays, frustrations, hindrances or threats, at the last we shall write over all those times and experiences and situations when we thought it was so otherwise—

'Jesus led me all the way.'

T.A.S.

THE NEED OF THE HOUR

AS we take account of the situation in the Church to-day we feel more and more deeply convinced that the greatest need of the hour is for men of vision and courage.

But we use the word 'vision' in the specific sense in which it is used in the Bible and not in the general sense of enterprise. That is, what is needed above all else is men who have had a Divine illumination by the Holy Spirit in their own hearts as to God's purpose in this dispensation, and as to the particular Divine emphasis for the present hour.

There can be much enthusiasm and zeal put behind a more or less generally conceived idea of what needs to be done, with a resultant activity and 'movement'. The opposite of this, and that which we are seeing to be so much more needed, is a burdening of the hearts of 'chosen vessels' with God's own most pressing concern at this time, resulting in an all-consuming passion which will accept all the cost of its realisation.

There are many earnest and devoted servants of God who are seeking to be faithful in the work to which they feel God has called them. There are passionate preachers, and men on full stretch for the furtherance of 'the Kingdom of God'. What we are saying is no overlooking of this and of much more, neither is it an undervaluing of the great amount of devoted and sacrificial service to the Lord. Nevertheless we press our point. There are very few men in our day of whom it can be truly said, 'That man has a message from God for the time in which we live'.

There is all the difference between being saved and then going into Christian service with the con-

sequent studying of the Bible, the preparation of sermons, addresses, lessons; collecting material, mastering themes and subjects, and so on, and giving this out as required or as opportunity affords—there is all the difference between this and an open Heaven, an anointing, an unveiling by the Holy Spirit. It is the difference between our labouring to get, in order to meet a constantly recurring demand, and the Holy Spirit continually revealing Christ in us. This is a general difference, though it is a very real one, and it may represent all the difference between bondage and liberty, between limitation and fulness, even between life and death in ministry. But this is not our particular point. The need of the hour is not only for a higher spiritual level of ministry in general—it is for men with a specific anointing which will meet the situation as it is *now*.

No one who knows anything about present conditions will disagree with the statement that the Church is in tragic need of men with a message. Our point is that what is needed is the knowledge of what is *the* message for the time. *That* message must come from God to men chosen for the purpose. This is not a ministry which can be taken up. For such ministry there is usually a long and deep history with God, a history full of mystery and suffering. Many phases are passed through, all in the permissive will of God, or in His directive will, inasmuch as they are intended to educate and give experience; the course is never that of the established and settled kind, and so big changes may be called for, each of which comes by a new spiritual crisis.

No one can do anything in the making of such

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vessels, however much they may be concerned for them. This is God's work alone, and they have to be left in His hands. We may sometimes almost despair as we look in vain for such, but there may be many more under the Lord's hand than we have any idea of, and He will produce them in His time. We do urge this need upon the consideration and prayers of the Lord's people to-day.

But what about *courage*? Men of vision and courage! Yes, and more courage will be required here than in any other realm of which we know.

A specific message may—to begin with—set a distance between such as have it and such as have not. This will give rise to many possibilities. Even the best servants of God who have not so seen will probably stand back. It will mean loneliness, and going on alone perhaps for quite a time. It will mean ostracism, misunderstanding, misrepresentation, suspicion, closed doors (so far as man can close them).

Then, no commission from God is ever just verbal truth—it always involves practical issues. These practical issues will appear like the crystalizing of the truth, so that those who obey it will become marked people. This raises a new set of opposing elements. If God has given an unveiling concerning His purpose in Christ which is of such vital importance as to have called for all this special history and preparation, we must realise that it is of very great moment to Satan's interests,

and he will leave nothing unused to make its course impossible.

Let it be understood that in the line of a ministry such as Paul's the only way of fulfilment is that of Paul's abandonment and courage. Listen to him again:—

“Circumcised the eighth day,
Of the stock of Israel,
Of the tribe of Benjamin,
A Hebrew of Hebrews ;
As touching the law, a Pharisee,
As touching zeal, persecuting the Church ;
As touching the righteousness which is in
the law, found blameless.
Howbeit what things were gain to me, these
have I counted loss for Christ”.

(Phil. iii. 5 - 7).

Here is birth, religious training, tradition, status, prestige, family, friends, reputation, all touched by his new revelation. He let them go as it became necessary in the fulfilment of his received heavenly vision.

And this was not all, for even in the apostolic circle Paul very largely stood alone.

If the greatest need of the hour is that of men of vision, along with it will go the need for willingness to pay the price. But there is another side, and that is God's side.

It is a great thing to be in possession of an open Heaven and of a mandate from God.

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He asks for your prayer for this extended ministry.