



the
**Golden
Candlestick**

**COVENANT RENEWAL AND THE
TESTIMONY OF JESUS**

**Excerpts of a conference by T. Austin-Sparks
and editorial comments**

Part 3

Volume 217

COVENANT RENEWAL AND THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS

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- Chapter six THE COVENANT, THE BLOOD AND
 LIVING UNION WITH GOD
- Chapter seven THE NEW COVENANT
- Chapter eight THE COVENANT AND THE HOUSE OF GOD

PREFACE

In this publication the editors have chosen to take excerpts from a conference held in Kilcreggan in August 1933 by T. Austin-Sparks and combine these with editorial comments on the Biblical texts that were used during this conference — mainly the book of Jeremiah — and some historical context. The reason for this approach is that the editors did not find the manuscript suitable for publication as a whole, but thought many of its passages were precious and edifying for the church. Also, T. Austin-Sparks' daughters have asked the editors to carefully look at material from before 1940, because according to them in later years of his ministry he revised his views on certain points, like the overcomers and the remnant. Though avoiding these controversial issues is left to the limited insights of the editors, they trust that these excerpts will not push the readers into a particular school of thought, but will be helpful in their understanding of the Scriptures and their walk with the Lord.

This issue contains chapters six, seven and eight of a total of eleven chapters. The quotations from the conference manuscript are marked with “...” and a sans serif type face is used. The editorial parts are marked with [Ed.].

THE COVENANT, THE BLOOD AND LIVING UNION WITH GOD

Reading: Exodus 24:1-11; Hebrews 9:19.

“Let us first take a brief glance at the covenant at Sinai in Exodus 24. Just glance at it. Exodus 24:1-11. You have all the elements there of which we have been speaking so far about the blood of the covenant. Here is the covenant as at Sinai which represents the charter of Israel’s nationality. We want to notice the development of this covenant at this point. We notice some slight, and yet important difference between Abraham and Moses. In Abraham’s case he provided the blood. In the case of Moses, that is, of the Passover, the Lord provided substitute blood. Here at Sinai half of the blood is from one side and half from the other, both being provided from a common and mutually accepted substitute symbolically. Here are the two sides of this covenant, two halves. I just want to mention that before passing on to the development of this in the covenant as we find it in Leviticus. It is really worthwhile studying Exodus 24, because of the fulness that is here. You have the whole of the constitution so far as the revealed mind of the Lord is concerned. The Lord has made known His mind; He has communicated that to His people. That is typically a foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus who is the Messenger of the Covenant, in whom the mind of God is fully revealed, and everything in living relationship to the Lord has to be according to Christ. The fragment: “As (the) truth is in Jesus” means God’s mind revealed in Christ, that God has summed up His specific revelation of Himself in the Lord Jesus. We

hear people say sometimes that they are learning the mind of the Lord from this or that, from nature, and from other things. Now for covenant or for living relationship with the Lord you do not get the Lord's mind in nature, or in anything else but in a personal, living knowledge of the Lord Jesus. It is important to remember that the Lord Jesus is the mind of God expressed as the basis of the new covenant and as the charter of nationality.

A chosen nation, a people for God's own possession, a people apart from all other peoples of the earth, in living relation to the Lord, are constituted upon the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. That is where you begin. So that the mind of God has been expressed, here in type upon tables of stone, in the antitype upon tables which are hearts of flesh; and the nature of the revelation is not with a pen and ink but with the Spirit of the living God, and the Spirit of the living God has shone into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It is all in the face of Jesus Christ that God is revealed in our hearts, as the new covenant, the basis of our heavenly nationality and the ground of living union with the Lord. To put all that in a word is, the basis of living union with God is Christ revealed in the heart. That is the basis. That is made living in virtue of the shed and sprinkled blood. It is the blood which brings that union into living reality and maintains it there. "If we walk in the light" — what light is that? "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ", the light which God has shone into our hearts by His Spirit: "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us (or keeps on cleansing us) from all sin." That means that the living communion with God is maintained by the blood as we go on in the light, as we walk according to the revelation. Sin can interrupt the fellowship; sin can bring about an arrest of the life; sin is disobedience to the light. Obedience to the light, which is meant by walking in the light, makes the way clear for the blood to keep the living fellowship going, by keeping sin from interrupting and paralyzing. So we have here first the revealed mind of God,

then secondly the blood sprinkled making it all living, establishing it in life. Then we have in that a covenant which includes both sides. Inasmuch as both sides provide blood there is this meaning, that God gives Himself, and man gives himself. Each is wholly for the other. God, in effect says: I am utterly for you when you are utterly for Me. There are two sides to this as we see in that breakdown in the Old Testament in Jeremiah: when they ceased to be utterly for the Lord, He ceased to be utterly for them. The covenant has mutual responsibilities.

And then the next thing which I would indicate here is the coming of the whole people as one body into this covenant. Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel; that is a representative company. When the Lord sent His disciples to the Jews He sent twelve; when He sent them to the regions beyond the covenant He sent seventy, and seventy is the number of the one Body, the whole Body of Christ, not just Jews but the heavenly company where the Jewish limitation has been destroyed and He "having broken down the middle wall of partition" has made "one new man", and in the blood of the eternal covenant the whole Body of Christ is sealed; it is a collective and a corporate thing which is represented here. Well, those are just basic facts to work upon.

Now I want to pass on to the covenant in the Levitical order of things as it is in the book of Leviticus. When we come to the book of Leviticus we find that we are met with a fresh emphasis upon the sacredness of blood. In such passages as 7:26 and 17:10 you find a tremendous new emphasis placed upon the sacredness of blood. Now at the heart of things here, the covenant in the Levitical order, we have the day of atonement, and I want you to be reminded of the order of things at this time. The priests who were engaged in this tabernacle service moved on a very clearly understood basis, a very clearly defined basis. There was an order, and they moved according to that order. They fulfilled their ministry at this time by a choice which fell by lot to them. That is, the priests were chosen for the various functions by lot. Their part in the daily sacrifice fell to them by lot, and there were degrees of importance, and the lot

decided what degree fell to them. The priest who was by lot first selected obtained a priority, a right over the others, and the nature of his priority was that he should receive into a vessel the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkle that blood. The next in order and of less importance than the priest who received the blood, was he who slew the sacrifice, and although slaying preceded the receiving and sprinkling of the blood, it was less important than the latter. It was a special honour and privilege to receive the blood and to sprinkle it. It was a lesser honour to slay the sacrifice. And so the one who by lot was chosen to take the first place had the vessel for receiving the blood; he took it, and sprinkled it. Then you are able to see where the emphasis is placed. The emphasis by God is placed upon that which carries with it the life. The principle of life is the thing upon which the main importance is made to rest in the order of God. The blood is the life, and the life is in the blood, so that the one who received that which represented and embodied the principle of life is in a place of special privilege and honour, and his is a ministry which is marked out as above other ministries. That sprinkled blood, you see, was taken and put on everything. That meant that everything touched by the blood was made alive to God. It immediately, in type, became a living, active thing in relation to the Lord. There were all the things made according to the pattern which God had shown: every detail was an expression of the Lord's mind, and the whole system existed completely as the Lord had ordered. But even then it was but the letter of the Word, perfect as such; nothing could be added to it to make it more perfect as an expression of the divine mind, but still it was inoperative, inactive, still it was not functioning. Not until the blood with its life principle was made to touch everything, did that thing and all those things spring into living relationship to the Lord and become an active system. It is the question of everything being alive unto the Lord, and that is accomplished by the sprinkling of blood. It is, as we have said, and we shall continue to stress, a question of a living, spiritual relationship to the Lord, and not just a system, or even the letter of the Word in its perfection as the letter. It is very possible to have

the letter of things so perfect, so accurate; you cannot find a flaw with the letter. It is all there so far as the letter is concerned, and yet you can miss something.

Beloved, it is possible for us to have the Word of God just perfect, believe in it, hold it, teach it, and no flaw can be found with the presentation or teaching of it. We have all the truth, all the Scriptures, all the doctrine, and nothing can be said by way of contradiction, and yet with all that there may be something missing, and that something is the most important thing of all. Not that you could have it without the Word, but to have the Word without it is to have something that is still dead although it is a mental apprehension of what is God's pure thought. Yes, we can have an apprehension of the purest thought of God, the most absolute truth of God, and it can still be dead. The testimony of the Lord is not a testimony to a system of truth that is a perfect representation of God's mind, God's thought; the testimony is the truth characterized by life. That is the heart of everything. That is what Jeremiah missed, and it was for that that Jeremiah fulfilled his ministry. And Jeremiah was in this position, that while this people would still claim to be performing the law, the Passover and the embodiment of all else, that did not for one moment justify God in suspending His wrath. What God was looking for and what Jeremiah was looking for was the spiritual, living union with God, deeper than the outward truth as merely systematized truth. When we have said that we have really touched the heart of the whole matter. This is what the Lord seeks and it is this that the Adversary contests up to the hilt. The enemy does not mind us having the truth, having teaching, the letter, the system of doctrine, and having it perfectly. He will not encourage us in that very often if he finds we are bent on that, but what he will do is to try and strike deadly blows at the spiritual expression of those spiritual things which make the truth live. We can have, for instance, the truth of the mighty power of Throne prayer over the forces of evil. We can have that truth and we can always be talking about it, but as soon as you begin to contemplate functioning in Throne prayer he does all he can to stop you praying. It is not the

teaching about prayer but the doing of it. If he can stop you short of doing the thing you are talking about, he has made your teaching, although true, a dead thing. It is the spiritual life that is the point.

What we are in is the mighty conflict with death. That is the point. Death is the ultimate and the supreme thing brought into God's universe through sin by the Devil. He is designated: "him that had the hold (power), of death". It was that with which Abraham had his hand to hand fight. The issue of Abraham's life is the testimony of resurrection. Everything for Abraham was tested out on that principle. Isaac is the fruit of a life-conflict with death. You see Sarah's state to begin with. Humanly speaking, Isaac was impossible. Then things were allowed by God to go on so long that Paul tells us in Romans 4 that Abraham "considered his own body now as good as dead". And everything goes into death all the way along until even after Isaac has been given by a miracle, he also has to be tested out in that realm, and the all-inclusive issue of Abraham's life is the power of resurrection, or, life triumphant over death, and the spiritual seed of Abraham are the spiritual seed on the principle of resurrection. Paul tells us quite clearly that every Jew is not an Israelite, every member of the earthly people of Israel is not a member of the heavenly Israel; God's Israel is the living Israel and not the historic Israel. Abraham, therefore, as the father of the race must have his entire life at every point based upon the principle of life triumphant over death. He comes out on that ground; he himself, his own body. His whole life, domestic, and every other realm is constituted upon the principle of resurrection life and from Abraham onwards, and even before Abraham, as far back as Abel, this is the principle. But you see from Abraham onwards that the testimony is the testimony of the resurrection, that is the testimony of the Bible from the beginning to the end, the testimony of resurrection. That is where God establishes His supremacy.

We are in that battle of the ages from Abel onwards, with whom the testimony commenced. The battle of the ages is the battle with death and him that had the hold of death, that is, the Devil. And no amount of beautiful teaching can overcome that. We are not deliv-

ered from death simply by systematized doctrine. We are never made victors over death by any kind of mental grasp of Christian doctrine. Unless that truth is quickened into life it can be just an ally of death, and one feels sometimes that a great knowledge of truth mentally, kills rather than makes alive, puts people further away from the light than nearer to it. We know that battle. What are we in today? It is really in the battle with spiritual death. The evil forces, the power of death is exercised by the Devil himself in this which registers itself upon us in every part of our being from time to time. Sometimes death descends upon the mind, sometimes upon the whole of our soul, and we feel blanketed and wrapped round with death. It descends like a dark, black cloud; sometimes our very spirits become suffocated with a sense of death, and sometimes it strikes our bodies.

I have an extract here from Hudson Taylor: "I am sorry to say that some of our younger workers engaged in the forward evangelistic movement are now ill and I venture to emphasize the importance of praying that the health of the missionaries may be maintained, and also that of our Chinese Christians. We know from the Scriptures that in their former state they used to worship demons, and these evil beings endeavour now not only to hinder and injure them spiritually, but also mentally and physically; hence the need of encircling them with intercession."¹

That is simply put, but coming from a greater authority than myself it carries its own weight; but it is true we are up against that force of the Devil and it seeks to register itself upon every part of our being; and atmospheres very often are just thick with spirits of death. That is the conflict and it is just there that the testimony has its supreme expression. The absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ as the Lord of Life: that is the testimony. No matter what else we may do, if we do not register His Lordship of life where we are, then we have failed in the highest expression of the testimony of Jesus. It is living, spiritual, union with Him by which that supremacy of His

1. The accuracy of this quotation is uncertain, as there is a note to say it was not checked in the original text.

is registered upon spiritual realms which are the realms of spiritual death primarily and pre-eminently.

You see the whole question is the question of *living* union with God. That is Jeremiah's question, and that is the question of the covenant all the way through. In Leviticus that is the question — living union with God. The whole aim of the Mosaic sacrifices was to bring about a living union with God, and it was by the sprinkling of the blood that everything was made alive unto God. The people were sprinkled, all the vessels were sprinkled, everything was made alive by the sprinkled blood and this whole system in Leviticus has that at its heart. What we have to encounter is not merely the reasoning, rational opposition of men, that our warfare is not in any way with flesh and blood pre-eminently. It is with these forces which all the time are making for spiritual death, and the testimony which the Lord must have is the testimony of a life which is triumphant over death; and that is the significance of the blood.

In the ordinary atoning sacrifice the blood was not applied to the people, it was just poured out Godwards, as though it were a sign of surrender; that is as far as a good many people get. The one word is always surrender. You will not get much further if you do not go that far. That is in the ordinary atoning sacrifice, that brings you to the blood poured out Godwards, which is surrender. But if we leave our movement there it is not far enough. That is more or less the passive side. Of course a lot of people have a big job to surrender, but even whatever it may cost to surrender, that is only the passive side, the inactive side. You have to go beyond that, the blood has to come on you, so that you are not just a surrendered one; you are a living, active one. So that in the other sacrifices, the higher forms of sacrifice as in the sacrifices for the whole congregation as in Leviticus 4:17 the priest dips his hand in the blood, and as the representative of the people he puts the blood between himself as the people's representative, and the altar. He stands for the people, and he puts his hand in the blood and then puts the blood upon the altar as though he brought, in that blood, the whole people into touch with the altar, for the altar is the point of contact

with God. This one thing which is given after that sacrifice is that it shall be a sweet savour unto the Lord; that is, something which the Lord receives and which is His pleasure. That is the positive side. It was all a foreshadowing of man's union with the Lord. That is brought about by the sprinkling of the blood. Living union with the Lord. A union in life. That is the testimony.

Now if we forget, or miss the mass of what has been said in this chapter, let us take the whole of this central thing and hold it; that what is before us is the age-long conflict with the forces of death which are out to destroy the testimony of the absolute sovereignty and supremacy of the Lord. They do that when death prevails, when they succeed in spreading a contamination of spiritual death. So that the overthrow of the whole power of the evil work is seen in resurrection, and when that which is the secret of resurrection, that is, the life of the Risen Lord is operating in us and through us, that is the testimony to His absolute supremacy and that is the victory over all the power of the enemy. The thing which you and I have got to know more clearly is that the testimony of the Lord is life triumphant over death. Now the Lord has His own ways of getting that testimony; we are not to dictate how it is to be.

Two things must be clear to us. One is the fact that the Lord's testimony is found in the manifestation of His risen life, the power of His resurrection. That is why the first chapters of the book of the Acts are little more than a testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Look at resurrection in the book of the Acts and you will be amazed. The other thing is this: that for that testimony, we must walk in the light. Walking in the light means obedience to the light. There can be no full testimony to the power of His resurrection if there is a reservation in something that the Lord has shown us that we should do. The testimony is arrested and death on that point operates in some measure at least. Two things: the object of the Lord is the testimony of the power of His resurrection, and this always means walking in the light, obedience to the truth.

Now how the Lord gets that testimony manifested is entirely in His own hands, and very often He gets it through experiences which

seem to be the most positive breakdown of His testimony. I mean that sometimes it looks as though things go into death and death swallows them up. Sometimes that is the Lord's way of getting that testimony. The Lord Jesus Who is the embodiment of the testimony could never have established the testimony of life triumphant over death if He had not gone into death. And herein is the wonder of the whole matter, that even that which is born, begotten of God, is allowed sometimes to go into death in order that it might be the means of demonstrating the power of God over death. The Lord Jesus had a deathless life. He was born of God. It was not possible that He should be held by the pangs of death, and yet His way was through death, in order that He might destroy death and him that had the hold of death. Isaac, a miracle from God, a type of Christ, was allowed to go into death just for the establishment of the testimony for the spiritual Israel, the testimony of resurrection. We are today in Christ; because Christ has risen our foundation is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The very foundation of our being as the Lord's children is the resurrection; we are constituted upon that truth, and that is the testimony that is to be displayed through us. And sometimes the Lord allows us to know something of death in various ways in order that there might be a manifestation of the power of resurrection. Sometimes He allows a piece of work He raised up to go into death in order that He might bring it through on to a stronger basis of resurrection where death has no power over it at all. His ways are of Himself, the facts are for us to recognize.

The blood is the instrument of victory. The blood is the sign of the testimony; it is the basis of appeal against death, and we plead the blood in the presence of every working of death and therein we find the victory.

I hope it is clear now what the remnant was intended to be. We said Jeremiah's whole ministry was constructed upon the basis of resurrection. The first thing shown to him when he was called was an almond tree; that means, that whatever happens in the end, it is going to be victory in the power of resurrection. And the remnant was dug up out of the grave of Babylon and brought back as a testi-

mony to resurrection from the dead. The Lord's way was to allow them, in their death, to be buried in the grave of Babylon seventy years, and after seventy years He raised a remnant from the dead and brought them back to be a testimony of His resurrection. So resurrection is the testimony. May the Lord get us well grounded and founded upon that.”

THE NEW COVENANT

Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34.

“This prophecy was taken up by the apostle and included in his letter to the Hebrews and in that letter is said to be fulfilled in the work of the Lord Jesus in His cross. If you look at Hebrews 10 you will see that the work of the Lord Jesus in the offering of Himself unto God as a whole burnt offering, brings in the New Covenant. Through the work of Calvary, the character of the new covenant would be introduced according to the words of Jeremiah. That is, all those features which we have just read from Jeremiah are brought in with the new covenant in the blood of the Lord Jesus, and it is concerning that new covenant and its features that we have something on our heart to say.

In chapter five we were occupied with the prophetic instrument raised up by the Lord to be in union with Him in His universal dominion. We took passages from Jeremiah 1:5,10. “I have made (appointed, ASV) thee a prophet to the nations”, and then further, “I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms.” We have seen in connection with Jeremiah that he represents a ministry raised up in a day of departure from the Lord on the part of the greater mass of His people, in order to testify against the spiritual conditions which prevailed, to warn of imminent judgment upon those conditions, and to bring into view the remnant company which will be representative of God’s triumph over those conditions. Our connection between that and this chapter is that that which represents God’s triumph over those conditions which He is so

strongly against, and which must inevitably bring judgment, must be constituted upon the basis of the new covenant, and it is for us to understand what that new covenant is. We asked a question as we closed, which we did not answer, and I just want to stay with that for a while before continuing. The question was: how shall the testimony be extended?

The testimony extended

1) The realization inwardly of Christ exalted

In the first place it will be through and by such as have the Holy Spirit with a twofold result, or effect. Firstly, the realization inwardly of Christ exalted. That is the first, basic principle to the book of the Acts of the Holy Spirit, commonly called the Acts of the Apostles. The principle upon which everything there rests is that, that there were people now in this world in whom, by reason of the indwelling Spirit, Christ as exalted was a living reality. The great thing which transfigured and transformed and revolutionized everything for those believers was the realization by the Holy Spirit, that Jesus of Nazareth was at the right hand of the Majesty on high. That is a fact which we may contemplate as something recorded in the Word of God. But the test of the nature of our apprehension of that comes when everything that is grasped by the senses contradicts that: that is, everything that comes to the eye, that you see; everything that comes to the ear, that you hear; everything that impresses itself upon you through your natural faculties of apprehension, reason and natural understanding, and all other faculties, says positively to the contrary, that Jesus Christ is not Lord; it is a fallacy. Look at this, look at that; see this, see that; it is only putting on blinkers to hold on to any such idea, and it is ignoring facts to believe it. It is simply that you made up your mind about something and you are afraid to change your mind. You do not have the courage to acknowledge what really is the case. That is how the flesh argues because everything appraised by the flesh denies that Jesus is Lord. Now that is when the nature of our apprehension

of this thing is tested, and therefore, the book of the Acts is given to us to show how much opposition, suffering and affliction there had to be encountered. And the Lord never for one moment covers up the grim realities, never smooths them over and makes them lighter than they were. He lets us know exactly how things were in order to show that things being as bad as they were, and according to natural judgments so contradictory to the truth of the sovereign dominion of the Lord Jesus, here were ordinary people who did not waver, but went right through in victory. They had not just accepted something that had been told them or that they had read in a book. They had not just mentally grasped some bit of doctrine, but the Holy Spirit had made this a living reality of their very being. It was a part of them that Jesus was on the throne. It was a work of the Holy Spirit in them and not the result of their exercise of mind. The thing had been revealed, made living within them, and it was because of that that the testimony extended. And that will be the only basic ground upon which the testimony will be extended truly. The Lord is not going to make it easy for the testimony to be extended. We often pray that the Lord will make it easy, that He will do this and that in order to clear a way for the testimony, remove this and that in order to smooth a way. It rather seems that in the history of things the Lord takes the opposite course and allows an intensification of opposition, allows the forces of evil to have a good deal of liberty in order to draw out a true testimony. And an end time is always going to be marked by that characteristic, that things are not going to get easier but harder, but the end time is going to be marked by the triumph of the testimony over against the intensified opposition. That is why a vessel of a peculiar character must be brought into being in which the Holy Spirit reigns as the power of Christ's absolute dominion. The testimony will be extended only by such as have the Spirit, with the realization inwardly, that Christ after all, in spite of everything, is having all authority in heaven and on earth. We will not be able to establish the testimony in fulness and finality at the end without that. The need is not so much for the outward demonstrations of the Holy Spirit as for the inward

establishment of the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus. We need a new filling of the Spirit at this time; not for sensation's sake but for the testimony's sake, and the testimony is, Christ triumphant in the midst of increasing difficulty.

2) *Divine life*

And then together with that, the testimony will be extended through and by those who have the Spirit with the facts of God's purpose, divine life, which is the testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The testimony will be extended through such as have the Spirit unto life, in whom the life is by the Spirit. By that I do not mean excitability, emotion, high-tension atmospheres: life is something other than that. Life is a mighty, deep energy. Life is such a powerful force that it can afford to dispense with all ostentation and display. It knows it can do the thing and makes no fuss about it. You see the working of life where life is, and you will see that silently, almost imperceptibly life moves in such a mighty way as to force itself through the mightiest resistances without any noise or exhibition; then you see the effect of life. That is the nature of the movement of the testimony. It is not the beating of drums, the sounding of trumpets, demonstrations to impress people that there is life about. Life is something deeper than that. We get up a great campaign, a great movement, have a great stir, and our whole idea is life. Let people know that there is life about, that we are alive. Life may operate so silently as to break down every resistance that there is in this universe without a noise, without any demonstration at all. Life is a mighty thing. His resurrection just happened, and no sealed tomb, or set guard, or any other power can stand in the way of the resurrection. It just happened, and you come and find that the stone is rolled away, and the guard is off their guard; it has happened. God has just quickened, breathed, moved, and the whole universal strength of death has given way and every precaution of man has proved foolish. He is risen by the power of life. The Spirit of life is the Spirit of a tremendous power which has no peer and no equal in this universe. It is the power of

His resurrection, God's mightiest act in the history of this world. Now the testimony will extend and expand through and by those who have the Spirit unto life, who are alive with the life of God. Oh, what a lot is bound up with being alive.

3) *Divine likeness*

And then the nature, divine likeness. The testimony will extend through such. The necessity for the extension of the testimony, as we were seeing in the previous chapter, is not just truth or teaching, it is an expression of Christ in His nature, His likeness. It will never really expand on any other ground. (...) If a vessel of the testimony is to go on it has got to be moved by the very nature of God. (...) It is because of these two things: the risen life of Christ which was in it from the beginning, and the very nature of Christ which it carries with it. I mean that the Holy Spirit is in this as the vitalizing reality and has the power of conforming to the image of Christ. It is there in essence, the nature of Christ which is imparted, and everyone who receives this becomes progressively changed into the same image. We are dealing with facts in the covenant as you will see in a moment. These various facts must come into the vessel of the testimony if it is to expand and go on.

4) *Other things*

There are other things which account for the wonderful expansion of the testimony in the beginning and which abide as features of the expansion. One was this, that each individual who received the Spirit was moved by the Spirit to be a positive agent of the expansion of the testimony. That is very simple, and yet it challenges us. It was an individual communication of the revelation of the life. Everyone came into the personal activity of the Holy Spirit. The organizing of Christianity since those first days has had among other painful effects, the crippling of that work very largely. Christian work has become so organized that you either have to be asked to do it, appointed to do it, and come into a system, or else it is not done. A system has captured the work of the Lord and you

have to conform to the system or else you do not do the work of the Lord. Today we may not, out of our own hearts, recognize our personal responsibility for the extending of the testimony and get on with it; we relate it to an organized movement and unless we are fitted into the organized movement somewhere in a definite way and given work to do, or asked to take up this or that, we do not do it. The organizing of Christianity has ruined the individual spontaneity of the testimony. We have to get back to God's way. When you and I really have the Holy Spirit ruling in us, we shall not wait to be asked to do the Lord's work: we shall be doing it. It will happen just as spontaneously as the Holy Spirit came from heaven on the day of Pentecost and just as spontaneously as believers then moved out in individual and personal testimony to give out the truth, so we shall respond to the movement of the Spirit within us. And it is quite impossible for anyone to really be dominated by the Holy Spirit and not be spontaneously moving out in the testimony for its expansion.”

[Ed.] T. Austin-Sparks will come back to this matter of the Holy Spirit and the expansion of the testimony when he speaks about the contribution of every believer in spiritual ministry. He wants to make clear that the growth of the church and the advance of the gospel do not come by organizing. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. And, as in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, that work often goes hand in hand with hardship. Do we shrink back then, or do we persevere?

“This is the test: where are we in this matter? There will be times when by reason of difficulty, pressure, opposition, suffering, we may get discouraged, and we will find ourselves in a state of reasoning, arguing, debating the whole thing. We may think in this realm: Well, after all can we not take a lower level; can we not accept a less strenuous course? We begin to talk to ourselves in that way, and we may allow ourselves to be led on by thoughts of this character. We go so far and then we find that our thoughts lead us to a parting of the ways, and we have to stand still and

say: Well now, which way are we going to take? Now is the time to follow our reason, we must put our thought into action, we must do something. Are we really going to choose this other way? And when we face the thing frankly, we have to say to our own hearts that that means sacrificing something that we have that after all is our very life, the thing which is more than anything else, and we cannot follow this incomplete reasoning at all. It means loss.”

[Ed.] That which feels like loss will ultimately result in gain. We will have to trust the Lord for that. We will bless others with the life experiences the Lord has brought us through, because they resulted in more of Christ in our hearts, in our behaviour and character. We may not notice it ourselves, but others will. That is a beautiful and powerful feature of Christian fellowship!

May we add some notes on fellowship before we turn back to T. Austin Sparks’ message? Fellowship is something Jeremiah does not seem to enjoy very much. We get the impression that he is lonely. But we should not forget that he is part of a movement, as we explained in chapter two. We have said it is not a political movement, but a group of people that understands that God’s way of restoration is through discipline and chastisement and that He is going to use the Chaldeans for this purpose. It will indeed mean great loss, but in the end God’s great promises are fulfilled. It is God’s way, the way He has laid down in the covenant He has made with His people. Jeremiah’s camp believes that God is true to His Word. This is Jeremiah’s message again and again. Rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar is rebellion against God. But a kind of patriotic religious madness has blinded the spiritual leaders of Jeremiah’s day, as well as king Jehoiakim and king Zedekiah and the nobility around them.

The Lord enables Jeremiah and his camp to look beyond suffering to a time in which every believer, small and great, will be filled with the Spirit. It will be a time of happy fellowship, young and old together (Jer. 31:13-14). The way towards fulfilment of this prophecy is returning to God’s covenant. Only returning to God — covenant renewal — will result in returning from exile and the rebuilding of the temple and Jerusalem and finally, in preparing the cradle of Christ.

This principle can be extrapolated to the time in which we live, as Jeremiah’s prophecy in chapter 31 has now been fulfilled. Life in the Spirit will

cause the testimony to expand, because it is the Spirit's mission to do so. Is this not Paul's overarching message in his letter to the Romans?² There will be suffering, yes, but when we are able to connect our suffering for the sake of Christ and the gospel with Christ's own suffering (see 5:1-11; 8:17) — He has identified Himself with us so that we can identify ourselves with Him³ — we will persevere and bear the fruit of sanctification unto eternal life. We will seek to use our spiritual gifts to edify one another. This is why fellowship is so important.

“That is how the testimony will grow, expand. Not because we have got teaching in view, not because we have a movement in view, not because we want to see something done differently and other than that which is done, but because we have something which we are sure is indispensable for the Lord's people. That is the Jeremiah spirit. Jeremiah came to that crisis himself one day, and I suppose all of us get into the school of Jeremiah at some time or other; and Jeremiah determined he would not speak any more. He says in effect; I am not going to say anything more about it, this is far too costly. But while he kept silent: “His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones.” Jeremiah, because of the fire in his bones broke all his resolutions to keep quiet and said: I cannot help it, here I go again; and so he goes head first into the job once more. That is how the testimony grows. (...) The question for us here is the testimony has got to grow, to expand, but have we got the testimony? Is it to us something objective, mental, something expressed in certain terms, phraseology, or is it a fire in our bones?”

[Ed.] In order to further explain the strong connection between God's dealings with us as individuals and its effect for the Church as a whole, T. Austin-Sparks refers to the title of the paper that was published by the fellowship he was part of, as an example.

2. See especially Rom. 5–8, 12 and 14, but also the other chapters that for a great part deal with God being true to His Word and absolutely consistent with His covenant of grace.

3. By grace God regards as being in Christ those who put their trust in Him and thus justifies them.

“A good many people do not know why we have both those words on our paper: ‘A Witness and a Testimony’. They think they are the same thing. They are not. The witness is the person or the vessel, the testimony is the thing they represent, and you cannot have the one without the other. You cannot have a truth without the vessel that represents it, and you cannot have someone who claims to be a witness who has not got a testimony. It was individual testimony out of the fire within. It was then disinterested testimony, unprofessional. Disinterested testimony in the sense that it was not a matter of making a living out of it, getting anything for themselves from it, but rather losing things for it. It means all personal interests and considerations going to the wind for the testimony’s sake, suffering the loss of all things for the testimony’s sake. It will grow that way. There has to be in the testimony of Jesus that element which does not love its own life even unto death. That is a far more general application than the specific application of simply being literally martyred for the testimony. There are many ways in which our own life has to be laid down for the testimony and there has to be in the testimony this feature, that everybody recognizes that they will not get anything personal out of this. This is something which costs, with much suffering, and therefore there is something more in it than only human interest. That is a great factor in the testimony.

Now I want to close by referring to this new covenant again. We have seen that the Agent of the new covenant is the Holy Spirit. That is said in as many words by the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:3: “... written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God ...”. The context speaks of Moses coming with the covenant down from the Mount, reading it in the presence of the people and the glory upon his face so brilliant that he had to put a veil over his face in the reading of the covenant. The apostle takes that up and says, if the reading of that covenant, which after all was in terms of judgment and death, was glorious, how much more glorious will be the covenant which is in terms of no condemnation and life. He is moving in the realm of the old covenant and the new. This new

covenant, differing from the old, is not written on tables of stone with pen and ink but written with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Agent of the new covenant. That is, the Holy Spirit operating in us brings in the knowledge of the Lord; He is the Agent of the new covenant. The materials upon which the new covenant is written, we are told, are the tables that are hearts of flesh. And then the features of the covenant. What are they?

The features of the covenant

1) Spiritual understanding and knowledge of the Lord

That is the right, the heritage of every member of the new covenant. Young people, I want you to know that if you have the Holy Spirit dwelling within you, that carries with it for you the power of spiritual understanding and knowledge of the Lord in your own heart. There will be those who by reason of longer experience and fuller growth may know more than you and have higher spiritual understanding than you. You will have to recognize, acknowledge and bow to that and thank God for it because it can be a great advantage to you. You should take advantage of it, but do not take the attitude that spiritual understanding and knowledge is the sole prerogative of advanced saints. It is for the child. What was that term of the new covenant in Jeremiah? Listen: "... they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them." That is fulfilled in Christ as we have seen in Hebrews 10. The Lord's people shall all "know me from the least to the greatest". Spiritual understanding and knowledge of the Lord is for the least in the covenant as well as the greatest.

I want to say to the youngest believer that it is for you to have by the Holy Spirit, personal, individual understanding and knowledge of the Lord spiritually. Reckon on that, count on that, make something of that. Believe that the Lord can speak to you, lead you, show you things, enlighten you; and that He can make you wise above the wisdom of this world, and give you an entrance into a knowledge which none of the princes of this world possess.

I wonder how many of us are alive to that fact. The Holy Spirit in you is the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, and you have in you by the Holy Spirit all divine knowledge. It is for you to come into possession of it progressively, to live on it, count on it, seek to be made alive to it. The effect of the new covenant is by the Holy Spirit, spiritual understanding and knowledge: "They shall teach no more every man his neighbour ... saying, Know the Lord." (...) That is bound up with the new covenant, but we are not living in the good of the covenant as we ought to be. Spiritual understanding and knowledge is implicit in it.

2) *Spiritual communion with the Lord*

That is in the new covenant: living communion with the Lord. I do not think I need to say very much about that, but at the same time it challenges us. We have often used the illustration of the difference between Abraham's walk with God and Lot's. Abraham walked with God, but Lot got his knowledge of God by walking with Abraham; he did not get it directly, hence his life was a chain of defects, weaknesses, breakdowns, messes. Lot was always getting into a mess because he did not walk with God but got everything second-hand. (...) Now is your fellowship with God second-hand, or is it direct? The new covenant would make for spiritual and living communion with the Lord firsthand. And again, my younger friends, this is for you. Have you got it? Do not think of mature saints having living fellowship, personal communion with the Lord, and that being their sole right. That is also for you. Would that we had many more young believers walking with the Lord, directly, firsthand. Now if you are going to be in the vessel of the Lord's testimony, that must be a feature. The features of this vessel are the features of the new covenant. The old has broken down: "... which covenant they brake ... I will make a new covenant."

3) *Spiritual ministry of all believers*

The new covenant brings every member of it into the ministry. The ministry no longer remains a select class. There may be specific

ministries in the ministry, but ministry is now related to the whole body, every member. In the Old Testament priests and Levites were set apart for their ministry by the laying on of hands. Hands were laid on them; (of course we know that this was a representative act by which all Israel said: The ministry you fulfil is our ministry and you do it as us and for us). Nevertheless, literally they were set apart as a company by the laying on of hands for ministry in the House of God. In the New Testament the laying on of hands became a general thing and by it every believer, no matter how humble, was elevated to the position which was held by a son of Aaron in the Old Testament. You look upon those sons of Aaron and see what a high honour and privilege is theirs, how outstanding is their dignity, and you would probably stand in a sort of awe as you beheld the sons of Aaron. In the new covenant you are not only equal to the sons of Aaron but higher, in so much as the New Covenant transcends the Old. The laying on of hands in the New Testament elevated every believer to the position of a priest, a minister in the House of God. Within that compass there were specific ministries with a specific laying on of hands. "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." That was preceded by Ananias laying his hands upon Paul when he came into the House of God at Damascus. "And Ananias ... entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, ...". That brought him in not only to the fellowship of the House but to the ministry of the House. Of course this may raise many questions — the three thousand baptized on the day of Pentecost, the larger company at Caesarea, those in the house of Cornelius — did they lay hands on them all? Not at all, for the simple reason that they were both two sides of one thing; that was the two sides of Pentecost; one in Jerusalem was the Holy Spirit descending upon Jews, at Caesarea the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles, making one Body. That act was the Holy Spirit's testimony at the outset that all this had come under the Sovereign Headship of the Lord Jesus; His Sovereign Headship as the Anointed Head of the Body. Jews and Gentiles brought into one Body. The laying on of hands was the testimony by which that

Sovereign Headship was declared under one anointing upon Him. That brought immediately into the House of God, and immediately into the ministry of the House of God.

Wherever you find anointing you find ministry, and the laying on of hands is always a testimony to the anointing and ministry is always involved in that. In this dispensation it is specific ministry, but it declares the generality of ministry in the House of God. It is a great thing to recognize that you and I, the least of us, under the anointing of the Holy Spirit are elevated to the place of priests in the House of God, and a royal priesthood. That is in the new covenant. It is a feature of the new covenant. Now again we must challenge our own hearts. Do we have the Spirit? If you do, that means that you are in the new covenant, and if you are in the new covenant that means that you are in the ministry, in the priesthood. Are you, even the least of you, fulfilling your ministry? Are you really in the ministry? Have you allowed this systematizing of things which has come since the days of the Acts to give you a mental conception of ministry as belonging to certain people? The New Testament brings us all into the ministry and there are no laity unless you come into that condemned realm of the Nicolaitans, which is priestcraft. There are no laity spiritually in the New Testament: we are all priests and ministers in the House of God. The point is, are we fulfilling it? The testimony will grow as every one of us from the least really does take up this matter of personal ministry in the House of God.

I had a great burden on my heart when I began this message, especially concerning the younger folk. I want you to be in the place where you know that if you are in the New Covenant, you are called into personal knowing of the Lord, a personal walk and fellowship with the Lord, and ministry in the House of God spiritually, and you ought to rise up in the presence of such a calling and know that you have an anointing and should seek to be an effective unit in the House of God, a real contributory factor. Are you a passenger, are you allowing others to have responsibility for you, or are you a worker in this spiritual sense? May the Lord move us into a place that is positive. What I am seeing in these days is that

a vessel that the Lord needs for recovering His testimony must be constituted in this way: a company of people who know the Lord, walk with the Lord, fulfil the Lord's ministry by the Spirit, everyone doing it. That is so different from going to church on Sunday and going home and that is the end of your responsibility. No, it is all being as much in the ministry as the man in the pulpit ever was. We are told that certain were given by the Ascended Lord: pastors, teachers, prophets, for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry. These gifts in the church are only to bring the church to a place where it can fulfil the ministry. May we be found fulfilling the ministry.

THE COVENANT AND THE HOUSE OF GOD

Reading: Jeremiah 1:5,10; 18:6-8.

Let us first of all bring back into clear view the whole object which is before us at this time, brought before us by the book of the prophet Jeremiah by him in his life and ministry. Three things constitute the life and ministry of Jeremiah. He was raised up by the Lord in a special way, firstly, in relation to the spiritual conditions which obtained at that time, conditions of departure from the clear revelation of God's mind; a state of falling away from the Lord and His disclosed purpose.

Secondly, he was raised up to proclaim and declare the inevitable and the pending judgment of the Lord because of those conditions: judgment which would ultimately be in the nature of the setting aside of that people by the Lord so far as His primary purpose was concerned.

And thirdly, he was raised up in relation to the recovering of a representation of His mind in fulness, in and by a remnant.⁴ We have been led by Jeremiah to Daniel who said that he was made to understand by books the time appointed at the end for the return of the people from captivity, to Jerusalem. Also we have been led to the books of Chronicles and Ezra where Jeremiah is referred to: "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled ...". We have dwelt very much upon the fact that one of the outstanding incidents in

4. We have to bear in mind that T. Austin-Sparks speaks from his own point of view on the significance of the remnant. See preface.

the life of Jeremiah was the sudden, unexpected rediscovery of the book of the Law, which immediately worked out in Josiah's intensified reforms and headed up to a national celebration of the Passover (...). That led us into a fairly extensive consideration of the divine thoughts in the Passover and we have been much occupied with the covenant in the blood of the Passover. I mention that because we are brought back there very definitely again in this chapter.

I want you to regard yourself in the light of what I said in the previous chapter, as called into the ministry for the new covenant, as we said then, as in it distinctly, the ministry of every believer.

The fact that every believer is called into the ministry of the new covenant, is made perfectly clear by the apostle Paul in these passages which were partly under consideration in chapter seven. In 2 Corinthians 3 and 4 many of the features of the old covenant are mentioned in contrast with the features of the new covenant: God having shined into our hearts, as differing from God having shined on Moses' face; God having written on our hearts as in contrast with having written on tables of stone; God having written in us by the Holy Spirit as differing from writing with pen and ink. Now the apostle goes on — and there is no break in chapters in his letter — "Therefore seeing we have this ministry ...". He is writing to the Corinthians. We have this ministry, the ministry of the new covenant; we are in this ministry. Our word about the laying on of hands signified that as it was apparently a general thing in New Testament times to lay hands on those who had been baptized, it brought everyone onto the level of the Old Testament priesthood, so that we become a kingdom of priests, everyone of this elect nation.

Now that is very strong ground upon which we should give heed unto the Lord's Word at this time. May I urge upon you again that you regard yourselves as in the ministry of the new covenant, and that the Lord is seeking to raise up a ministry today of the new covenant to His people, to define His own thought for His people spiritually. You are in the ministry: can you define the thoughts of God? Can you give out of your heart by revelation of the Holy Spirit the terms of the new covenant? Well, I hope you can grow-

ingly. Some of us are more in public ministry than others. It is only perhaps a matter of degree or form; it is not in any other sense a difference. You are in the same ministry, or you ought to be, and whether it is on platforms or gatherings of people, or whether it is in personal contact with other believers you ought to be able to fulfil a ministry of spiritual enlightenment concerning the testimony of Jesus, what it is, its nature, its principles. Not to just be manuals of doctrine. I do not mean that. But out of the reality of this thing in your heart, as written by the Holy Spirit, to be able to impress others with the spiritual truth of things, the spiritual reality, the spiritual life, the spiritual glory of things, and remember that the new covenant is in the glory which excelleth. In what way does it excel the old glory?

Well, Moses came down from the Mount and the people could not look on his face — that is wonderful if people cannot look on our faces — the new covenant is by reason of the glory that excelleth. There is a glory which is more than having your face illuminated; that is, having your heart illuminated. And the new covenant has to be given out in terms of inward illumination which is glory. Are you regarding all this teaching as a load, something to be struggled with, or has it come to you with the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and you have said: This is wonderful; I have never seen anything like this before. It is what we so often call having an opened heaven, seeing things in the heart as the Lord sees them, and finding them your heart leaps and you say: This is life, this is health, this is strength, this is glory. The glory which excels. Are you in the good of the new covenant? Perhaps not in its fulness but is the glory breaking through? If so, you have this ministry. People will say: So-and-so has something, some glory in their heart. Or they will say: So-and-so has something that is very wonderful, and there is something in it and I want to know about it. Yes, but this treasure is in a vessel of fragile clay. People are not going to take account of us, but they are going to say that we have a wonderful Lord, a wonderful revelation. I do not see anything in them but they have something — and that Something is the Lord. That is this ministry

of which the apostle speaks. Oh that we might get more into this ministry. There is life in that ministry, in that revelation. Every time you touch it you touch life. You may be nine-tenths dead and get a touch of that ministry and you come up at once. It means life. Read on in 2 Corinthians 4 and the apostle will tell you about all the adversities and the things which are intended to bring death, an end: persecuted, perplexed, cast down, all this, yet abounding. We have this ministry. What is it? "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ". We have in living reality the new covenant in His blood. That is our ministry.

In the previous chapter we were speaking of the nature of the new covenant and first of all we noticed the Agent as the Holy Spirit. "Not with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God". The Agent of the new covenant in our heart. The material upon which the new covenant is written, tables which are hearts of flesh. And then the features of the new covenant: spiritual understanding and knowledge for every believer by the Holy Spirit; spiritual and living communion with the Lord for every believer; and then spiritual ministry for every believer.

Now we take the fourth thing, the inclusive object of the new covenant: *the House of God*. That is an invariable feature and factor of the covenant which God has made. Did He make a covenant with Abraham? Well, read what the New Testament has to say about Abraham's final objective and you will find that it leads you to the House of God. Did He make a covenant with Jacob? Where was it? At Bethel, the House of God; and He brought him back there twenty years after. Did He make a covenant with Israel in the Passover? Was the blood of the Passover lamb the blood of the covenant? Well, we have seen that it was. What was the first thing we said about the Passover and the covenant of the blood there? It was bringing the corporate people on to covenant ground, and they were constituted by that covenant blood, the House of God. We are told in the letter to the Hebrews that Moses was a servant in the House of God, but Christ a Son, Whose House are we. Moses was faithful as a servant in God's house. Israel was constituted God's House in the

blood of the covenant, and the remarkable thing is that the blood of the Passover and the eating of the flesh of the Passover was in an attitude of going. It had a prospect. They had to eat with their loins girt. They were people who were now on the move. When you read the song of Moses on the other side of the Red Sea, you find it definitely and distinctly stated that the object of their going out was that He should bring them to His House. You see the prospect of the covenant is the House of God. It is the object in view.

That is why we have turned to Jeremiah 7, because chapters 7 to 10 are occupied with the temple. At the beginning of chapter 7 the Lord commands Jeremiah to stand in the gate of Jehovah's House and proclaim these words. And it is on the steps of the temple that the things which are contained in chapters 7 to 10 are uttered. He is brought definitely in relation to the House of God in his ministry. The contents of these chapters are tremendously illuminating. We are not able to go over it in detail but we shall sum it up in one or two statements. But when we recognize that the covenant which has been reintroduced into Jeremiah's ministry, into his life, into Israel in the rediscovery of the Law and the celebration of the Passover, that brings us right up to the House of God, and everything relates centrally to the House of God, to the temple. That is the central object, and everything circles round the temple, everything is focussed on the temple, everything is because of the temple, the House of God. Now when you consider the blood of the covenant as having as its main and ultimate object the House of God, you gather up the features of the blood of the covenant into the House of God and you find that those features are the features of the House of God. I give you one or two by way of illustration.

Features of the House of God

a) The Passover — a protection from the power of death and the destroyer

The Passover basic to Israel's life, by which they were constituted the House of God, was first of all a protection and a covering

from the power of death and him that had the hold of death, the Destroyer. That blood of the Passover became for them the thing which intervened between themselves and the oncoming judgments of death, so that the blood of the covenant was for them a means of gathering them into a place of shelter as a people. Everyone had to come within that compass. They came as a Body, collectively, on to that ground. Just as individuals had come before onto covenant ground, now the Body came. This is a very important development, it is the collective people brought onto covenant ground by the blood of the Passover, and that blood for a people, composed of individuals, everyone coming in individual responsibility but acting in relation to all the rest and forming a whole, a collective people coming on to covenant ground, and finding that that blood provides them as a people, with protection from the Destroyer and from death. It is the House of God as the place, the sphere of deliverance from the power of death.

This carries us right over to Ephesians where we come to the House of God, a spiritual House; Paul calls it the church there, which is the same as The Body of Christ, but we are keeping to our own designation for the moment. Everything in Ephesians is relative and viewed in a collective light. While there is individual responsibility, every parent is put under personal responsibility, every master, every servant, yet everything is viewed collectively and corporately and relatively, that is, as related to the other people of God. That is, the masters and the servants are regarded from the church standpoint and the Body standpoint, and they are told that their relationships shall be such as are consistent with one Body. All relationships are to be viewed in the light of the one Body. That does not bring everybody onto a level here in this world where the fact of service ceases and everybody becomes master. You understand — but these positions and these functions are still recognized — that there are still masters and servants, parents and children, yet recognizing these positions in their differences, the relationship of all is to be the relationship of fellow members of the one Body. We are brought on to that ground as a people through the blood.

In our identification with the Lord Jesus in His death, His burial, His resurrection, and in the redemption which is ours in His blood; that takes you back to Israel redeemed from Egypt through precious blood. We have redemption, we are told here, through His blood, and that blood brings us out as a corporate people to be a spiritual House. Now in that spiritual House is the place of deliverance from death, and so Paul goes on to speak of the "exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead ...". That is Israel being brought out of Egypt, raised as it were from the dead, delivered from the power of death, and symbolically, in the Red Sea baptized into Christ. The apostle says in Corinthians: "And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea", and he carries the figure over to show that in baptism we are baptized into Christ: "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body ...". And the blood brings us to be the House of God on the ground of deliverance from death; and the House of God becomes the testimony to the victory over the power of death and it is as in the House of God that we find that testimony operates.

b) The Passover – deliverance from death

That opens up a very large sphere which I can only indicate. You notice in your New Testament we are taught again and again that it is in relation to the House of God and its order that we find deliverance from death. To put it the other way, it is very often when we ignore the House of God that we become exposed to death. What the apostle said to the Corinthians was that some of them were not discerning the Lord's body. In chapter 10 he is saying that this loaf is for the body of Christ collectively, corporately: "We, who are many, are one loaf, one body", and that in the disorders in the Corinthian church, some were so behaving at the Lord's Table as to make others feel perfectly miserable; there was disorder. What happened? "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" — not discerning the Lord's body, not recognizing what

oneness with Christ means. Well, when they did that they became exposed to death and they died, they came under the impact of death, and the Lord could not protect them because the protection of saints is in His House. The testimony of the anointing with oil is that. One has become smitten, is suffering, death is working, and you call the church in through representative members: "Let him call for the elders", through those who in their representation imply the church coming in and by an act of identification, that one who is suffering an attack of death is brought under the cover of the House of God. It is the place of protection, it is covenant ground; the victory of the blood begins to operate in the power of the Holy Spirit. In principle it is the same thing. The House of God, because it is constituted upon the blood of the eternal covenant is the place where the testimony of victory over death is for the Lord's people, and if we violate the truth of the House of God and become independent and detached and out of accord and out of fellowship, out of love, death will begin to operate. It may not always be physical death at the beginning, but spiritual death will be there.

Now you see that that was the state in Jeremiah's day. The temple, the House of God, represented something for those people. In the Lord's thought spiritually that temple meant the place of their protection, of their covering, it was God's provision for their safety. It was the place of life, but because of the disorders all this that he is saying is going to come to pass, death and destruction because of the Lord's House. Remember that judgment is always related to the House of God.

Coming to the Lord Jesus, He takes the knotted cords and goes into the temple: a judgment in relation to the House of God.⁵

Judgment must begin at the House of God (1 Pet. 4:17). So it was with the Corinthians. Judgment came in relation to the House of God. Many are sick and some die. It shows how jealous God is

5. Jesus quotes Jeremiah at this occasion (see Matt. 21:13 and Jer. 7:11). Here Jesus does not rebuke the tradesmen for supposed greed or unfairness (they were officially allowed in the temple court during this period of the year), but he rebukes the temple overseers for excluding the Gentiles from paying tribute to God. With their patriotic-religious motivation they robbed the temple from its world mission and made the God of the universe into a national mascot.

for His House and how the House of God becomes God's provision for the protection of His people, and if they violate His principles, that which is provided for their protection becomes the very place of their undoing. I believe you may hold the truth of the House of God and be out of accord with that truth and find that very truth your undoing. It is possible for the very truth of the House of God to spell spiritual death because the state is not in accordance with the spiritual truth. We may have got the truth of the House of God but spiritually death is there. It is not life. It is always a deadly thing to hold truth and not apply it. So the House of God is the place of protection because the blood which constitutes the House of God is the testimony to victory over death and the power of death.

c) The Passover – food

Then again, the Passover as the basis of the covenant and the House of God, represented food. They were to eat it and if something was left over that night it had be burnt. It was food. It was intercommunion with the Lord. "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you" (John 6:53, KJV). It is food. A people of God are constituted the House of God on the principle of intercommunion with God in feeding: eating and drinking with the Lord and of the Lord so that the House of God represents spiritual food. The trouble in Jeremiah's day was that the prophets were not giving spiritual food. Spiritually everything was a state of starvation. Things were out of accord with the House of God. Is that not a feature of our own day?

It is a great thing to have food. The House of God is the place of food. The Lord gives to the enrichment, building up and strengthening of His children. Will you not pray more and more that this state of starvation may be met in some way, that the Lord will get an instrument that can minister spiritual food to His children, that He will strengthen what He has in that way? You know something of what it is to be spiritually hungry. But you can have food to give, to meet that need. We have to come back to God's level of things, to things spiritually in the House of God, the place of food.

d) The Passover – instruction

Then not only the nourishment side, but there is the instruction side. The Passover represented teaching. Notice what the Lord said about it. It was to be a token carried on from generation to generation and their children were to be instructed about this. They would ask: What do you mean by this? And then the opportunity was to be taken. And from generation to generation the blood of the covenant, the Passover, the foundation of the House of God was to be the basis of instruction. That which constitutes the House of God is a token of something, and so we are called to be a teaching people and a place where the Holy Spirit teaches.

e) The Passover – prospect

And then we have said the House of God always has a forward-looking aspect, the loins girt, looking forward. You notice how the Passover both in the Old Testament and in the Lord's Table has a forward-looking: "Till He come". The House of God has a prospect, a future.

Now these are illustrations of what we mean when we say that the House of God embodies the spiritual principles and features of the new covenant and becomes the vessel of the testimony of the covenant, and that is the testimony of Jesus which is deposited in this vessel, the House of God. Now Jeremiah was up against the lack of all these things. There was no future for these people. The horizon for them was very dark. Why? Because things in the House of God were all wrong. There was no teaching; the prophets were false prophets. Jeremiah had to speak very strongly about and to the false prophets. Jeremiah said: 'You prophesy falsely, God has not sent you; you are only saying these things because people like you to.' Jeremiah found having to take the opposite course cost him very dearly and these false prophets were not prepared to pay the price of true teaching. No protection, no food, no teaching, no prospect. That is the state of things when the people of God are as they were in the days of Jeremiah. Recovery of all these things is what the Lord is seeking to get now.

The potter's vessel

Well, it is just here that the potter's house has its significance. Jeremiah went out one day, followed a desire, an inclination to go down into the vicinity of Jerusalem, and when he was down there he was passing by the house of a potter and he turned in and saw the potter working on his wheel making a vessel. He saw him take the mass of unshaped clay and throw it on his wheel, set the wheel in motion with his feet, press with his hands, press and press, and slowly there emerged a vessel expressing something that the potter had in his mind. The pattern was in his own heart and he was trying to reproduce his own heart, his own mind in that clay: so that the clay should be a monument of his own heart, and so he pressed and so he shaped. Jeremiah saw that the vessel reached a certain point of development, full of promise; he was expecting to see perhaps a few more pressures of the hand, a little more shaping and smoothing and the vessel to be taken off the wheel perfect. Just as he was expecting some finishing touches he saw the whole thing collapse into a shapeless mass. It seemed so sudden, so unexpected, so disappointing; it just seemed to happen. Suddenly under the pressure of the potter's thumb, some unyielding, unadjustable factor had been struck; something that would not respond. And as his thumb struck it, it was so hard that it broke down the rest of the vessel. Its strength could not be withstood by the pliability of all the rest of the clay and it broke the whole thing to pieces and caused the whole vessel to scatter into shapelessness. The potter stopped his wheel, surveyed the situation. Jeremiah expected him to take that mass of clay off the wheel and throw it aside and was surprised when the potter took up the pieces, put them together and started off again out of the same lump to make another vessel, a vessel that would please the potter.

Jeremiah walked quietly out of the potter's house along the valley thinking. As he mused the fire burned and he went straight to the Lord's people and told them what he had seen, and so this is

a parable.⁶ Surely you would have expected that Israel, the people who heard, the leaders to whom he gave his parable would have been moved and would have had some heart response. All that it led to was an intensification of bitter antagonism towards Jeremiah and even towards his family. He had spoken of the failure of one thing that existed, its breakdown, and God getting something fresh, and that had provoked, not now the opposition of the general crowds, but his own family in his own home rose up and became a party to a plot for his death. Israel intended to represent God's thought and God's heart. But there was this factor in them, this unyielding factor, so manifest in the prophecies of Jeremiah, of a divided heart; the principle of idolatry. It would not give. They said in a definite manner to Jeremiah: We will all walk in our own way. They would not yield. God's thumb came on them and everything collapsed because of that. The Lord, with the broken shapeless mass in Babylon started the wheel to work again and made another vessel, and out of the potter's house in Babylon came that remnant. They put up the House of God, rebuilt the temple, and recovered the testimony of the House of God. The great feature of the remnant is the House and the wall, with the altar as the most conspicuous thing in the whole. The full testimony⁷: the cross, the church and the ministry to the world. The altar, the house, the wall.”

[Ed.] T. Austin-Sparks ends this session with an exhortation to shun idolatry and compromise, to rid the church of Christ — within our scope of

6. T. Austin-Sparks interprets Jeremiah's visit to the potter as a parable in which the potter reworking the clay into a new vessel signifies the return of the exiles, the remnant, from Babylon. However, the passage is not a parable, but an oracle of God based on an object lesson, in which God calls for repentance. God teaches about His own righteous sovereignty. He may have declared a nation to be destroyed, but if that nation repents, God will decide not to do it and cause it to prosper instead. And He may have declared that a nation will prosper, but if it turns away from Him, He will destroy it, in spite of His initial declaration. Having this divine principle in mind God shows the absurdity of Israel's recalcitrance and that calamity is inevitable. An application would be to check our responsiveness to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and our obedience to the Word of God, individually and corporately.

7. It is arguable whether the remnant was as successful as represented here. The books of Ezra-Nehemiah, Haggai, Zachariah and Malachi give a soberer picture, wakening the expectation of the great missing factor: the king on David's throne, the Messiah. Central to the message of the return from exile is God's faithfulness. It does not focus on people utterly devoted to God's cause.

responsibility — from syncretism and radically and courageously live for the sake of the spreading of the pure gospel.

“Another vessel. That is where we are today. The matter of food, the matter of life, the matter of instruction, the matter of the forward look, the hope (...) the Lord is seeking to constitute for Himself another vessel, and we may be in that, and we may be unto that in the ministry to which we are called. Remember it is going to be costly. Oh, if you are not going to accept the position of the false prophets, to say everything is alright, if you are going to strike for God’s utter line of things, the thing which is wholly spiritual and wholly of heaven, and nothing of man at all but all of God, you are going to come directly into collision with all that is. It is a costly way. As Jeremiah was put into the pit, the dark dungeon, those who stand for things utterly of God are put into the dungeon. We are on the living side because we are on the side of Him who said: I have set you over the nations — “... they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee.” The assurance is of ultimate victory for those who go all the way with the Lord and they will fulfil their ministry no matter what men or demons try to do.”

To be continued.

The purpose of this publication is to encourage God's people to lay hold on eternal life, the hope set before them, knowing that Jesus Christ, their Saviour, will soon return to establish His eternal Kingdom, "so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:12).

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