

"This Ministry"

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“This Ministry”

Chapter 1 – The Gathering together of All Things in Christ

“Therefore seeing we have this ministry ...” (2 Cor. 4:1). And those two words will be the key to our meditation and consideration in these messages.

This ministry ... *this* ministry. As you know we are using these evenings for the purpose of re-stating and clarifying what we believe to be the Lord’s meaning and purpose in the church, and in our having been, by His grace and mercy, brought under His hand as a people here. It is very necessary that, from time to time, as the years go on, and the company changes that we keep very clearly before us that full purpose of God into which He has called us. While we are always seeking new light, and to be open to new instruction and counsel from the Lord, we must preserve the original vision, and keep in line with that which has been the object of our apprehending. And it is the church’s ministry — a ministry, for which the church is chosen of God and for which the church is equipped by God. So far as we here are concerned we feel that the Lord has laid it very much on us to seek to be in line with the ministry of the full counsel of God. And, as things are in these times, it is very necessary that there shall be preserved a ministry among the Lord’s people for the Lord’s people; that they shall the better be fitted with spiritual wealth, and larger measures of Christ to strengthen all the Lord’s people to the fulfilment of their holy vocation in this world.

Now Paul here says: “*We have this ministry*”, and I think it is quite clear from the larger context of these words, that when he said “we”, he was including the Corinthians as well as himself and his brethren who were with him in the ministry. In 2 Cor. 3:18 he says: “We all with unveiled face ...”, it is the ministry of the whole church the apostle has in view. This ministry is what the Lord would have the whole church fulfil. And it is of very great importance that the whole church (and that includes every one of us, while it goes far beyond), should realise that we are called of God not only unto salvation and unto ultimate glory, but particularly unto a ministry — a ministry from the Lord for the Lord, and unto the Lord. We have this ministry! And when the apostle says: “this ministry”, you notice the whole context of this letter defines what he means by this ministry. It is a ministry of a certain nature, character and constitution. So that, if this is true that the church is here particularly and pre-eminently to fulfil a ministry and we are in that we must know what that ministry is, and we must be in line with it.

The apostle first draws attention, then, to what the church is, in itself, “We ...”, and then he proceeds with the vocation of that church. The church is affected as to its character by its calling. If we were to clearly apprehend our calling, we should the more forcefully realise what we have got to be. The impetus, the motive, the dynamic of ‘being’ is found in the vocation, in the calling, in what we are here for, that is the divine purpose. Have you grasped that? Let me repeat that: that we shall find our inspiration to be what we ought to be when we adequately apprehend what it is the Lord has called us for, that is, to do. Because we cannot do that, and fulfil the vocation, unless we are of a certain kind, of a certain character; it does not just happen willy-nilly. The Lord requires a certain kind of ‘we’ for this particular kind of ministry. And that is the whole force of this letter, as you know; the apostle is seeking to show what the ministry is, and by showing that, inspiring and encouraging and admonishing the church to be worthy of that ministry, to be the kind of church necessary to fulfil it.

So we now begin to consider the nature of this ministry — what constitutes it. We will seek to confine ourselves to one aspect or phase of this ministry. It is what the apostle means when he repeatedly speaks of “God’s purpose”. Notice that that was a characteristic conception in the apostle’s heart and mind. We are very familiar, for

instance, with the words of Romans 8:28 the last clause of which is: "*called according to His purpose*". And again in Ephesians 1:9: "*Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to his good pleasure which He purposed in Him*" — that is, 'in Christ'. Ephesians 1:11: "*In whom also we were made a heritage having been foreordained according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His will*". It is with something that the apostle terms "the purpose", "the eternal purpose" in mind that the church has its existence.

When we come to look at these Scriptures and break them up or analyse them, we find that this purpose has several aspects. Firstly, it is shown to be consummately and all-inclusively a 'gathering together of all things in Christ', That is the purpose. Comprehensively: 'to gather together all things in Christ'. And then, in the second place, the purpose is to manifest, or express 'the fulness of Christ' in and to this whole universe. That is the 'counsel of God's will'. And then in the third place, we find that, for that, God before times eternal, chose, or elected, the church, that which is called 'the church', to be the vessel for this purpose.

Let us look a little more closely at those three things 'To' — and it is put in several different ways in different translations, "to sum up all things in Christ", or "to gather together all things in Christ", or again, "to re-unite all things in Christ", or, once more, "to gather up into one all things in Christ". That is the pre-eminent explanation of the Lord Jesus. Paul was mainly interested in the eternal signification of Christ, and of His vocation in the purpose of God. Therefore there is very little indeed in Paul's writings throughout of the earthly life of the Lord Jesus, practically nothing from His birth onwards to His cross. Paul does not give us any account of the journeys of the Lord Jesus when here on earth, of His miracles, of His discourses; he says practically nothing about that whole period. If he has anything to say about the Lord Jesus in that connection, it is almost entirely about the meaning of the incarnation: His self-emptying, His humbling Himself and taking upon Him the form of a bond-slave, and being found in fashion as a man. From there onwards he has practically nothing to say until he comes to the cross and he has a lot to say about that. Paul is not concerned with the earthly, or historic Christ; he is concerned with the eternal significance of His Person and His work. And that is very largely why he so often uses the title 'Christ' and 'the Christ', which is a larger title than 'Jesus'. He often speaks, of course, of Jesus, but Paul's great title for Him is 'Christ', and 'the Christ'. That relates to His anointing for His vocation, to fulfil His great purpose in this universe. It is the *eternal* Christ that Paul is concerned with. And he it is, who in this unique, peculiar and particular way, brings us to that eternal vocation. He shows us that in those eternal counsels of God, the Son was intended to be the sum of all things, and all things to be the sum of Him. He should fill all things, and in all things have the pre-eminence — 'in Him all things should consist'. And all things in this universe should find their centre and integrating power in Christ. That was the divine intention. Then things proceeded as we only too well know, to the point where the mighty determined counter to that entered into this universe. Along every line of divine intention concerning the Lord Jesus there is a counter-movement in this universe. Did God intend and determine that in and through His Son the glory of God should be manifested in this universe. 'Very well, then', says this counter-movement, 'we will make it our business to see that everything that relates to the Lord Jesus is brought into shame and dishonour.' What a history there is! You cannot bring anything of the Lord Jesus in for glory without this counter-movement to bring that under a reproach, into shame, into disrepute, to thwart and frustrate the glory. Is it the wealth, the riches of Christ that are in Christ that are to be displayed and enjoyed? 'Very well', says the counter-movement, 'We will bring into poverty everything that is related to Christ.' And there is much spiritual poverty in what has the name of Christ on it in this world! And so you follow it round the clock, and at every point where God determined something concerning His Son, you find the counter-movement; and here it focuses upon this matter of 'gathering together', 'summing up', 're-uniting', 'gathering into one all things in Christ'. 'Very well', says this counter-movement, 'we will make it our business to divide everything that has the name

of Christ on it. We will not stop short at anything to counter that uniting movement in Christ. We will break it up somehow!' And what a lot of history there is in that! If the church was brought into being for that purpose, well, the enemy has not spared himself to spoil that purpose in church. We come to that again in a moment. But here we find ourselves in a disintegrated and disrupted universe, in every direction and every connection, not stopping short of what is called 'the church' (I very carefully put it like that - what is *called* the church). But the purpose of God stands and His predeterminate counsel, the counsel of His will, will eventually and ultimately be fulfilled. He will "*sum up all things in Christ*".

Now you see, God is engaged, deeper than our sensing and our sight, upon this matter of re-integrating in His Son. And the basic principle of this integration and re-uniting is Christ Himself. If you get hold of that, you will get past a great many difficulties. The ground of oneness is Christ Himself. Many things are thought to be the way to unity or the ground of unity but no, there is only one ground of unity, and that is Christ Himself. And where Christ is, beneath and beyond whatever else may be present, there is unity. There is no doubt about it. There may be a lot that is extra, the accretions, the things that are built upon that, which are not Christ. But get away down through all that, to the fundamental reality of Christ within, by new birth, from above, and you have got something in common; there is the unity. Christ Himself is the Law of this new integration, but it depends upon the measure of Christ how much manifested unity there will be. That, of course, would be a terrible indictment, would it not, of very much, where there is disunity among the Lord's people; it would say: 'Well there is not enough of Christ; if only there were more of Christ.'

So it resolves itself into a matter of the greatness and the fulness of Christ. If what we have said and all the more that lies behind it, is true, how very great Christ is! That He has the capacity for filling this universe. And those are not just words, it is not just a wild statement but it can be borne out in various ways. You can take any manual of any subject or subjects in human knowledge, full and detailed and comprehensive, and you can master it. You can get the substance out of it, so that it is in you and you can put the manual away, and have no further need to refer to it. It may be very vastly comprehensive, but you have got it, you know all that is there. You can never do that to anything that relates to Christ. A little fragment of written ministry which you can read in fifteen or twenty minutes, like the letter (so-called) to the Ephesians, or to the Philippians, or Colossians, yet inexhausted over twenty centuries, and still deeper and fuller than all those twenty centuries have ever been able to extract from it! It relates to Christ, and it takes more than all time to comprehend Him, to fathom Him. He is still beyond us, vastly beyond us! He is a universe. He has the capacity for filling all things; He is inexhaustible.

But not only in the matter of measure or degree, but in the matter of character. It is not only that He is going to fill all things, but He is going to give character to all things. And what a wonderful thing it is when the Lord Jesus gets in! The changes He makes in character! And if it be true, as we have illustrated that He is capable of filling all time, and going beyond it, as to measure, He can change this whole universe with His character. He can give a character to all things which is different, and which cannot be found in any other but Himself. We know that, that where Christ is, truly, there is something different. All the prophets of men; all their teachers; all their religion; all their philosophies — as wonderful as they may think them to be — don't change the character! They don't make this radical, constitutional difference in men. But He does! Therefore, in Him is not only the measure, but the character of the coming universe. It will take its nature from Him; He is capable of doing that. That is the gospel, that there is not one remote figure or point or creature in this universe that cannot be changed by Jesus Christ, and be different. He is the measure, He is the nature, but He is also the criterion!

Everything in this universe is going eventually to be judged by Him according to Him. Not that He sits upon a judgment seat at some time, and gathers all before Him, and passes sentence objectively — that is our mentality in thinking of the judgment. Let us understand that it is spiritual, and that all things will be judged according to the measure of Christ that is there; according to how they measure up to Him He is the standard; He is the criterion; He is God's measuring line for everything. And with God, all things, *all* things are judged in this way. What place have you given My Son? What place could you have given Him? What place did you have the opportunity of giving Him? What place did all that was given to you make possible for Him? What is the result? God will be righteous in His judgments. Some may have very little of Christ, but God will be righteous if they could not have had more. But you see, the much or the little, after all comes back to this: it is Christ who is the criterion of everything.

All that then, and so much more is found in this first fragment of the purpose - "*to sum up all things in Christ*"; "*to gather together all things in Christ*".

Then you come to the elect vessel which we know by the name of the church. What is the meaning of election after all? For it is this 'church' that is elected, that answers to this particular and peculiar thought in the mind of God from eternity. What is the meaning of election? We have gone far wide I think, from the real answer to that question in the Word of God. If only we did realise that election is related essentially to vocation and not salvation, we would be saved a lot of trouble. It is: "*chosen according to the purpose*", in relation to a vocation. It is "elect" with a meaning, and that is not just to be saved, and to be got to Heaven; it is "this ministry" that governs election. "This ministry" is the ministry of something elected of God to fulfil it. Get quite clear about that, and get your minds free from other thoughts when the word 'election' or 'foreordination' or 'predestination' rises; at once focus upon this, it is purpose that is in view.

What is the purpose of the election? It is vocation. What is the purpose of the election? Again the purpose of election is Christ, 'chosen in Him' for the very purpose of being God's vessel and vehicle for the revelation of Jesus Christ in the nations and beyond in the heavenlies.

I keep strictly, if you care to follow with the Word, to the Scriptures in all this. "*Now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenlies, might be made manifest the manifold wisdom of God*". It is in the nations and over the nations that this vocation is to be fulfilled; it is Christ! We are chosen in Christ to reveal Christ, to manifest Christ, to show what Christ is. Then what is the demand if this is true? The demand is found in one little phrase: "*Give diligence to make your calling and election sure*". In other words, See to it that you are fulfilling this ministry: that you really are in this ministry of Christ," So *this* ministry relates to the fulness of Christ. First of all to fill its vessel, the vessel of the ministry, and then to overflow, or pass beyond or through the vessel to the nations.

What is required for this ministry, if this is what it is? Well, first of all, again keeping close to the Word, it can only be fulfilled on heavenly ground. It is absolutely essential that the church stands on heavenly ground to fulfil this ministry. It is on the ground of the 'heavenly Man'; it is on the ground of a 'heavenly order' — "*... as it is done in Heaven*" was the phrase used by the Lord Himself. It is on the ground of the Holy Spirit sent down from Heaven. In every way it requires heavenly ground. Paul so constantly uses this phrase: "*in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus*"; "*in the heavenlies*". Touch the earthly and the natural man, and what happens? At once the integration changes to disintegration again. Let me put that another way: here is something that is raised up of the Lord, used of the Lord, and then man or men put their hand on it, take charge of it; begin to hold it and use it and govern it. What is the history of that? It is the history of all the divisions. At any rate, in most of the divisions, among the Lord's people, it can be traced to it coming down to the 'earthly man' somewhere; the touch of the 'earthly man'

in the otherwise 'heavenly man'; there are always two sides to men! When men get on to their earthly side and touch the things of God, division comes, the glory fades out; the fulness of Christ narrows down; spiritual poverty comes where there was once wealth. Touch the earthly man, touch the earth itself, and at once you come into this realm of breaking up, of dividing; you come down on to this earth-level of things. There is no oneness or integration on this earth. If you like to change the word 'earth' for the word 'the world'; let the church come into touch with this world, and then what happens? It breaks up, it divides, it loses its spiritual fulness and its glory; it loses its effectiveness and its registration here. And that is exactly what is happening. Come down, come down! If the letter to the Ephesians means anything at all as it comes to its consummation, that great warfare in the heavenlies, it means this: the tremendous conflict the church has for maintaining its heavenly position, for all these forces of evil are bent upon forcing it down. Now, is that not true to your own personal experience — pressing down, forcing down, dragging down? It is essential that we maintain our heavenly ground, and not come down, if we are to fulfil this ministry.

You must keep off of all ground that is of man's making, forming, shaping and constituting, if you are going to have this fulness of Christ, and minister it to His people. We are speaking about the ministry to which we are called, and it is an essential part of that ministry, that we do not come on to man's religious, traditional, historical ecclesiastical ground; we maintain a spiritual position in the heavenlies, in Christ. And as soon as we lose that position, and become something down here — an institution, a sect, a denomination, an organization — we lose our wealth and we will lose our glory; and we will lose our measure of Christ. We will lose everything spiritual, and pass into being what so many things have become — just another thing down here among many things, very little different from the rest. Oh no, the church of Christ is not that! And if we say: Well, where shall we find this? does 'Ephesians' still hold good? I verily believe with all my heart that if we are in the right position we will find there the right and full resources of Christ

Now, you say: How is all this to be? It is all perhaps very wonderful but it is so much beyond us. And I don't want to be occupied with setting forth great ideas and truths and concepts. I am most concerned to solve some of the spiritual problems of this matter of spiritual fulness. I take an illustration to try and help in this matter. You see all this that we are thinking of — this ministry — is not going in the first place, to be an objective thing at all. In 2 Corinthians we find how *subjective* this ministry is, "*God hath shined into our hearts ...*". It is not, first of all an objective thing. You won't find this church first of all in an outward way, here on the earth. It is no use going about looking for this kind of church which corresponds to 'Ephesians'. You won't find it. You won't find this ministry in that objective way, although there may be ministries which more or less approximate to this, but, it is not to be found in the objective way, in the first place. How is it to be found then?

Perhaps I can best illustrate it in this way: Have you ever been inoculated? Have you ever had an injection? Well of course it depends very much what it is, but it is characteristic and usual with infections or inoculations, that you get a reaction, a flare-up, and you have a bad time for a while. Something has been introduced into your system which is either a deficiency in your system, a supply to a deficiency, or something that is antagonistic to what is there. So, a battle ensues, until that which has been introduced has got the mastery, and has subjected everything to itself and becomes the governing constituent in your system, so that the old thing against which the injections or the inoculation was made does not arise again and take the mastery. It is overcome.

Now that is known to most of you as being quite true and quite a simple illustration. But do you recognize that that is exactly what is happening in the spiritual constitution of the Lord's people. We are *all* defective in Christ; there is a terrible deficiency of Christ in us all. And Christ is so other than we are, so different. Really this heavenly man is

antagonistic to this earthly man. Introduce Christ into the life and it is not long before the battle rages. There is a flare-up; you go through a bad time, until that which has been introduced into your spiritual constitution gains the mastery, and that old man comes under, that other thing is made subject to Him and He becomes the dominant constituent. And that battle is over! How in thousands of ways and connections that is what happens. You have an injection for this, and an injection for that, an inoculation for one thing and another, all sorts of things. And in our spiritual constitution there are numerous things that have got to be brought into subjection to Christ, and that never takes place without a battle. And the more of Christ that is going to come in, the greater the battles will be. There is this antagonism for a time; our nature does not take kindly to Christ! While we in heart want Him, there is something in us that does not *like* Him. And it means a battle.

Now that is the sort of thing that changes the people of God, that changes the church. If you bring in Christ, and more of Christ, you bring in first of all tremendous reactions, a good deal of inward conflict and suffering until He has the mastery, and there is a larger measure of Christ that is dominant. I believe that is the real spiritual history of the church; the church does go through these tremendous battles. The Lord's people go through these times of stress, and it is all what used to be called in my young days, 'growing pains'. It is that increase of another character, another order of things, and it never takes place easily. It is always a battle, related to some fuller measure of Christ.

That may explain a lot for you, but I believe that is the way we come to the fullness of Christ. It just does not happen quietly and gently and kindly; we only come to every little extra bit of Christ through some conflict, stress or flare-up, until He gets the upper hand. You see, all things have got to be brought into subjection to Him. And the very word 'subjection' means that there are enemy forces at work *in us*. There is a lot of subduing to do in us, but He has the power to subdue all things unto Himself. If He comes in He will do that.

Now how then is this ministry to be fulfilled? It is by, first of all, the church, in which Christ has the largest possible place, which possesses the largest possible measure of Christ. That can only be as everything in us and in the church becomes subject to His Lordship, His Headship, His absolute mastery. It opens up the Word so much. For example, Peter, the man, who in the first place, had the most that did not take kindly to Christ. He was well-meaning, but he was all the time rising up in himself to oppose something of Christ: "*This shall never come to thee ... this shall never be...*". But this terrific battle was set up in Peter as to who was to have the mastery. I believe that mastery was gained on that morning on that shore of the sea, when Jesus said, again and again: "Do you love Me ... do you love Me? ... do you love Me?" We have a very large measure of Christ in Peter afterwards. But you can see the inward battle through which that man went to make room for Christ. And it was all along the line of absolute subjection to Christ, Christ having the mastery; being in the ascendant; and those things in the man subdued to Christ, that "*in all things He might have the pre-eminence*". It is the way of the fullness; it is the way of this ministry.

Oh, may the Lord go beyond what I am able to say to you to convey to you, and bring a mighty impression upon you, that we are called, as, with His church, with a great purpose, which only has its beginning here in time, in this life, which will have its fulfilment, as Paul says, "in the ages to come", "unto the ages of the ages". We are called with that purpose. And the purpose is the manifestation of the greatness of Christ, the significance and meaning of Christ. Then, if we are to make our calling and election sure, it is a matter of Christ, in all things, having the pre-eminence, absolute mastery. It is a matter of all things being in subjection to Him, in us, and among us.

"Wherefore, seeing we have this ministry ...". Perhaps you are feeling now: "Well, we will faint, it is too much! "... *we faint not*", says the apostle - "*we faint not*". The Lord fulfil all His purpose of grace in us.

Chapter 2 – Spirituality (version 2: edited)

Reading: 2 Corinthians 3:4-4:1.

"Seeing we have this ministry ..." (2 Cor. 4:1).

"And shall not the uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who with the letter and circumcision art a transgressor of the law? ... but he is a Jew, who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter" (Rom. 2:27,29).

"But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that wherein we were held; so that we serve in newness of the spirit, and not in oldness of the letter" (Rom. 7:6).

"... the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" (Eph. 1:17).

In our basic fragment, referring to "this ministry", you will notice that what Paul means by "this ministry" is partly explained in the immediate context. There is a follow-on from chapter 3 with: "Therefore ..." - that links up with what the apostle has been saying about Moses and the veil. And it is focussed in those words in 2 Cor. 3:6: "... 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". That is a tremendous fragment, for it represents the terminal point, or point of junction, of two entirely different dispensations and economies. The phrase, "the letter", represents a past dispensation, the Mosaic economy. "The spirit" represents the present dispensation, and the economy of Christ personally. The whole section is full of vivid contrasts between these two.

Paul, as you see, distinguished between them by, on the one side, the glory that faded; on the other side, the glory that surpasses and abides. The glory that faded was connected with, or belonged to, that which Paul means by 'the letter'; the glory that surpasses and abides is connected with what he calls 'the spirit'. So that "this ministry" about which he is writing, and about which, as committed to us, we are now thinking, is resolved into one word — 'spirituality'. That word defines the nature of this present dispensation. It covers much ground; it includes many things; indeed, it includes everything in this dispensation in the purpose of God.

(1) In relation to the People of God

First of all, it relates to the 'people of God'. The people of God are different in this dispensation from what they were in the past, in the dispensation of the letter, the dispensation of the law, the economy of Moses. It is the difference and it is a very great difference between the historical, the sacerdotal, the sacramental, the ritualistic relationship with God, which obtained under Moses, and the 'new birth' which marks this dispensation. That whole system of Moses, comprehensive as it was, and wonderful in many respects, containing all the vital principles of God's mind for His people, nevertheless fell short in this one tremendous thing: it fell short of 'new birth'; it never brought about regeneration.

That means an immense difference for the people of God. In that former dispensation there was a people of God, but their economy was, as I have said, that of sacraments, ritual, and so on. In this dispensation, God also has a people; but the fundamental, basic characteristic of God's people in this dispensation is that they are 'born from above': 'new birth' has taken place. And that is a very great difference. You can have all the other without this; if you have this, you comprehend all the other in spirit. The other is in letter, and 'kills'; this is in spirit, and 'makes alive', in the first instance, by new birth. It

is the spirit that 'gives life', says Paul; and I trust that we all know the truth of that in this initial respect that the Spirit gives life in new birth. We are able to attest that, put our seal to that, and say: 'At any rate, that bit of the Bible I know to be true — "the Spirit gives life" to a new entity, a new person, by new birth'.

Paul also points out here, quite clearly, that it is the difference between two covenants: the 'old covenant' which was of 'the letter', and wholly outward; and the 'new covenant' which is of the 'Spirit', and inward. That is what he means, for instance, in his references to circumcision. That was the sign of the covenant with Abraham. "But the 'new covenant' has now been instituted; and, according to Jeremiah 31:33, the 'new covenant' is: *"I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it!"* The 'new covenant' is inward, whereas the old was outward. This people, Paul argues in his various writings, is the people of the Spirit in this respect, that circumcision is a thing of the heart and not of the flesh, *"He is not a Jew, who is one outwardly ... but ... inwardly"*. The difference between the dispensation of 'the letter' and that of 'the Spirit' lies in these two covenants. Under the new covenant, there has been something done in the heart, which is the spiritual and inward counterpart of the sign of the covenant in the old dispensation.

Again, as we so well know from Paul, the difference of the dispensations, where the people of God are concerned, is that of 'works' and of 'grace'. We are so familiar with that. But it is all compassed by this very first aspect of this change-over in the dispensations. It begins in relation to the people of God.

(2) In relation to the Holy Spirit

In the second place, it relates to the Holy Spirit. There is all the difference between the Holy Spirit's presence and work in the old dispensation, and in this. That in itself is a big subject. You will call to mind what a lot of time, and a lot of care the Lord Jesus took to make His disciples understand this great difference between the old dispensation and the new, as to the Holy Spirit. His emphasis and reiteration was: *"in that day ... in that day ... in that day ..."*; *"when He, the Spirit ... is come ..."*, and so on. That is the day! Well, this is that day, and it represents a tremendous change-over. Then, it was the outward operation of the Holy Spirit, and periodic visitations of the Holy Spirit to men, and inworkings in men by the Holy Spirit, who then departed. Now, it is the presence of the Holy Spirit within abidingly. It is this latter feature upon which the Lord put His emphasis: 'He shall abide with you for the age'; *"He shall be in you"* (John 14:16,17). It is this that defines what Paul means by 'the Spirit' as over against 'the letter'.

The Spirit is the Spirit of *life*, as different from 'legalism'. We could, of course, say that the law was given by God; I think we could even say that it was given by the agency of the Holy Spirit; yes, but it was a legal system. The Holy Spirit does not work 'legally' in that way now. The Holy Spirit is now 'the Spirit of life'. 'Legalism' is only another phrase for 'the letter, which kills'; but the Spirit who 'gives life' is the 'Spirit of life', and that represents a tremendous difference between economies and dispensations.

Then, in the next place, the Spirit is the Spirit of *truth* and of *revelation*. And we have to put quotation marks round that word 'truth', because it represents a particular and peculiar thing in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus said: *"The hour comes, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth"* (John 4:23). He was making a statement about a peculiar characteristic of this dispensation; the Spirit of 'truth' and 'revelation', as differing from symbolism without understanding what it meant and reality in the understanding of God's mind. Two different dispensations! They had it all in type, figure and symbol, but it is perfectly clear that they did not understand.

Moses said a tremendous thing about this. We have it in the Book of Deuteronomy - a late statement by Moses, who said: *"But the Lord hath not given you an heart to know, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day"* (Deut. 29:4). With all the history —

Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers — yet with it all, 'even to this day, hath the Lord not given you eyes to see and a heart to understand'. They had it all, but they simply saw it with natural eyes, observed it objectively; it was something external, and they understood none of its meaning.

Now 'truth', in the New Testament sense, is not just symbolism. That is not the 'truth': that is only representation. It is not the true thing. Jesus was indicating that when He said to the woman of Samaria, 'The hour cometh when neither in this mountain, nor at Jerusalem, shall men worship God'; 'neither in the temple here in Samaria nor in the great temple at Jerusalem'. That is not the *true* thing. It may be symbol and representation, but it is only that; it is not the *truth*. We have come into the dispensation of the 'truth'; that is, that which is spiritual, and not only just a matter of symbol and type; the dispensation of the Spirit; the dispensation of the meaning of things - yes, the meaning of all the symbols and all the types, the meaning of everything that God had foreshadowed in that objective way. We have now, by the Holy Spirit, come into the meaning of things. When you come into the meaning of things, if you have got the reality and the meaning, you can dispense with the childhood object lessons and pictures. That is the characteristic of this dispensation: the Spirit of Truth and of Revelation.

That is a very challenging thing; it is a sweeping thing; it is almost a terrible thing. One would perhaps, be tremendously misunderstood, certainly very hotly taken up, if one were to apply that. If it be true that it is the *spiritual* and the *meaning* which is the true, and that that is the characteristic of this dispensation, then there is something terribly lacking when people cling to, or revert to, an Old Testament form of outward representation, ritual and sacerdotalism, and all that. You have to ask this major and fundamental question: Have they seen, after all? Do they know the Holy Spirit? And it is just there that there is this tremendous uprising of indignation, when you use the word 'revelation'. That He "*may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him*" (Eph. 1:17). Paul is only saying: 'that He would grant to you to see the *meaning* of things' and be saved from the mere outward representations.

That is the second thing about the change-over, and all this is included in the phrase 'this ministry'. We are defining 'this ministry'; this is it. It is the ministry of an entirely different kind of person from those who were the people of God in the old dispensation; and it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit in an entirely different way, as within the life of such people, particularly and peculiarly as the Spirit of truth and of revelation.

(3) In relation to the Kingdom

In the third place, this connects with the Kingdom. In the old days, the ideas of the kingdom were of something entirely temporal and earthly, to be gained by force, by outward force of arms. In the old dispensation it was a matter of literally fighting with flesh and blood to establish a kingdom, a temporal kingdom, with a throne on this earth, and a political regime. 'Like the other nations', but a bit better! Certainly above them! The kingdom in the Old Testament was an earthly thing. And that whole mentality of the people of God as it was then, is carried over into the New Testament; and it was over that that the Lord Jesus probably had His greatest difficulties with His disciples and followers. But this is a part of the new dispensation, and the new people, and the new Spirit — that the conception and mentality of the kingdom is entirely changed. In this dispensation, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Heaven, is not temporal; it is spiritual. That needs no emphasis.

And yet it is set right over against some of the greatest so-called 'Christian' systems on this earth. That is the profound contrast between the true church of Christ, and that false one of Rome, and Rome's sisters. That is a temporal thing, a political thing, an earthly thing, and a thing which will stand at nothing — persecution crushing, force of arms, if needs be — to establish what it would call 'the kingdom of God'. But no; the Kingdom is

not like that, it is spiritual, not temporal; it is heavenly, not earthly; it is divine nature: righteousness, holiness, peace, purity, and such like, not force. We read of the "*kingdom and patience*" of Jesus (Rev. 1:9), This Kingdom is the kingdom of the divine nature; and what a contrast it is with that other, which is so hateful in its moral (or immoral) life - using that word in its largest sense.

(4) In relation to the church

In the fourth place, this change-over between the 'letter' and the 'Spirit' relates to the church itself, here, very little need be said; all that is necessary is to underline one thing. The church in this dispensation is not an institution; it is not an earthly system; it is not something national; it is not sectarian; it is not denominational, interdenominational, or undenominational. The church in this dispensation is a Person - it is Christ -and it is the extension of that Person. It is not a hierarchy at all; it is certainly not a clerisy; it is Christ! And it is the extension of Christ, of the Person: that is, a people in whom Christ dwells, in whom Christ is Lord, and over whom Christ is Head. That people, and no other, is the church.

It is not a name; far better to avoid all names. Immediately you put names on something that is the church, you bring it to earth and divide it from all others. It is not a tradition; it is not a place; and it is not a form. It is a *people*, whose basis of life and sum-total of life is Christ Himself; the church is Christ. This church is not something that you can see in its entirety; it is not apparent; it is no use going here and there, looking for it. You may find a greater approximation to it here or there; but you will not find this church in fulness anywhere on this earth. But wherever you find Christ in men and women, there you have the church at least in its foundation, and the measure of the church depends upon the measure of the Christ,

There is a very large context for this that I have been saying. The letter to the Romans is occupied with this; the letter to the Galatians is Paul's mighty sledgehammer, we might say, on this change in dispensations. And the letter to the Hebrews is the classic in the New Testament on this difference in economies between the Mosaic and that of Christ; between the past and the present.

Moses and the Veil

We come now to the great illustration which the apostle takes up, and uses the subject of Moses and the veil, which he put on his face. This is not so easy to interpret as might be thought. As a close observer will recognise, Paul changes his own position on this matter, and he has in so doing created a bit of a problem. However, let us analyse it:

There was a derived reflection of God's glory on the face of Moses. Now, I put that very carefully. It did not come from within Moses; it was not the glory of Moses. It was 'borrowed' glory; it was 'derived' glory; it was, in fact, divine glory union he carried on his face from the divine Presence on the mountain. The point is, to begin with, that *it did not come from within* Moses; it came from without.

But even so, being the divine glory it was something that the natural eye of man could not endure. That is the first argument of Paul. But notice it: this glory, which was not inherent and intrinsic where Moses was concerned, but was only derived, reflected, mirrored glory, was something which the natural eye of man could not look upon. A veil was therefore used. And in the first instance that veil became the symbol of man's visual disability as to God and His things. It signified that man had not the ability or the capacity to look upon what was of God; it declared man's inability or disability in the presence of that which was of God.

But then, that reflected glory faded — and this is where Paul makes the transition which creates the difficulty. It has puzzled many, and many interpretations have been given. As the glory was fading, and Moses subsequently read the law to the people, and the glory had gone, he put a veil on so that they should not see that the glory had gone! Now that is a problem. It is stated here, quite definitely, that he put the veil on, latterly, so that they should not see that the glory had gone. So that, when the reflected glory faded, the veil took another significance. It became the means of hiding, not the presence of the glory, but the absence of it. Now, what does it all mean?

Well, the law was real; it was from God; it contained the mind of God; it was not something unreal. Yes, it had in it the glory of God: the very law itself has in it the glory of God. But that mind and glory of God became hidden. These were statements of the divine mind; but, because of a state of the people, there was no apprehending, and hence no abiding presence of the glory of the divine mind. There was no heart revelation. There was no capacity for receiving and understanding the mind of God; therefore the glory could not be present.

Now, you can see how true that is in principle even now. If there is not the Spirit within as the Spirit of Truth and Revelation and Life, there may be present a ministry of 'truth', of the Word, of the mind of God, but there is no glory. If I were talking like this to a group of unsaved, unregenerate people, if I were speaking the 'truth' they would all be looking bewildered and dull and dark and heavy, and wondering what it was all about, and longing for the moment to come when they could go home! If the Spirit is not there, there is no glory, no response. There is 'a veil'; though the 'truth' may be there, the glory is not there, because of the state of the people.

"But whensoever 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 ..." (2 Cor. 3:16-17), there is 'release' from this condition, and the glory comes in. As we read that whole section (2 Cor. 3:4-4:1) at the beginning of our meditation, I take it that you in your own mind were underlining that word "glory ... glory ... glory ..." You see the difference! Now Paul argues that even today, when Moses is read, the veil remains, simply because of the state of the people themselves. But — "we have this ministry". What is that? *"God ... 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 ministry"; it is a ministry resultant from the inshining. In other words, the revelation of Christ in our hearts. It is there in the word.*

But the thoughts of God were in the word that Moses spoke; the mind of God was there in the law, just as much as it is in the New Testament, it is the mind of God, and He is the same God; it emanates from the same God. It is no less truth, no less meaningful than anything subsequent; but, you see, lacking a spiritual condition and capacity in the people, it went for nothing; the veil remains. "Whensoever it shall turn to the Lord", and "the Lord is the Spirit", and God has "shined in" the heart, the veil is gone — it is removed! "We have this ministry", a ministry of inward revelation of Jesus Christ.

This is release from 'the letter'; and when Paul speaks about the letter killing, he does not mean that it is not the Word of God, or something less as to the Word of God. He is not drawing a contrast between what God said then and what God says now. He is saying that then it was the 'letter' in the sense that it could only be given *objectively*, read to the people from the outside; but now it has been revealed to the *heart*, and has become life. So it is now the Word plus the Spirit. Then it was 'the letter' and no indwelling Spirit. How we are released into the glory of the unveiled face of Jesus. "We have this ministry."

What does it mean for you and for me? It should mean this, that you and I have the meaning of things. They only had the things; we have got the meaning of them. That meaning is given to us by the Holy Spirit within, not all at once, but progressively. A

mark of the Holy Spirit's abiding, and of our life in the Spirit, is that we are progressing in the meaning of the things of God — Life and Glory!

It is true that no matter how many times we have read the Word, and thought we had got it and knew it, there comes a new flash, and that old statement, those old words, that old truth means to us new life, new glory! We never saw that before. That is a mark of a life in the Spirit. That is what Paul meant by "revelation" (Eph. 1:17); not something extra to the Word, not apart from the Word, not our private 'revelation', but what the Spirit Himself is teaching and showing, according to the promise of the Lord Himself.

This, then, is what Paul means when he says: "*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.*" "We have this ministry"! And: "*Therefore seeing we have this ministry, even as we have obtained mercy, we faint not*".

I trust that, although I have said nothing new, you are able to recognise, perhaps in a fresh way, if not in a new way, what it is that the Lord has called us to, what is the nature of our life and ministry. May He open the eyes of our hearts, and give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.

Chapter 3 – The Living God

Now we are going to consider 'This Ministry' in the light of a fragment which occurs many times throughout the Bible, just a few of which we will look at now.

Firstly then, in Matthew 16:13-20, and our words are found in Peter's answer to the Lord's question, as to who they, His disciples, would say that He was. *"Simon Peter answered and said: Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God".*

"As He says also in Hosea; I will call her My people which was not My people, and her beloved which was not beloved. And it shall be that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not My people, there shall they be called the sons of the living God" (Rom. 9:25).

"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves as to account anything as from ourselves, but 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. 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 ...?" (2 Cor. 3:5-8).

"Having therefore such a hope, we use great boldness of speech, and are not as Moses who put a veil upon his face, so that the children of Israel should not look steadfastly upon the end of that which was passing away. Their minds were hardened, and until this very day, at the reading of the old covenant, the same veil remains uplifted, which veil is taken away in Christ. But unto this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies upon their heart" (2 Cor. 3:12-15).

"For they themselves report concerning us, what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven" (1 Thess. 1:9).

"These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly. If I tarry long, that thou mayest know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1Tim. 3:14).

"But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God" (Heb. 12:22).

"I saw another angel ascend from the sunrising, having the seal of the living God, and he cried with a great voice to the four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying: Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we shall have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads" (Rev. 7:2).

So you will have recognised the phrase and the title - The Living God. As I have said, it is a title of the Lord which occurs many times throughout the Bible; indeed it is found in no fewer than seventeen of the books of the Bible, from the Book of Deuteronomy to the Book of the Revelation. It is instructive to take note of the occurrences of that phrase, and of the particular connections, because it is a phrase which is used, or a title of the Lord employed, always with some special object, Usually, of course, to counter or offset something which is contrary to what is represented by that title — The *Living* God. When we have gathered all these references together in which these words occur, we are able to arrange them all mainly in four particular or main connections. Of course, the first is set over against paganism and heathenism — the other gods of the nations — and the title 'The Living God' is that which discriminates between the gods of the heathen and the nations, and the Lord. And quite often the title is employed in that connection.

But as we proceed, we find it is used in other connections which are even more instructive, until we come to the final usage of it, which is the most instructive, in the second place, of course, it is set over against mere ritualism, ceremonialism, and sacramentalism, and such things of a merely formal, outward, religious order. Over against that, the words are used — the Living God — something more than a mere system. Although that system may be related to Him, to the Lord, it can exist, as is quite clear from these connections, and be carried on, and the Living God not be in evidence. There may be quite a contrast between all that and what is meant by the Living God. And it is there that the prophets come in, not against paganism and heathenism in its naked form in the nations, but against mere formalism in Israel, and there the prophets come along with their word 'the Living God' as being much more than all that of a merely formal religion.

But then we proceed further, and we are led by this title into another realm, this time into 'Christianity' itself, and, to a very large extent, orthodox Christianity. This is the Christianity of traditionalism, of institutionalism, of sectarianism, of nominalism. You see this phrase 'The Living God' is found in our New Testament! It is found being used among those who bear the name of 'Christian'. And still, it represents a contrast, even among Christians. That there can be the Christian doctrine, and the Christian practice, the Christian order, and the Christian activity, and all that belongs to 'Christianity', and still the Living God is something more than all. It is used in that connection, again, in a contrasting way. If I only pick out one fragment extra to the ones I have quoted, again from the letter to the Hebrews and again, that letter was written to Christians, and yet there is this statement: "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*" With Israel's history, used as you know as the great illustration of warning: "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God!*" — a word to Christians! Well, that is another connection.

But then we come to the fourth, the final connection. And here, the Living God is 'at home'; here everything corresponds to that very title. Here there is no clash and no contrast at all; here things are living, because they are spiritual and not merely formal or ritualistic. Here things are essentially real. Here are heavenly things themselves, in the custodianship of the Holy Spirit. And here the title fits: The *Living* God!

So it was with the Thessalonians, the setting of the phrase corresponded to the phrase itself: "*Ye turned from idols to serve the living God, and to wait for his Son from heaven.*" We are all right now! We are on the ground; it is the happy ground for the Living God.

And, dear friends, it is this last connection that we have before us. We feel that it is what is represented by that, that the Lord has presented to us as the purpose and object of our existence, and it is to this, that we have seen in a little way, that we are committed. It is this that defines 'This Ministry'; it is that which corresponds to this title 'The Living God', in a setting that is fitting to that name, and everything here expresses the Living God. It is the *Living* God who is among us! That is what we feel we have a little of, and have been drawn toward by the grace of God. It is not first a teaching, it is first the Lord Himself — the Living God! It is not first a system of practice and procedure, but it is first 'livingness', or life. It is not first 'the letter', but it is first 'the Spirit'. This is the realm in which the initiative and the abiding control is not with men, but with the Lord, with the Living God! The one supreme feature of what this means is *reality*. If the phrase means anything at all, 'the *Living* God'. that means reality, in every direction and every connection.

It is the reality of the Lord Himself among His people. It is the reality of the truth which is believed, which is taught, which is accepted. It is the reality of life — the life is real!

Now, there are three main relationships of that reality. I trust that you recognise what it is we are seeking to say at these times: it is what we believe the Lord is really desiring to have. And I think we can say that our hearts are set upon that. We can never be satisfied with anything other or anything less than what the Lord would really have. But, if that is so, we are really set upon that, and we say it is *reality* that we want, if that is true, then we are committed to the Holy Spirit to make things very real, and keep them very real, and deal with everything that is not real, that is artificial, that is false. So, the Holy Spirit is concerned with reality, and the Holy Spirit always begins His work of making things real by introducing the cross in a very real way into things. And the first main connection of this spiritual reality is *the cross*. Not just as an object; not as something external to ourselves; not as a thing; but the cross as a present, living, potent force and law governing everything. Yes, the cross as a working power in the hands of the Holy Spirit is the ground of reality.

If you and I are set upon what God wants to have, the essential thing His heart is set upon, the *real* thing, we shall find that we are brought into the presence of the operation of the cross in the hands of the Holy Spirit. The cross, truly, on one side, is for our good and our blessing, and it works *for* us. There are boundless blessings in the cross for the people of God. It is something in which to glory, as the apostle said he did. Yes, the cross is a mighty power working for us. But the cross will also work *against* us; it is just as potent against us. You see, we cannot come into the realm of God without discovering how unsuited we are for that realm, and that something has got to be done to deal with this which is so unsuited to the Lord. And what I am saying to you, dear friends, is this: not to give you further teaching on the cross, but simply to point out that if you and I are really with the Lord for that which is closest to His heart, our lives will be kept very near to the cross, and the cross will be kept very near to our lives. We shall find that while we come into the good and blessing that the cross provides, we also come into very strong and exact dealings with all that is contrary to the Lord, by the power of that cross. It is a working thing!

Dr. Mabie, many years ago, long before the atomic age opened, used this phrase: the 'radioactive' cross! You can't touch it without meeting something that burns you, that sears you. It is 'radioactive'! Well, that is a very good phrase. It is like that! The cross is not just a doctrine; it is certainly not a wooden object carried round the neck; the cross is a present and continuous force and law in the life where God is going to have things according to His mind. The cross is *for* us; the cross is also *against* us. That is an essential of reality. It is glorious on the one side, but it is terrible on the other. You cannot abide in its presence without being real with God. We shall find that this thing is no merely formal thing, of teaching, truth and system. Here we meet something. Ah! we meet the Living God in terms of the cross of His Son. You see, the Holy Spirit does all His work on the basis of the cross. He begins His work on the basis of the cross, and He continues His work on the basis of the cross, and He will finish His work on the basis of the cross. The Living God means that the cross of the Lord Jesus is not something in history long ago, the cross of the Lord Jesus is something here and now, as the ground of judgment, of testing, of finding out. It is a mighty thing. That is the first connection of reality.

I suppose, while that sounds rather heavy and hard, you and I would rather it was like that. We don't want to be in a religion that does not work; we don't want to be in a Christianity that is merely formal and empty, carrying on something, going to meetings and all the rest. We want reality; we want things to work; we want the Living God! If so, then that reality will first of all be manifested in terms of the cross. The cross is the first instrument of divine reality. It is there that we first of all meet the Living God.

The second connection of reality is in resurrection. The Living God makes Himself known to us in terms of resurrection. Resurrection is the controlling reality of the Living God and of His purpose. The whole purpose of God is going to be worked out and realised on the

basis of resurrection. Again, while the cross of the Lord Jesus is not only an historic fact long ago, and far away, something that was enacted there at a certain place in a certain time, in this world, but is continuously living, the same is true of the resurrection. Resurrection is not just something that just happened, and that was the beginning and the end of it, there in that garden, in that country, at that time. No! Resurrection is the ground on which God proceeds to the realisation and fulfilment of all His purpose. This resurrection has got to become more and more, progressively, the experience of His people. And He works on that basis. How do you know the Living God? How shall we know the reality of things? In this way, that we again and again, are brought to the place where, now, but for the God who raises the dead, all is finished, that is the end! Here is another occasion for the God of resurrection to come in and save the situation, or it is all lost. That is reality! That is keeping things real, isn't it? That is bringing the resurrection right up to date. And if we could read it, and we can to some large extent, that is the history of everything that is *truly* of God; that is the history of the true church; the history of true spiritual life. It is just one succession of resurrections! That is a way of putting it. Perhaps more correctly it should be said: a succession of experiences of the resurrection. Reality! Well, it is terrible reality! There is something about it that, in a way, is terrible, when you come to where Paul came, when you say: We despaired of life; we were pressed beyond our measure. That is something terrible. But it does not stop there — *"that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead"* (2 Cor. 1:8,9). *"We have this ministry..."* (2 Cor. 4:1). *"Seeing we have this ministry ..."*. What ministry? Not ministry of truth about the resurrection that took place so many centuries ago, but the power of that resurrection right up to date; the resurrection, in a sense, being repeated in our experience, not once nor twice. That is the 'ministry', born out of that experience. You see, resurrection is *the* seal of the Living God. The Living God puts *His* seal on things by resurrection. He put His seal upon His own Son, and attested Him: *"... Son by the resurrection from the dead"*. He puts His seal upon everything that is related to His Son, in the same way His seal is resurrection!

Resurrection marks the beginning of everything that is of God; it begins there; God begins there. In the material creation, God began with a resurrection — out of darkness, out of death, out of chaos — resurrection from the dead! Again and again you have it illustrated for you, and when you come into the New Testament, it is just that, everything takes its rise, its beginning, in this dispensation, from the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. God begins everything with resurrection, and every new phase — and this should instruct us and encourage us — every new phase finds us at the place where now it must be resurrection. And if it requires resurrection, then we may take it that there is a new phase imminent; there is some new phase of things of God in view. We should trust in God who raises the dead. He begins; He proceeds on the basis of resurrection. This is a constant, continuous, repeated thing in the onward movement of God. It is not just that God repeats the thing, but that every fresh expression of resurrection sees some increase, and some advance upon what was before. We could say that the death seems to be deeper, but if that is true, then the resurrection must be the greater.

I am trying to define for you, dear friends, a true spiritual experience, and a true character of that which God wants to have: it is this that is the testimony to the Living God. What is true about the beginning of God, always in resurrection, and His continuance, progressiveness, will be true, as we know from the Scripture, in the consummation of everything. The last thing which sets the crown upon all the work of God will be the resurrection! Final resurrection — spiritual and physical, and of the creation again — raised as from this death of corruption. The mighty and glorious emergence! The point is, that all this is the way in which God shows that He is the Living God. It is very real to know the Living God.

And then, in the third and final connection, reality is found in the truly spiritual church. In the cross, in Resurrection, in the truly spiritual church. I am not now speaking of something which is called the church, but that which is *"the church of the Living God"*.

What is meant by that word, that name, that designation, 'the church', "*the church which is His body*" is, if it is the true church, that the Living God is resident and is to be found there. If the Lord has here in this world, anywhere, a true representation of the church, the thing that will mark that will be the presence of the Lord.

That sounds very simple; perhaps it does not sound very wonderful to you. But, after all, that is the thing which decides and settles everything, does it not, as to the church? If it is true that the church is the church of the Living God, the place of His residence, then, wherever that is represented, the thing which must be more dominant and real than anything else is: "*The Lord is there.*" Whatever you may say about the people, or about this or that, you have to say: The Lord is there! you find the Lord there; you meet the Lord there. That does determine whether it is the church of the Living God or not. Not, in the first place, in the teaching or the practice, but the Presence of the Lord. It is the place where He is resident!

It is the place where He presides, not just as a guest, but as the host; not as a member, but as the Head, where the Lord Himself is in charge, Lord over all things. The true church of the Living God is, according to the Word, the true church of the Living God — where the Lord is in charge.

It is the place of the Lord's jealousy. According to the Word, the Lord is jealous for His House; He is jealous for the place where His Name is; He is jealous for His dwelling place; He is jealous with a great jealousy and a great wrath, when He has anything that is the 'church of the Living God'. There we meet the jealousy of God.

Now, dear friends, that last statement contains a very great deal that you and I must ever try to keep in mind. I am speaking about reality. Reality working in two ways now as to the church as the House of God. If this does correspond and answer to this title, 'the church of the Living God', then to be in that, and a part of that, on the one side, carries with it many great and peculiar blessings, advantages, things which are for us. We shall find peculiar values in that 'House of God', peculiar values of relatedness, of the Lord coming to us on that ground, on that ground of His church. It will be a House of Bread; it will be a House of wealth, spiritual riches; it will be a House of encompassing and comfort. It will have many values and many advantages if it is the church of the Living God. We may fall far short of the ideal, and of this truth, but this is the thing that we have always had before us, that it should be like this. And on the other side, this involves us in responsibilities. And things work here. We could say much as to history in our own experience as a people over the past thirty and more years, as we have seen the principles of the House of God sadly and seriously violated, with the most terrible consequences. The knowledge of the truth of the House of God, may be almost deliberately violated, with tragic results in lives. It is a big and terrible story on that side. But on the other side, what blessing, what enrichment, what good. The point is, that the House of God is not a place, it is not an idea, a truth, a thing, but the House of God is a terrible but glorious reality! Would we have it otherwise?

Now again, we are challenged with this. Do we want just to go to the meetings, and go home, and keep on doing that sort of thing, year after year, and carrying on something, almost like a performance? Or, do we want this thing to work? Do we want it to be gloriously, and yet, if necessary, terribly real? Do we want that it shall be the Living God with whom we have to do? If so, it is like that. We have got to come into the mind of God about His House, and if we do, we come into the great values and blessings of the church of the Living God. If we violate the principles of the House of God we meet something. You see, Paul put his finger upon that at Corinth: "*For this cause, many of you are sick, and some even die!*"! There you are, the thing was real. It is the church of the Living God! There are responsibilities resting upon us in the House of God, which is the church of the Living God. There are great blessings to be realised and to be enjoyed in the church of the Living God. Well, it is reality, reality in everything, livingness, something that works.

And dear friends, we should be continuously in prayer that we should be saved from something that is empty form, just carrying on a tradition; this settling down into something which is accepted and established. But that we should be kept continually in the line of reality in every way; that should be the prayer among us continually: 'Lord, whatever it means, make it real; whatever it costs, keep it real; don't let us become a formal people, a people just set in a way. But, keep things living; keep things real; keep things working all the time, if needs be, against what is wrong, what is false, what is evil.' The uncovering of all things, that, being hidden, simply hold the Lord up, so that He cannot go on with us. 'Lord, if it must be, uncover it; let us have it all out in the light. Lord, be faithful; be true; be right.'

Now, if you read again the early chapters of the Book of the Revelation, you will see that all that I have been saying is found there, and: "*I am He that liveth*" — "*I was dead, but behold I am alive for evermore, and have the keys*" — the symbol of authority. And now, "*to the churches ...*". It is the Living God who is bringing everything to judgment, to bless where He can bless, as things correspond to His mind; to judge with terrible judgment where things are otherwise. But He is there, making His mighty appeal to the churches, to get into line with Himself as the One who lives. You see, it is 'livingness' that governs everything; it is the 'livingness' of the Lord. 'Oh you churches, you cannot just go on as though the Lord were far away and out of touch and out of relationship, and it is all just a system of things.' No! He is the Living God, right here on the spot, presenting Himself, and everything has got to be very real in the presence of the Living God.

Well, I hope that in striking the serious note, for it is a serious matter, and it is a matter which brings us into the realm of very great reality, that that serious side is well offset by reminding you that if things do measure up to the meaning of this very title of the Lord, 'The Living God', in the midst, then it becomes the place of very great blessing, very great enrichment. The Living God for us is no small thing. To have His jealousy for us is no small thing. To have Him in the midst of us is no small thing. So we have 'this ministry', the ministry of revealing, manifesting the reality of the Living God.

Look again at that whole letter from which these words, 'this ministry', are taken, and you see how everything is living. It is all so real. May the Lord make it like that with us!