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Golden
Candlestick*

**THE CROSS OF OUR LORD
JESUS CHRIST**

Part 2

T. Austin-Sparks

Volume 206

**THE CROSS OF OUR LORD
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by T. Austin-Sparks

This is a transcription of the Easter Conference at Honor Oak, London, during World War II.

THE CROSS AND SPIRITUAL MINISTRY

There is a word I want to say before we come to the message of the cross in the second letter to the Corinthians, and that is as to the fruitfulness of our lives. Just how much does what we hear work out in real fruitfulness of life? John 15 still stands — “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; *so* shall ye be my disciples.” I understand ‘disciples’ to be the taught ones of the Lord Jesus, not just one who follows, but one who is taught by Him — one who is taught by the Lord Jesus is one who brings forth much fruit to the glory of the Father. While we do not want to turn in upon ourselves in a wrong way, I think we must really consider this matter of the fruitfulness of our lives. We always cling to the comfort that we may not see all the fruit of our lives; very often there is fruitfulness of which we know nothing. Nevertheless we should be concerned about fruitfulness; it should be a matter which really exercises us deeply. Each one of us ought really to be greatly concerned about this matter that we should be in the position and in the way of real fruitfulness. We ought to be asking ourselves, Am I a fruitful branch in the Vine? Is the life of the Lord flowing through me in fruitfulness, manifested in fruitfulness? I say again, there may and always will be fruit which may be very largely unconscious, but do not let us hide behind that fact and take fruitfulness for granted. We should be really deeply moved about this matter of fruitfulness, the fruitfulness of our individual lives to the glory of the Father, and it is with that before us that we meet together and we speak the Lord’s Word. And may I appeal to you, because the concern of which I am speaking is as much mine as it is yours. I mean that I am just as deeply concerned about this thing as ever I could wish you to be. The thing that matters for me here on this earth is how much the Lord is getting by my being here, and I want that to be your concern, and to come to the Word of the Lord with that before us. Let us come before the Word of the Lord which will be spoken and all the time take the Word, view the Word, with an end before us, and that end greater fruitfulness in our lives. Let us ask the Lord for a deepening concern for fruitfulness of life. Unto that, of course, we must really ask Him for a deepening concern for

the spiritual lives of others. We do not want fruitfulness for its own, or for our own sakes, for our gratification or glory. The safeguard against that is a real concern for others. May it not be that a lack of fruitfulness is often caused by no real concern for others? I mean this, if really we look upon the lives of others, the unsaved around us and the children of God around us with a real concern for them, we should come back to the Lord with greater anguish of spirit to discover the secrets of fruitfulness. How can we meet that need? How can we really speak to them in a way which will be spiritually fruitful? That kind of exercise is the most healthy thing, and perhaps the most direct way to real fruitfulness, something so different from just living within ourselves or within our own little circle, shut in. Now let us ask the Lord that this word may see us viewing everything from the standpoint of greater fruitfulness in our lives. Having said that, we are able to come to the next part of message, which is in 2 Corinthians.

We are looking at the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ in its manifold application. We saw what the letter to the Romans has to say about the cross of the Lord Jesus and the particular revelation of the cross there, and then we followed on with the first letter to the Corinthians and the message of the cross there; respectively, in Romans, the cross and the sinful body of the flesh, and 1 Corinthians the cross and the natural man.

Now we come to the second letter to the Corinthians — the cross and spiritual ministry, which goes right to the heart of this matter of fruitfulness. Let us look at one or two fragments in order to note the place of the cross here. “For as the sufferings of Christ abound unto us, even so our comfort also aboundeth through Christ” (2 Cor. 1:5). You see the cross and spiritual ministry linked together in this portion — the sufferings of Christ abounding to us and then our comfort in those sufferings abounding. That is spiritual ministry through the cross at work in us. “But thanks be unto God, who always leadeth us in triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest through us the savour of his knowledge in every place” (2 Cor. 2:14). “Thanks be unto God who leadeth me from place to place in the train of His triumph to celebrate His victory over the enemies of Christ” (2 Cor. 2:14 Conybeare).

His victory — that is the cross working out from place to place in ministry, the cross and spiritual ministry.

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels,” (“in vessels of fragile clay” — Conybeare), “that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves; we are pressed on every side, yet not straitened; perplexed, yet not unto despair; pursued, yet not forsaken; smitten down, yet not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body. For we who live are

always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you ... knowing that He that raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also with Jesus, and shall present us with you" (2 Cor. 4:7-12,14).

These are words full of this message of spiritual ministry by the working of the cross, the death of the Lord Jesus.

"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again. Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh: even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more. Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new. But all things are of God" (2 Cor. 5:14-18^a).

So much for the Scripture which will help us in this message.

The basis and nature of spiritual ministry

Now we must come to see in the first place the basis and nature of all really spiritual ministry, and when we speak of spiritual ministry, we are only using other words for fruitfulness of life, to God's pleasure, and this letter makes it very clear to us that the basis and nature of all spiritual ministry is *the outshining of Christ as glorified*. If you think of it for a moment that is essentially the meaning of Pentecost, the very essence of the fulness of the Spirit. There can be no fruitfulness, no spiritual ministry, apart from the filling of the Holy Spirit. Do you realize that? The filling of the Holy Spirit is indispensable to fruitfulness, to spiritual ministry. The great fruitfulness of the day of Pentecost was the result of their all being filled with the Spirit. You trace through the New Testament and you find that whenever it was said that they were filled with the Spirit, you have some real fruit following, some rich result, and you will find in this letter of which we are speaking, the Spirit has a very real place. The apostle says, in the first place, "God who anointed us and gave us the earnest of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 1:21,22), and then he says that the revelation is not given now externally with pen and ink on tables of stone, but by the Spirit of the living God upon tables which are hearts of flesh, and that writing upon the hearts of flesh is the revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ in hearts of flesh by the Spirit of the living God (2 Cor. 3:3). Later he speaks of the veil being taken away. "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); that is, there is absolute

release from the veil of the Old Testament and now there is the undisguised, unveiled, showing forth of the Lord by the Spirit. The old dispensation was a dispensation of the veil, that is, things were seen in shadow, in a veiled way, in a half-hidden way. Now, things which were partial, only types and symbols, have passed, and the fulness has come in, which is Christ, to whom they all pointed, and there is no longer any need for a veil to be there. The fulness has come in, the Spirit is here to reveal clearly the effulgence of God's Son without a veil over our hearts. The Spirit means the veil is taken away from our hearts and Christ is unveiled — freedom from the veil where the Spirit is Lord. And yet once again — “We ... beholding ... the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18) — the *Spirit*. You see the place of the Spirit in this letter bringing Christ in unveiled fulness of glory into view as in the heart, and it is the outshining of Christ glorified in the power and fulness of the Spirit which is spiritual ministry and real fruitfulness.

Well, that is enough to bring us to real exercise if we went no further. It challenges us on the question of the Spirit's place in our lives, the Spirit's free place, free way, unhindered, being filled with the Spirit. There is no fruitfulness otherwise; we can settle that. Unto fruitfulness then the Spirit must have a free and full place in every one of us, and if we are concerned about fruitfulness of life, we must get before the Lord very definitely on this matter of the Spirit's unhindered place in our lives. Do not be afraid of this matter of being filled with the Spirit. Do not allow all the mischief that Satan has done by the most precious and most fruitful truth to set up fear in your hearts. I know that there is no realm in which Satan has been more successful than in the realm of the fulness of the Spirit by his counterfeits. But we are not going to allow the fact that Satan counterfeits every good thing to rob us of the good things, are we? Do not be afraid, therefore. The Holy Spirit still is the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit still means to fill the child of God if He can, and therefore the fruitfulness of the life of a child of God depends entirely upon whether the Holy Spirit fills that life. We must settle the fact before we come to the method. It is one thing or the other. We are going to be fruitful or unfruitful. That means we are either going to be here for the glory of God or we are going to be here not to the glory of God. Well, if we look at the fact and are really concerned about this matter, we are then ready to come to the next thing.

The place of the cross in spiritual ministry

Now we come to the place of the cross in spiritual fruitfulness or spiritual

ministry, if you like, the place of the cross in relation to the fulness of the Spirit, for that is what it means. Paul is so full and rich in this letter as to the great fruitfulness and fulness of life which results from a certain application of the cross. He gives us as the background of spiritual ministry the work of the cross in our own lives, in our own experiences. Here in this word in 2 Cor. 1:5: “the sufferings of Christ abound unto us”, that is the work of the cross. It has nothing of the redemptive work or the atoning work. Now it is the fellowship of His sufferings, now it is the work of His cross to get the way clear for His life. Then in 2 Cor. 4:10: “always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body”, there is the cross in connection with fruitfulness. The sufferings of Christ abound; therefore the comforts, the ministry of comfort, abounds. The putting to death of the Lord Jesus borne about in the body issues in the life of the Lord Jesus manifested, shining out, in our bodies. Well then, ministry is just the passing out of that which has become known of Christ through a deep need. The consciousness of deep need brought about in us is the work of the cross and out of that we get to know the Lord.

Have we yet really settled it — I do not think we have because our conduct and our attitude of mind and heart in times of trial and of suffering rather betrays us that we are not settled on it — that there is no real knowing of the Lord apart from a deep and terrible sense of the need to know Him? Really the genuine and spiritual knowledge of the Lord is only gained through deep, terrible and conscious need of knowing Him, We never know the Lord by going to meetings, hearing addresses — never. We only hear truths which will help us if we will take hold of them and take them before the Lord and have real dealings with Him about them, and say, Lord, I have heard that and, if that is true, You must make that good in me. I have heard that there is no fruitfulness of life apart from my being filled with the Spirit. If that is true, then I must know what it means to be filled with the Spirit. And now, Lord, if there is no real fruitfulness of life apart from a real knowledge of Thyself, and if there is no real knowledge of Thyself apart from a deep and terrible consciousness of the need of such, then Lord I count on you to bring about that knowledge in me and give me grace for the sufferings of Christ which will produce it!

Here is Paul saying that he was able to comfort, to pass on to them abundance of comfort because he had been down to the depths. I would have you know the sufferings that befell us in Asia, how deep they were — we despaired of life! We are able to comfort you now because we have found comfort in the depths, the Lord has shown us His comfort when we needed it! That is spiritual ministry, that is fruitfulness, when you are able to comfort by

saying, My dear friend, I know what it is to go down into the depths even of despair and to make a discovery of the Lord when I thought that everything was at an end, a discovery which has saved me from my depths of despair, and I can tell you what the Lord is when everything else fails! That is spiritual ministry, you see, that is the shining forth of Christ glorified. The people who know that carry something with them, there is something about them. It may not be shining on their faces, but there is something about them and you have to say that person has been in the depths and knows the Lord. I wish I had what they have got! That is the result of the sufferings of Christ. It is simply the passing out of that which has become known of Christ through inwrought need. Spiritual ministry or fruitfulness is the ministration of life which has been received through deep death.

We despaired of life, Paul says. He gives us the meaning of his experience. He says, We were brought there that we might not trust in ourselves, but in God who raised the dead, (2 Cor. 1:9). Paul was able to say, Look here, I have been to the place where I despaired of life, where everything was at an end for me. I saw no future, I thought my life and my work were finished; death was an awful present reality, and at that moment it was a question as to whether to accept death, yield to death, believe that all was finished, or to lay hold of God by the hand of faith as the God of resurrection and in faith trust Him that if He did not mean this to be the end, then it should not be the end. If in His mind this was only a death unto life and not death unto an end, then we claim the life! And Paul would have said in other words, That is what it was, we made a new discovery! The Lord had brought us down there not to let us go out this time but to make us know how deep down the power of His resurrection can reach, and what a mighty power that is, for this death was such a terrible thing! I have been wondering, and I have had reason to wonder whether, when the Lord's time comes for us to go, when it is in the Lord's purpose that we should pass to be with Him, death is really a terrible thing, and I have doubts about it. I certainly have serious doubts as to whether it ought to be. And when the Lord's time comes, with Paul we might be able to say, I have finished my course! I am not going to fall a victim to horrible death, I am going out in triumph! But, on the other hand, it seems to me when death confronts us and it is not in the will of God, it is always an awful thing and that betrays it and whether, when a thing is awful, we ought not to refuse it. That is how it seems to me Paul dealt with it. This awful, horrible experience he had in Asia, whether it was not just the devil and all the power of death to put him out. It was Satan there as the lord of death seeking to swamp and overwhelm this servant of God and cause him to finish up in despair, in defeat, a man pushed out by Satan, and God who raised the dead is

not just setting back the hour of our departure but overpowering all the power of Satan and death, and when we know even a little of that, (not many of us know much about it), we have discovered something that is going to be of value for spiritual ministry; it is going to be fruitful. If you cannot understand what I am saying, do not worry, but this is a principle, I think, that works in many connections.

I believe that when the Lord wants us to go through an ordeal, it may be an ordeal, but if it is the Lord for us, it is possible to go through that without fear or dread. But when Satan confronts us with an ordeal, it is always accompanied by terrible fear and that betrays it. If I am presented with some course which it seems I have to take, and the presentation is accompanied by an awful fear and dread, I am suspicious. I have learned that in the course of years. I stand back and ask, Is this the devil trying to get me to take something on? This does not savour of the peace of God. The will of God is something accompanied by peace. Satan's will is always accompanied by something dreadful. Well, that is how it was in the matter of death with Paul at Ephesus. He made a discovery and he was able to say, "God who raised the dead". It is life out of death. That is the secret of real fruitfulness. But oh, it is costly; it is the cross. Now we are not going to be very fruitful or as fruitful as the Lord would have us to be unless we are going to know something about the sufferings of Christ in this way — that we know God who raised the dead. Oh, how much we owe already to the great reality of the God of resurrection in our history, not only in our physical history but in the history of our spiritual experience. Again and again we have gone down and almost gone out spiritually. God has raised the dead. We are not out yet. Again and again the work of the Lord has gone down, it seemed almost to be overwhelmed, hidden, as though it were finished, and God has raised the dead. Our past great experiences of the Lord have departed from us, have ceased to be what they were. It seems as though we have lost a great thing which was everything to us. God has raised the dead, and in every resurrection there is something more than there was, something more than that which went down into death. It is like the recurrent tides: every fresh tide seems to go further out than ever, but comes further up than ever next time. It is like that. That is fruitfulness. That is the cross. Spiritual ministry is the supply of Christ known through constant emptying, weaknesses and a deepening sense of dependence upon the Lord. Emptying! Well, I am keeping very close to this letter. You must read it again in the light of what I am saying.

Emptiness! Hear what the apostle cries. "Who is sufficient for these things?" He is only saying in other words, I am not sufficient, I do not know anybody who is sufficient, but then he says, "Our sufficiency is of God." That

is faith, of course, on the positive side, but if you leave that out, you give it up. Who is sufficient for these things? Emptiness, weakness, inability to face demands. “We have this treasure in vessels of fragile clay” (2 Cor. 4:7). I do not think Saul of Tarsus was like that. All the evidences seem to be that he was anything but a vessel of fragile clay when he was persecuting and chasing those Christians from city to city, country to country — no vessel of fragile clay there. But he is now a vessel of fragile clay. “Our outward man perishes” (2 Cor. 4:16, AV). “The earthly house of this tabernacle being dissolved ... in it we groan” (2 Cor. 5:1,2), longing, waiting to be clothed upon with our habitation which is from heaven. Well, there are all the evidences of a deep conscious dependence upon the Lord every moment in the life of the apostle. But it was through that which was the working of the cross in the hands of the Holy Spirit in him that he came to know the supply of Christ — Christ, his fulness in emptiness, his strength in weakness, his sufficiency in dependence. So, what he ministered was not of his own resource in any way, but it was just Christ; Christ was outshining. That is fruitfulness. It is by way of the cross, beloved.

And this all resolves itself into one thing, and it means this, that the death position to all of nature makes a way for the release of the life of Christ. “Always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Christ that the life ...” (2 Cor. 4:10). The death position to all of nature means the release of the life of Christ.

What ministry is

Yes, that is all very good, but how does this come out in ministry? Well, in this letter, it simply resolves itself into a matter of personal testimony. That is what I find here. It is Paul all the time giving his testimony. Paul was a great preacher. Some have thought he was an orator. Maybe, but Paul helps me most when he is testifying, and I believe that that lay behind all his ministry and was the very essence of all his ministry. There is no man who is more autobiographical than Paul. No man used the personal pronoun more than he did. No one can ever honestly, if they have any purity of heart and mind and motive, can ever say it was bragging or egotism. No, it was testimony. That is ministry; that is fruitfulness — your testimony. But I do not find that Paul is always talking about something that happened long years ago on a certain day at a certain place. On such and such a day and year he found the Lord and that was the beginning and end of his testimony. How up-to-date Paul’s testimony is! It is *today*, miracles today, the wonder of Christ *today*, new discoveries of Christ *today*. The cross keeps testimony alive and up-to-date.

The work of the cross will make things living today. You know the full river and overflow of Paul's testimony in this letter. I want you to read it again. The remarkable thing is that the deepest sufferings are here, yet the overflow of testimony to what the Lord is, is constituting ministry. You note the personal pronouns in this letter.

Then there is a phrase which was a criticism hurled at him by his critics in Corinth — Paul has some enemies in Corinth who do not like him. They said, You can have Paul, if you like. I like Apollos. Others said, I have no place for Paul, I like Peter. These were critics and enemies of Paul in Corinth — and one of the things they said about Paul was, He is beside himself! He takes it up. "Whether we are beside ourselves ...". He is quoting them. Why should they say that he 'was beside himself? Have you seen a person beside themselves with excitement, unable to contain themselves, just overflowing, when they have lost control of themselves? We call it hysteria. Were the critics of Paul right? Well, to all appearance they were right. There was something there which justified the criticism. Paul did not repudiate it. What is it, then? It is the overflow, the full river, and it was that very thing that resulted in two things. It was this testimony. Paul was saying, I know the Lord, I know the Lord as the power of resurrection to bring you right up from the depths of dark despair! I know the Lord as the mighty Comforter when you have lost everything, and everything seems to have gone and you have gone wrong and everybody seems to have turned against you! I know what the comforts of God are! He was talking like that and they said, You are mad, you are beside yourself. When they said that, it issued in two things. Of course, it meant opposition. The testimony brought out the opposition. If you and I have got a testimony born out of deep experience which those who have not had our experience do not possess, which testimony is not theirs because they have never gone through the depths as we have to discover the Lord, then you may take it that it will not be long before some of those people become your persecutors. People who have not been the same way never understand and they always misinterpret. They say something has gone wrong, you have become eccentric, you are beside yourself, you have lost your balance. Well, do not be surprised. The Lord leads you through a deep way and then reveals Himself to you in a deep way and you have a testimony that is beyond the ordinary — do not think that everybody is going to accept it. Don't you imagine that they are all going to jump at your testimony. You will find people, like those at Corinth, say you are singular, extraordinary or abnormal; this is not the normal Christian life. They will not understand.

Well, that must be recognized, but it brought out something else. It brought out this beautiful thing.

“For whether we are beside ourselves, it is unto God ... For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died ... Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh” (2 Cor. 5:14,15,16).

What is Paul really meaning? These carnally-minded critics at Corinth, listening to Paul’s testimony couched in such personal language with the person pronoun so much in evidence — I, I, I — said: Man, you are an awful braggart, you are boasting; this is self-glorification, you are bringing yourself very much into view! This is the thing I hate about Paul, he is always talking about himself! And he, in effect, says: You, with a fleshly or carnal mind, are judging me according to your own standard, you are viewing me after the flesh, after fleshly standards, you do not know the meaning of this, you do not see that this is the mighty, constraining, surging love of Christ! You think that this is mere man, mere nature, mere flesh, coming out in boasting: you are judging me after the flesh! My dear friends, if you knew the meaning of the cross of Christ, you would not judge me like that, you would recognize that in the cross of Christ I as a man died with all my boasting, with all my self-glorifying, and now my viewpoint is altogether changed by the cross! I view no man like that. If I were to view the Corinthian critics like that, I would have something to say about them, but I love you all the more, the love of Christ constrains me! Do you see the cross? Paul could never have gone on with his ministry if he had viewed people, especially his critics and enemies, after the flesh, and neither will you or I go on with ministry. We will never be of any use to others if we are taking account of what they are naturally. Our real spiritual value and ministry is only possible if the cross has really dealt with the ‘I’ in us that judges other people according to our own natural standards, and has so displaced that ‘I’ that the love of Christ now fills the ‘I’ place, and when they criticize and when they oppose and when they persecute, the love of Christ constrains — we love.

What I am trying to get at is this, that I believe that one of the greatest and most fruitful aspects of the ministry or life of Paul was here, that he loved so much where he was not loved. It is marvellous. Paul was not turned aside by opposition, even from Christians. He was never embittered; he never turned upon them and became their enemy because they opposed him. He went on loving them when they misinterpreted even his apparent boasting, his testimony, and put it down to the worst motives and the most polluted stream or spring, and said, it is all coming from the self-glorifying of this man! When they did that, he loved, he went on loving, and I believe that was one of the most effective things in Paul’s life. I wish we had the divine genius of friendship, that love of Christ which does not alienate people who do not like us.

It is the easiest thing in the world, if people do not like us, for us to say, All right, you can go and I do not care, I have no place for you! Real fruitfulness comes when someone takes up an antagonistic attitude, says the worst things, and misunderstands, distorts and twists your purest motives. Yet the love of Christ in you says, That is the person I am not going to give up, that is the person that I am going to love through! It requires the love of Christ to do that, but the greatest trophies have often been those people who fought most. Here is Saul of Tarsus; he is out against the Lord Jesus with every ounce and drop of his energy. The Lord loved the man right through and he became His greatest trophy. Lord, put that love into our hearts! That is spiritual ministry; that is fruitfulness. You see, ministry is not just taking the Bible and giving addresses. It is the work of the cross wrought in us that even though others misinterpret and twist and distort, we know what the cross has done in us, we know it is our boasting, we know it is our testimony, we know it is something the Lord has done. We are not speaking of anything but that which the Lord has made known Himself to us. That is fruitfulness. Will you come back to the beginning of this word and ask the Lord about this, that we shall be fruitful in this way.

THE CROSS AND A LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

“For I through the law died unto the law, that I might live unto God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me” (Gal. 2:19-20).

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

“And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof” (Gal. 5:24).

“But far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Gal. 6:14).

We pass now into the message of the cross in the letter to the Galatians. Here it is the cross in relation to spiritual life and liberty in the power of the Holy Spirit. We have read the fragments which have special mention of the cross. They are very familiar.

The basis of life

It is not our thought to make a study of this letter to the Galatians, but rather to seek its resultant meaning, to know what its message is and what the issues are which arise from the letter. The first and inclusive thing which this letter shows is that the churches in Galatia came into being on the basis of life, not on the basis of a system of truth or doctrine, not on the ground of an interpretation of Scripture, not by having brought to them a new religious order or a prescribed manner of life and behaviour, but purely on a basis of life. This is shown to be the first meaning of the cross. That first reference to the cross in Galatians 2:20 makes this very clear. “I have been crucified with

Christ; nevertheless I live; yet it is no longer I, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith which is in the Son of God”, and the emphasis is all the time to be placed upon that word ‘live’. I live, Christ lives, that which I live — because it is set over against that which had come into the churches in Galatia to bring them again into death. We shall refer to that as we go on, but I am content with this simple beginning, and I do trust that none of us will be stumbled at the simplicity, because I do feel that this really goes to the root of things. What was true in the case of the churches in Galatia must be true of every church and every believer, that they do not come into being on any other basis than that of life. We may be quite sure, and we shall be made well aware in due course that, if any believers are found together on a basis of truth, doctrine, interpretation of Scripture or some prescribed form of life, that will be a very dead community; it will not get very far, it will constitute a dead weight. The only prospect of any Christian life or any Christian gathering, church, is that in every single case and instance it is a matter of coming in solely and purely upon a basis of life. That is where the emphasis is, and that amounts to this affirmation being possible in the case of everyone as something which has taken place, and I want to challenge you with it.

Can you — not as a statement of doctrine, not as a fragment of Scripture or something which is set before you as an article in your faith — but can you right out of the depth of your heart in honesty before God say as your experience, “I have been crucified with Christ, yet I live, and yet it is no longer I, but Christ lives in me, and that life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me”? Can that come out from your heart as something of an utterance of real experience? If not, the foundation is wrong, the basis is false, you will not get very far, you will be a dead weight upon the work of God, the saints of God, the Spirit of God.

Revelation the essence of spiritual life

Now, let us look into this and see what this life basis really meant in the case of Paul and these believers in Galatia in the first instance. You see, the very strength or essence of this life is that it was a revelation. Paul makes that perfectly clear as to his own case and he builds or bases all he has to say to these believers upon that very thing so far as he himself was concerned. His opening of the letter is unique; it differs from the opening or introduction to other letters. This is how he begins, and he is at his point at once; he does not wait very long to give an extensive introduction to his message, he is right

at it in the first sentence. “Paul, an apostle, (not from men, neither through man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead)” (v.1).

He says that with an object, a very definite purpose. Paul, an apostle, sent not from men nor by man — and he later in the same chapter enlarges upon that a little as you will see in verse 11 and 12: “I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (AV).

The very essence of spiritual life is revelation and the question which arises at once is this — Where did it come from in my case? How did I come by it? Where did I get it? What is the nature of my apprehending of it? Did I go to a certain place where they teach certain things and felt that the teaching there was quite good, right and proper, and so I joined that place and accepted their teaching? I went to hear so-and-so and he was so convincing in his matter and in his manner that I had to believe that he was right and so I have been sitting under him ever since. Paul says he went to the chief apostles in Jerusalem but they that were pillars gave him nothing. “I received it not from man.” I am not saying that you cannot get it through men; that is a different thing. But is it something which you have accepted or adopted? Is it the teaching of a place, a community, certain teachers and you like it, believe it to be right, or has it shone clean into your heart by the power of the Holy Spirit so as to become to you something which might never have been revealed to anyone else? That is how it affects you. You have seen and you wonder if anybody else has seen it as you have. Of course they have, but that is the effect. It has become your revelation of Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit having revealed Christ, the meaning and significance of Christ, the content and implications of Christ to you. Maybe it was in a small and imperfect measure at the beginning, but no matter how small and imperfect the measure it has come like that as though God Himself had come out of heaven and shown you that. The churches in Galatia came into being on that basis. Paul was the channel; he was the instrument. In his case it had become a firsthand revelation of the Lord and then through the Holy Spirit by his instrumentality they had seen. It had wonderful effects upon them and they thanked God. It is true they thanked God for the instrument. He says they would have torn out their very eyes for him and given them to him in their gratitude to God for what had come to them, but you do not do that sort of thing unless you are deeply, overwhelming grateful to God for something. They glorified God in him. It was thankfulness to the Lord. That is life. It is a question of whether it is by revelation or from men. It may be revelation through men, but it is not *by* men, it is revelation by the Spirit of God.

Now, if we said no more and really tarried with that and received the challenge, perhaps it would be enough to drive us on to our knees and to cry to the Lord, Oh, Lord, where am I? We have got to be supremely practical over this because it is this whole question of life and death. It was a life and death battle that was being fought for the churches in Galatia. It has been called 'Paul's battle for Galatia', and it indeed was no less an issue than that of life and death spiritually, and this is it — revelation or from men? Paul says, So far as I am concerned, not of man, not even the great apostles at Jerusalem. Listen! It would be better for us to all go away, leave this or any other assembly, and meet this challenge to start right again from the beginning by coming onto the basis of our own personal knowledge, revelation by the Holy Spirit, of Jesus Christ, than for us to go on on the basis of some teaching, some interpretation, something already settled and fixed which obtains in that place. It really would be great gain if that sifting took place and the Lord had together just those who had, however small and simple and imperfect, a living revelation in their hearts of Himself, and who never advance beyond that measure, either in their talking or in their professing or in their work, but just keep to the measure of their personal revelation of the Lord Jesus and do not stretch themselves beyond their measure. It would be life.

What I mean is this, that there is so much today among Christians and in communities and fellowships of Christians which is like a pyramid standing upon its apex. It is top-heavy. The real measure of life and revelation is that little point upon which it is standing, and all this great bulk is teaching, things heard, listened to for years, accepted, talked about, phraseology. But it is not the real thing; the pyramid is upside down. Now the Lord wants it the other way. He wants that the basis shall be the fullest thing and the building shall go up always heavenward so that its crown, the top stone or headstone, is Grace, Grace! (See Zech. 4:7). I do feel that it is going to be necessary, unless this top-heavy thing is going to overbalance and crash, it is very necessary for us to face a question like this today. How much of all that I am in and associated with is real revelation in my heart of Jesus Christ, a living thing to me? That is the question, and that measure is the only justification for our being where we are. Every believer, every child of God, must come in on the basis of an open heaven. Now, you have thought that that phrase, 'an open heaven', is something for believers who are well advanced, well on the road, who have attained, reached a standard. But do remember that that phrase related to the very beginning of our Lord's life in connection with His baptism, His typical death, burial and resurrection. Then He had His open heaven and His

anointing, and we are not baptized when we reach a certain standard of Christian life. Baptism is not for mature believers. We put it there as the very foundation.

You and I have got to come into the church, into our vital union with Christ as a member of His Body on the ground of an open heaven. It is the birthright of every child of God to have an open heaven at once. When we speak of an open heaven, we are only using other words for saying, the Holy Spirit cleaving a way right from God into our spirit and keeping that way open for God to reveal Himself in Christ in our hearts to us, to set up the rule of a revelation of God in Christ within us. That is an open heaven, that is revelation and that is life. That is not just teaching.

It seems to me that the greatest danger, the most pernicious harm to the church's vitality is a coming to something already set and formed, a company of the Lord's people. Well, they believe and teach certain things; the interpretation of Scripture with them is such and such. These are the tenets or doctrines upon which they are constituted a body of Christians, something set, something crystallized, and then other people come to that, there is an accretion. It is the most pernicious and deadly thing. Have you experienced that? Well, if you have, no wonder there is arrest and death; it has become teaching. No wonder that souls are not saved, for I do not believe that we should ever get to such a place of such spiritual exaltation and heights of spiritual life that souls are not saved. Let us get rid of that at once! Let us deal with it. However much there may be a rising from certain levels of soul-saving methods, whatever there may be of the increase of the fulness of Christ, you and I as we go on with the Lord should never get away from the effect of our lives being the influencing of the unsaved — never! Don't ever think that you come into a place in spiritual things which is so full and so rich that now you have 'graduated' from the realm where the simple saving of the unsaved is something quite elementary and you have nothing to do with it. God forbid! I do not find in the New Testament that, however far believers advanced, the unsaved ceased to be a deep and great concern to them or ceased to be affected by their presence and by their testimony. Let us put that right if we have got wrong on that. This means that if we have no gospel for the unsaved, no testimony for the unsaved, no effect upon the unsaved by our lives because we have advanced so much in spiritual truth, there is something fundamentally wrong.

I know that I ought to stop to put in a parenthesis here. We may be accused of having no ministry to the unsaved, there are few definite evangelistic efforts made by us as a people, and perhaps you say that what I have just been saying is to our own condemnation. People who say that altogether fail

to understand what we are here for and fail to recognize that God does, from time to time, have need of an instrument to bring His own people into a better position that they may get on with the work, and this place and this ministry here is in order to help the Lord's people and the Lord's servants into a greater fulness of Christ that they shall go out and do that work, not to come in here and stay here and go on with us, and that to be the beginning and end. If you are not going out from this place with a registration upon those with whom you meet in this world, then the whole thing is a mockery; it is missing the object. This is a ministry to the ministry and we desire with all our hearts and pray God continually that the effect of this ministry shall be better servants of God in the world. I have put in the parenthesis, but don't ever get to that place where your concern for souls for whom Christ died has gone, however far you may go on with the Lord.

Now, I was saying the greatest peril is that there should be something already set up, some teaching, and people come and join that and adhere to that instead of coming into a revelation. I do ask you to get down before the Lord with this matter, every one of you. Are you in a certain company of the Lord's people because the Lord has revealed something to you, because you have a firsthand knowledge of the Lord by a work of the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit has really shone into your heart? Are you on that basis? Nor did He shine years ago, but He is shining, the thing has not become something of the past, but a living thing going on, for remember, if the cross does one thing, it keeps them alive, and it keeps things alive very often by taking us down into new depths. Some of you, some of us, have been taken down into new deaths, depths of death, darkness. What is the effect? If that were not the Lord, if that were not the Holy Spirit, if that were not the cross of Christ, you know what the effect would be. Probably you would give up everything and go back into the world or do something even more desperate than that, but the effect of it as in the hands of the Holy Spirit is to create in you a great cry and for what do you cry? It is the cry for a new knowledge of the Lord such as you have never had before and the Lord has created that cry. You never appreciate a new revelation until you come to the place where you cry in desperation for it. That is God's method. It is necessary to make things a matter of experience and not just doctrine, not just truth, and the cross is keeping things alive, moving, fresh, and every fresh application of the cross by the Spirit of the living God creates a fresh issue. This message of the cross is not just some truth or line of teaching. The cross is a mighty reality to keep the spiritual life fresh, to keep it open, to keep it growing, moving, and it means new life along the line of new revelation. Everyone must come in and abide on the basis of an open heaven, for this alone is life.

Life attacked by means of legalism

Then the next thing that is shown in this Galatian letter is that the enemy attacks life by means of legalism and, whether it is Jewish or whether it is Christian legalism, it is in effect the imposing or substituting of a form or a system, a set of commandments, in the place of the Holy Spirit. That is what comes out here very clearly in this letter, the imposing or the substituting of a form, a system, a set of commandments in the place of the Holy Spirit. Life, of course, has its laws, the Holy Spirit has His laws, the Body of Christ has its laws, the church has its laws, but while these are to be made known and their necessity has to be pressed home, it is only by an utter yieldedness to the Lordship of Christ that life is possible. I wonder if you realize what that means? We saw that legalism is the imposing of a set of laws, the substituting of a form for the Holy Spirit. Then the question arises, Are we to be people without any laws, rules or regulations? No, for life itself has laws, the church has laws, the Spirit of God has laws of spiritual life, but how are these laws to work out to life? Are we just to take them as laws and regulations and impose them upon ourselves and upon others, that is, to lay down the law and say, Now, this is the law of life, this is the law of the Spirit, and this is the law of the church, and you must, thou shalt, thou shalt not? Well, see the effect of that. It will be death. It is useless for us to say, Look here, the Body of Christ has certain principles, certain laws, and here they are and you have got to tow the line, you have got to come under these laws of the church, the Body of Christ and obey them! The effect of that will be death, bondage, but you cannot sweep those laws away and say they do not exist or do not matter. How shall we come into the value of those laws?

We shall come into the living value of those laws by one way only, and that is a complete surrender to the absolute Lordship of Christ by the Holy Spirit and that is what this letter teaches. The apostle is saying this to these Galatians: Look here, all the law will be fulfilled if Christ is Lord! In other words, if the Holy Spirit governs, it will be life, but if it is simply a matter of rules and regulations — thou shalt and thou shalt not — that is death. Satan is always trying to substitute for the Lordship of the Holy Spirit — a system of regulations, a legalistic order, and so he would counter life, he always fights against life by means of legalism. Remember that — bondage in any form is the work of Satan. The Lord never intended any of us to be in bondage. Satan has always, from the beginning, sought to bring people into bondage. Bondage can be brought about by anything, even divine truth, no matter what it is, being allowed to become legalistic. The great truth of the Body of Christ — its relationships, its order — is that it must not become legalistic or

it is bondage at once. It does not matter, you can put your hand on anything that is of God and allow it to become legalistic and it is bondage, no matter what it is. Satan is always trying to use the things of God to bring the people of God into bondage. That is, trying to live up to a standard, that is bondage.

For example, you come to a prayer gathering. In a certain place the standard is so-and-so and because you feel you cannot pray up to the standard there, what happens? You do not pray at all, you are in bondage, you are bound hand and foot, you have no liberty, and because there are so many people like that, the whole meeting is in bondage. There is no liberty, no flow, no release, no life, because people have mentally visualized a standard as the standard which obtains there and allowed it to come upon them in legalistic bondage, so that they cannot pray up to the 'standard'. And if they pray below the standard, they are coming under condemnation, so they do not pray at all; they are in bondage, they are bound. What are we to do then? Oh well, pray anyhow! Oh no, don't swing round the other way and say, We are going to wipe out all standards, all standards of prayer, have no consideration whatever for how we ought to pray, we will just start and get going as we think and feel! No, I am saying praying in the Holy Spirit gets you to God's standard. If you are really filled with the Holy Spirit as you ought to be as believers, you can afford to have no regard for standards, you are free. Because you cannot rise to that standard, you are not going to sink into the flesh. No, beloved, the point you see is this, that if you and I are living as we should be in the Spirit, walking in the Spirit, we have a living inward knowledge of the Lord, and then other peoples' standards or standards of truth as may be accepted in any realm should not trouble us at all. We ought to be free, and if there is any frowning, it is only if we move away in the flesh dissipating what is really spiritual, but give the simplest expression of a true heart relationship with the Lord, the simplest utterance out of spiritual life, and all bondage disappears, and God forbid that anybody should put legalistic bondage upon that. I have used prayer as an example but this applies to many other matters. We need not stay to mention them.

The cross and the fulness of the Spirit

We have got to be in the liberty of life and the liberty of life is the Holy Spirit in us moving, working, governing. This is not the liberty which is license and rides roughshod over all considerations, talks to no effect and wanders round the world in prayer, never getting anywhere at all. That is not liberty. Real liberty from bondage is to be under the government of the Holy Spirit and you will reach the Lord's standard, and you will go on to ever

higher levels of spiritual life. The cross does that, because the Holy Spirit uses the cross to deliver us from ourselves from what is not of the Spirit, what is not of Christ. The Holy Spirit leads us through the work of the cross, into the realm of life and it is simply coming back to this. The trouble with us is that the cross has not done its work somewhere; the cross has perhaps not been applied to our lips. We may have uncrucified lips, we just talk and talk, and our talk is very often mischievous and harmful and it has been known to do great damage even in prayer gatherings. But crucified lips are not silent lips; they are liberated, sanctified lips. Do not go from one extreme to the other. Or in some other way, the cross has not done its work. I do want to help you. Perhaps you say, How am I to know the cross has done its work and I am moving in the right realm? Well, I would just say to you, if you will seek to keep to the realm of your own life with God, that is all that is required. Don't do things because they are expected of you or for any other reason than that it comes out from your walk with the Lord, the life in the Spirit.

I am going to stop now without concluding, but I do want to conclude this meditation on a positive note. Beloved, what I feel so strongly to be the need of the Lord's children, my need, I think your need in most cases, is a new knowledge of the filling and anointing of the Holy Spirit to release us, to bring about the marks of life. The Holy Spirit is the clue to all our problems and the solution. The Holy Spirit is the answer to all our need. Remember the Holy Spirit never works apart from the cross of the Lord Jesus. If you keep that in mind, it will help you a lot. Oh, I used to pray so much for the filling of the Spirit, the baptism of the Spirit, a mighty work, a visitation of the Spirit, and then the Lord began to challenge me. Why do you want the baptism of the Holy Spirit? What is your object, your motive? Do you want to be a greatly-used man? Do you want to have a great deal of influence? Do you want a great experience? Why do you want this? Supposing I did it but you should never know that it was done, supposing I did it, and the result was that, instead of becoming recognized, popular and accepted, you became the off-scouring of all things, Public Enemy No. 1 among Christians? Supposing it brought you into the loss of everything? Well, is it now the fulness of the Spirit you want, or the advantages that would accrue? Well, ask yourself. You see, the Holy Spirit always works by the cross. Before there can be a fulness of the Spirit, there has got to be a deep and desperate emptying, a deep and terrible weakening, and we have got to be made very safe for any usefulness that we may be to the Lord. This is because this flesh is always ready to rise up and take hold on divine blessing and turn it to its own glory. The cross works through stakes in the flesh and messengers of Satan to buffet, to make us safe for revelation.

A Holy Spirit filled and governed life is a very humble, broken, empty thing; very often, in order that it should be that, a very suffering thing. Now, do you want the fulness of the Spirit? Why? Just for His glory, just for the Lord's own sake, no matter what it costs. We need the Spirit to solve our problems, to bring us into life. But do not let any one of us begin to prescribe for the Holy Spirit. The Lord may take you in altogether another direction from what you have prescribed. You think that, if you get filled with the Spirit and governed by the Spirit, anointed or baptized or whatever you may call it, your life becomes a Spirit-governed life, this is how it will work out. It will be nothing of the kind; it will be altogether different. Do not prescribe for the Holy Spirit, never set bounds to the Holy Spirit, never lay down laws for the Holy Spirit. All that we have to do is to be abandoned to the Spirit and let Him take His own way, whatever that may be. It may be something not pleasing to the flesh, nevertheless the Spirit has got to be Lord. It is one of the great messages of the Galatian letter.

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

The cross makes a way for the Spirit. “I have been crucified”.

To be continued.

