

**In That Day**  
*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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**Chapter 1 - The Nature of the Life of the Child of God**

*"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"* (John 3:6).

*"He that is spiritual judges all things, and he himself is judged of no man"* (1 Cor. 2:15).

*"Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness"* (Gal. 6:1).

*"Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh; even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more. Wherefore if any man is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old things are passed away"* (2 Cor. 5:16-17).

*"Jesus said unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour comes, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father. But the hour comes and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for such does the Father seek to be His worshippers"* (John 4:21,23).

*"In that day ye shall ask in My name"* (John 16:26).

**The day of the Holy Spirit**

*"In that day"*. I think that you all recognize that phrase — "that day" — refers to a dispensation or an age. The chapter leads up to that, as you see. The Lord Jesus is here speaking of the day of the coming of the Holy Spirit, that it is expedient for His disciples that He should go away, for, unless He does so, the Comforter will not come, and if He goes, He will send the Comforter, and then what the Comforter will do, and that leads on to this phrase, *"in that day"*, the whole day, age or dispensation of the Holy Spirit, and we know that that day lingers until now. This is "that day". But it is a day or a dispensation or age which is unique in all the ages and in all the days. It differs from all past ages and it differs from coming ages. It is a day by itself, a day with its own peculiar features. The day before this one had its own very clearly defined characteristics. It was a day when God was doing things manifestly on the earth. That is, what related to God yesterday in the dispensations was something in the way of a tangible, manifest, temporal work or kingdom. Religiously, it was something related to this earth: politically, it was something related to this earth, so far as His people were concerned. It was all of a temporal, earthly character, tangible and seen. Tomorrow will be another day like that. The Millennial Age will bring in another set of earthly conditions under the immediate government and direction of God. Things will again become temporal and tangible, but not so today.

This is a different kind of day altogether, and for those of us who belong to today, the most important thing is to know what this day means, and, for want of a very clear strong apprehension of that, there has been a very great deal of confusion and of missing the way. Retarded progress, weakness, ineffectiveness and confusion are very largely due to a failure clearly to apprehend and conform to the true nature of this day, this age, from the divine standpoint. So, this day being characterized by a peculiar purpose and a peculiar method of God, we must know what it is and we must come into line with it, and what is it?

### **Intensification of conditions at the end of the day**

Well, before we proceed to think about its real essential nature, let us see this, that the end of any divine day, any divine dispensation, will see an intensification of the divine intention in that age. God has some very clearly defined thought for each age. As that age nears its end, that thought of God will come into prominence and everything will be put into the melting-pot in relation to that divine thought, and that divine thought will be the explanation of all that is taking place at the end of that dispensation. When that dispensation is moving towards its close, a set of circumstances will arise, a situation will develop, which will be of a very intense nature, and there will arise the deepest questions in the hearts of people, especially in the hearts of God's people, and the question above all questions will be this — What is it that God is doing? What does God mean by this? What lies behind this situation in God's intention, and if you can get through to that, you have got through to the very purpose of that dispensation. Then you are able to see that this situation, is only working towards the intensification of that divine thought for the whole of that dispensation; it is related to that, and that central divine thought is now being brought to its consummation, and that by tremendous intensification, and that is the way in which to watch the signs of the times. I do not want to say anything that would turn from the prophetic contemplation so far as the Word of God is clear to men along the prophetic line. We ought to be watching the signs of the times. But there are a good many people who are extremely interested in prophecy, but are getting into an awful mess, and the more they try to work that thing out, the more confused they become.

What I want to suggest to you is that there is a much more profitable line, and the way in which to interpret the conditions of a given day is to see what these conditions imply as to God's thought. What does this mean in the mind of God? It is with that that we shall be occupied by the Lord's help now for a little while. What I have just said is this, that we believe very firmly that we are in the end of this day, of the day to which the Lord referred — "in that day". A set of conditions has arisen which in themselves are very intense conditions, and the implication or the indication is that God is bringing His age purpose to consummation, and that He is behind these things, using them to that one divine end.

### **The peculiar character of this day**

Well then, what is the divine meaning of this day, this age? What is its particular and peculiar character so far as God is concerned? The answer is this. It is that everything of God in this dispensation is essentially spiritual. That is the peculiar nature of this age, of this day, and means will only be recognized by the Lord in relation to that end, and not as things in themselves. God has used means, God has blessed means, but in His thought anything and everything that has been taken note of by Him, used and blessed, has never been for a single moment because of itself, as something in itself, but only in the light of this one thing — to reach spiritual ends, to accomplish spiritual purposes, to bring into being spiritual things.

The end of the age in its intensification will therefore see, among other things, this thing — the suspending and setting aside of things with a view to getting to the end directly, and I suggest to you that that is the most conspicuous feature of our day. Are we not moving rapidly now into a situation where the things in relation to the work of God are being suspended and it is becoming more and more a question of the immediately spiritual — spiritual life, and not the means to that end? Presently we shall put it in another way. We shall see the Lord Himself and not the things in relation to the Lord. Things are being suspended, are being set aside, and we may find ourselves very soon in the position where all those means which have accompanied the spiritual purpose of God are no longer possible — meetings, organized work for God at home and abroad, and one

could catalogue a whole list of things related to the purpose of God which are going to be suspended or are being suspended.

The question arises now, What have we got when the things go? What is there in us, what is our measure spiritually when all this goes? I say again, God is doing this. This is no European despot. It may be a man or system immediately governed by the devil himself, but God lies behind that. "*Nebuchadnezzar ... is my servant*". (Jer. 25:9). If you go far enough back, you get to God behind everything, using this, and what is the meaning of it? It is the meaning of the age; the whole meaning of this very day is this. The day came in with the Holy Spirit and with the coming in of that day, the order, the divine order, for the age is that everything in this age is essentially spiritual, and whatever may be used only has that as its object. But as soon as those things become things in themselves, ends in themselves, they pass out of the divine view of value, and, in the long run, all things which may have served a good end will have to be suspended that the end itself may be the most pressing thing. So the end sees an intensification of the divine thought for that whole day, and we are in the presence of the wonderful development and intensification and consummation of the particular thought for this whole dispensation.

When you come to think about it, the difference in things from God's standpoint is ever that of their degree of directness towards the divine end. Some things reach the divine end by a long circuitous route. They take a lot of time, attention and resource, and the measure of spiritual value lies a long way down the road so far as those instrumentalities are concerned, and the measure is small. Well, God values the little measure and gives what acknowledgment He can to the means, but then there are different degrees of serviceableness to that divine end, and that means there are different degrees of spirituality, and what God ever had in His heart as His greatest desire is the most direct and immediate way of reaching His end. That is, that which gets at once to the spiritual value of things, that comes immediately upon the end, and that is spirituality. The difference in things is ever that of their degree of directness in relation to the end.

Now, accompanying that fact, there is this other fact, that the more immediate the service to the end, the more direct is the way and the means to the end, the more closely a thing is bound up with that end — that is spirituality — the more intense will things be in every spiritual way in that direction in that sphere. That is, if we should be without a great deal of means to an end, but getting right on to the end itself, we shall find spiritual conflict far more intense than others find it whose way of reaching the end is less direct and immediate. And we shall find that God the Holy Spirit deals with us more immediately and directly, that we are in the realm where God is acting in a direct way with us because we are so much more closely in touch with His end at the time. This is a very important thing to recognize.

Well, what it amounts to is this, that, when all is said and done, in the end it will all just be the measure of spiritual life and nothing else. It will not be the measure of our activity; it will not be the number of meetings we attend or at which we may speak. It will not be anything as a means; that will go. Our public ministries may go, meetings may go, everything may go as the means. But what determines the value of things at last is the measure of spiritual life, and towards that God is working. When we have got through to the end, it will just be that — what is the measure of spiritual life? What is the measure of Christ in us? That is the issue. That is the end and that is the only thing that is going to count.

How much is possible, how much is going to be possible, of all that is outward of our Christian life and service, and when all that goes and you and I may be shut up from all that, all that that has kept us going, all that that has been our stimulus, our interest, and there is no more of it and we are left standing alone, the whole of our life will stand or fall upon one question. How much have I got of the Lord? Is that not true? We are

getting there, we are right in that and we are going to be found out. This kind of judgment must first begin at the house of God. We do not know how much we have been kept going as Christians by the things of Christianity. A man once confessed to me — “I don’t believe I could continue to be a Christian were it not for my Christian work”. That is an awful confession. But there may be a good deal more of truth in that than many of us would confess, or would be able to confess. It comes back to what is spiritual — the measure of spiritual life.

### **The aim of the Holy Spirit in this day**

So then, let us note that the aim of the Holy Spirit is not firstly or primarily to do things on earth. Many people are confused about the action of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament and the action of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. We read in the Old Testament that the Spirit came upon so-and-so and so-and-so, and they did this and that, and certain people were filled with the Spirit even in the Old Testament. Now you have the same phrases in the New Testament, and yet you say it is a different age, a different dispensation and a different operation of the Spirit entirely. What is the difference? Well, in the Old Testament, the operation of the Spirit where it was upon or within men was to accomplish things here on this earth as seen, tangible things in relation to a temporal kingdom. The Spirit came upon Samson and he did what you and I could not do by the Holy Spirit — smite men to death here and now. We cannot do that by the Holy Spirit in this dispensation. But do not misunderstand me. I am not talking about pacifism; I am moving in the spiritual realm.

The Spirit of the Lord came upon Bezaleel and he made all manner of things, but that does not mean that you and I will take up knitting and sewing and do it in the Holy Spirit as the work of the Lord. That is not the work of the Lord in this dispensation. In that day making of curtains for the tabernacle and all those other things was the order — seen, tangible, for that dispensation, and the Holy Spirit came to do it. He is not doing that now. The Holy Spirit has not come for the purpose of making us make things material in these days. The difference between yesterday and today is this, that the Holy Spirit’s primary object in this dispensation is to make *spiritual* people, and to develop *spirituality* to fulness. That is His business now. That is this day.

### **What spirituality is**

But I wonder if you are all clear about that word “spiritual”, “spirituality”. So I must stop and bring you down out of the clouds if necessary. What is spirituality? Well, to begin with, it represents the difference from what is natural. It is that which is differing from and stands over against the natural. That is a New Testament explanation of spirituality. That is 1 Corinthians 2.

*“Now the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged. But he that is spiritual judges all things, and he himself is judged of no man” (1 Cor. 2:14,15).*

*“Now the natural man ... but he that is spiritual ...”.* The natural man and the spiritual man are contrasted, but that does not get us very far as to what spirituality really is.

Let me say what it is not. Spirituality is not just an element like the air, like a frame of mind, something abstract. No, spirituality is a kind of being. That is what the New Testament says. *“He that is spiritual”* — the spiritual man. It is a kind of being, a constitution, a person constituted in a certain way, not abstract but an organism, an organism with peculiar faculties.

We talk about a kingdom, or kingdoms in the Word of God. We talk about the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, and then here in this world order we speak of the animal kingdom, the vegetable kingdom, the mineral kingdom. There has been a far too general answer to that question. The answer, has been in the main this — a realm of things, a sphere. The kingdom of God — that is the realm of God. The kingdom of heaven — that is the realm of heaven. The vegetable kingdom is the realm of vegetables. The animal kingdom is the realm of animals. But that is not enough. In any one case, that is not enough. A kingdom is not only a realm or a sphere, it is a nature, it is a kind of constitution. The animal kingdom is not a defined circle in which there are animals. That is not the animal kingdom. The vegetable kingdom is not a defined sphere in which there are vegetables. It is that, but it is something more. The kingdom of God is not the defined sphere in which God dwells. That is not enough. The kingdom of heaven is not some place to which you and I go or come. The kingdom of God is that realm in which only what is the nature of God obtains. The kingdom of heaven is that realm in which only what is heavenly in its nature is. It is not only a sphere. It is a nature. The human kingdom is not some defined realm in which men live; it is human nature itself, we make the kingdom. God makes the kingdom of God. Heaven as a kind of nature makes the kingdom of heaven. That is why you have got to be born again to get into it. You have got to be constituted according to God, according to heaven, a new kind of nature has got to come in. You have got to be reconstituted according to what obtains in nature in that realm. That is what spirituality is. It is not just an abstract thing, an element. Spirituality is that we are constituted with certain spiritual faculties. We are an order of being, the supreme characteristics of which are spiritual. That is spirituality, that is what is spiritual, and in the last analysis it is what is God, the measure of God.

God is Spirit. That does not mean God is a vapour, God is an abstract element. No, God is a living Person, God is a very real Person, but God is Spirit. It does not say in John 4, that God is a Spirit. There is no article there. God is Spirit, but God as Spirit speaks, God as Spirit acts, and as definitely and positively as any man ever acted. God is also personal, with intelligence, with executive ability. Spirituality is that — a kind of being having certain faculties which other kinds of beings have not got. This is the kingdom of God. This is the kingdom of heaven.

So it is a kind of person constituted by an act of the Holy Spirit Himself. He that is spiritual because of that act of the Holy Spirit in him is a different kind of being from all others, and in the deepest reality of his being he is joined to God, and all that God is, except His Deity. I do not know yet if I have made clear what spirituality is, but I do want you to get away from that mystical idea of spirituality. You go to an art gallery and someone who is artistic speaks about the 'spirituality' of a picture. Well, I am not talking about that. They mean something suggested by the picture, an atmosphere about the picture, something that comes out and makes a suggestion to you about it beyond what is actually painted. I am not speaking about that. That is abstract, purely in the mental realm. Spirituality in the New Testament sense is something very different from that, and so we must be very clear as far as we can as to what it is the Holy Spirit is seeking to do — not to make us abstract people who are always occupied with abstractions, with the mystical, with the occult, with something remote from life. That is another realm altogether.

Spirituality is the most practical thing, and it comes into touch with all the most practical matters of our lives, so that, through anything in daily life, God seeks to promote an increase of spirituality, which is only another way of saying an increase of Himself, an increase of the Lord Jesus in us, for it all resolves itself into a personal matter where the Lord Jesus is concerned.

### **The initial act by which we are made spiritual**

Then this initial act of the spiritual life is called 'new birth'. That which is born of the Spirit is spiritual. "*He that is spiritual ...*". That is the first interest of the Holy Spirit — to constitute people something other than they are in their very being. I am not going to follow on the matter of new birth just now. I feel so concerned that you and I should be quite clear as to what it is that God is after. A great many people have assumed that they are Christians, children of God and that they are born again. Assumption is very widespread, and what is going to arise as God intensifies things in relation to His ultimate thought is that multitudes of people are going to discover they are not born again after all. They are going to find that their foundations do not hold in distress, or, to put it another way, they really do not know the Lord in an inward living way. If you have no question or doubt about that matter yourself, remember the responsibility which rests upon us all of leaving other people in no doubt about it. You and I, in so far as there is yet preserved unto us an opportunity of touching other lives in the Lord's Name, have got to leave them in no doubt about this matter. We are not going to be satisfied with a put-your-name-on-the-dotted-line kind of salvation. That is, something which is their doing, their decision, their agreement, their consent; the handing over of their old man to be a Christian, which can never be done. Oh no, right at the very beginning, something has got to take place which constitutes them different beings from their natural human being.

As God looks down upon this world, He sees two different species of men, of humanity. He sees the natural humanity, and He sees another species altogether different. Its very constitution is another, and that is what He calls 'the spiritual'. "*He that is spiritual ...*". Not 'he that has interests in things abstract, religious or artistic'. That is not it, but, he that is another being, and it is just there that the judgment will begin with us. Are we other beings than the rest of men by the constituting act of the Holy Spirit? That is basic and from that point the Holy Spirit's primary interest is to increase that, develop that and bring it to fulness by spiritual growth unto a glorious spiritual consummation.

### **A constitutional change**

Now, in closing, I want to say two things, or use two words, by which to sum up what we have said thus far. It is that word 'constitution'. It is a constitutional change that makes us spiritual. We know that a constitutional change has taken place in us. We are altogether differently constituted from what we once were and from other people in the world. That is the foundation of all God's work in this dispensation. Upon that He operates. With that in view, He will use what He can, but His end is the thing which governs, and oh, that we got more quickly to God's end in the salvation of souls that they did not have to wait about so long after a certain kind of decision before they really do know the Lord in any real way. A constitutional change — upon that we shall build what we have to say; upon that the Holy Spirit works towards God's full end.

### **The inscrutability of the spiritual man**

But another word that comes up in this connection, a big word, I hope it does not sound too big — inscrutability. I get the word simply from 1 Corinthians 2:15.

*"He that is spiritual judges (or examines) all things, and he himself is judged (or examined) of no man"*.

Neither the word 'judged' nor 'examined' is the best word we can get. There are a whole number of words that would help. You could use the word 'understood'. 'He that is spiritual is not understood of any man'. He is inscrutable. God is inscrutable. God is Spirit.

Now, a spiritual man, a spiritual woman, is, as far as other beings are concerned, inscrutable. He cannot be fathomed, he cannot be understood, he cannot be comprehended. There is that about him which is beyond the ordinary judgment, beyond the ordinary power of understanding. Oh, what a long way that word takes us. The more you walk with the Lord, the more spiritual you are, the more conformed to the Lord's image, the more you are constituted by the Holy Spirit, the further you get away from men, the less you can be followed or understood. Any instrumentality of God or any work in which God is doing His deepest thing in spirituality lies altogether outside the pale of other people's understanding, and therefore they misunderstand it, they misjudge. They cannot understand, but they will try, and so they put their own judgment upon it. They say, 'It is this' or 'It is that' 'It is not this', 'It is not that'. But they do not know, and the only way in which they can prove is to be alive to the Holy Spirit and be on the spot. There is no other way. You cannot stand outside a spiritual thing and determine what it is by any natural judgment or faculty or facility. Men who have walked with God, that which has been peculiarly in close touch with God, have always had a way of loneliness, a way which could not be followed by the great number, and a way which has been considerably misunderstood.

Now, that is going to be a part of the cost at the end time, and we see it today. The world is going to say ten thousand things to us that we ought to do. We ought to do this and that, thousands of things we will not be able to do, and that will be the mark at the end, the mark of the beast or the mark of the Lamb, and there is a great cost of misunderstanding, because — well, simply because the Holy Spirit says, 'Others can, you cannot.' The way of the Spirit is another way for you. To come to God's end we have got to walk very much with *the Lord*, and not with men — to walk with the Lord. Don't walk with things, don't walk with truth, don't walk with movements, doctrines, or even Christian people. Now that wants guarding, but you know what I mean. Don't walk with men in this sense, that they are your support. Don't walk with anything. Walk with the Lord Himself. That does not mean that you are going to be independent, that you are going to separate yourself from all others. There is another side, the matter of spiritual fellowship and so on, but the important thing for us now is to walk with the Lord first. We will not go wrong if we do that. I am quite sure that no one who walks with the Lord will separate himself from brethren or violate what is in the Word of God, have a superior judgment to the Scriptures themselves, but our need in these days is to know the Lord. The Lord may, in dealing with some of us, because of our peculiar disposition, make Himself known to us through others and only through others, because our disposition is to be independent, but the point is that you and I have got to know the Lord Himself and that is spirituality. That is what the Holy Spirit is working at so strongly just now, to woo us to the Lord Himself so that He becomes the everything of our lives.

May the Lord interpret His word to us!



## Chapter 2

### The Nature of Man's Relationship with God

Reading: John 3:6; 1 Cor.2:15; Gal. 6:1; 2 Cor. 5:16-17; John 4:21,23; John 16:26.

In our previous meditation, we were seeing that we are in what is meant by "that day", that day meaning an age or a dispensation of the Holy Spirit, and that the end of any day sees God intensifying the purpose of that age. We saw that the aim of the Holy Spirit is not primarily to do things on the earth, but to make spiritual people of us, and to develop that spirituality unto spiritual fullness.

Now we are going to deal with this matter of spirituality as the Lord's great object in this age being intensified towards the end. There are quite a number of particular matters to which this applies. There are the major matters and there are subsidiary matters. Probably we shall only be able to consider of major matters, and they bring us in the first place to something which is quite elementary, but which at the same time is a real test to all of us.

The first feature of this particular dispensation is the spiritual relationship with God. That word in John 4:21, carries with it a double significance. To the woman the Lord said,

*"The hour comes, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father ... the hour comes and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit".*

You notice it is God the Father, worshipping God, worshipping the Father. We need not make anything very much of the words, the terms. It is the idea, it is the principle. It is a matter of relationship with God, and the point there that the Lord Jesus is making is that there is a change of dispensation. Up till now men have worshipped God here and at Jerusalem. Now there is a change. It is a matter of relationship with God. You can see that, in the day that was passed or was passing at that moment, the matter of relationship with God was a matter of locations. That is the first thing — *"in this mountain, in Jerusalem"*. It was a matter of places, it was a matter of outward means, of visible and tangible systems, places, locations, priests, sacrifices, feasts, and that whole system of things as on the earth, something down here.

Now the Lord Jesus says in effect, 'That day has passed, that dispensation and its order is done with. The hour is now when an entirely new order is brought in in the matter of relationship with God, and in this day it is no longer according to those features and forms. It is now solely an inward matter of the Spirit.' That is very utter. You know that when God brings in a day or an age, He brings it in in an utter way, and when God takes out that day, He takes it out in an utter way. There may be in between the beginning and the end a good deal of confusion, mixture, loss of definition, but you may take it that the beginning and the end will be very emphatic. Pentecost was the ushering in of the day and it was very emphatic. The end of the dispensation may not be after the order of Pentecost, but God will intensify His principles at the end, and there will be a company, comparatively small perhaps, at the end which will embody the full thought of God. It will be there. We believe that that man child of Revelation 12 is that company which embodies the full thought and comes to the throne. That brings the dispensation to an end, or marks the ending of a dispensation. The beginning and the end is emphatic, is intensified, and we are at the end now. God is therefore causing conditions to bring about a very intense situation where at least a company of His people are concerned who are to take the throne in the behalf of the rest. That is well-known ground.

Here you see the Lord Jesus indicated the coming in of this day, this dispensation, and in indicating it, it was very utter. He says in very few words — and, as we understand, so far as the gospels are concerned, there is the germ of everything; not the full development or explanation which comes in the epistles, but the germ of everything, and the germ is the concentrated essence of everything — here He says in very few words this. 'This day which now is, this day, this hour, which now comes is marked not by outward things, systems, forms, means, methods, which stands for man's relationship with God, but this day is marked by the inwardness of the Spirit and everything now is spiritual. It is not temporal, material, tangible, earthly; it is spiritual, it is an inner relationship with God.' That is the nature of this dispensation. The dispensation has not proceeded on that basis as a whole. There have always been right through the dispensation people of God who have stood there and gone on on that ground, but as a whole, the people of God, the Christians right through this dispensation, have moved very largely back on to yesterday again, back to a priestly order, material forms and rites and outward things seen of men to represent man's relationship with God. Well, God says that that day is done. That does not belong to this age. You are living behind the times if you are there. You are in the Old Testament, although you may call it Christianity. The Lord is not concerned with that. The only thing the Lord is concerned with is this spiritual relationship with Himself as an inward thing. In a word, it is no longer things related to God. It is God Himself immediately and directly dwelling within our hearts by His Holy Spirit. It is the Lord Himself in terms of His Son, Jesus Christ. That is the feature of this age. This is the age, the dispensation, of God's Son as within by the Holy Spirit, the revelation and the impartation of God Himself, so that everything new is a matter of what Christ is as God's provision within our own hearts, within our own lives. We cannot say anything more comprehensive than that, and it would be difficult to say anything more testing than that.

Let us get clear about this. For this whole dispensation from the day of the coming of the Holy Spirit, the day referred to by the Lord — "in that day" — to the day of the translation of the church, in this dispensation, God has but one concern and that is that His Son as the fulness of Himself should be the life and the resource of His people in an inward way by the Holy Spirit, that it should all be a matter of Christ known in us as God's fulness. That is all.

Now, that is elementary, but I say again, where are we over that? Test Christendom today by that rule and I think it will have to be said, 'Weighed in the balances and found wanting'. That we should not be found wanting in the day when judgment begins at the House of God, the Lord would say this to us, 'It is not a matter of outward forms or means. It is not a matter of doctrines or truths as in themselves. It is a matter of the Lord Himself known in the power of the Holy Spirit', and when we fail to recognize this, we shall fall into several deplorable mistakes and failures. If we take truths, for instance, or doctrines, as things in themselves, we shall at once limit our spiritual scope. You will see very clearly if you look in those directions where particular truths have been made things in themselves and become the standard and a slogan of any company of people; you will find that that people is narrowed at once in its spiritual scope. That truth may be very precious to them, it may mean a very great deal to them, but, if they are solely taken up with that, if that is the range of their spiritual horizon, they are a limited people. It is always so, and that is the inevitable result of taking teaching or truth or doctrine as something in itself. All doctrine has got to be held in relation to the Person, and when you hold it in relation to the Person, you find that you cannot isolate anything. We will say more about that.

But then we shall do another thing if we take doctrines or truths as things in themselves. We shall divide the people of God. We shall divide them into truth groups, and that is fatal to spiritual fulness. The important thing is that we have a full Christ, Christ Himself, as the centre, and, as we have Christ Himself and not an 'it', and not an 'ism', and not a truth, and not a doctrine, but the Lord Himself, we will have fulness. We are bound to see

all truth as we have the Lord Himself. That does not mean that there will never be a specific emphasis. There is — the Lord has seen to that from time to time, but when the Lord raises up a specific emphasis, it is never an isolated thing. It is only when men give a specific emphasis that it becomes isolated. When the Lord raises up a specific emphasis, it is because something is lacking which is necessary to all the rest, so He brings that in to restore fulness, it takes its place, a place it has lost. The church is lacking in that particular thing and it has got to come in, and when the Lord brings it in, He brings it with emphasis because of necessity, but in the course of time it just takes its place with all the rest. It does not remain an isolated thing. It is a blessed thing to notice that. From time to time the Lord recovers a specific emphasis, but if the Lord is doing it, He never allows the people to whom it is restored to become a people with that one line. For a time that thing is hammered home, but when the Lord has got that established, it is there. He does not keep it up there in that abnormal position. He lays hold of something else needing to be brought in. It is necessary for us to walk in the Spirit that we know when the Lord ceases to keep that thing before the eyes of His people and moves to something else. The Lord's object is always spiritual fulness. Our danger is, when we see something and it is blessedness, to make it something in itself and circle round that, and then we become a group marked by some specific truth and nothing else. We are unbalanced if that is so. That is not the way of the Lord.

So everything must be held in relation to the Lord Himself. The Lord will with His own true children always be bringing them back there. One mark of the Holy Spirit, a pre-eminent mark of the work of the Holy Spirit is this, that He will not occupy and engage us continually and always with any particular aspect of the truth, but He will all the time be bringing us back to the Lord Himself, and when we are in danger of getting out on a truth line as truth, as teaching, as doctrine, we shall find that the Holy Spirit's hand upon us will check us at some point, and say then, 'You are getting on to a line of teaching. It is Myself, come back to Me', and He will bring us back to Himself again. That is the way of the Lord and it is a most important thing to recognize that.

John's Gospel, as we all know, is the gospel which is marked more than any other by this spirituality. It is timeless; there are no time marks in John's gospel. It begins with "In the beginning was the word". It is universal; it takes us altogether and outside of this world far beyond time and locations and it is quite heavenly. It is all the time using that word 'heavenly'. "*I came down from heaven*". That is the word of the Lord Jesus. Everything is heavenly, out from heaven; it is spiritual. This is the gospel which, more than any other, is marked by spirituality, and, that being the case, it is interesting to notice that this gospel more than any other, we may say as no other does, relates everything to the Person of the Lord Jesus, and the great feature of this gospel is the little phrase "I am", and that I AM is brought into relation with everything that the Christian needs. I am the light of the world. I am the door. I am the shepherd. I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life. I am the resurrection. I am the bread.

Well now, what is the object or capacity of each of these things? What do they stand for?

### **"I am the Light"**

What is the object of light? Well, it is for illumination. 'I am the illumination', not, 'I give the illumination'. Not, 'I give you light'. "*I am the light*". It is in what I am that you will have light, not that I give you something called light. The light has got to be a personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus. It is inseparably bound up with Him personally. If we have the Lord, if we know the Lord, we have light, and there is no true light and no true knowledge as a thing in itself. It is personal. It is not that there is a light coming from the Lord to us, the Lord being objective like the sun. No, that light is in us, He Himself is in us as the light. The Holy Spirit within us is the sum total of divine light. It is not that the Lord gives a bit of light and then a bit more and a bit more objectively. That is a wrong conception entirely. I know we do not enter into the fulness of that light all at

once, but the fulness of that entered into us all at once. When the Holy Spirit really comes to reside in us, when it becomes true of us that we have received the Spirit, we can never have any more light than we have got. We can enter into more of the light than we have entered into, but we have got light fully and finally in the Person of the Lord Jesus resident within us by the Holy Spirit. It is a matter for us to walk according to light in order to know what the light holds for us, what Christ is. Christ is the finality of God.

*"The anointing which ye have received of him abides in you, and ye need not that any man teach you"* (1 John 2:27). That is never said with the intention of making us independent of those who are anointed to be teachers, but that does mean that, even so, we have the final authority on all matters, and that it is for us by the Holy Spirit, the anointing, within us, to know the truth when someone else speaks it, to have the witness in our hearts that it is true, and, if it is not true, the witness within us says, 'That is not true'. If we live solely upon what people say without having the Lord, the light, within us, we are at the mercy of every wind of doctrine, but the authority is here. *"He that is spiritual judges all things."*

*"He that is spiritual"*. How is he spiritual? We are constituted spiritual beings by that act of the Holy Spirit in new birth where He comes to take up residence within us. I know the problem that arises. The question arises with many — Do you receive the fulness of the Spirit at new birth? You are supposed to. That is the New Testament teaching, and if there is a place left for something else, something more, it is because you have not been properly born, fully born, something is in suspense as to your new birth, some check arises, you are not right through. There is something to be done to finish that off. Take that word to the Ephesians' believers.

*"Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?"* That is the proper way of putting the question according to the original. When you believed, did you receive the Spirit? To many that has been resolved into doctrine, that you can be a true Christian without having received the Spirit. I think there is another way of looking at it.

They answered, *"We did not so much as hear whether the Holy Spirit is"*. Do you think a person can be properly born again without ever having known the Holy Spirit is? Paul said, *"into what then were ye baptized?"* Why bring that in? That is another question. Oh, it is not another question, and that question is very closely related in the Lord's thought with our new birth. *"Into what then were ye baptized?"* And they said, *"Into John's baptism"*. Ah, there is the fault. Then Paul explained the difference between John's baptism and being baptized into Christ. Then, when they saw what it meant to be baptized into Christ, they were baptized, and when Paul laid his hands upon them, they received the Spirit.

What is baptism? Where is baptism placed in the New Testament? Well, we shall find baptism placed first of all in the letter to the Romans when we come to the Holy Spirit dispensation. We are out of the gospels, the Spirit has now come. He is interpreting the gospels. So the very first movement, so far as the Holy Spirit's interpretation of baptism is concerned — not the act of baptism but the interpretation — is in Romans 6, and there the statement is —

*"We were buried ... with him through baptism into death;: that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life"* (Rom. 6:3).

Is that conversion? Is that being born again, or is it something subsequent? It is the very foundation of the Christian life, the beginning of the Christian life. It is rising together with Him into newness of life on the ground of having been buried. That is the old man

put away, as the context points out; the natural man finished with and the spiritual man brought in through death and resurrection.

Well now, on that ground, the Holy Spirit is given, and here are those at Ephesus who have some sort of belief, are some sort of Christians, and they had never had that at all as a foundation and therefore never did receive the Spirit. Paul has probed right down to the heart of things, and what issues is this, not that you can be a Christian and not have the Spirit. You can have some kind of Christian belief and not be born again. The point is this, that a really thorough-going full-orbed new birth means that you have received the Spirit, the Spirit takes up residence, and if you have not received the Spirit, there is something unnatural about your spirituality, something that is not normal, there is something in suspense. We have got to leave room, of course, for the grace of God, the mercy of God, towards us in that condition, and His faithfulness to bring us into light, but some of us know that years hung between our act of faith in the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and our coming into the real knowledge of the inwardness of things in the life of the Lord. But I do not say that there were two things. I say that the second was the making complete of the first. It was what was intended to be at the first. For lack of proper teaching, perhaps understanding, I do not know why, it was not there at the beginning, but I do know that when that day came of the entering into the meaning of this in an inward way, it was just a part of that glorious experience of salvation. Well, so much for that question about receiving the Spirit and new birth. You see, it is after all the Lord Jesus Himself really taking possession of us, and if He does then He is in us in the capacity of divine fulness. Ours it is to enter into the meaning of that. We may enter a bit at a time.

### **“I am the Door”**

Well, the same principle holds good with regard to all these other matters. *“I am the door”*. What is the purpose of a door, or the door in this case — the door of the sheep? He immediately follows up by this. *“He that is a hireling, and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not”*. The point here is that the door marks the ownership of the sheep, for, in the Eastern field, as you know, there is no gate, it is just a vacant place. The shepherd himself becomes the door. He stands there and when he passes them in for the night, he himself sleeps at the door. He is the door, He is the owner. The hireling, the thief, the robber, is not the door at all. He comes some other way. This door means ownership. The Lord Jesus Himself is the mark and seal of divine ownership. How do we know that we are the Lord’s? That is the question. We have the Lord Jesus Himself within us. That is the answer. It is very simple, but that is the answer. *“If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His”* (Rom. 8:9). That is only another way of saying that if the Lord is not in us, we are not the Lord’s. He is the door. That marks ownership, and no one can be sure they are the Lord’s until they know the Lord is in them, and that is spirituality. That is the mark of this age, and how different from other things. The claim to belong to God is made upon the ground of certain creedal statements, forms, membership of this society, and so on. Oh no, that will not do for the Lord. Ownership is marked and sealed by the Lord Himself within.

### **“I am the Good Shepherd”**

The shepherd — what is the capacity of the shepherd? *“I am the good shepherd”*. What is the capacity of the shepherd, what is the shepherd for? Well, look at the contrast again. *“The thief cometh not, but that he may steal, and kill, and destroy. I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly”*. What is the capacity of the shepherd? The Shepherd is to give His life to be the life of the sheep. That is just the opposite of the enemy — death and destruction. How can we know security? How can we have assurance? What is the basis of our certainty? It is Christ within.

### **“I am the Way”**

"*I am the way*". What is the purpose of a way? Well, it is to join two things, to bring two things together. It is to bring myself at one end into touch with God at the other. "*No man cometh unto the Father but by me*". I am here and God is there. I want that there shall be union with God, that God and myself shall come together, that we shall be one. How can that be? "*I am the way*". The Lord Jesus is not a road, He is not a thoroughfare, He is not a passage. He is a Person, and in the Person of the Lord Jesus, God and man are one. It is the Person. It is not that the Lord Jesus says, 'Now, go this way, take this course, follow this road'. No, He says, 'Have me and you are there'. You are at the end of the road when you have got Him. It is always like that in principle. Immediately we have the Lord Jesus, we are at the end of our object. You remember the disciples were in the middle of the lake, toiling, far from land. The Lord Jesus came to them on the water and they received Him into the boat, "*and straightway the boat was at the land whither they were going*", all the miles disappeared. And it is like that — the Lord Jesus coming in and you are with the Father at once because God and man are at once united in the One Person. Once I have the Lord Jesus I am one with the Father. But later the New Testament will explain that in spiritual terms. "*He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit*" (1 Cor. 6:17). It is a spiritual matter. I have not to toil along a certain road of ordinances and commandments, the legal road of wearisome obligations, to get to God. No, I am there in Christ, and I have dismissed an objective priest because He is my Priest. I have not got to call in someone to get me in touch with God. In Him, I am with God.

### **"I am the Truth"**

"*I am the truth*" — the same principle. Not, 'I am going to tell you a lot of things. I am going to give you a lot of instructions'. No, it is a matter of knowing Him, that is all, the Holy Spirit revealing Him. In John 16, the Lord Jesus is saying this in gospel language, in parabolic form. He is saying, "*When he, the Spirit of truth, is come ... He shall take of mine ... all things whatsoever the Father has are mine, therefore said I, that He takes of mine, and shall declare it unto you.*" That is, all the things of God in Christ taken by the Holy Spirit and shown unto us. It is a matter of Christ being revealed in us. That is the truth. I cannot tell you how precious that has become to me since I first saw it. All my business is to know the Lord. Oh this Bible, what a lot of things it contains! What a lot of subjects there are in this Bible, all these subjects and themes, this prophecy business. What a relief to the heart when you see everything in the Bible is only a matter of knowing Christ. He is the key to everything. There was a time when there was a vogue of gathering up a man's life and teaching into his profile. I saw one of John Wesley once. Standing back at a distance it looked like a portrait of John Wesley, just his profile, but every little space was filled in with some doctrine of John Wesley. That is how it is to see the Lord Jesus. You see everything in the Lord Jesus and you have everything. He is the fulness and truth is not a thing. It is a personal relationship with the Lord. If you and I only had a sufficiently Holy Spirit life in union with Christ, we should be wonderfully enlightened people. Our trouble is that we are trying to get hold of subjects, themes, truths, the Bible as a book, and its contents. That is objective and we do not get very far. What we need is a Holy Spirit life in union with the Lord Himself, and then the Bible becomes alive. Do not think you have got to know everything in the Bible. Start at the right end, which is Holy Spirit union and communion with your Lord, and in that the Word of God takes a new place and what happens is this. You go through the Word and you are not looking at the Word as a volume of subjects. You have one question in your mind — What is it of Christ that is here? What is this revealing of Christ Himself? Or what is it saying which is contrary to Christ. If you have the Lord Himself always before your eyes, you have the key to everything. "*I am the truth*" — not, 'I will tell you the truth'.

### **"I am the Resurrection and the Life"**

"*I am the life*" — not just, 'I will give you life.' "*I am the resurrection.*" Not, 'One day there will be a resurrection, whether it is the general resurrection or a specific

resurrection. There will be those things, but mark you, there is no hope for you in the resurrection to which you may be looking forward unless I am already the resurrection in your case. You have got to know Me personally within as the resurrection and the life if you are ever going to know Me as the resurrection up from the dead in that particular sense’.

### **The Lord Himself**

Spirituality is this, spiritual life is this, spiritual growth is this — it is the measure of what the Lord Himself is within us. We may have all knowledge, all truth, all doctrine, all Scripture, and everything else as a thing, and yet when it comes to days such as those into which we are moving, into conditions such as those into which many brethren not so very far East have moved, I tell you then, the test is pressed home. For them it has become a very real thing. It is not what I have been practising, not where I have been going, it is not what my particular form of church or denomination is and so on, but what I have got of the Lord. That is the test, and I believe in the beginning the church was driven into the catacombs for that very purpose, to save it from things. They were the purest and healthiest days of the church’s history. It was a sifted church then. The only thing then was the Lord Himself. Yes, but that has always been the Lord’s thought. The Lord has never had anything other, extra. He has not moved one fraction from His purpose. It is I Myself and He is bringing us back to that.

We must face this matter now. It is very difficult to stand back from our traditions and from everything that we have, but I do urge upon you to be much before the Lord in this matter. Have a real understanding with the Lord. ‘Lord, I do not want Christianity as a thing. Save me from it. Save me from doctrine, teaching, as a thing. Save me from Christian practice as such, Christian forms, Christian associations, as things. Make very sure that it is Thyself that I know, and that I know Thee sufficiently well to stand me in stead when everything goes and there is nothing left.’ Have that dealing with the Lord. He would exercise us about that in advance. It will be too late when the day comes. It will be a terrible thing if some sudden swoop should find the things gone and we have not got sufficient of the Lord to carry us through. It must be that. The Lord has ever brought His people to that point.

Yes, even in the Old Testament, we have the thing foreshadowed. Abraham is a great example of the Lord putting His hand upon things to get Abraham unto Himself. First it was his country. Where are we if our country goes? Our country is very dear to us, we love our country. Supposing it goes, supposing we lose our country. Are we going to pieces? Is our heart going with our country? Difficult as it is to believe it might be, we are up against at least the possibility, and a good many Christians have passed into the actuality. They have lost their country. They have gone to pieces. So the Lord put His finger on thing after thing in Abraham’s life with that one object — to see that Abraham’s life was not a matter of the things he possessed on this earth, but that his life was a matter of God Himself, the Lord Himself, and I believe that is the heart of God’s great word about Abraham — *“Abraham my friend”*. What is that? ‘Abraham lives for Me. Abraham’s life is Myself. I am Abraham’s life’. I believe that is what it is. Surely that is what it is. The Lord would bring us there. I think that the two things are linked in that little word in Colossians 3:4.

*“When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory”.*

The two things are brought together. The coming of the Lord and the Lord our life. That is to be the situation when the Lord comes. He would have it that He and He only is our life; the coming of the Lord should be the bringing out of that fact. Unto that He is working with us.

We have touched this in the matter of relationship with God, the nature of relationship with God in this dispensation. It is the first thing, the basic thing, in spirituality. True worshippers must worship the Father in spirit. This relationship is a spiritual and inward thing. I am sure you see what a lot many would have been saved if they had seen this. Many have embraced Christianity and been thoroughly disappointed, if not disgusted. Many look on the things which go to make up Christianity and find dissatisfaction. If we are going to look at the churches as such, the organization of Christianity as such, well, that is going to fail us utterly. We have got to know the Lord Himself, and only as we know Him shall we go through. This same thing is to apply to a number of other things. Here the first is our relationship with God. What is the nature of it? The only relationship which God recognises in this dispensation is a spiritual one, an inward one, a living one.

### **The church a spiritual thing**

That truth will apply, as we may see, to the church. I am not going to follow that through. What is the church from God's standpoint in this age? It is only a spiritual thing. Yesterday it was otherwise. Tomorrow in the Millennial age it may be on the earth something again in representation. In this age — oh no! and you and I are clinging to something here on the earth as the 'church'. It is going to be destroyed. It is going with this world system and that is unspirituality. The more spiritual we are in this true and right sense, the less will earthly things called 'the church' have a place in our system. We will be out of all that; it will not hold us. It cannot govern us. That organised thing called 'the church'. Of course, it is the result of a spiritual position. Do not mistake what I have said. 'Oh well, he said I must quit. I must get out of this'. Don't do it, you will get into a worse mess. But if the Holy Spirit reveals to you the true nature of the church as spiritual, as heavenly, if it comes by revelation and if you come into that in the Spirit, it will not be long before everything here that is earthly will cease to have a place in your heart. Then it will only be the relation of saints in the Spirit. That is all. It is spiritual.

All that has been said has only been to stress one thing — God's one predominant purpose in this age, which purpose is being headed up through circumstances of great stress and pressure, is to make us spiritual people and in spiritual fulness.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Nature of the Church**

Reading: John 3:6; 1 Cor. 2:15; 3:1; Gal. 6:1; 2 Cor. 5:16-17; John 4:21,23,24; 16:26.

We pass on to the next phase of the application of the truth of the spiritual nature of the age, of the dispensation, and that as to do, not with the individual believer and not the relationship of the child of God with God Himself, but now the relationship of the children of God to one another. That is a spiritual thing — the relationship of God's people one to another. This is what is meant by the term 'the church', and when we consider that word, let us at once see that it simply signifies the relationship of the people of God among themselves. That is what the church is. It is a very simple matter. What a great deal has been made of this! — all our ecclesiastical doctrine and theology. But after all, what is the church? It is simply the fellowship of the children of God in one Spirit. That is all. You can dismiss a very great deal when you get down there. What a lot has been brought in to make something of this church idea. But when the church came into being under the anointing of the Holy Spirit at the beginning, there were none of those things which obtain today associated with the church to try and define it. No, it was a very simple matter. It was just the fellowship of the children of God in and by one Spirit; a spiritual relationship between them.



We find that the letter to the Ephesians is addressed to a large number of people, the Lord's people, scattered over a very wide area, over all Asia, residing in many places at considerable distances from one another, and the word concerning them all is, that though scattered as they were, dispersed over wide areas and into many places, they all were by one Spirit constituted a holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:20-22). It was not a matter of the place. They were in many places, but they were one holy temple in the Lord, and it is just that last clause that defines it — "*in the Lord*". If we are in the Lord, it does not matter if we are scattered over the whole face of the earth. We are one temple in the Lord.

To the woman the Lord said, 'This mountain ... at Jerusalem ... that is your idea of the temple. The Samaritan temple here where men worship God. In Jerusalem the Jewish temple where they worship God, and you say that that is the temple. It is here or it is there. No, that day is past. In this day it is not in this land or in any other land, not in any one particular land, but it is in the Lord, a holy temple in the Lord'.

Now, we want to get down to that — "*in the Lord*". What does it mean? That means that it is constituted according to Christ. It is then Christ Himself in expression. I am deliberately being very simple because I believe the Lord wants to get us right back to this simple truth about things, away from all our ideas and traditions, to real living but very simple facts, and therefore when we ask what the church is, the comprehensive and inclusive answer is this — the church is Christ. Christ is the church, and there is nothing more than that as there is nothing less than that. Christ is the church. But Christ is in you, in me, in ten thousand of those who have been constituted spiritually by the act of the Holy Spirit and His indwelling, and Christ, while remaining in His own Person in the glory, is now, by the Holy Spirit, corporately manifested and expressed and that is the church. Where Christ is in believers — that is the church.

But what a tremendous thing that is! If later we are led to speak about the work, the service, of the Lord, we shall see by this very thing how simple and how real it is. At the moment, it is the instrument of Christ, His Body, which is the church, and the church, far from being an institution, an organisation, a society or any such thing, is a Person and that Person is the Lord Jesus, and the presence of the church here means the presence of the Lord Jesus and means therefore the impact of the Lord Jesus, and, so far as fellowship is concerned, it is simply the matter of the absolute unity of the Lord Jesus Himself. There is a wonderful harmony about the Person of the Lord Jesus, a wonderful unity about Himself as you follow Him in the days of His flesh. There were no discordant elements in His life, there were no contradictory things about Him. He was not saying two or three different things, let alone a thousand different things. What is called the church today is doing that, and the one cry today is for authority. Who is right? Which is right? Which is the voice of authority? There are thousands of contradictory and opposing things being said by what is called the church here. But you cannot trace one shadow of contradiction in the Lord Jesus when He was here on earth. He never said two contradictory things, two opposing things. He was one and perfect in His teaching, in His expression, and what authority there was! Why the contrast, the unjust comparison, I am afraid it was, between Him and the very people who were supposed to be the authorities? He spoke, they said, as one having authority and not as the scribes. But the scribes were supposed to be the authorities. They were the very people to give the meaning, the sense, of things. Ezra, the scribe, was a man who gave the sense of things. The scribes were there for that. If you wanted the law interpreted, you went to the scribes and their interpretation of the law was as good as any King's Counsel in our day. You take counsel and you say that is the interpretation of the law upon which you can base your case. But here people said that He spoke as one having authority and not as the scribes. Here is an authoritativeness which registers itself upon the hearts of men as final, as superior, and not until we get right back to this basic truth and reality so far as

the church is concerned shall we have authority and get away from all these conflicting, dividing and paralysing contradictions of man.

I believe that this is what lies behind that statement concerning the day of Pentecost, when the apostles moved under the anointing Spirit in the first movement of the church — it was the church then coming to function, emerging into its vocation — it says, "*Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice ...*". Now eleven did not lift up their voices. I do not believe all twelve of them were speaking at the same time. But "*Peter standing up with the eleven ...*". The principle, the meaning, here is that the church in representation under the anointing of the Spirit is one in mind, one in word, one in statement, one in interpretation, and all that Peter says is the voice of the church, and they are all there in perfect agreement under one Spirit. If Peter went on, you would not find any of the other apostles saying, 'Well now, we must modify that, safeguard that. I am not quite sure that your interpretation is right.' That is how we go on today, and so people do not know where they are. They are looking for authority.

It is Christ Himself. That is the church. Christ is one, one in mind, one in interpretation, one in thought, and that oneness between the children of God depends entirely upon the measure of their spirituality, for spirituality, as we have seen, is a matter of Christ now indwelling by the Holy Spirit, and let us settle it, difficult as it is — it brings us up against all the real difficulties — but nevertheless it stands as an unshakeable rock of fact, that the more spiritual we become, the more one in mind shall we become, and the more diverse we are, the more that means that we are unspiritual. "*I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal ... for when one says, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not men?*" Are ye not carnal? Are ye not unspiritual? (1 Cor. 3:1,4). All divisiveness is lack of spirituality and true spirituality expresses itself in oneness and therefore gives authority, and the church is here in the authority of Christ with the impact of His authority, of His finality, of His certainty.

If we knew all the details, if all the story of His life on earth was written, we should know that there were many who had become bewildered by the various interpretations, who resorted to Him because they felt that He had got the final word, He had got assurance for them, and was it not that that lay behind His great invitation, "*Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matt. 11:28)? What was the labouring and the heavy-ladenness if it was not the imposition of the great religious system of their day upon them as so many demands? 'You must do this, you must do that and the other. You must not do this and you must not do that', and the poor people were burdened and overwhelmed with all that was demanded of them by their religious system, and yet there was no authority, no satisfaction in it, no heart rest. It was in Him that the rest was to be found, rest unto their souls.

So I say to you we are not here to try and build up something called 'the church'. We are not here to found 'the church' or to extend 'the church'. The church is not our business. We are here simply to grow together in Christ, and the church is the spontaneous and inevitable result. Let us get back behind all this idea about the church as some thing to be built, to be extended, something in itself. Let us see that after all, the divine thought from eternity about the church was only to be a corporate Body for God's Son in which and through which He might be known and might express Himself. That is all; and the increase of Christ results in the church. Oh, let us come right back to the heart of it and concentrate all our prayer upon the larger measure of Christ, for is not that exactly what the Spirit was pointing to through Paul in that letter to the Ephesians? 'We grow by various helps and ministries divinely provided, unto the stature of the fulness of Christ'. That is the church — the stature, the full measure of Christ, a man, and that man is Christ in expression. I am not putting the church in the place of Christ personally, but I am putting the church in the place of Christ's vessel of expression and self-manifestation.

What this world needs is for the Lord Jesus to be here. 'Oh', we say, 'if only the Lord were here. If only Christ would come back to earth. What is needed in this world is that He should be here'. He is here, and, mark you, in His own thought, in His own mind, He considered that the present form of His being here was more important than that single bodily presence of His earthly days. He said, 'A little while, and I go away'. *"It is expedient for you that I go away; for If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send Him unto you"* (John 16:7). "In that day" — and He makes that day to be marked by things far superior to the things which obtained when He Himself was here. It is not that the Lord is not here. The trouble is that the Lord is not being expressed here as He ought to be.

Now let us come back to that point which has been so much before us as the reason why the Lord would speak to us in this way today. We have said that the end of a dispensation will see God concentrating far more definitely upon the real nature of the dispensation, to have at the end something at least in the heart of things which will be a true and full expression of the meaning of that dispensation. Now, here is this. We can at least see the possibility today, as we have never seen it before, of God getting many of His people to the place where it is just the Lord Himself who brings them together. Supposing in one given area all the places of public gatherings for religious service were destroyed, and that place was held under continual threat by day and night so that anything in the way of religious public gatherings became impossible, and all those external orders and forms of religion simply had to go by the board, and you came just down on to the level of being men and women before God — just men and women where your social distinctions and every other kind of distinction are gone — now what would arise so far as Christians are concerned? Do you think, in those terrible conditions, people would say, 'Do you belong to the church of England or are you a Baptist?' I do not believe anything like that would count in peoples' minds. The thing would be, 'Do you know the Lord? Can you help me spiritually? What have you of Christ that you can give to me?' That is the thing among Christians, and Christians would come together as they could never come together before, because of suspicions and prejudices which hold sway in normal times. All go, and we are right down on common ground and our relationship is one of the Lord Himself and nothing else is of any account. It is all too small, paltry, unworthy. The only thing now of value is Christ and you have got the church back on primitive ground as it was in the beginning. We can visualise that thing becoming very real at the end, whether we are in the end or not. I am not saying we are not.

That is where the church comes at the end, passing into fires when everything else is stripped off, broken, overthrown, and all that is left is what you have of the Lord, what you know in an inward living way of Him, and that brings you together and that is the basis of a very real fellowship. All the other things which have kept you apart are gone. It is the Lord. That is the church, and, believe me, that will be a day for the manifestation of Jesus Christ in a very real way. That will be a testimony to others, and has it not always proved to be in conditions like this, in days like that, that the church's testimony has been purest and strongest — when things outside were in such a state as to make it quite impossible for them to live on any other ground than just the Lord Himself? We shall be driven to that. People will not come to it otherwise, it seems. It does not matter how you appeal. Suspicions reign, prejudices hold sway. All these artificial devices are still governing, but are there not enough spiritual people who will stand there without having to be driven there? Let us drop everything of the outside. Let us get right away from what is merely earthly, which marks us off as different externally, and get right down on to the ground of Christ and have our fellowship with every child of God, not on what they are in organized Christianity, but because they are children of God, because they are the Lord's, because they are our brothers and sisters if Christ is in them. Let it be one Christ who constitutes our oneness, and not things at all. The Lord carry His Word to our hearts.

## Chapter 4

### The Nature of Service

*"Now he that established us with you in Christ, and anointed us, is God; who also sealed us, and gave us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor. 1:21-22).*

*"... being made manifest that ye are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in tables that are hearts of flesh" (2 Cor.3:3).*

*"... ministers of a new covenant; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the children of Israel could not look steadfastly upon the face of Moses for the glory of his face; which glory was passing away: how shall not rather the ministration of the spirit be with glory? ... Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:6-8,17).*

*"Now He that wrought us for this very thing is God, who gave unto us the earnest of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 5:5).*

*"... in pureness, in knowledge, in longsuffering, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in love unfeigned, in the word of truth, in the power of God ..." (2 Cor. 6:6-7).*

We are being led to take fresh account of the peculiar and particular nature of God's thought and activity in this age, especially as that thought will come out under His hand with an intensification towards the end, that is that, in this age, all that the Lord is concerned with is what is spiritual. We shall go on to see this truth in relation to service, that service in this dispensation from God's standpoint is purely and only spiritual. And I may as well say right away that there will be some things said which many people of God would find it very difficult to accept, and I would ask that you would be governed by one consideration only. Ask in your heart and answer this question. If that were true and actual, would it contribute more greatly and directly to the end which God has in view? Anything which contributes directly and immediately to God's end must be right. So we shall seek to be governed by that consideration and not by our traditional position.

The second letter to the Corinthians is the letter which particularly has to do with service, and all those passages which we have read refer to the Holy Spirit. Before we touch upon the letter itself, let us bring this matter of spiritual service, right into relation to the Lord Himself. In this matter of service viewed in the light of things at the beginning so definitely and strongly under the anointing of the Spirit, there surely needs to be some reconsideration and adjustments. As we said in our previous meditation concerning the church, so we can say now concerning service, there has been a long period of deploring the loss of first conditions. How often have we heard the words, 'Back to Pentecost!' And how often have we heard yearnings expressed that the church might get back to the days of the apostles, and this is peculiarly so in relation to service, and we are all aware of how different things have been for a long time and are today from what they were at the beginning. This has been a subject of long and arduous discussion. Many books have been written on it, and many conferences have had it as their subject, all with a view to try to recover the secrets of those early days. I suppose what I may say now may be regarded as only another attempt at solving the problem. But it does really seem as though the Lord Himself by His sovereign acts today in the world is moving very definitely in that direction, to get back to the quite simple but very effective and fruitful conditions of first times, and none of us would pray for anything more ardently than for that.

Well then, what is the trouble? What is it that is in the way? I would suggest to you at the outset that the organization of Christianity is the main trouble; the organizing of Christian life, of Christian fellowship or what is called 'the church', and the organizing of Christian work has been a second best way for reaching God's end. If God cannot have His best way, He will bless what He can and we are not going to say for one moment that God has not blessed and used the organization of Christian work. But what we do say is that it has been the second best way and can therefore never be immediately and directly related to God's end. It is the detour, the long way round. It puts the end far more distant than it should be, than it need be. That is, it has become the limitation of spiritual things rather than the full realisation of them. We ask why things are so other than they were in apostolic days, and this is the answer in the main.

But how shall we best meet the situation and deal with this problem, and again I think the only way is to contemplate Christ Himself, for the law of God is that everything is inseparably bound up with the Person of His Son, and service is no exception. We have said that the church is Christ corporately expressed, is not something being used by Christ. It is Christ corporately expressed by the Holy Spirit, and is intended by God to be here just as Christ here, as though Christ were really personally in this world, but universally instead of localised. Now, that very same law holds good in the matter of service. Look at Christ Himself. When He was here under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, everything was spontaneous and entirely unorganized. He made no plans, He had no scheme for His life. He did not map it out, He did not arrange it. He just lived His life in touch with the Father under the Holy Spirit's government. He lived in fellowship with God. Very often He did not know from one hour to another where He might be. He would say to His disciples, 'I go not up to this feast. You go up', and when they were gone up, Jesus went up also, indicating that He was waiting for liberty from above, a witness of the Father in His Spirit under the anointing to go up. His life was like that, unplanned, unorganized, unarranged so far as He was concerned. A purpose dominating, but only a life lived.

Only a life lived — but was there ever a more fruitful life? He visited many places, He went in many directions, He did countless things. His was not, therefore, an inactive life, a life without meaning, a life without order, but it was only a life lived under the anointing. I believe that that is the secret of service, and I believe that that is exactly how the church was fruitful in the beginning. I see no plans made, I see no schemes launched, I see no enterprises engaged in, as set things. I see no organisation whatever. All I see is a church under the anointing, living its life on the earth, but so under the anointing that the anointing had the disposing of it. As we would speak humanly — it 'happened' that they were found here and there. The sovereignty of the Spirit saw to it that they did not stay all together in one place. They were scattered abroad. They did not arrange that. It was like one corporate Man, just like Christ again, one Man under the anointing living His life on the earth, but what a life! Very simple, but very effective and very fruitful. It is Christ again here living to effect in His church.

Again and again through this dispensation, the most mighty and abundant fruitfulness has been the result of conditions sovereignly allowed or even brought about by God, which have cut His people off from all their organisations and all their organised work and simply thrown them back upon God Himself where they could plan nothing, they could arrange nothing, they could decide nothing. It was not possible for them under the prevailing conditions, to say, 'We will do this or that, go here or there', but at that time, under the government of God the Holy Spirit, they were scattered or driven into a certain direction; but those were days of tremendous fruitfulness. I think of the Moravian brethren, and I could mention many others, where there was no possibility of planning, no possibility whatever of organising their Christian work and deciding to go and evangelise here and there. The Lord took that in hand, and just what happened was this, that they were, under that sovereignty of God, made to live in certain places, and that was all they could do, but how they lived, and to what effect they lived I do not mean

that they lived without testimony, without bearing witness, but it was their being there under the anointing that resulted in the tremendous fruitfulness. That has happened not once nor twice, and it proved to be a getting back to apostolic conditions, to the primitive way under the sovereignty of God. That is the secret of service.

That really, after all, is not an emergency thing from God's standpoint, that is not something of an alternative with God, something that has to be because it is not possible to have something else. This is the thing that God ever intended. This is the first thing. All the other has come in and how it has confused people! How it has complicated and how it has put the divine end much further off than it should be. The church was like that at the beginning. No schemes, no plans, but very much done. I do trust that no one is going to hide behind what I am saying as a kind of back-door way out of responsibility, because this living is going to be a tremendous thing and it has to be a very energetic thing. It does not mean that we can just retire into silence and fold our arms and wait for something to happen. Oh no, in apostolic times they lived energetically in relationship with the Lord, they lived under a deep sense of responsibility for those around them, but there is a great deal of difference between living like that and organising and planning Christian work.

So you see, the basis of everything is the spiritual life. The basis of service is the spiritual life. But it is a great mistake to talk about service as service. Many a young life has been got into trouble by having that imposed upon them, and the limitations have been obvious to all that that method does not get there directly and immediately, but only in a very limited way. No, it is not for us to interrogate anybody on the question of service as service for the Lord. I am not going to say to you young people, Have you considered the Lord's service? Have you considered going to the Mission Field? Have you considered being in the ministry? I should be quite wrong, as I see it, in doing that sort of thing. It is a dangerous thing to do, but what I do feel is the Lord's way is this, to attend to the spiritual life, because, if the spiritual life is as it should be, this matter of service will arise spontaneously.

You see, some of those great servants of God who have become marked in their lives particularly by fruitful service started on this very principle. After their departure, their work was taken up and carried forward as an organisation, an institution, but its inception was upon this basis. Mr. Hudson Taylor very clearly declared that he was not going about appealing for missionaries for China. He was going about to get the spiritual life of the Lord's people right and to get them to pray. We know that in the case of Mr. Hudson Taylor, Charles Inwood, Andrew Murray, great work has come out of their ministry, but their ministry was above the world in relation to the spiritual life of the Lord's people. That is where it started. Afterwards is another matter, but the fruit of their own ministry is seen by all.

It is quite impossible to have a right relationship with the Lord, a living, deep relationship with the Lord, and be out of touch with the Lord's own purpose and compassion and desire, but if you have not got an adequate life in the Lord, it is a most terrible thing to be projected into Christian service. Multitudes of missionaries have before long, or at length, come to the place where they realise that they have not got the background essential to carry on. The whole thing is beyond them. They need a new knowledge of the Lord.

So service is not a matter of something you and I can take up, enter into. It is not an 'it' at all. It is Him, it is the Lord. The Lord would work with us if we were spiritual, and this is a real test as well as a fact stated. He would work with us, and say, 'Stand back a bit and be quiet. Has your service, your ministry, been something in which you have been engaged, in which you have been busy — a matter of speaking, giving addresses, doing all sorts of things, or has it been the spontaneous and natural outflow of your life with Me?' Now, you may not be able to discern the importance of that difference. It is possible

to have your ministry closed down and your work cut off and to be brought to a place where you can do no more because of circumstances and conditions, and then for you to feel that your life has gone, your world has gone, that everything has come to an end and you do not know where you are, and then you can get into an awful state. You can become very depressed, you can lose your faith, you can have questions about the Lord. The enemy will very quickly jump in there and say, 'You see, you have been mistaken all the time; you have been on the wrong road'. All sorts of things can happen to get you into terrible confusion, but if you listen to the Lord, He will be saying, 'It is not service as a thing, it is Myself, and service, work, as apart from Myself, was never My thought. Step back and get an altogether new life with Myself, and as I am your life, your fulness, your satisfaction, as it is Myself and not things, not even service, fruitfulness will be spontaneous'. "*Herein is my Father glorified ...*" — *that ye organise all sorts of things for Me and be found very busy everywhere working for the Lord? No — "that ye bear much fruit"*, and if you abide in Me, ye shall bring forth fruit. "*If ye abide in me..*". It is the Lord who is the spring of fruitfulness. It all comes out from Him and from our union with Him. The Lord is the Worker. We are not the workers. It is the Lord who is the Worker and He produces the fruit.

Well now, turn to this letter to the Corinthians and see how this is borne out. I am not saying or suggesting that service for the Lord in other lands or at home is not important, not necessary. That is not what I am getting at at all. There is something about being known as a missionary which is a tremendous snare. It can put you in a false position. Being known as a minister or Christian worker marks you off, if you are known as that, and puts you in a false position. It gives you certain advantages to be known as that.

We are all in a sense as great a missionary as ever was sent out to a foreign country in the eyes of God, but it resolves itself into your spiritual life. I think the Lord just wants us in that very simple natural position that He can have our lives and dispose of them and cause us to live here or there, whether it be in this country or that, and, by living there, be His witnesses. Not by being there in an official capacity, not by being there under some designation, but being there as men and women of God. That is service that is according to God's mind. It is spiritual; it is not organised. It is spiritual, and that is what makes every child of God a servant of God, a Levite. It is spiritual now, and not as designated something among men. All ministry is that.

Well, that brings us to this second letter to the Corinthians, just for a brief word or two. You notice that it is taken up with the matter of service and ministry, but there is so much about the Holy Spirit in it, as we have read, so that ministry here becomes a matter of the Holy Spirit, and that in one or two connections.

### **Ministry is Christly personality**

Firstly, what is brought out here is that it is the character of the Lord's servant as formed according to Christ, interwoven with his ministry, that is the important thing. It is not his ministry. It is the man himself as formed after Christ who is the ministry. It is not that the man has a ministry. It is that the man himself is the ministry by his being formed after Christ. That is the great truth of this letter.

Moses had ministry given to him of God and he performed that ministry. Before the people of God he took the law and read it and fulfilled his ministry like that. The apostle says that was yesterday; that is in the yesterday of the dispensations. Today it is not that. Today it is this — "*God ... has shined into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*" (2 Cor. 4:6). This is not written on tables of stone — that was yesterday — but in tables that are hearts of flesh. Not by pen and ink — that was yesterday — but now by the Spirit of the living God. "*We have this treasure in earthen vessels*"; it is inward, it is spiritual. In a word, the ministry is Christly personality; personality constituted according to Christ. That is the ministry. That

is what Paul is saying. It comes from the inside of us, and listen, young people, there are no short cuts to service.

That has been the peril of organised Christianity — short cuts to Christian service, a provision made for you to jump into it at once. That is not God's way. Here the Word of God makes it very clear that service is the outcome of a secret history with God, the nature of which history is the formation of the inner man after Christ. Now you see that in the two outstanding illustrations and examples of ministry, the greatest and then His most devoted follower — the Lord Himself and Paul. The Lord Jesus spent thirty years in secret with His Father, secret history going on. At the end of thirty years, ministry comes into view, but, as He stands at the end of the thirty years, the heavens are opened and the voice of the Father says, in the form given to us in two different gospels — *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"*. (Matt. 3:17); *"Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"*. (Mark 1:11). What is that? It is the seal upon the thirty years. Ministry begins with the approval of God. Ministry begins with the seal of God upon secret history. You have in secret been formed to the pleasure of God and then God attests, and only as God attests the secret history is there ministry. That is the Lord Jesus. Oh, ministry is not professional; ministry is the man.

Paul had secret history with God. There was a period of several years before Paul moved right out to his great apostolic work. The last phase of that secret history was at Antioch. He was there for at least a year and you do not know anything about what was happening there in the assembly. He was one among others in that church at Antioch. This man to whom the heavens had been opened on the Damascus road, this man who had seen the exalted, glorified Christ, this man who had been given a commission, who had been told that God had come to him in Christ for a special purpose in his life, this man of whom it had been said, *"He is a chosen vessel"*, this man must come into secret, this man must stand back, and I believe when the Holy Spirit spoke at Antioch those words *"Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them"*, that was heaven's attestation of the secret history. It was heaven saying, 'I have been watching these men. I have been taking account of these men, I have been seeing them in secret. It is all right, I can commit Myself to these men. They have been formed in secret according to My mind', and we may take it that in principle, the Lord never commissions any of His servants, only on that ground of His own approval. *"He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry"* (1 Tim. 1:12). *"He counted me faithful"*, and how many of those who have been thrust out have really had sufficient secret history with God, been long enough under the hand of God, to have come to the place of tested, proved and approved? That is the tragedy.

This that I am saying is not going to limit service. Not at all! If, in the measure, in the number, it were limiting, I am quite sure that would be made up for by the quality, and it is quality that counts after all. Well you see, this letter says so clearly that the divine approval after what has gone on in secret is the doorway of ministry, of service.

### **"Our sufficiency is of God"**

Then it says another thing, as a part of that, that the vessel in itself has got to be a very fragile thing. *"We have this treasure ..."* — what treasure? *"God ... has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"*. *"We have this treasure in vessels of fragile clay that the excellence of the power, the exceeding greatness of the power, may be of God and not of ourselves"* (2 Cor. 4:7). Let us not limit the thought of the fragile nature of the clay. I mean that need not necessarily be physical. In some cases it may have to be that, because the danger lies in that direction of physical force and drive and energy being the basis of our service. It is not so with everyone. God deals with us according to our peril. To be fragile may mean anything, but the fact of being fragile is that we are, and we know that we are, utterly dependent upon God, and so we are brought to this. *"Who is sufficient for these things?"*



(2 Cor. 2:16). *"Our sufficiency is from God; who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant; not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life"* (2 Cor. 3:5-6). It is God who has given us the Spirit for this ministry, and He and He alone is the resource of it. To be fragile means to be always conscious of our dependence upon the Lord. It is very easy to take that position and declare it, but let us get a little burst of exuberant spirits, physical health, and see what we will be doing for the Lord! Very often our most fruitful days of ministry have been those when there has been no exuberance of spirit, but we have been altogether at a discount in ourselves and it is holding on to the Lord for breath. That is so often the time of greatest fruitfulness, the fragile vessel, the vessel of fragile clay, in itself easily broken, counting for very little in itself, so that it is the Lord, all the Lord and only the Lord. Well, that is what it means to be spiritual. That is spiritual ministry.

### **Liberty in service**

Finally, see how liberty in this letter is related to service. Here is Moses and the present form of ministry contrasted. Moses fulfilling his ministry in reading the law and, with the glory of God upon his face, he has to put a veil over his face, and that veil speaks of limitation, bondage. The people could not bear to look upon him. There is the arrest of everything in that old order. But now the apostle says that that day has passed, and we are in another day, and, with the passing of that day, the veil passes and the veil is taken away for *"when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty"* (2 Cor. 3:16-17). The apostle is saying in other words that the veil which corresponded to the law is bondage, but, when the veil is taken away, there is liberty. Now is the day of the Spirit, and where the Spirit is Lord, there is liberty.

What is the difference? Well, in application, it is this. If you bring over yesterday into today you will be saying — 'You must go and work for the Lord. You must be a missionary, a minister, a Christian worker. You must take up this. You must, and woe betide you if you don't' — and you are brought under that lash of service. Many a young man and woman has gone into service because they were afraid to keep out of it, because they have been told they must give their lives to it, because it has been put on them. It has become a legal order and system. Now, in this day, will it be any less? When it shall turn to the Lord and the veil is taken away and where the Spirit is Lord there is liberty — liberty to do as you like. Ah, but that is it! Do you think love will produce less than law? There is something wrong with your relationship with Christ if it has got to be law all the time which goads you to work for Him, to look to His interests, but, if you are in the Spirit and the Spirit is Lord, you are delivered from all the goading of 'You must'. You are free from all that fear and dread, but you are doing the thing all the same. You may not do it where men tell you you ought to do it, but your life will be fruitful for the Lord. Do not let us think, because we are not constantly told, urged, driven to serve the Lord, that there is no need for us to care about it.

Our point in all this is that we have got to come right down here. It is a matter of the Holy Spirit. It is a matter of our true spiritual life. Our fellowship is a matter of our spiritual life, and if our fellowship is upset, it means our spiritual life is wrong. Our service is a matter of our spiritual life, and if we can be content with just listening to addresses and never be exercised at all in our hearts about others, there is something wrong with our spiritual life. A really strong spiritual life is a service life, a fruitful life, and spontaneously so, and it is immediately in touch with the situation. We can dispense with all organization if we have got a Spirit-filled life, but the organization has come in because the Spirit-filled life ceased. It is the second best way. God used it because He had not got the other, but He would bring us back to His own position. If it were like that, would it be of greater profit to the Lord? Everyone says, Yes, we know it is true!

We know that the hundred years of missionary revival commenced with William Carey having to argue with the leaders of the church that there were souls beyond their pale that needed rescuing, and they said, 'Oh no, William Carey. If God wants to save the heathen He will do it without your help.' Those were days when the spiritual life was at its lowest ebb, but when the spiritual life is in full flood, we shall be on full stretch for the Lord. There is no doubt about it.

What is the point? It is this — the most immediate and direct way of reaching God's end. How is that? By a life in the Spirit, a true spiritual life, a growing spiritual life. As a matter of fact, I have been praying for a long time to the Lord to destroy organization in order to get a way for Himself, a direct way. So often the one limits the other, and if we have the other — that is the spiritual life — we do not need the one.

Well now, the Lord give you grace to hear what has been said, and, if you cannot accept it all, just weigh it up and again in the light of this — Was it true that, at the beginning there was a fruitfulness and immediacy of attaining divine ends which does not characterize all the activities today? I think we will all say it is true. Why was it? What was the nature of things then? With all that we have today, we are not doing what they did without it. What is the secret? Well, the secret was the Lord Himself in fulness by the Holy Spirit, and it was done without anything else. Our need then, is the Lord in fulness by the Holy Spirit, and, after all, I don't suppose anybody will mind what goes if we get that. I trust we are not so wedded to things as to feel sorrow that they would go if the Lord came right in in a floodtide. The Lord save us from being wedded to a second best and get our hearts free to be linked wholly with His first way — that is, spiritual life in strength.

## **Chapter 5**

### **The Cross and the Holy Spirit**

In these meditations, the Lord has been directing us to consider anew the essential nature of the dispensation in which we are found, that is that, from His standpoint, everything is meant to be of a spiritual nature in this dispensation, and we have seen that the child of God is a spiritual person, being born of the Spirit. We have seen that the church is a spiritual thing, being altogether a matter of the spiritual fellowship of the children of God. We have seen that the work of the Lord is a spiritual thing, being just the Holy Spirit in us expressing Christ — that is service, that is the work of the Lord.

There are many other things which we are without time to speak of, such as the fact that the training of the Lord's people is a spiritual thing, not an academic, intellectual or even a doctrinal thing — that is, learning Christ. Or again that prayer is essentially a spiritual matter, for in this dispensation it is prayer in the Holy Ghost. That is the only kind of prayer that effects anything, that gets anywhere. Or once more, warfare in this dispensation is spiritual warfare, and so on. But with all these matters we are not going to stay now. They all come under the one great fact that everything is a matter of our spirituality, or in other words which may be more explicit or more simple, it is a matter of the measure of Christ in us by the Holy Spirit.

### **Our position in Christ**

Now I feel constrained to come to the foundation of all this, and just say a little about the cross and the spiritual life, or the cross and the Holy Spirit, and I think the way in which we could best see this would be by just passing our eye over several of the letters in the New Testament where the two are brought very clearly together — the cross and the Holy Spirit — and see to what the application of that combination is made specifically in these different letters. We shall not be able to do more than say the briefest word about

each, but we do start right away with the first of the letters in our order of arrangement, which is the letter to the Romans, and the sixth chapter finds us very quickly at the cross.

*"We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein? Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with Him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin; for he that has died is justified from sin" (Rom. 6:2-7).*

Romans 7 is a kind of parenthesis, and then in Romans 8 the direct discourse proceeds.

*"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death ... For they that are after the flesh mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For the mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace ... But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:2,5-6,9).*

So that, just lifting the parenthesis, Romans 7, out, you find Romans 6 and Romans 8 brought together, and the double reference is to the cross and the Holy Spirit, and the particular connection or application in this letter is that of our positioning in Christ. Positioning in Christ is marked by our having the Spirit. *"if any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."* So that positioning in Christ is a matter of having the Holy Spirit. That is the very first step in the Christian life. It is our position in Christ and everything hangs upon our position in Christ. Until the position is established then there is nothing and there is no hope, but this word makes perfectly clear that, just as nothing is possible without the positioning, which is the receiving of the Spirit, so the positioning or the receiving of the Spirit is impossible without the cross, and that is made something here which is not merely or only objective, but something which draws us in, something into which we are gathered. It is not only here — it is firstly, but not only — that the Lord Jesus Christ died for us. It is that, but it is also that we died with Christ. We have been crucified with Christ; we have been buried with Christ; we have been raised from the dead with Christ, or in Christ, and our testimony to that fact is our baptism. So baptism is here brought in and made perfectly clear as the means by which the one who has apprehended his own death in the death of Christ, his own burial in the burial of Christ and his own resurrection in the resurrection of Christ, bears testimony thereto. That is very simple. For most of you, it is so well-known as to be perhaps almost unnecessary, but nevertheless we begin at the beginning and we assume nothing.

Now the fact is that this basic thing is the opening up of everything else. It is the making possible of everything else. What that everything else is we shall see in a very small degree as we go on, but let it be understood at the outset that there is no hope of anything until two things have happened. One is that the old man, the natural man, has been put away. God does not accept the natural man. There is no such thing as dedicating our old man to the Lord. What the Lord says is that he is crucified with Christ, and there is no hope of a Spirit-filled life or a Spirit-governed life until that has become something very real in our history, for what took place in the case of the Lord Jesus has got to become our experience. That is what this word says. It has got to become our experience, and our position rests upon our apprehending and appropriating that which took place in the Lord Jesus as belonging to ourselves, as related to ourselves, and it makes a tremendous difference to recognize that.

We find this, for instance. A very great many Christians, among whom we ourselves have been included in the past, have apprehended the work of Christ in the atonement, in the giving of Himself on their behalf as their Saviour, their Redeemer, and have come to take a position upon that and have gone on upon that basis with more or less of a new life, more or less of a new experience, very largely an objective thing, being clung to and perhaps rejoiced in, but for a very large measure still predominantly the old man, still as living and working for the Lord out from themselves. And you know quite -well that that is a very up and down experience. Again I say, with more or less success — rather less than more. A variable Christian life with a very great deal of personal inward disappointment and dissatisfaction, and yet a holding tenaciously and grimly to the fact that you are a child of God, that you are saved, not getting very much beyond that, and seeking to work for the Lord as out from yourself, and doing many things and working pretty hard at it for the Lord, but you are providing the straw. You are having to find the resources. Well now, that is a Christian life of sorts. It is based upon the very first things which are mainly objective as to what Christ has done.

But then there has come a crisis in the life of many, in which there has been a showing by the Lord of this extra factor, that the Lord Jesus not only died *for* us but as us, and we were included in His death, lock, stock and barrel. That, revealed by the Holy Spirit, is a tremendous thing. Those of us who know it, know that it is a tremendous thing, and those of you who have not known it, you must believe what we testify, that it is a tremendous thing and makes very great differences indeed. It makes the one great difference between an open heaven and a closed heaven. On the other side of that experience, our life and our work was as under a closed heaven. I do not mean by that we had nothing of communion with God, but, somehow or other, we were within strict limitations, and we were labouring and striving as out from ourselves, but, after that experience, it was out from the Lord. The heavens were opened and it was the Lord Himself, and now an altogether different kind of Christian life came in which to us was something even bigger than the initial step — what we called our conversion. I am not saying these are two things. As I said previously, I believe they are two parts of the one thing, and the Lord never intended us to have that gap between. That comes about. Just as the Lord never had forty years in the wilderness a part of His programme for Israel — it came about. His way was a very swift way through, but, because of them, because of things, there was delay. However, what we are on is not the gap. It is the fact, and this fact is that entering experimentally into the death of the Lord Jesus has been one of the greatest experiences in our lives, because it represents not our passing from death unto life, only in an extra degree, but from self to the Lord, and you know quite well that self is always bondage, always defeat, always limitation. When we are in the self-life, we are always in prison. There is no greater tyrant than our selves, and that is not excluding the devil, because the devil is powerless when he has no self to work upon or through, so really it is what we are in ourselves that gives the enemy his real power over us. So I say our real enemy is the self-life.

Now here then is an apprehending of our union with Christ in His death and burial and resurrection in order to emerge into a position under an open heaven by reason of the anointing Spirit. So the death of the Lord Jesus as something to be known by us in an inward way is a tremendous thing in relation to a new position where it is now in the Spirit.

You know that the letter to the Galatians is one with the letter to the Romans. While it may have something extra, nevertheless it is dealing with this foundation thing of law and grace as the Roman letter does, and Paul, in that letter, puts it this way, "*I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I ... but Christ*". Well, that is the first meaning of the cross when it is rightly apprehended. That is what the cross is intended to do initially, to bring an end to the 'I' and to bring us into the position where it is no longer I but Christ. That is the simple beginning, and I do not propose to go further with that. Let it be recognized that all the possibilities are only opened up through an

experimental knowledge of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and apart from that as something in our own history, in our own spiritual history, there are no possibilities at all. But I have said, possibilities are opened up. They may not necessarily be entered into, they are not always entered into. Very often, as with Israel, something comes in to just suspend all that that means after it has been apprehended, and so that leads us to the next — the first letter to the Corinthians.

### **A Life in the Spirit**

In this first letter to the Corinthians you have these two things. In the second chapter — the cross.

*"I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified"* (1 Cor. 2:2).

And then there is much in that chapter about Christ crucified. Christ crucified, the wisdom of God and the power of God. Then also in this letter, commencing in this very chapter, there is much about the Spirit, as you know.

*"God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God. For who among men knows the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the things of God none knows, save the Spirit of God"* (1 Cor. 2:10-11).

Here is the cross and the Holy Spirit brought together again, but with another connection. These people had received the Spirit, and the rest of the letter makes that perfectly clear. You know the section which deals with spiritual gifts. The apostle says that they had been blessed with all the spiritual gifts, they came behind in no spiritual gift, and spiritual gifts are very much in evidence in this letter, more so than in any other, yet to those who have received the Spirit with all these spiritual gifts abounding in their midst, the apostle says, *"I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified"*. In other words, 'I determined to know nothing among you save the cross of the Lord Jesus'. What does this mean? Having received the Spirit, having such a display of the Spirit's operations and ministries, and yet it becoming a necessity for an apostle to deliberately set aside all other matters in their presence, in their midst, but Christ crucified.

Well, the immediate context will make the meaning perfectly clear to you. You can have received the Spirit, you can have received spiritual gifts by the Holy Spirit, and you may be living still within a very limited compass of spiritual life. The apostle says quite clearly in 1 Corinthians 2 one thing about that limitation. He says, in other words, in his own way, 'After having received the Spirit and after having received spiritual gifts among you, you may still be without spiritual understanding. You may still be living apart from the spiritual faculty of comprehending God's mind.'

*"Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love him. But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit ... Now the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged (or discerned — they are discerned by the spiritual)"* (1 Cor. 2:9-10,14).

That is said to these Christians. The apostle is not referring to people outside of that company in Corinth when he speaks of the natural man. He is not saying to them, 'Now you, of course, know all things, but those people outside — the natural man — they do not know anything about it and they cannot'. No, natural here is not the same as the old man, not the same as that Adam man. 'Natural' here in the original is the soulical man as

set over against the spiritual man, and it is only another way of saying, 'You Corinthians are living on the level of your own natural life. Although you have received the Spirit, although the Spirit is among you, you are still not living in the value of the Spirit, and therefore you do not know and you cannot know'. Therefore it is possible to have received the Spirit and have spiritual gifts and still not know.

This letter makes one thing perfectly clear; that you may have — call it if you like — the baptism of the Spirit, and be very small in your spiritual stature, so small that you are saying, 'I am of Paul and I am of Apollos and I am of Cephas', so small that you are doing all sorts of things contrary to the Spirit. That is terrible, almost unthinkable. Surely that is not possible! But here it is. The point I want to fix upon at the moment is this, that, having received the Spirit, there may be very much more than ever we have yet realised or come to see or grasp and even imagined lying in the direction of the Holy Spirit, but which is closed to us for certain reasons found in ourselves and the cross must come in, not now to place us, not now to give us the position of children of God, not now to make us Christians. The cross has got to come in for Christians to bring them out into emancipation from the limitations of the natural life. So do not let us be mistaken about that, if we have received the Spirit — the baptism or fulness, however we may put it — we have got to the end of things. We have not got to the end of things. We have really only got to the beginning of things, and there lies before us a large land full of divine things which eye has not seen, ear has not heard, and which entered not into the heart of man. These are for the spiritual, but we may have the Spirit and basically be spiritual, but not living in the good of the land, in the fulness's which that position is intended to mean for us.

You can conceive of an Israelite passing over Jordan under Joshua's command and entering into the land which has been so variously described, the land flowing with milk and honey, within whose hills you can dig brass, and the Israelite passes over into that land and sits down in some little patch, puts up his tent, and never knows anything of all that has been described. He is there in the position, but where are all the treasures? It depends whether he is really living in the good of that land into which he has been positioned, or whether he has stopped short and said, 'I am saved, I am in the land. Surely that is enough'. No, the position is unto the beginning, and the Corinthians unfortunately stopped at their position and did not move on into all that the position held for them. Therefore another work was necessary, not another death of Christ, but another application of the death of Christ, and this time to free them from that Christian life which is being lived on the merely soul level of things, the natural level; freedom out into all that a life in the Spirit really means. The cross does that. A true application of the cross not only brings us into Christ, but brings us, or makes possible our coming, into the fulness of Christ, and here let me say again the special point made is that it is in apprehension, in knowing, in seeing. Oh, the cross has a wonderful way of liberating from limitations of spiritual knowledge and understanding.

What is the soul-life in the matter of knowledge and understanding? It is simply the application of our own natural capacity to spiritual things. That is, seeking to know the things of God with our own minds, our own brains, studying things to get them along that line. There are a great many people who have acquired a lot of knowledge about divine things in that way. They have studied the Bible and all the subjects and topics of the Bible and all the commentaries about the Bible, and they know in that way a tremendous amount about the things of God, and they are just about as dead as you can find. It is not spiritual understanding. It is not spiritual perception. It is not revelation of the Holy Ghost, and, while it may be entertaining, it may be interesting, it may be very impressive in its way, it does not minister to the spiritual enlargement and growth and maturity of people. It does not effect anything in that spiritual attainment of the Lord's people to divine fulness, and that is what Paul is referring to, because he says that it is possible to preach the cross in the wisdom of men and thereby make it of none effect. Even the cross is made of none effect when you deal with it on natural lines, that is, on

your own soul lines. The cross must come in and put all that aside, and bring you through to the place of the open heaven, where, even having received the Spirit, you come into all the Spirit means in you and the apprehension of it. So we need the cross in that connection.

### **Sonship**

I have already referred to Galatians — the cross and the Spirit are brought together very fully. Galatians 2:20 is so well-known, *"I have been crucified with Christ ..."* and then:

*"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us; for it is written. Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree; that upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith"* (Gal. 3:13-14).

Here is the cross leading to the Spirit. It is not now a matter of being born again as a child of God and not now particularly a matter of life in the Spirit or of the values of the Holy Spirit made known to us. Here it is a matter of that end which God has in view, which is understood among us in connection with the word 'son' or 'sonship'.

You notice that sonship is a great matter in this letter to the Galatians, and what the apostle is saying to these Galatians is this. 'You started all right, you have begun in the Spirit, but you went so far and you have stopped short of God's intention. You are children but you are not sons. You have started in relation to God and in the Spirit, but you have failed to go right through to God's end', and he says,

*"My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be fully formed in you"* (Gal. 4:19).

*"Till Christ be fully formed in you"*. That is not in your translation, but it is in the original. Till Christ be fully formed in you — and the full formation of Christ in us is sonship in that sense of spiritual maturity — coming to a full place in the Lord. You see, the cross applies to that. The cross comes in there. The cross is that which works against the thing that will arrest us on the way to God's fulness, to sonship in the full sense. Children of God — but the Spirit is here to make not only children but sons, not only born again ones but fully matured ones. That is what the Spirit is here for, and the Holy Spirit can only do that by way of the cross. He has never been able to do anything without the cross of Christ. He has always been, in the types of the Old Testament and the realities of the New, closely linked with the cross. The blood and the oil are found together — the cross and the Spirit operating together. So the Spirit, in order to get us past the hindering things, brings in a new work of the cross in us to apply there, and, only as the cross is applied by the Holy Spirit, can we go on to the fulness of sonship. Here it is a matter of spiritual growth — one aspect of fulness.

### **The Heavens**

Passing to the letter to the Ephesians, as you know, again there is that reference or allusion to the cross early in the letter.

*"But God ... even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus"* (Eph. 2:4-6).

There is the allusion to our union with Christ in death, burial and in quickening.

Then the letter has much to say about the Spirit. Chapter by chapter, the Spirit is brought in in different connections. I want to gather it all up in this one word and show

that this letter says that the cross as the Spirit's instrument secures that full heavenliness of life, fellowship and vocation of the church.

The letter to the Ephesians, to begin with, is that which has to do with the heavenly. Christ in the heavenlies and us seated together with Him in the heavenlies so the heavenlies as our position, as our sphere of life, fellowship and warfare, is in view here. Heavenly position, heavenly nature, heavenly vocation, heavenly warfare, and unto that the cross has to make its own application.

The Holy Spirit has to apply the cross in the first place to cut us off from what is earthly even in a religious way. The majority of Christians are still earthly Christians, and even in their religion, their Christianity, they are earthly, their church is an earthly thing, their relationships are earthly, their interests are very largely earthly. What they are after is to see something built up on this earth, something established here which can be seen, talked about, written up and advertised. The most difficult thing for a great number of Christians is to apprehend a life which is of real value to God, which has got nothing to show for it here on earth, a walk with God which has no monument here other than itself — just the walk with God. And so many of the Lord's people have their hearts set upon something as the result of their labours and their life here which can be seen, and this letter cuts us right off from that, and says that everything now of this life is heavenly. The church is heavenly, fellowship is heavenly, our vocation is heavenly, and everything is determined in its value from heaven's standpoint in this letter, and not from man's standpoint or the world's standpoint. That means a mighty work of the cross in us. We find that more and more every day. If the Lord withholds from us those evidences, those signs, those proofs of the value of our lives and our work here, we have a very bad time. The Lord simply shuts us up to Himself and says, not in words, but in His dealings with us, 'Be content with Me, be satisfied with Me. Just walk before Me, not before men.' When He keeps us on that line, it is a hard thing for the flesh, and the cross is a very real thing to that flesh when the cross comes in to make us heavenly in life, in position, in vocation, in warfare. The Holy Spirit is bringing us to that position by means of the cross.

### **Christ — All and in All**

Then passing to the letter to the Colossians. The cross is referred to in terms so similar to those used in Romans 6:

*"... in whom ye were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:11-12).*

The connection of the cross here is in relation to what we have in Colossians 1 to begin with. In Colossians 1 the Lord Jesus is brought into view as the eternal fulness of God. Before the world was, God summed up all things in Him, and then in Him, through Him, for Him, unto Him, created all things and caused all things to hold together, to consist in Him, and determined that in all things He should have the pre-eminence, so what we have here is the fulness of God in Christ. It is spiritual fulness. It is not our growth — that is the other side of fulness. It is not our full growth now, it is what Christ is and what there is in Christ by the summing up and including of God. All things in Him, that He should be all and in all. The Holy Spirit is here to bring that about where we are concerned, and we are made full in Him, in Him is all the eternal fulness of God.

But how shall we come there? It will be by our emptying, that is clearly implied if not stated, when we come to Colossians 3.



*"If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth. For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:1-3).*

It is emptying of earthly things to be filled with the fulness of Christ. But that emptying is done by the cross. It is the meaning of the cross.

All things which I have referred to about the cross were actually true in the case of the Lord Jesus Himself. The cross for Him, as represented typically in His baptism, which was the foundation of His life and ministry, meant that all that was natural had to be refused. That does not, in His case, mean sinful. I refer to what He meant when He said, *"The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father doing"* (John 5:19). *"Not my will, but thy will"* (Luke 22:42). There was another side of Him which, while not being sinful, was not a sinful self, but Himself, that was not God. The cross for Him meant that that line of things had got to be forsaken. So every phase of what we have said to be the work of the cross applied to Him and became a real thing in His experience.

That is transferred to us by the Holy Spirit that we might be constituted according to Christ, conformed to the image of God's Son, but it means that the cross in every aspect has got to be applied before the Holy Spirit can bring us through to what God intends, and unto this glorious fulness which is for us in Him there has to be a deep and drastic emptying by the work of the cross, so that we have nothing in ourselves at all, and the Lord is everything. That is easily said. Those are words which many can use quite glibly — *"I'm a poor sinner and nothing at all; Jesus Christ is my all-in-all"*. But to get there is no small thing. "Nothing at all". That is the thing about which you and I have had our biggest troubles, our greatest controversies with the Lord. We have kicked again and again against being nothing at all. When the Lord begins to make us feel like that and we know we are nothing at all, it is not a pleasant thing to the flesh, to nature. But that is the place or the way of the fulness of Christ. "Jesus Christ is my All-in-all". Ah, it is a mature saint that can say that really in truth. We can say it, we may mean it, but oh!! we do not know what we mean when we say it. "Jesus Christ is my All-in-all". That means that I have nothing and I know I have nothing. I am stripped of everything but the Lord Jesus. He is Alpha and Omega for me, first and last, He compasses everything. That is a high position when it really is true. Well, the cross works in the hands of the Holy Spirit to empty us unto that — God's fulness in Christ, in whom we are to be made full.

So you see the Holy Spirit works by the cross, stage by stage, point by point, in order to bring us to God's intended end, and we see that that is what is here. Romans 6, Colossians 2, Galatians 2:20 bring us right back to our baptism. Baptism is our apprehension, (not someone else's apprehension for us), for no one else can die for us, we have got to die ourselves — of our union with Christ in burial and resurrection as the way to divine fulness. This is not it, but this is the means of testifying thereto. It is a divinely prescribed means. It is placed there to be a testimony before all intelligences, human, divine and demonic, that we have died to that whole realm which stands against the fulness of Christ, and we have risen unto that — the fulness of Christ.