

A lighthouse with red and white stripes stands on a grassy hill. The sky is dark and cloudy. The lighthouse has a red top section and a white middle section. A white building with two chimneys is visible at the base of the lighthouse.

God's One and Only Purpose

*A Study in
Biblical Reality*

Compiled by Bhai Musafir

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2 Timothy 1:9, 10 Amplified

*[For it is He] Who delivered and saved us and called us with a calling in itself holy and leading to holiness [to a life of consecration, a vocation of holiness]; [He did it] not because of anything of merit that we have done, but because of and to further **His own purpose** and grace (unmerited favor) which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began [eternal ages ago].*

[It is that purpose and grace] which He now has made known and has fully disclosed and made real [to us] through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, Who annulled death and made it of no effect and brought life and immortality (immunity from eternal death) to light through the Gospel.

Contents

God's One and Only Purpose	2
<i>A Study in Biblical Reality</i>	2
Forward	6
Prologue	8
1. The Purpose of God <i>by T. Austin-Sparks</i>	9
2. God's Eternal Purpose <i>by Milt Rodriguez</i>	13
3. The Eternal Purpose of God <i>by Manfred Haller</i>	17
4. Called According To His Purpose <i>by Joy Thomas</i>	26
5. A God-Given Vision <i>by Jesse Jason</i>	31
6. Christ, the Center of All Things <i>by A. W. Tozer</i>	37
7. God's Purpose – A Mature Church <i>by Joy Thomas</i>	43
8. The Present Purpose of God <i>by DeVern Fromke</i>	51
9. God's Eternal Plan for the Church <i>by Watchman Nee</i>	56
10. The Church According To God's Thought <i>by T. Austin-Sparks</i>	60
11. "It Pleased God to Reveal His Son" <i>by Jesse Jason</i>	65
12. God's End in God's Way <i>by T. Austin-Sparks</i>	73
13. The Master Design in the Universe <i>by DeVern Fromke</i>	80
14. The Need for a Revelation of Christ <i>by Jesse Jason</i>	86
15. Church – A Help Meet for the Lord <i>by Joy Thomas</i>	91
16. The Lordship of the Spirit <i>by T. Austin-Sparks</i>	94
17. The Reality of <i>Koinonia</i> <i>by Jerry Coulter</i>	99
18. A People of the Upward Way <i>by George H Warnock</i>	104
19. The New Israel <i>by Jessy Jason</i>	109
20. Church - God's Covenant People <i>by Joy Thomas</i>	115

21. The Eternal Purpose of God <i>by T. Austin-Sparks</i>	119
22. A Zeal for His House <i>by Manfred Haller</i>	128
23. The Altar (The Cross) Governs Everything <i>by T. Austin-Sparks</i>	131
24. The Fullness of Christ <i>by George H. Warnock</i>	136
Bibliography	141
Copyright Information	143

Forward

When I turned fifty it seemed to me that the best part of my life was over. It is a familiar story; the years ahead seemed bleak and empty. But one day, as I turned to the Lord with tears of desperation and loneliness, He lifted me out of my misery and filled me with His Spirit and my life underwent a dramatic change. That happened twenty-five years ago.

I discovered that I was caught up in something much larger and more glorious than I had ever experienced or imagined. Becoming a Christian was not just about winning souls, Bible study, praise and worship, or joining a church. I found that I had acquired a hunger for God's presence, a longing for the company of God's people, and a new vision of God's purpose for His church. Being a Christian took on fresh impetus and a new meaning. My Christian life was no longer a matter of what I could do for the Lord, but something that centered upon the person and presence of Jesus Christ and upon the need of God in this dispensation and age.

By the mercies of God, I found myself in a place where the pastor and people were ever moving forward toward a greater measure of Christ in their lives. The worship was Spirit-led and the messages were anointed of God. It seemed as if I had stepped into another world where all that mattered was to be separated from religious mumbo-jumbo, and from the tradition of *churchianity*, theology, eschatology and ecclesiastic terminologies. My eyes were opened by the Lord to glimpse into the grandeur of His purpose and plans for man. Of course this did not take place in a day, but nevertheless I discovered something of what it means to see the unseen and the eternal.

Later I discovered that the ageless purpose of God is a purpose so great that to merely glimpse into is to be caught up in it and be drawn into something of incomparable glory! The sighting of God's all inclusive purpose set me free from many man-centered activities that pollute the church today. To really see what the Church of Christ is called to be is to be involved in something that changes the whole direction and thrust of one's life.

Gradually I began to realize that God has a very definite plan and purpose for His Church, the world over. God is breaking down the religious, false and the hypocritical man-made gospels and recovering the life that He wants His people to possess. There was an awakening within me when I began to see that something spiritually fresh and alive is entering into the lives of people who thirst for the reality of God's plan and purpose.

What I am able to glimpse in some measure has been wonderfully expressed by Frank Viola in his book, *From Eternity to Here*,

I had discovered the driving passion of God. And that passion gave birth to a divinely crafted purpose---a timeless purpose that had little to do with my individualistic efforts at being a good Christian or 'going to heaven'.

I gradually discovered that the ageless purpose of God stretches from eternity to here, then from here to eternity. It is a purpose so brilliant that the mere glimpse of it can cause the human spirit to be blinded by incomparable glory. A sighting of that

purpose has the power to deliver us from all the things that do not matter; things that do not give life; things that divide and fracture the body of Christ into pieces.

The sighting of God's all-governing purpose possesses the power to set us free from the "me-centered" gospel that's so commonly dished out today. In addition I discovered that this purpose runs throughout the entire Bible like an unbroken thread, weaving all of the teachings together into one heart-stirring narrative.

That initial glimpse of the Lord's ageless purpose has become an ever-expanding revelation within me. It has given my very existence on this earth new meaning and direction. To put it another way, in beholding God's central purpose, I found my own purpose. In touching His ultimate passion, I found my own passion. This eternal purpose burns in me to this very day.

The tragedy is that not many Christian writers seek to unveil the ageless purpose of our God. Nevertheless, the Divine purpose of God in Christ is being disclosed in several books by some renowned Christian authors who have drawn hard upon the Spirit to present the true essence of what God wants to do in the present times. It is my privilege to bring to light some of the writings that have stirred me up spiritually and helped me to see the realities of Christian life from God's point of view.

Bhai Musafir

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Prologue

The aim of this collection of excerpts is firstly to highlight the goal of a Christian life. Unfortunately much of the Christian testimony today is centered upon religious ethics that tilt the balance towards what the Apostle Paul calls carnality. Little attention is paid to God's 'purpose' for His people. Thus, many miss the trees for the forest! We live in a day when most believers don't really have a purpose, nor do they know God's purpose for saving them and setting them apart.

God has a single purpose, not many purposes, and all roads lead to this one single purpose. Everything God plans, and everything He does leads to the fulfillment of this single, over-riding purpose. The Scriptures say, *He worketh all things after the counsel of His own will* (Eph.1:11b). We are not here to fulfill our own purpose; we are here to fulfill His purpose. The Apostle Paul, led of the Spirit says, we are called according to "*His purpose*" (Rom. 8:28). A believer's spiritual eyes have to be opened to see this all-governing purpose of God. Then it will become the driving, all-consuming passion of their lives.

All the workings of God revolve around His great goal in His Son---to sum up all things in Christ and His Church, which is the fullness of Him who filleth all things. We must not just be satisfied in relegating our seeing of Christ to the past experience of being born again. It is the Lord's will that our eyes be continuously opened so that we can live and walk by the Spirit.

The second objective that I had in mind while presenting these extracts is to show what various well-known writers say concerning God's purpose for His people. Some of them bring a fresh understanding of time-worn concepts and some take us into new areas of discovering Christ. The whole sphere of the revelation and knowledge of Christ is so vast and deep that we need several inputs to truly understand our calling in Christ. I believe these excerpts from the writings of internationally acclaimed men of God will broaden the scope of our understanding of God's '*so great a salvation*'. Disciples of Christ can no longer be like the proverbial blind men who touched an elephant from different angles and came to their own narrow minded conclusions! These selections, from the writings of a few Christian authors, are by no means all that there is. The works of many other writers, notably Gene Edwards, Rick Warren and Frank Viola who have vividly emphasized God's 'purpose' in their books could not be included due to the limitations of space. However, the sensitive believer will be able to appreciate that the Holy Spirit's initiatives in this generation is in line with getting believers to know God's eternal purpose for His people.

I gratefully acknowledge the sources from which the contents of this book have been drawn. These are mentioned at the end of the book to help those who would like to delve deeper. My prayer is that believers would seek a revelation of God's one and only purpose which is a foundational necessity for our lives.

1. The Purpose of God *by T. Austin-Sparks*

God Has Only One Purpose

It is of immense help, in contemplating the manifold activities and energies of God, to be able to gather everything into one inclusive, comprehensive, and concrete issue. The Bible, from Genesis to the Revelation, covers a wide range and includes a vast amount of matter, but it has one all-governing and conclusive objective. The purpose of God is one, and only one. It is always referred to in the singular; "...Called according to His purpose..." (Rom. 8:28) "...According to the purpose..." (Eph. 1:11) "...According to the eternal purpose..." (Eph. 3:11) "...According to His purpose and grace..." (2 Tim. 1:9) It is not a variety or number of things; it is just one.

And what is the one, single, comprehensive purpose? The answer is Christ! "...His Son, *Jesus Christ*." And when we ask further, What about His Son? The answer is, to have Him fill all things and to have all things in Him. That this is so is made clear in the definite statements of Scripture;

"In Him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible... all things have been created through Him, and unto Him."

"For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in Him should all the fullness dwell" (Col. 1:16, 19)

"Whom He appointed heir of all things, through Whom also He made the worlds (ages)." (Heb. 1:2)

So, then, in the counsels of God, all things must head up in Christ. God's occupation is with bringing Christ in, and bringing into Christ. If we would be "*God's fellow-workers*", this must be our single-eyed aim and business. This defines precisely the purpose of the Church.

The Expression of God's Purpose

The presence of the Church in this world is, firstly, to be a corporate expression of Christ here. The very designation "The Body of Christ" means Christ corporately present. The Church is not an institution, organization, society, or religious fraternity. It is, in God's intention, the embodiment of His Son in a continuation of His life and work on this earth. In the next place, after the *being* of the Church, is its work. This is just one thing, and by the one result alone its work stands or falls. This work is to make for an increase of Christ in this world, and this is to be accomplished along two lines; namely, by *evangelism* and *building up*.

Evangelism is the bringing of Christ initially *into* lives. Every new instance of Christ coming into a life is an additional measure of Christ in the creation, making a new creation. It is of the utmost importance that there should be no stopping short at mere mental agreement, or emotional expression, or just an outward act of acceptance, but that Christ by His Spirit should really have taken up residence within. But our object is not to deal with evangelism, but to point out its object, which is *to bring in Christ and to bring into Christ*.

The other purpose of the Church is building up. In the most familiar versions of the New Testament the word in this connection is "edification". But "building up" is much better. The Church is to "build itself up". We are to "build one another up". Spiritual gifts and ministries are all meant for "building up". What is this "building up"? It is the increase of Christ. The New Testament repeatedly refers to "babes in Christ" and "full-grown men" in Christ; and there is a constant urge to "go on to full growth". Thus, by extensification and intensification, by increase outwardly and inwardly, it is Christ gaining an ever-increasing place. We repeat, by numerous ways and means God is governed by this one all-dominating objective - His Son.

But there is a point which needs very much to be emphasized and kept in view. These two things, evangelism and building up, are not two separate things; they must be kept together. If they are separated, or if either is given a greater place than the other an unbalanced condition will arise, and this will defeat God's full end. If evangelism is given a place greater than building up, or to the exclusion of the other, the result will be a great number of spiritual babes who remain such, no matter how long they live. There will then exist a preponderating number of Christians who are like those referred to by the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews - "*When by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that someone teach you the rudiments of the first principles... and are become such as have need of milk, and not of solid food*" (Heb. 5:12). By this and what immediately follows, the Apostle makes it quite clear that God can never be satisfied with just having so many, however many, "converts", born-again babes, but His end demands that these shall come to the spiritual position where they can take all that He has to give of spiritual strong meat, and have spiritual senses exercised, being "experienced in the word" and of spiritual intelligence. All this means what Paul called "*the measure of Christ*", and the end in view - "*unto the measure... of the **fullness** of Christ.*"

If, on the other hand, building up is given a place out of all proportion to evangelism, we shall have another malformation. There will arise an ultra-spirituality that is divorced from what is practical. Truth will, sooner or later, take the place of Life. The mental will rule out the truly spiritual. The worst outcome will be that those involved will be found to have got into a false position which will not stand up to the tests of real life, the expression of Christ, among the people and conditions of this world. For the real proof of spiritual life is in its ability to express Christ in love, forbearance, patience, meekness, and self-forgetfulness, in an unsympathetic, un-understanding, and unappreciative world. This does not mean that there should be a limiting of either evangelism or building up, but it does mean that there *must* be a close relationship between the two.

This is very strikingly manifested in the fact that the Apostles of the New Testament combined these two ministries in such fullness. They evangelized mightily; but what an immense building up ministry they fulfilled also! They brought Christ in almost everywhere they went, but they brought Him in in ever-increasing fullness wherever they *had* been. The point is the combination of the two. In the matter of ministry gifts to the Church, the Evangelist and the Pastor and Teacher are complementary ministries.

Perfecting the Saints

All this is surely very patent. But where are we now? We do not hesitate to say that the relationship between these two things has not by any means been preserved in equal proportions. The fact is that there is a preponderance of Christians who are, after many years, spiritual babes, sadly immature; without understanding in spiritual things; without capacity (and without appetite) for "strong meat". The result is that the impact and effect of Christ in this world is not at all commensurate with either the time that Christianity has been here, or the number of Christians on the earth. A few strong, healthy, and "experienced" people of God will count for a very great deal more than a vast number of Christians whose maturity is unduly delayed. There is therefore much to be done by way of removing this ill-balanced state and bringing the Lord's children to the state and position which should be theirs "by reason of the time".

This means that there is a real need and demand for a ministry of "*the fullness of Christ*" to the Christians of our time. The world's need is preeminently Christ in greater fullness, and this can only be in and by the Church, His chosen vehicle. But, we repeat, all such ministry must not stop with itself. It must result in stronger, richer, fuller evangelism. That is to say, the Christians must come through it to the position of having more of Christ to show and impart. This then is what is our sense of calling - "*for the perfecting of the saints unto (that **they** may do) the work of ministering*"; the word "*perfecting*" meaning making complete or full.

To sum up, God's end is the bringing in of His Son to fullness. This is the object and nature of the Church's being and work. The method is twofold: evangelism and building up. These two must be kept in close relationship as complementary, and the balance must be preserved in equality. This balance has *not* been preserved, and there are very many Christians whose spiritual maturity and capacity is very unduly delayed. There is therefore an altogether inadequate registration, impact, and effectiveness as to Christ, considering how long Christianity has been here and how many Christians there are. The need then is for a ministry by which *Christians* can be helped to the position that is God's desire and intention for them. Such a ministry must not end in people becoming interested in and taken up with teaching as something in itself, but rather in a richer and fuller representation of Christ to and among the peoples of this world. It is a misapprehension of truth if it results in less concern for the increase of Christ by the salvation of sinners and the mutual spiritual helpfulness of the saved. Truth should never turn us in on ourselves, but should make us conscious of being under a great debt to others.

Then we must realize that there are certain things which are basic to full spiritual development. One of these is the essential organic oneness of all who are "*in Christ*". No individual, or number of individuals, as such, can attain unto the full stature of Christ; that is only possible for "*the whole Body*". Any kind of division amongst Christians is a violation of Christ ("*Is Christ divided?*"—1 Cor. 1:13), and that must be contrary to the Holy Spirit, by whose work alone can we attain unto full growth. Therefore believers must abandon schismatic and divisive ground and occupy only the ground of Christ. In the beginning the Church was constituted by the acceptance of the absolute Lordship and Headship of Christ, and not just His

Saviourhood. *"We preach Christ Jesus as Lord."* The Saviourhood was largely for *men's* good, but the Lordship was mainly for *His* place. This issue was the occasion of all the trouble.

This then is the ministry to which we feel the Lord has called us. Through deep and drastic ways He has formed it. We have not assumed it, and we can only give what He has given. We have sought much and always to be saved from mere theory, and we feel that in this the Lord has been faithful; but it has been costly.

And now, brethren, how can we gather up what we feel as our burden? Perhaps in no better way than in the Apostle's words:

"Teaching every man, and admonishing every man, that we may present every man perfect (full grown) in Christ." Col. 1:28

2. God's Eternal Purpose *by Milt Rodriguez*

We live in a day when most believers don't really have a purpose. We have agendas, programs, causes, activities, and ministries, but we don't have a purpose. Of course, if you ask most believers if they have a purpose they will say yes. When you ask them what it is, they will proceed to tell you what their church is currently doing. Or they may give you some vague answer such as to do the will of God, or to glorify God. But the will of God is the same as saying the purpose of God, so in effect; they are telling you that their purpose is to fulfill His purpose! But what is the purpose?

Many others will tell you that God's purpose is to evangelize the world. That's why Jesus came, to save sinners, after all. Or perhaps it's healing, or deliverance, or to bring restoration to the family, or to this nation, or to the church. Yet none of these things even come close to describing God's eternal purpose. How do I know this? Simple, all of the above answers have to do with time and space. They all take place in creation, after the fall. Yet Paul tells us that God's purpose is *eternal*.

An Eternal Purpose

Eph.3:11 (KJV): *According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord*

Eternal purpose here literally means "purpose of the ages." You see this purpose, this will, this intention, this plan, has *always* been and *always* will be His purpose throughout all ages! Therefore, His purpose existed *before* there was man, or the fall, or creation. Therefore, His purpose cannot be to save the lost because this purpose is before (and after!) the fall of man. Of course, God *does* want to save the lost, and heal, and deliver, and all the other things that Christians love to focus on. But those things are not His eternal purpose. He had something in His mind and heart, before any of those things were necessary. He created the entire universe and all realms, visible and invisible, with this purpose in mind. This purpose is what motivates your God to do everything He does. It is the driving force behind creation, and salvation, and reconciliation. It is the reason why the church exists.

Please take note that God's purpose is singular. He has a purpose, not many purposes. Your God is single minded in this matter of His will and purpose. Please understand that in God's mind, all roads lead to this one single purpose. Everything He plans, and everything He does leads to the fulfillment of this single purpose. "*Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will.*" Eph.1:11b

The Godhead took counsel together in eternity and decided upon a great goal. All the workings of God would revolve around this great goal. All of His hopes and expectations would move to this one great end. He would not stop until the fullness of His great purpose was realized. God is relentless and unswerving in His pursuit of this glorious quest.

The Importance of Revelation

You and I need a Spirit-borne revelation of His eternal purpose. Why? The answer is simple. How will we understand our purpose if we don't know (by revelation) His purpose? We are not here to fulfill our own purposes. We are here to fulfill *His* purpose.

Rom. 8:28 (KJV) *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

However, we need to see this purpose with our spiritual eyes. We need the Holy Spirit to give us a revelation of this wonderful purpose in our spirits. If we can truly "see" this purpose, it will be branded into our souls and we will never forget it. It will become the all-consuming passion of our lives. It will become the driving force behind everything we do, just like it is for our Father in heaven.

The Eternal Purpose Revealed

Eph.1:7-12 (KJV)

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

Eph.1:22-23 (KJV)

And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,

Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Eph.3:8-12 (KJV)

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,

*According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:
In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.*

Col. 1:18-20 (KJV)

And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;

And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

Col. 3:10-11 (KJV)

And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.

These scriptures, along with many more, show us God's eternal purpose. Simply stated, it is the sum up all things in Christ. God has a Person, a Man, who is to be the Center of all things. This Person is His Son. His goal is to have this Person be enlarged so that He fills the universe with Himself. He is to be the all-comprehending and all-inclusive One. He is to be all-encompassing and all-sufficient. He is to be the All in all! All things are to be filled with Him and He is to be the total equation of all things. God's goal is that His Son would be the fullness of all realms. Yes, He wants the Lordship and Headship of Christ to reign supreme, but it is much more than that. All things are to be in Him, and all things are to be filled by and with Him, that is, with His life.

"He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things." Eph.4:10(KJV)

Do you see the issues here? He is to have the preeminence in all things. The issues *are filling, fullness, and all*. The fullness of Christ must be expressed throughout the universe and all that He is must be seen everywhere. He is to be the *All* in you and the *All* in me. He is to be the All in all of us! The life, love, character, and power of Christ are to permeate every inch of this universe. He is to be the beginning, the end, and everything in between. He is to be the Center and the Circumference. He is to be the end all and be all at all times and at all places. This is God's glorious will and purpose.

Of course, it is not enough just for us to know that this is God's purpose. The very purpose itself demands that we come progressively into a growing knowledge of the fullness of Christ Himself. Paul said that it pleased the Father to reveal His Son in him and this revelation was the basis for the gospel he preached (Gal. 1:15, 16). We are to attain to the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature Man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ (Eph.4:13).

God is going to fulfill His purpose by developing a Man. This Man is to grow into maturity so that the measure of His stature is the fullness of Christ.

3. The Eternal Purpose of God *by Manfred Haller*

And we now that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined, these He also called; and who He called, these He also justified; and who He justified, these He also glorified. Romans 8:28-30

This Scripture makes mention of an eternal purpose or plan of God. Everything God does, He does according to a plan which He purposed before the foundation of the world. From the very beginning, God has envisioned the final outcome of all things. The closing scene of the Bible, the heavenly Jerusalem, is not a product of chance, but the clearly-sighted objective of all God's works.

A discerning Bible reader will notice that all the elements of salvation come together in this city of God. All of the threads in the fabric of biblical revelation—creation, election, redemption, purification, transformation, love, grace and perfection—find their crowning glory conclusion in the heavenly Jerusalem. It is the key to the whole story of creation and salvation. It is crucial to interpreting the entire Bible. Without this foundational concept we will understand nothing in the Word of God. Therefore, when the Scriptures speak of God's eternal purpose, they do not mean merely disconnected ideals and objectives which God intends to carry out someday. Rather, the picture of this city, "the perfection of beauty," is His goal.

And now we read in Romans 8 that we who believe in Jesus Christ, we who are born of God and implanted into Christ, are called "*according to His purpose.*" In other words, He chose us so that He could carry out His plan and realize His aspirations! Isn't this thrilling? We have traditionally understood the gospel of grace to mean that God was lenient with us, and out of grace He allowed us to join Him in glory. We were candidates for hell, but God simply couldn't stand to see our sorry state and so He had mercy on us. But this is again a great misunderstanding. If God had not saved us, His desire would not have been met. Our salvation and deliverance are absolutely necessary to Him.

We were called from the very beginning to partake in the nature and character of His Son. Thereby we also partake in His delight, in His obsession, which is the object of all His thoughts, feelings, love and joy. God saw us in Christ before we were even created. We were created to be conformed to the image of His Son.

But let us proceed in proper order. We will try to understand how the eternal plan has been spiritually carried out, step by step, and how we fit into it.

The Visible Creation

In the last chapter we discussed the invisible creation. "*In the beginning, God created the heavens ...*" Indeed, the heavens and the earth belong together, which is why we are now addressing the visible creation. Still, as we turn to look at God's visible creation, keep in mind that the invisible reality exists—an invisible creation which is also part of the eternal purpose of God. The order in which God created correlates perfectly to the order of heaven and earth's

functions. First, the heavens were created, then the earth. In God's plans, the earth is not merely a way-station from which we later proceed on to heaven. God's way is to progress from heaven to earth, from the invisible to the visible, from grace to glory.

Traditionally Christianity holds the rapture to be the climax and also the conclusion of our spiritual development, and what follows is eternal fellowship with God in heaven. But God's way runs in the exact opposite direction. The New Jerusalem comes from heaven down to the earth. Christ returns "with all His saints" (1 Thess. 3:13). Certainly, what we have come to call the rapture is an important event in the course of the last days, but it is not what most believers think it is. It is only a prerequisite to the final victory over Satan (see Rev. 12).

The nineteenth-century German cleric, Friedrich Christoph Oetinger said, "The end of all God's ways is loveliness." What he meant was precisely this: The end of all the plans and activity of God is not an ecstatic retreat in heaven but a renewed and glorified earth. Not a heaven full of blissfully strolling saints but "*the tabernacle of God among men*" (Rev. 21:3). Not some eternal dormancy but government, administration and service on a new earth in God's name. "...and they will reign upon the earth ...and they shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation chapters 5 and 22). This reign is clearly not only in the heavenly realm, but also over a physical creation that has been liberated from sin and death.

The visible cosmos, therefore, became the setting in which the drama of God's eternal plan would play out. It was, is and shall remain the arena for the dealings of God. And the earth was always the focus and life of this cosmos. Whatever modern physics may say about it, whatever theories man's learning may influence him to adopt, from God's perspective the earth—this tiny particle of clay among billions of other heavenly bodies in seemingly endless space—is the center of the universe.

The earth is the planet of God's love. It is the planet of God's Son. It is also the planet of God's church. God centers His attention and all His plans here. His Son in human form served here, and the cross of Golgotha was set here. God's people live here, Satan will be judged here, and finally the heavenly Jerusalem will be established here.

It is nonsense to charge that the Bible has a false perspective of the world; it has a perfectly sensible world view. It is the world view of God's eternal purpose. It is only when we can set out theories against the backdrop of God's purpose, that any of our global perspectives take shape and begin to make sense.

Our little earth is of such great consequence! How prominent she becomes when we consider her role in the unending purposes of God! How deeply rooted is our unbelief, that we even feel the need to talk about "world views," origins and "cosmic perspective." How desperate is our need of revelation!

As we mentioned before, the six days of work described in Genesis 1 is an account of the restoration of a former perfect creation. The story does not tell us about how God created the world, but of how he proceeded to reconstruct what was destroyed. It reveals the principles God applies after there has been some deviation from His will or a departure from His original

plan. The “creation story” contains deep spiritual insight into the work and intervention of God, but we shall not deal further with the topic here.

In Zechariah 12:1, we read: “*Thus declared the Lord, who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him*” The order here is significant. God made the heavens for earth, and the earth for man’s sake. Heaven is the servant of earth and earth is the realm of man—to support human life literally, but also to make possible the special task man would have.

Man is unmistakably the goal of the visible creation. God exercised great care with him, and he alone was created in the image and likeness of God. Of all God’s creatures only man is God’s partner, called from the beginning to be conformed to the image of His Son, as the Scripture so clearly states.

The words image and likeness are indicative of man’s spiritual nature. God is spirit, and Zechariah 12 tells us that God formed the spirit of man within him. This human spirit is what makes relationship and fellowship with God possible at all. Through his spirit, man can walk in step with God. In the spirit he is one with God. Through his spirit he knows of God and receives everything God wants to communicate to him.

He who puts on Christ is one spirit with Him, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians. It is only because man is a spiritual creature that he can receive life from God, be transformed into the likeness of God and become Christ like. Jesus became a “*life-giving spirit*” after His resurrection.

Man’s spirit is the inner core of the visible creation. Everything having to do with restoring the fallen “*first man*” takes place in the human spirit, and all of God’s transforming work issues forth from there. It is in man’s spirit that Christ takes up residence. It is in man’s spirit where the threads of spiritual history—of God’s eternal purpose—are taken up again as soon as an individual turns to God and is saved.

It is not the individual, however, whom God wants to manifest. From the beginning, God was interested in humanity, in a race, in a family. Adam was considered the head of all humanity from the very beginning. When he was created humanity was created. He is the chief over the family of man. The first man as well as the last man represented mankind. The entire potential of the human race was in them, Adam’s mission was to populate the earth with his kind. He not only personified the humanity God created, but he was also the crown jewel of all visible creation and its most excellent expression.

The ancients seemed to perceive that the human body is a microcosm, manifesting through its various organs and processes the laws and operation of the universe. It is from this idea that magic is derived, plus the belief that stars and planets influence the lives of people, and much more. While sorcery is a deception to be avoided, it is true that man is indeed a resume of God’s creation.

Man is a Vessel

Adam is far less important as an individual, the first among many, than he is as a corporate unit and embodiment of all humanity. When Adam was created, the human race was created; and when he sinned, humanity sinned. Adam's fall meant the fall of all mankind, but his election with regard to the eternal purposes of God was also the election of all mankind. Yet this is not his only significance.

In God's eyes, Adam was a vessel. The spirit which He placed in man was a shell, a hollow space intended to be filled with something definite. That is why Zechariah directs attention to man's spirit when writing about the creation of heaven and earth.

Human beings were created to receive the life of God. This is signified by the tree of life in Eden. They were to take this life into themselves. This was why they were made. Before he set about populating the earth, man was supposed to eat of the tree of life. Then he would live forever! Adam's eternal life did not mean endless existence, as we tend to define it today. At that point, death was not yet in the world, so there was nothing that could have ended his life. Yet unknown was the terrible curse of mortality and corruptibility which turned the earth into the planet of death. There was no reason to limit man's days and shorten his life. No, God's plan was for men and women to partake of God's eternal life, then to multiply and fill the earth.

God wanted to dwell in man, glorify Himself through him and manifest His greatness in a human race which He would permeate and fill up. Before Adam fell he was God's hope for a humanity united with Himself by His Spirit, a race which would reveal God and would mature unto the fullness of God. Through such a race God would reign and glorify Himself.

Adam was not yet complete on the day the Creator formed him out of the dust. He was first of all a vessel, an earthly vessel. He could only become complete by receiving the life of God. Even then the goal still lay far off, because it was through obedience and trust in God (trust in the life of God within him) that he was to grow to perfection. Through testing, and under the refining hand of God, Adam was to become a being which radiated God through and through, revealing the character and the ways of Christ without distortion. Men and women were to become sons and daughters, the first of whom is Christ Himself. Christ as the first born among many brethren—this was the divine idea behind the creation of man.

Three Main Motives in God's Eternal Plan

We have already established that from the very beginning God envisioned the heavenly Jerusalem as the completion and perfection of His eternal purposes. The new Jerusalem has three significant aspects to it. It is a city. It is the bride of the Lamb. And it is the tabernacle of God among men, that is to say, the temple, or dwelling of God (Rev. 21:2-3). These three aspects correspond to the threefold necessity of God: (a) His authority. (b) His need to love. (c) His redemptive and reconstructive grace.

God's desire for authority is satisfied by a city—Jerusalem. A city is the quintessential model of an ordered society, of administration and government. A city can only exist when the community and co-operation of many people is ensured by an authentic and reliable

administration. In the middle ages, a city was always associated with security and protection, even with freedom. After a serf had lived for a year within the walls of the city, he could no longer be claimed by his landlord. The former serf could settle as a free man in the city. A city stands for power and authority, especially in the Bible.

God's need to manifest His love is satisfied by the bride. The heavenly Jerusalem represents the bride, the wife of the Lamb. Here the people of God are depicted as the object of God's love. Even the Israel of the old covenant was referred to as the wife of Jehovah. The prophet Jeremiah described Israel's time after the exodus from Egypt as the time of betrothal; as the people devoted themselves to building the tabernacle and to service in holiness, God entered into a covenant of marriage with Israel.

God's love, of course, required a worthy partner. What man in his original innocent state failed to become because of his sin, Israel would become as God's chosen people. But even this was only a shadow of the spiritual reality which would manifest itself in the second man, Jesus Christ. He was raised and, as the first-born son raised from the dead. He was exalted and set in office. He was to be the head of a new mankind. The previous mankind was unified on the basis of fleshly relationships. This new mankind would be unified through the power of the residing life of God. He would be the head of the church.

Think of Adam before the fall. Think of Christ after the resurrection. In these two we see sonship. By Christ the Son, many would be made into sons. This is why He is the first-born among many brothers. But man did not consist of Adam only. *"It was not good for the man to be alone."* God gave the man Eve. Only then was God's second motive able to be seen—the love of and for a bride.

As a city, Jerusalem satisfied God's desire for absolute authority. As a bride, she satisfied His longing for love. This symbolizes the church as God's goal. Here is where the marriage of the Creator with His creation takes place. Here the love of God finds its fulfillment and completion.

God's third motive can be described by the word grace. Grace is much more than simply pardon. During the reformation, the reformers were afraid that a materialistic, perhaps even a magical interpretation of grace, might develop. Unfortunately, to prevent this they created another problem concerning grace. They established a purely jurisprudential understanding of grace.

But grace is something material, and many examples of Scripture prove this. Grace is even an active force, a transforming force. Grace is that which stands behind the mystery of transformation.

God's motive of grace is covered by the third aspect of the new Jerusalem, that of the temple, the dwelling place, the house of God. The entire Bible is the report of one mighty construction plan. At the core we find a great edifice—the temple of the Almighty, which is not a structure of literal stone. It is nothing other than the dwelling of God among men.

In the New Testament, this is of course the church, the community of God's people which gets built by God's grace. The believers are called lining stones which are fit together into an architecture of which Jesus Christ is the cornerstone. Stones must first be formed, however,

before they can be built into a building. The material originally available to God was dust. Then there were uncut stones, then living stones, and finally there will be precious stones.

This is the order of transformation which expresses the mystery of divine grace. By grace we were saved, by grace we were chosen. It is grace which grants us access to the living God, and it is grace once again which makes us His servants. It is grace at work when His hand forms us and we are changed under discipline and care into His likeness. Paul said, "*but by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain*" (1 Cor. 15:10).

Still, behind this triad of authority, love and grace—and also city, bride and temple—is something much more tremendous. Our God is a triune God. Each of these expressions and each of the symbols refer in a special way to one of the three personalities of God. The city satisfies the desire of Father (*Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory*), the bride is for the Son (the bride of the Lamb), and the temple meets the need of the Spirit (the temple of the Holy Ghost).

The city is the symbol of the kingdom, God's kingdom (authority). In both the Old and the New Testament, the kingdom always stands in direct relationship to the Father, to God Himself. In Revelation we read, "*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.*" God's authority is at issue here (see also Romans 13:1). Paul says that, in the end, even the Son will submit Himself to the Father, that God may be all and in all.

The theme of the entire New Testament is Christ and the church. The church is that which is presented to the Son as His Bride. Jesus was even introduced as the bridegroom by John the Baptist.

And finally, it is the Holy Spirit which was poured out to perfect the work of regeneration, maturing the heavenly birth within us. He is the Spirit of grace. He works God's grace into our lives and transforms us. He is the presence of God among us, and the life of God in us. This is how our bodies become the temple of the Holy Spirit, and by the Spirit we will ultimately be transformed and glorified.

In God's plan we are finally able to see the triune God at work in a spectacular way. Full of wonder, we begin to glimpse how the new Jerusalem is a perfect expression of the three divine motives—the authority of the Father, the love of the Son, and thirdly the grace of the Spirit in the form of a glorious architecture built with flawless materials.

Let us examine these three features of new Jerusalem individually.

(a) God's Authority:

In our discussion of the creation of heaven, we considered a being who, in the entire heavenly realm, held a unique and exalted position. We didn't identify this creature, but he was always believed to be Lucifer before his rebellion and fall, the highest of the angelic beings. It is not possible to cover this exhaustively, but if the Scriptures quoted truly distinguish him as an archangel, perhaps as the greatest of them all, then one of the mysteries of God's purpose is opened to us.

Satan's position as prince of this world is not even challenged by Jesus when they later confronted one another in the desert. This angel must have always had some special connection to earth and to man. Some have speculated that Lucifer at one time combined the offices of king, priest and prophet, and was intended to direct the entire creation in the worship of God. As representative of the visible and invisible worlds, he would have presented the heavens and earth to the Son, the Son being the legitimate heir of all things. But Lucifer, at some point deluded by his own resplendence and beauty, determined to set himself in the place of the Son, assume equality with God and make creation subordinate to himself, especially the earth and its realm (including the sun and planets). God drove this rebel from His presence, and Satan with all his domain fell into darkness. It is noteworthy that Satan was allowed to retain authority over the area assigned to him.

This is where the Bible in Genesis takes up the creation story. Instead of destroying Satan and liberating the fallen creation through a single act of might, God chose a protracted course, in that He created a being who, in communion with Him, would overcome Satan and deliver creation out of the thrall of perishability into the glorious freedom of the children of God. Adam was assigned to rule over the earth, which entailed cultivating and keeping the Garden of Eden. The fact that keeping or tending the garden was necessary indicates the possibility of undesired events. Satan was able, through the seducing serpent, to cause this first man to fall and become enslaved to the prince of this world. Even though God took certain preventive measures in the old covenant, the full consequences of the fall could not be abrogated. So He sent His Son; the Word became flesh. As the second man and the last Adam, the Son was subjected to the testings of darkness and the flesh, but this time without failing. From this resulted our deliverance from the course of sin and death. Friendship between God and man was restored, and by the Holy Spirit God could now live in man. The Son took on a corporate form through the church; she has become the body of the risen and exalted Christ. In her and by her the Son of God rules over Satan and the powers of darkness, and it is only a matter of time before death will also be crushed under His feet. The new Jerusalem is the completed embodiment of the re-established, absolute authority of God:

"... and they shall reign forever and ever ..., there shall no longer be any death ... and there is no longer any sea (the waters of death)."

(b) God's Love:

In Adam's case, it was *"not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."* Love requires communion. Love is union, harmony, mutual enhancement, fructification. Such was only possible if Adam did not remain alone. The remarkable manner in which God created woman is full of deep symbolic meaning. She was not raised up directly out of the dust as Adam was. God took instead a rib from Adam while he slept and fashioned the man's partner with it. Adam's deep sleep is certainly a prefiguration of the death of Christ. Here we have an illustration of how the church, which is supposed to be the bride of Christ, came to be.

The rib, *"bone of my bone,"* stands for resurrection. Bones are the only part of a person which remains for centuries, even millennia, after the person has passed. The rib God covers with flesh, creating a woman whom He gives to the man. In her, Adam recognizes his

counterpart and equal. Out of all the creatures of the earth, he can have fellowship with only this one. With her he can accomplish God's command to multiply and fill the earth.

So it is with Christ. What Eve was to Adam, the church is to Christ. Paul affirmed this relationship clearly in his letter to the Ephesians. She is His body; she is the part taken from Him. She emerged as people were born of God, which is to say, as they received life from God. They were human beings and always will be, but in them is the life, the reality, of the second Adam. They are bone of his bone and flesh of His flesh.

The church is characterized by fellowship (*koinonia*, in Greek). The church exists because Christ lives in all saints, all are partakers of the same life, all are baptized by the same Spirit into a single body. And the basis of fellowship is love. Through the Holy Spirit, the love of the Father has come into the hearts of those who make up the church. It is expected that the church holds to her first love, a love which deepens and intensifies and swells to such great longing that it can only be satisfied by wedding the Lamb.

The mystery of Eve's creation is the mystery of redemption. Nothing has demonstrated the deep love God has for his creation—especially for man—so distinctly as redemption does.

You can see the whole Bible as a love story. (You could also interpret the entire Bible from the standpoint of God's authority, and see it as one single purpose of the mind of God including the restoration of divine authority, the final triumph of God's throne, and judgment of all His enemies.) From the standpoint of love, the Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation, are but one great love story about God and the race He created. Over long periods the story seems to be a tragic one. God's untiring appeals and struggles to win His people, His beloved bride, are met time after time with rejection, apathy, apostasy and harlotry. Still God never gives in. He is the most tenacious lover the universe has ever seen. He was willing to make even the greatest sacrifice in order to win back His bride. *"...for God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son ..."*

As tragic as man's fall and deception were, what glory has come out of it! Not even Satan was able to steal from God. Consider for a moment this holy city, the new Jerusalem. She possesses the very glory of God! The sun and moon pale before her eternal radiance. The nations walk by her light. No more sin, not a trace of death or corruption, only life, light fruitfulness, purity and absolute clarity in every street and throughout every niche and corner. What a love God is! What a bride He has made, redeemed, purified and perfected.

(c) God's Grace:

This third aspect of the city can be seen in the story of the house of God in both the Old and New Testaments. The motive is one of the most fundamental desires God has: to live with men. He wanted to build Himself a temple out of living stones. The blueprint for the house is as old as time; it was even shown to Moses on the mountain. David, too, received a revelation on which his son, Solomon, later based the temple. The layout and every dimension had to be according to the original pattern; nothing was left up to the imaginations of men. God's house had to be suitable to the One who would fill it, the standard being nothing less than God's own image. The grace of God through the person of the Spirit made this building possible. Again it

begins with Eve. An alternative translation to the word fashioned in Genesis 2:22 (And the Lord fashioned into a woman ...) is built. Some translations and other languages do indeed read that God built the woman out of the rib of man.

It is here that the divine concept takes effect for the first time: God builds a temple, a dwelling for Himself as Spirit, using the materials He has created. In the New Testament, the church is called the house of God. Christ living in the saints is what makes them one. Just as the body of each individual believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit, so is the church the dwelling place of God in the Spirit. We read repeatedly in the New Testament of our being built up together. The saints have to be hewn, chiseled and reshaped as living stones until they interlock in the perfectly in the walls of the divine structure. All this is the work of grace. And the grace of God becomes ours through the Holy Spirit.

The entire Bible, again, is one great story about constructing God's temple. All three of these revelatory strains come together in the new Jerusalem. She is the culmination of God's kingdom, the rule and authority of God. She is the consummation of God's love in the wedding feast of the Lamb, and she is the perfect manifestation of the grace of God at its goal, the dwelling of God with men. In this city, God's eternal purpose is accomplished, and the desire of His heart fulfilled.

Thus God's plan turns out to be a perfect symphony ending in the worship and glorification of God without end. May the Lord so work in us that the day on which everything stands perfected and ready is hastened and that our Brother John's vision comes to pass:

Rev. 21:1-6

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

All glory be unto Him!

4. Called According To His Purpose *by Joy Thomas*

A Purpose Governs Our Salvation

2 Tim 1:9, 10

Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,

...But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

How beautiful and true these verses are! Read them again and again and let the sound of these verses ring in your ears till they are registered within the spirit. Let these precious words fill your heart.

We need to realize that there is a purpose of God that is governing our salvation. We must also realize that we do not know the depths of the 'so great a salvation.' It may be beyond our present level of comprehension. There is content in this salvation that goes beyond our comprehension of spiritual things right now. That is why Paul says that God has called us according to His conception of salvation and not ours. God's purpose will be revealed to us from them to time by the Holy Spirit of God because God alone has designed and knows the heights and depths of our salvation. The Scripture says, "*The things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God.*" (1 Cor. 2:11). Remember always therefore, that we are saved according to His purpose and His grace.

Our salvation has a composition that is not easy to comprehend. There's something in us, on our very constitution that says, 'we are called according to His purpose.' By this we know that God has only one gospel through which He brings salvation to all mankind. He has only one gospel and therefore, there is only one calling and only one hope of our calling. There is only one calling, one hope, one baptism, and one faith (Eph.4:4, 5). Paul seems to have been gripped by the enormity of this truth, as he was inspired to write these letters to the churches—that God has called us to one purpose in His Son. Every one of us has been saved from damnation by the grace of God for one purpose only. This call of God is something that God has purposed from eternity past. God has purposed it in eternity, before He laid the foundation of the earth! Such is the love of God for mankind. His purpose was established before man was created. This is the love of God towards us. It is difficult for the natural mind to understand this. God has chosen us before the foundations of this world. We need to realize that the call of God was not a result of the fall of man; it was not God's reaction to man's fall, nor did it come into existence all of a sudden. Therefore, we are a people who have a destiny—there is a destiny that governs our lives.

An Overshadowing Destiny

A sense of destiny should grip each and every one of us for we are called according to His purpose. There is electiveness here. This means, something separate, something different, something not general but something particular and special. At times, we wonder why God has chosen us and not other better qualified persons. We are saved because of His mercy and not because of our works, abilities or talents.

Rom. 9:15-18 KJV

For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

Rom. 9:23 KJV

And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,

Let us remember that there is a selectiveness of God at work in our lives. It is foolish to think that you have been saved because you cried out to God more than many others! This selectivity of God continues to work in our lives even after we have been saved.

Some friends of mine who were saved at the same time as I was, experienced a splendid beginning in their spiritual lives, but today, they are far away from God's ultimate purposes. However, I have been carried as it were upon the wings of an eagle. Who can explain these workings of God except to say that there is a hand of God that comes upon us! It is not that we found Him but that He found us. That is the reality. If the grace of God has appeared to you, then remember that God has a purpose for you. Every person who is saved must know that he is called and chosen by God for a specific purpose that God has in mind. There must be an in-wrought consciousness of being called and chosen for something. We need an in-wrought work of God within our spirit to know and accept the fact that we are called according to His purpose. We are called and chosen by God to be brought into the image and likeness of the Son. He has predestined us.

Rom. 8:30 KJV

Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

An In-wrought Consciousness

2 Thess. 2:13-14 KJV

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through

sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

An in-wrought consciousness will assure us that we are called, chosen and justified that we may be conformed to the image of the Son. We have been called according to God's purpose. There is a destiny written upon our lives. We must have an in-wrought consciousness that we are a people of destiny. Knowing that we have been called according to His purpose will sustain us and help us to go through suffering and adversity. It will help us to remain in the center of His will under incredible perplexities, diverse situations and abnormal circumstances.

Rom. 8:35-39 KJV

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There were so many difficulties that came upon Apostle Paul, yet something held him up and sustained him through all the perils he faced from time to time. Paul, the Apostle says, "*We were pressed out of measure, above strength, inasmuch that we despaired even of life*" (2 Cor. 1:8). There is an 'indefinable something' of God that sustains us in every crisis and dilemma, beloved. There is a grip of God upon our lives. When we become despondent, when we feel we cannot go on any longer, when the situation we face seems untenable, unbearable and insurmountable an 'indefinable something' holds us and takes us through that circumstance! Something holds us, grips us, and refuses to let us go in any way but the way of God! There is a substance in our salvation that is incomprehensible to us. That indefinable element of God's holding power or keeping power will not allow the situation to get the better of us. But let us not take this in the wrong sense and make it a doctrine. Let us not say that we can live in any way we want and yet be in the center of God's purpose. Do you experience the deep reality of something keeping you and holding you in the midst of every adverse condition? Can you say that there is a consciousness deep within, that tells you that you are being 'kept', day by day, by an unseen Divine hand? A voice within tells us that we have been separated and have a destiny. This is God's great act of mercy and grace in our lives. We are reminded daily that we are called according to His purposes. We must have an in-wrought consciousness of our destiny to be the sons of God. God's purpose for us which is in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, holds and keeps us despite the fact that we do not grasp the whole purpose of God for our lives. However, the Holy Spirit in His mercy unravels and unfolds it to us as we continue to hear His voice and comply with His counsel.

The churches by and large ignore God's purposes in the Son today. Instead their concentration is upon the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit and upon gathering many more churches under the denominational banner. A lot of activities in the name of the

Lord are carried out towards this end. Nevertheless we ought to remember that God has a purpose in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And God's desire is to present it to the Church again. There is going to be a recovery and re-instating of these foundational things again. My prayer is that our eyes may be opened to behold the reality of God's purposes for the Church.

The Eternal Conceptions of Christ

Now let us reflect on the eternal conceptions of Christ. There are many people who know the Christ who was born in Bethlehem and who hung on the tree for the forgiveness of sins. Many people are only concerned about what He did while He was upon the earth. However, we need to behold a Christ who existed in eternity with the heavenly Father and who is the eternal Son of God. When Jesus lived upon the earth, the Jews readily accepted Him as Jesus. They had no problem with that name. However, Jesus told them, "Before Abraham was I am." This is what they could not accept, and as a result, they began to grind and gnash their teeth.

Beloved, the greatest tragedy in the Church of God is that most Christians do not have a revelation of the eternal Christ. Many have an ardor and fervor for Christ, the Son of God, they may staunchly believe that Christ is the Captain of their salvation, but they do not have a revelation of Christ. This is not astounding, since even nominal Christians, who are unbelievers and have not experienced the new birth, agree with this. As a nominal Christian, I also had no difficulty believing that Jesus Christ is the living God, for that was the creed of my church. When I was born-again and joined a believer's fellowship, I found that they also had their statement of faith, very similar to that of my previous church, but with some modifications and changes. However, I did not have any revelation of the eternal conceptions of Christ. This is the calamity of Christianity! The majority of believers do not have a revelation of the eternal conceptions of Christ. They have no idea of all that the Father holds for His Son. If we have a revelation of the eternal conceptions of Christ then we will also get a revelation of the eternal purpose of the Father.

Our salvation has a much higher purpose than we think. We are often guilty of limiting our salvation to a few things such as sin and the forgiveness of sins. The writings of Paul show us that his burden for unbelievers was that they might be saved from sin, but when it came to believers, Paul's burden was that they might live a holy and godly life. He told believers that the things that they had been called into were much higher—much beyond forgiveness of sins and having a place in heaven. In the book of Ephesians we are lifted beyond time to see that our redemption is deeper than the forgiveness of sins. It is something more than being saved from sins. There is a redemption that is ready to be revealed in these last days. It is much deeper and higher than mere deliverance from sin and finding a berth in Heaven. This redemption touches the eternal conceptions of Christ. It touches something beyond the present. It not only stretches back to eternity past but it also goes into eternity future. Our redemption has heights and depths that we seldom realize. We cannot lower the heights of our redemption in Christ to the level of meager human concepts. This salvation is 'so great', its measurements stretch beyond human scales! The verses from Chapter one of Ephesians tell us clearly that we are lifted beyond time and are given a significance altogether beyond anything here.

Saints of God, redemption in Christ is something more than the saving of men and women from their sinful state. It gets behind everything to the ultimate ranges of this universe and the touching of all its power, linking up with eternity past and eternity yet to be, and even embracing all the forces of this universe for man's redemption.

5. A God-Given Vision *by Jesse Jason*

A New Spiritual Horizon

The times in which we are living are strange, hard and indeed special. These are end times, perilous times and times of great conflict, upheaval, shaking, of darkness and of frustration. The special character of these times is exemplified by the lives of Simeon and Anna, who lived at a time when the old form and order of the Old Testament was changing to a new order. On the one hand, they faced the power of religion and tradition binding them to the old order, rituals and practices that were mostly outward and peripheral in nature. They had the outward shell of religious things but the inward spiritual essence was missing. Everything took on a legal foothold; there was no vision and there had been no word from God for four hundred years! It must have been very frustrating to devoted people who were holding on to the promises of God concerning the Messiah. On the other hand, however, we see there was something new on the spiritual horizon that was at once challenging and full of hope. In Luke 2 we read that Simeon and Anna were waiting for the consolation of Israel. The Spirit had given a word to Simeon that he would not die until his eyes had seen the Lord. There was an air of hope and expectation as they entered the temple every day. They waited for the Lord to appear. They remembered the prophetic utterance of Malachi's time, "*Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet . . . and he shall turn the hearts of His people.*"

So we can see the negative and the positive sides in full operation. While the multitudes faced a time of decay, demoralization, discouragement, moral death and hopelessness, there were also a remnant people, a small group of believers characterized by Simeon and Anna, who had kept the torch of God's testimony alive. Their lives were focused on the coming Messiah and they looked forward to the move of the Spirit with hope and certainty. It is heartening to note that at a time such as that, God did not give up on man but He continued to work out His purposes in and through a remnant people. God was at work in the midst of all the superficiality, the pretense, the hypocrisy and the facetious priesthood.

The times we face today are much like the times of Simeon and Anna. We live in similar times of general unbelief, disheartenment, despondency and spiritual decay all around. However, God has not given up on man: He is working out His purposes in and through the Holy Spirit in the lives of those whose heart and mind is centered on the ultimate purposes of God.

The Bible reveals that at times such as these the Lord in His mercy imparts a vision to a few saints who would lead the people out of their present predicament. He begins a work of preparation in them well in advance. God reveals His Son in fresh ways to stem the tide of happenings and lend new hope and life to those who trusted Him. In times past the Lord said, "*If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself know unto Him in a vision, and will speak to him in a dream*" (Num. 12:6). A few chosen ones were able to see something of God's divine purposes and what they beheld was sufficient to keep them moving forward. There were many in the Old Testament, like Abram, Jacob, Moses, David and prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Habakkuk, and Zechariah who imbibed a vision of His purposes.

There were many others who received visions of His purposes, but not all were men of vision. Though God was faithful in imparting visions to them, not many were able to identify with the ultimate purposes of God for man. Even when the old order was passing away and a new order was appearing on the scene, when the whole fabric of religious life was under strain and test, when the enemy was doing his best to inculcate a spirit of resistance to the things of God, to establish confusion in rank and file, to threaten, destroy and annihilate the very foundation, God was faithful in imparting a vision to the likes of Simeon and Anna, who stood on the ground of His word. Later, there were men and women like Mary, Ananias, Cornelius, Peter, John and Paul who were burdened with the reality of God's purposes and intentions for their times. A God-given vision kept those who trusted Him and were prepared to go all the way with Him, whatever the cost.

A Present Vision

Let us remind ourselves that today we have no vision other than that which is centered in God's Son. God has spoken in and through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ and no other vision can replace the beholding of the Son.

Heb. 1:1-3

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,

Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

In these times vision relates and pertains to seeing spiritual things through the eyes of the Spirit. A vision is more of an inward seeing of Christ and the purposes of God in His Son. This is an important change. In olden times vision was more of a supernatural presentation of certain things. Visions (plural) were the norm to the prophets of old, but now the vision is linked to a seeing and a beholding of the Lord and His purposes in His Son. There has been a decided shift from the outward to the inner; from the peripheral to the center; from the natural to the spiritual. In these last days God has spoken to us in His Son. Therefore, our vision needs to be bound up with the Son. The concept of a vision today has become more lively and dynamic. What the Church needs today is a practical, on-going vision that relates to the progressive fulfillment of His purposes. The desperate need of the hour is to have a vision of God's perspective of the Church, the ministries, and the people.

Watchman Nee writes, "The true work of God with us is not when we consecrate ourselves to Him, but when we see. Consecration should result from spiritual vision, it can never take its place. This is where God's work begins. Our work may begin at any time; God's work through us can only spring from divinely given vision."

Thousands of Christians, longing to serve God wholeheartedly, sincerely, and meaningfully consecrate their lives to God believing that in order to serve God all they need to do is to consecrate themselves. But they lack the vision of God's ultimate purposes in His Son. Hence, God cannot do a lasting work in their lives. It is true that consecration must begin with an inward seeing or else it will peter out and remain a long lost wish.

In the eyes of men, their work for God can begin whenever they choose to do so. Some will choose to enter into God's work only after obtaining the right education in divinity; some will choose to obtain the prior support of some organization and some will choose to manipulate and evolve a vision all their own. Only a few are prepared to spend three years in isolation as did the Apostle Paul of Tarsus, to behold the vision in a measure before they consecrate themselves in ministry! God's work can only begin with a Spirit-initiated or a God-given vision.

Watchman Nee adds, "Without that vision, our service for God follows the impulse of our own ideas but not in accord with God's plan. When we come to Paul we see that for him this revelation was twofold.

"It pleased God to reveal His Son in me."(Gal. 1:15, 16) That was an inner revelation, subjective if you like the term."

"I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision."(Acts 26:19) This was the outer vision, objective, concrete and practical.

The inner and the outer working together make perfect completeness, whereas either is insufficient without the other.

And this is the need of the Church, of the people of God today. Inward revelation must go along with outward vision: not only knowing the Lord within, but knowing also God's eternal purpose; not stopping at the foundation, but understanding too how to build upon it. God is not satisfied with our just doing odds and ends of work; that is what servants do. We are His friends, and His friends know His plans.

What concerns each one of us is to receive not only an inward revelation of Christ but also a vision of God's purposes in the Son, in this day and age. O may the Lord apply eye salve to our eyes to not only behold Him but to also see His eternal purposes. And let me say that the inward beholding of the Lord must precede the outward seeing. Only in seeing Him shall we also be able to visualize His purpose for the Church which is the Body of Christ.

Let me provoke your thinking with this question: "Did Jesus Christ visit the earth only because Adam had sinned, due to which posterity was born in sin? Would Jesus have come had Adam not sinned?"

The answer to this question will truly test your vision of God's purposes. Your answer to this question will reflect your understanding of God's purpose in the Son.

Evangelistic Christianity has long been encumbered with the sin problem. All their teaching is related to seeing the purpose of God in terms of redemption. For them, salvation is mainly a sin problem. In their mind everything stems from Adam's disobedience. Therefore, their time-perspective is limited to the time of man's sin. They are not able to relate to the eternal

purpose of the Father that was formed from the foundation of the world. For the Bible says, *"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:"*(Eph.1:4).

It is tremendous when one is able to see the truth hidden here. God's eternal purpose for His people goes deeper than the sin issue. We have to see the incarnation and redemption phases in their proper relationship to God's eternal purpose. God's vision for His people does not begin in God's Son dying for the forgiveness of our sins. Note how the apostle Paul starts the revelation of God's purpose in the Son with the eternal Father and not with the fall of man. This is the viewpoint of God from His eternal vantage point or perspective. Paul saw this and opened the epistle to the Ephesians by taking them back to the Father's heart where the desire, purpose and intention of God the Father, cherished before the foundation of the world, is made known.

This does not mean that redemption has no place in the life of a Christian, for we know that Christ died upon the cross of Calvary for the forgiveness of our sins. The effect of the first Adam's sin had to be washed out. But we need to also put redemption in proper perspective according to the plan of the Father. God is looking for a vital union between God and man and this had to come from the sacrifice of His Son but we need to go beyond and see that the Father's eternal purpose was to fill the earth with His sons.

The Apostle Paul saw that the goal towards which the Holy Spirit is working is to have all things in Christ.

Eph.1:9-11

Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

The Father determined that His Son becomes the means to bring in a vast family of sons into the glorious measure of His full stature. This is the vision-perspective that we must come to. This does not mean that we minimize the importance of redemption and that we should take sin more lightly than we do. Only as we see redemption rightly related to God's purpose and plan can we truly appreciate what Christ did on the cross for mankind. This was also Paul's advice to his spiritual son Timothy,

2 Tim 1:7-10

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;

Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,

But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:

We have been saved, by His grace and not according to our works, not only for the forgiveness of our sins but according to God's purpose and grace for something which God had upon His mind before the world began.

A Growing Vision

What we think we see at the beginning of our Christian life is only a dim reality compared to what we shall see and understand at the end of our lives in Christ.

When Abram received a divine vision at Ur of the Chaldees, he was not really aware of the tremendous depths of that promise of God. God had called him and said,

"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 12:1-3)

These tremendous promises of God were just a small bud within Abram. The vision had yet to blossom into the fullness that is now made clear to us by His Spirit. Only towards the end of Abraham's life was he able to see in some measure the promise of God that he had received at Ur. This is because the vision is invariably tied and bound up with separation, suffering and adjustment. It is wonderful to see that the vision God gave to Abraham in miniature concerning his family is unfolded to us in greater magnitude in the book of Revelation.

The example of the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus is also a case in point. The Lord had opened Paul's spiritual eyes in a measure. It was the beginning of a life that went on to see much greater things in God's economy. The vision began as a small flowering bud but grew in stature and depths as Paul was subjected to the cross in his life. Twenty seven years later Paul was able to tell King Agrippa that the purpose of the vision was to make him a witness both of the things which he had seen and of the things which he will yet appear to him (Acts 26:16). The Lord appeared to him again and again and enlarged his vision of His purposes, and Paul was able to say, "*I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.*" (Acts 26:19)

Beloved Saints, the vision that God gives increases as we remain obedient to His Spirit. He will enlarge and He will give an on-going revelation that knows no end. That bud within must blossom into the fulfillment of the divine purpose of God in the Son. It happened with Paul and it can certainly happen with any of us if we give ourselves to the workings of the Holy Spirit in complete obedience. Let us be those who are able to say, like Simeon of old, "*Mine eyes have seen.*" No man can impart a Spirit-born vision to us. The Lord alone will put us into His vision and His vision into us. If it is not so, we will always remain mere passengers and parasites in the Body of Christ, depending on the vision that others have seen. God desires each one of us to have the vision that God has for His Church and for His people.

In this day and age when a great deal is collapsing all around us spiritually, let us be those who find strength in the vision that God has imparted to us in whatever small dimension. And let us move along with the things of the Spirit, for God alone can enlarge and broaden the vision that He has initiated.

6. Christ, the Center of All Things by A. W. Tozer

And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, Peace be unto you. (Luke 24:36)

Contrary to the opinion held by many would-be religious leaders in the world, Christianity was never intended to be an "ethical system" with Jesus Christ at the head.

Our Lord did not come into the world 2000 years ago to launch Christianity as a new religion or a new system. He came into this world with eternal purpose. He came as the center of all things. Actually, He came to be our religion, if you wish to put it that way.

He came in person, in the flesh, to be God's salvation to the very ends of the earth. He did not come just to delegate power to others to heal or cure or bless. He came to be the blessing, for all the blessings and the full glory of God are to be found in His person.

Because Jesus Christ is the center of all things, He offers deliverance for the human soul and mind by His direct, personal and intimate touch. This is not my one-man interpretation. It is the basic teaching of salvation through the Messiah-Saviour Jesus Christ. It is the teaching that runs throughout the Bible!

I remind you that Jesus Christ came into the world of complex religious observances. Perhaps it can be likened to a kind of religious jungle, with a choking and confusing multiplicity of duties, rituals and observances laid upon a people. It was a jungle grown so thick with man-made ordinances that it brought only a continuing darkness.

Into the midst of all this came the Light that was able to light every man that was to come into the world. He could say and teach, "*I am the light of the world.*" because He shone so brightly, dispelling the darkness.

Jesus Christ came in the fullness of time to be God's salvation. He was to be God's cure for all that was wrong with the human race.

He came to deliver us from our moral and spiritual disorders – but it must also be said He came to deliver us from our own remedies.

Religion as a form is one of the heaviest burdens that has ever been laid upon the human race, and we must observe that it is a self-medicating burden. Men and women who are conscious of their moral and spiritual disorders try to medicate themselves, hoping to get better by their own treatment.

I often wonder if there is any kind of self-cure or human medication that man has not tried in his efforts to restore himself and gain merit.

Millions of pilgrims may still be seen in India, flat on the ground, crawling like inchworms toward the Ganges River, hoping for a release from the burden of guilt in the sacred waters.

History tells of countless persons who have tried to deal with guilt by self-denial and abstaining from food and drink. Many have tried a kind of self-torture by putting on hair shirts or walking on spikes or on hot coals. Men with the hermit complex have shunned society and

hidden themselves in caves, hoping to gain some merit that would bring them closer to God and compensate for their own sinful nature.

Mankind is still inventing new ways of self-treatment and medication for failures and weaknesses and wrong-doing, even in our own day, not recognizing that the cure has already come.

Simeon, the old man of God who had waited in hope around the temple, knew that the cure had come! When he saw the baby Jesus, he took Him up in his arms, looked down at Him and said, "*Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace . . . for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*" (Luke 2:29-30)

So, I say to those who doubt or to those who are not instructed that it is Jesus Christ Himself that Christianity offers to you. I know that some churches are confused because of the introduction of human ideas, such as the self-medication idea, which has grown and expanded much like the proverbial mustard tree.

But, really, all Christianity offers is Jesus Christ the Lord, and Him alone—for He is enough! Your relation to Jesus Christ is really the all-important matter in this life.

That is both good news and bad news. It is good news for all who have met our Saviour and know Him intimately and personally. It is bad news for those who hope to get into heaven some other way!

Notice in the record that Jesus stood in the midst and said, "*Peace be unto you.*"

Here is a beautiful explanation of the angel's words, "Peace on earth , good will to men." The angels could say that only because it was Jesus who was coming! He is our peace. I once had a wall motto which said, "He is our peace." Because of the coming of Jesus, the angels could announce, "*Peace on earth.*"

This portion of Scripture illustrated Jesus' method of imparting health, directly and personally. It was Christ in the midst—at the center—and He could take that place because He is God, He is spirit, He is timeless, He is spaceless, He is supreme, He is all in all. Therefore, He could be at the center!

Christ the Hub

Here I borrow an illustration to stress the point that Christ is the center of all things. He is, as it were, the hub of a wheel around which everything revolves. Centuries ago someone said that Christ is like the hub and everything that has been created is on the rim of the wheel.

One of the old church fathers said, "Everything that exists is equally distant from Jesus and equally near to Him."

There is the hub in the middle of each wheel with spokes going out to the rim. Then, in the perfectly shaped wheel, the rim goes around equal distance at all points from the hub. To us, Jesus Christ is that hub and everything else is on the rim. When Jesus Christ has His place as hub, we are all equally close or equally far from Him.

Jesus is in the midst, and because that is true, He is accessible from anywhere in life. This is good news—wonderful, good news!

Christ—the Center of Geography

This truth makes it possible for us to insist that Jesus Christ is at the center of geography. No one, therefore, can claim an advantage with Christ because of location.

It so happens that I am at the present time reading Neuman's *History of Latin Christianity* and have read again the story of the Crusaders. At the time of the historic crusade, many believed that merit was to be gained by making a pilgrimage to the very place where Jesus was born, and particularly to the sepulcher where His body was laid.

When Peter the Hermit, old and barefooted, whipped all of Europe into a white heat to get the crusades launched, he set the goal of liberating a grave out of which Jesus Christ had stepped more than a thousand years before. The crusaders felt that if that empty tomb could be taken from the Moslems, everything would be all right. Today there is still great interest in being where Jesus had been, but I don't know why we insist upon being spiritually obtuse.

Have we not heard Jesus' words, "*I tell you that neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem do men worship the Father, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him who worship Him in spirit and in truth*" (John 4:21-24). It is not in a certain mountain or in a city!

We wonder why the crusaders did not consider that. Why all the bloody wounds, starvation, suffering and death? Why the long, weary treks to get to the place where Jesus had been born or where He died, or where He had been buried? For there is no geographical advantage anywhere in the world. Not one of us would be a better Christian just by living in Jerusalem. If you lived in some spot in the world actually farther from Jerusalem, you would be at no disadvantage. Jesus Christ is in the very center of geography. It is just as near to Him from anywhere as it is from anywhere else! And it's just as far from Him also! So geography doesn't mean anything in our relationship to Him!

Plenty of money has been spent by preachers who felt that they could preach better if they could just visit Jerusalem. So they go over and look on Jerusalem, and when they come back, they have just a few more stories to tell. Actually, they are no better and their audiences are no better. Let's believe it—Jesus is the hub and geography is all around Him!

Christ—the Center of Time

Then we must come to the conclusion that Jesus Christ is the center of time. Many people become sad when they talk about missing the time of Christ on earth. It is good to recall and study the life and ministries of Jesus long ago.

We sing a song that says:

*I think when I read that sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men,
How He called little children as lambs to His fold,
I should have liked to be with Him then!*

Many a tear has been wiped out of the eyes when people have sung that, but did you know that the people who were with Jesus at the time when He walked among men were not as well off as they were ten days after He left them?

Two days after He departed, He sent the Holy Spirit, and the disciples who understood only in part suddenly knew the plan of God as in a blaze of light.

But we say, "I would like to have lived in the time of Christ."

Why? There were hypocrites and Pharisees and opposers, murderers and unbelievers in the time of Christ! You would not have found things any better two thousand years ago. Some of you who look back with nostalgia upon what you consider the good old days ought to be delivered from that!

Christ—the Center of the Human Race

Consider too, that Jesus Christ is the center of the human race. With Him there are no favored races. We had better come to the point of believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of Man. He is not the Son of the first century not the twentieth century. He is the Son of Man—not a Son of the Jewish race only. He is the Son of all races no matter what the color or tongue. When Jesus Christ was incarnated in mortal flesh, He was not incarnated only in the body of the Jew, but in the body of the whole human race.

Go to Tibet or Afghanistan, to the Indians of South America, the Mohammedans of Arabia, the Englishmen of London, or the Scots of Glasgow and preach Jesus. If there is faith and willingness to follow, He will bring them all into His fellowship. They are all in the rim. They are all as near and all as far. That's the reason for the kind of missionary philosophy we hold. We do not first go into a country to educate the people and then preach Christ to them. We know better than that! We know that Jesus Christ is just as near to an uneducated, uncultured native as He is to a polished gentleman from New York or London.

Christ—the Center of Culture

Christ is the center of all cultural levels. Preach Christ and show the love of God to the most primitive, most neglected, most illiterate people in the world; be patient and make them understand. Their hearts will awake, the Spirit will illuminate their minds. Those who believe on Jesus will be transformed. This is a beautiful thing that is being demonstrated over and over again in the world today.

In New Guinea and throughout parts of Indonesia, for instance, stone-age men and repulsive cannibals are being born again just as quickly as those with college degrees, because it is just as near to Jesus from the jungle as it is from the halls of ivy.

He is in the midst of all cultures!

Christ—the Center of all Ages

Jesus is in the midst of all ages as well. By that I mean our human ages, our birthdays. It is just as near to Jesus at 80 years old as it is from eight; just as near from 70 as it is from seven.

We have been told that as we get older, we are harder to reach for God and the likelihood of our coming to Jesus diminishes. But our ability to come to Jesus—the distance we are from God—is no greater when we are 90 than when we were youngsters.

Christ—the Center of Life's Experiences

Christ is the center of all life's experiences. Our Lord speaks peace to us throughout life's experiences. An experience is an awareness of things taking place around us. A newborn baby does not have experience. So far, he is just a little stranger in our world. But he learns fast, and very soon experience will teach him that when he howls, he will get attention.

The man who lives to be 100 years old has really had some experiences. However, if he lives somewhere in the hills and seldom comes out, he probably will have a narrow field of experience. If he is a world traveler with a good education and a wide circle of friends, his experience will be so vast that it is a mystery as to how his brain can file away so much for future memory and reference.

I ask, which is nearer to Jesus? Does the child with little experience have an advantage over the man of wide experience? There is no difference! Jesus Christ stands in the middle of life's experiences and any one can reach Him, no matter who he is!

Jonathan Edwards, that mighty preacher of earlier days in our country, was converted when he was only five years old. He wrote, "I never backslid. I went right on." What experiences can a five-year-old boy have?

Read the early chapters of First Samuel and consider that the boy Samuel was twelve. He was just a lad. And then there was Eli, 98 years old. Here are the two of them—the boy and the aged man. What experiences had the boy had? Practically none. What experiences had the old man had? Practically all. He had run the whole scale, the gamut of human possibilities. Yet it was just as near to God from young Samuel who had no experience as it was to Eli who had found out through the years what life was all about.

Christ—the King of the World

Remember that when our Lord hung on the cross, a superscription was written below in Hebrew, Greek and Latin and placed on the cross above His head: "This is Jesus Christ, the King of the Jews." Someone has pointed out that in doing this, God had taken in the whole world. Hebrew stands for religion, Greek for philosophy, and Latin for Rome's military prowess. All the possibilities of human experience on a world scale were taken in.

It was just as close from the Roman soldiers to the Son of God as from the Hebrew teacher, Nicodemus, who said, "Master, Thou art sent from God." Still the world of that day was really divided into three parts, and that is about all we have today, isn't it?

We still have religion, culture and the combination of military and politics. Everything else seems to fall somewhere inside those brackets.

Jesus Christ was crucified in the very center of man's world. So it is just as easy to reach Him from the philosopher's ivory tower as it is from the priest's sanctuary. It is just as easy for

the uniformed soldier to each Him as it is for the thinker with his big books. Christ Jesus our Lord stands in the midst so no one can claim advantage. Thank God! No one can frighten me, intimidate me or send me away.

No one can put me down and say, "Ah, but you don't know!"

They have tried. They smile when they say it and I smile back and think, "Brother, you are the one who doesn't know—because I do know!"

I know that I can reach Him as quickly from where I am as any other man. Einstein, with his great mind, could reach out and touch his Messiah if he would. There are many in America who cannot read or write. Einstein and the man who marks an X for his name are in the same category. Both are equal on the rim. No man can actually say that he has been given an advantage over others.

You say then: "Why doesn't everybody come?"

Because of inexcusable stubbornness; because of unbelief; because of preoccupation with other things; because we do not believe that we really need Him.

Millions turn their backs on Him because they will not confess their need. If you have found you need Him, you can come to Him in faith, you can touch Him and feel His power flowing out to help you, whoever you are.

Jesus did not come to save learned men only. He came to save the sinner! Not white men only—but all colors that are under the sun. Not young people only—but people of all ages!

Let us believe that and let us honor Jesus in our midst! The most important thing about you and Jesus is that you can reach Him from where you are!

7. God's Purpose – A Mature Church by Joy Thomas

So Great Salvation

God desires and even demands a going on and a growing up. The following Scriptures are very emphatic on this divine desire of the Lord:

John 16:13

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

Acts 3:19-21

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:

Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

Eph.4:12

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

Heb. 6:1-3

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,

Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

And this will we do, if God permit.

2 Cor. 3:18

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Heb. 2:10

For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Phil. 3:14

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Eph.5:27

That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

The spirit has been redeemed, the soul is being redeemed, and the body shall be redeemed. This is the full salvation, the *'so great salvation'*, which we should not neglect.

God Calls Us to Be Perfect

There are many who say that the church cannot come to this realm and dimension of perfection in the earth. People often say, "We cannot be perfect." They ask, "How can the church be perfected?" They say, "It is just not possible." May the Lord help us to have a humble heart which is open to His Word.

The Bible commands God's people to be perfect throughout their lives. The Lord said unto Abraham, *"And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect."* (Gen. 17:1).

Again in Deut. 18:13, the Lord says, *"Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God."*

The Lord Jesus said, *"Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."* (Matt. 5:48)

The apostle James writes, *"But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing"* (James 1:4).

These verses imply that believers can have a life that is pleasing and acceptable to God during each stage of their progressive growth. There are two kinds or two types of perfection--progressive and ultimate.

Progressive Salvation

Let me illustrate progressive salvation by taking the example of a normal, healthy baby. A baby at the age of one month is not able to walk or talk, has no teeth and spends most of the day lying in bed, drinking milk from a bottle. The baby is perfect for her age. At that stage of its life it can do no better. We can say so because that is all it is supposed to be and expected to do at that stage of its growth. If it tries to be more than it is capable of being, it would frustrate its spirit, confuse its mind and disrupt its emotional peace and joy. If that baby has no bodily disease and eats, drinks, rests and exercises sufficiently, it will grow to be as big and strong and capable as any other adult is. If the normal growth process stops, for some reason before it reaches maturity, it will never attain full manhood until the hindrance to its growth is corrected. In other words, it will not be able to be progressively perfect. This example could well be applied to us individually and collectively.

Like a new-born babe the Church was birthed on the day of Pentecost. She began to eat the Word, drink of the Spirit, exercise in the supernatural, and rest in the confidence of God's

power to supply all her needs according to Christ's riches in glory. The Church continued to grow until her teachers began to feed her poisonous and false doctrines, and took away her diet of the Word and the Spirit. They stopped the Church from exercising herself in the supernatural manifestation of God. They allowed her no rest or peace in the promises of God, but encouraged her to try and become good through her own self-efforts. They kept her busy in doing external things that they thought would be acceptable to God. Thus, the growth of the Church was hindered for centuries. She retained just enough truth to be able to breathe and stay alive all these decades! Around the year 1500 AD, God began to initiate times of restoration and growth in the Church.

The process of restoration is continuing century after century. God is determined to continue the work of restoration by adding the truth and grace to the Church. This is necessary for her to come to maturity and to be ultimately perfected as a Bride, ready for proper presentation to the precious Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ. All the heavenly hosts in God's vast domain were created to work with Jesus, so that God's eternal purposes may be completed. All the hosts of heaven are involved in bringing the Church to her place of ultimate perfection.

The Opposition to Growth

It is necessary for us to note here that Satan and all his evil spirits have arrayed themselves against God's eternal plan for Jesus and His Church. Lucifer, who is called the devil, is recognized as the god of this present world system by the apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 4:4). There are good reasons for that. The Bible indicates that Lucifer was an archangel at one time, but he and one-third of the angels rebelled against the rule of Jehovah God and were cast out of God's holy domain. After his fall he was cast down upon the earth. All light was removed from him and from the earth. Lucifer became a dark evil spirit hovering upon the earth and the earth became the dwelling place of gigantic historic creatures that roamed the rugged wastelands.

The purpose of God's six successive days of creation was to restore the earth and make it a habitable place fit for man to dwell. God wanted man to rule all things upon the earth in obedience to His Word. One can see several things that happened in the Garden of Eden as types and shadows in the Scriptures.

In cursing the devil, God took away all the power of the devil and delivered it to the church according to all that He purposed in eternity through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, even today, the devil refuses to acknowledge that he has been defeated. He refuses to relinquish his rulership over the world and hand it over to the Church. He has maintained his position over the centuries, and restrained the Church by blinding her so that she does not attain her rightful position. Satan has continually convinced the Church that God does not really mean what He says in His Word. The devil has prevailed upon the Church not to believe what Jesus says the Church can do. He has been able to convince her that she does not possess what God's Word declares in and through Christ.

Beloved, as long as Satan can find professing preachers and teachers who will work with him, he will keep the Church bound and tethered by the imposition of man-made doctrines, creeds, and the dogma of devils.

Do you know that the devil knows that the Church has power over all the power of the enemy? He knows that all things are possible if the Church would believe. Yes, he knows it very well. Satan fears the Church as he feared the Lord Jesus Christ. He knows that the Church is a giant more powerful than all the devils put together. That is why he has drugged and anaesthetized the Church to sleep all these centuries, through the teachings of the perverted and carnal preachers in Christendom. Satan fully realizes that the Church is a powerful giant and that he is safe as long as she continues to sleep. Nevertheless the Lord has spoken that He will restore her from her backsliding and bring her into her full maturity and purity.

“Things the Angels Desire To Look Into”

The Lord Jesus Christ and all the heavenly hosts are committed to bringing the Church to her place in the purposes of God. The angels participated and rejoiced at the birth of Jesus on planet earth. The death of Jesus upon the cross was the greatest revelation, and demonstration that the heavenly host had ever beheld, concerning God’s nature and character of love. There was great rejoicing in heaven when Jesus arose from the grave, victorious over death, Satan, and the hordes in hell. There was also a great celebration in heaven, when the Church was birthed.

The eternal heavens, nonetheless, have never witnessed anything like the celebration that is going to take place at the marriage of Jesus and His bride, the Church. It will be a time when the mysteries of the ages will be made known. There will be special displays of God’s creative wonders in the vast expanse of his universe. There will be shouting, dancing, singing, praising, and rejoicing with joy sublime, beyond compare, as every tear is wiped away from the eyes of the Bride. The ring of unity and authority will be place on her finger and the crown of life, upon her head, designating her right to eternally rein jointly with her Bridegroom, Jesus Christ the Lord! Oh, Hallelujah!

Angels do not know the day or hour of this glorious event, but they do know that it is scheduled to happen in the near future. They are not a part of the Bride, but they are her friends and helpers who are ministering spirits that will bring her unto this day of marriage. The Scripture says, *“But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”* (Hebrews 1:13, 14). They know there has never been anything in all heaven to compare with the coming marriage of the Lamb.

The entire heavenly host is excitedly looking forward to that day. They are doing all in their power to urge the saints to fulfill all Scripture, attain maturity, and restore all things so that Jesus can be released from heaven to receive His bride unto Himself. Beloved, it is good to know that there is no jealousy or competition among the heavenly host over the fact that fallen humanity has been chosen of God to be the bride of the Lamb through His own shed blood. There is no resentment in the heavens that God has chosen the Church to sit with Jesus upon

His Father's throne to rule and rein with Him. They willfully and joyfully work with Him in the fulfilling of His purposes.

The Heavens Shall Retain Christ Till ...

Saints of God, the Father kept His ultimate purposes in mind when the Church was birthed into this world. Everything He has done and is doing in the Church is by divine design. The truth is being restored in the right order that Jesus had pre-ordained. Each step of restoration is designed to bring the Church to her last-day ministry. There can be no rapture of the Church before the restoration, for the scripture says, *"And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive (retain) until the times of restitution (restoration) of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."* (Acts 3:20, 21)

If the only thing Jesus has left for the Church to receive was a sovereign rapture, with no preparation and participation by the saints in these end-times, then He could have raptured the Church so far, despite the cries and shouts of the people, according to their own desires and after their favourite doctrines. He has not translated the Church because there is a special work that He wants to accomplish in and through the last generation or the end-time church.

May I declare to God's people that the Church if God is not in suspended animation, awaiting the restoration of natural Israel or the fullness of wickedness in the world. The Jews will undoubtedly be restored in the economy of God, through the blood of the Lamb, as will every one else. The world's cup of iniquity will undoubtedly become full but that is not what has prolonged the duration of the Church Age. There is a work of preparation and restoration that must be accomplished in the Church before Christ Jesus can fulfill His ultimate purpose for and through the Church. He must come TO His Church in full restoration before HE comes FOR His Church in translation.

Every restorational work of the Holy Spirit has been aimed at progressively preparing the Church for this day and hour. The next restoration can only be brought forth by the living generation of the mortal church (saints alive) in the earth.

Every restorational truth of the Holy Spirit brings greater redemption to the whole man. Every additional truth has enabled the Church to appropriate more of the complete redemptive work of Christ. The Holy Spirit of God, who has been commissioned by the Lord, has been leading the Church into all the truth step by step. The fullness of truth will undoubtedly bring fullness of life. When the Church reaches her full maturity in the life of Christ, she will come into all that Christ presently is. Beloved, as it is written, *"... as He is, so are we in this world"* (1 John 4:17).

A Groaning For Full Redemption

Truth runs parallel and consecutive to the ultimate objective, which is to redeem the whole man – spirit, soul and body. The apostle Paul says, *"... ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession ..."* (Ephesians 1:13, 14). What is the 'purchased possession'? Why is it waiting to be redeemed? What is the guarantee that it will be redeemed? The physical body of saints is the

'purchased possession', which is still waiting redemption. The church has yet to receive its full inheritance. Our spiritual birth and our baptism of the Holy Spirit is only the '*earnest*' or guarantee of our inheritance (2 Corinthians 1:22).

Every truth that has been restored to the Church in previous restorational moves of God had brought new meaning to the Scriptures. Each period of restoration took a group of Scriptures that religious men had placed in the mythical, allegorical, spiritual and futuristic category, and made these Scriptures a workable reality in the life of man. Jesus inspired the writing of the Scriptures, not to give men a set of idealistic philosophies and platitudes to be eulogized by great religious leaders, but to give mankind truths, living principles, and promises which will work in meeting every need of humanity. Every Scripture which has been spiritualized in the ethereal will be fulfilled in the literal. Every movement or restorational move of God did just that in past revivals. During the Dark Ages, most of the Scriptural blessings we now enjoy were kept from the Christians by religious leaders, who spiritualized them into some ethereal realm or postponed to some future age.

All the doctrines concealed in the Feasts of Israel relate to the Church. They will be fulfilled in, by, and through the Church. An act of faith and obedience helped the Church to receive the benefit of truths declared in the Feasts of Passover and Pentecost. For example, Jesus Christ died on the cross to provide salvation for all humanity, but one does not receive it by being a part of the human race. Eternal life is the sovereign gift of God. An individual cannot give himself eternal life. Neither can God give it, unless that person believes in Christ and receives Christ into his life.

There are strong Scriptural indications that the Church will be brought to translating faith in the preparation for the immortalization and glorification of the Church in fulfillment of the Feasts of Tabernacles.

This means that all hindrance to the believer's deliverance clear up to total glorification is on the human side. One man, Enoch, proved, verified and confirmed this principle by appropriating faith for glorification (Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5).

Enoch's experience proves that there is a legal basis for full deliverance in this life from every result of the fall for every child of God.

The Scripture tells us that Enoch had a testimony that he pleased God and walked with God. The New Testament reveals that Enoch had a revelation of Christ coming with His saints (Jude 14, 15). He evidently understood that the saints would be translated. He received a word from the Lord. Enoch laid hold of that Word and applied it to himself. Hebrews 11:5 states that "*By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death.*" Enoch is a type of the last generation of the corporate body of Christ that shall come to glory and be translated and not see death.

Theologians and preachers have applied many Scriptures to man's spirit and soul for many years. Experiences such as being born again, healing for the body, speaking in other tongues and many other truths have been brought out of the ethereal realm and made into living realities in the lives of saints. In a similar way, Scriptures on life and immortality applied to the whole man including his body will become living realities. The hour is coming closer. The Holy

Spirit is causing a cry to arise within the hearts of the saints for their full sonship, full rights, full redemption and all their inheritance.

The apostle Paul says:

"...but we ourselves, we have the firstfruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:23 NIV).

"We wait for that redemption of our bodies which will mean that at last we have realized our full sonship in Him" (Romans 8:23 J.B. Phillips).

"We, too, wait anxiously for that day when God will give us our full rights as His children including the new bodies He has promised us – bodies that will never be sick again and will never die" (Romans 8:23 TLB).

We read in the Book of Hebrews, "just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and He will appear a second time not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him" (Hebrews 9:27. 29 NIV).

This appearance for *'a second time not to bear sin but to bring salvation'* is only for those who are *'waiting for Him'* and not for everyone. The word salvation is an all-inclusive salvation of the spirit, soul and body. As we read in this Scripture, *'it is appointed unto man once to die,'* but the prophetic word declares that there will be a generation that shall dwell in Mt. Zion and they shall break the appointment with death, *"to hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death"* (Psalm 102:20).

'Ables' And 'Not Ables'

Beloved, we are the present generation of the Church. If you have caught the vision and your heart has felt the thrill, to the call of the Master, and your heart has said, "I will get ready for the conflict of the ages", surely the fury of the enemy will be upon you. This is the cry that the Holy Spirit would like to place within the heart of every hungry soul in this generation.

I have never been a part of the restorational move of the Holy Spirit to restore a truth and I am sure most of you haven't either. However, I would say, "let us get ready and get excited in our spirit!" There is another restoration truth that God is going to give to the Church, which will bring her into full maturity. Be assured that it will be the same with Christendom today, as it was when Israel was challenged to go in and possess their promised inheritance. Twelve spies went into the land of Canaan. They all saw the same bountifulness and truthfulness in the land of which God had spoken to them. Though Joshua and Caleb also saw the impossibilities in the natural, they believed God's promises and said, *"... we are well able to overcome it."* The ten unbelieving spies said, *"We be not able ..."* (Numbers 13:30, 31).

I can prophetically say that there are two camps in Christendom today – the camp of the *"Ables"* and the camp of the *"Not Ables"*. The present challenge of the Holy Spirit to the Church will sound just as unreasonable, irrational, impossible, and ridiculous, to the majority of present day ministers, as it did to the ten natural, humanistic-minded, spies. If this Old Testament type

is to hold true in percentages, it means that for every two ministers who are preaching this precious truth, there will be ten against it!

We read in the Book of Numbers that all the children of Israel believed the majority (the ten spies) who said, "*We be not able*"! In the Bible, the majority has rarely been right; it has always been a minority that believed God's Word and obeyed Him. God is not looking for a multitude but for a remnant people who are willing to cross their 'Jordon of death to the self', and arise in new 'resurrection life' to go on and possess their promised possessions, in these end times.

In which camp are you today – the camp of the '**Ables**' or '**Not Ables**'? Will you be a part of that remnant who will cross the 'Jordon of death to their self', arise in resurrection life and possess the land? Beloved, hear the cry of the Holy Spirit to this generation, you who are a part of it! And you, who have never been a part of the restorational truth and move of God, get ready!

8. The Present Purpose of God *by DeVern Fromke*

What is God saying Today?

"A striking feature of our times is that so few of the voices have a distinctive message. There is a painful lack of a clear word of authority for the times. While there are many good preachers of the gospel, and while we are not without champions of the vital verities of the Faith, we are sadly in need of the Prophet with his, 'Thus saith the Lord,' which he has received in a commission born of a peculiarly chastened fellowship with God."
(T. A.S.)

Someone has said: "If you would know what is the burning issue or *present truth* which God considers imperative in each generation, just observe where the enemy has concentrated his fire!" Through the past four hundred years since the reformation, many of God's servants have recognized the progressive recovery of certain vital areas of truth. Each new wave of spiritual awakening has not only had in view the immediate renewal of spiritual life in that generation, but also the progressive unfolding of truth for the Church as she moves toward the glorious realization of His ultimate intention and purpose. Even Peter, in his day, seemed to recognize that the young Church needed to be "*established in the present truth*" (II Peter 1:12).

For the individual or group who walks with God there is always fresh meat according to their need. There have always been those individuals who saw with God and lived beyond their day; yet there is a most sovereign element in God's working to unfold each new step of present truth.

That which was present truth in the days of Augustine is still truth, but it is not the present truth that God is speaking through His prophetic voice today. That we can be saved simply by faith in the finished work of Christ on the Cross, and not through the forms and ceremonies of the Church was present truth in the days of Martin Luther, and with this emphasis he shook the world and changed the course of church history. While that is a most essential and foundational truth, it is not the present truth of this hour.

What hinders men from hearing and proclaiming that present truth for this hour? May it not be that many who could be a prophetic voice have become so much involved in a system: a system which puts preachers largely upon a professional basis, the effect of which is to make preaching a matter of demand and supply; of providing for the established religious order and program? We have seen how the old wineskins are usually not stretchable to receive the present truth. Little kings who are fearful for their own security or protective for their own little kingdom will not hear nor proclaim that which might destroy their kingdom.

We must be sure to discern two classes of men whose motives are mixed. There are the "loyalist" who fear anything which will shake their little kingdom, so they become over-protective under the guise of being faithful shepherds of God's heritage. Then there are the "opportunists" who are really only ambitious to use any new truth or emphasis in carving out a little kingdom for themselves. They are not primarily concerned about how the present truth will build His kingdom, but what it can mean in their own design of opportunism. God must help us

who discern the divine course to proclaim the present truth with only one end in view: building His kingdom and not our own.

A Pile of Stones or a Temple

We can rejoice that in the past hundred years there has been an awakening to Church truth and the importance of unity in the Body of Christ. This concerted thrust of gathering together those living stones in a locality to become a testimony of unity was indeed a present truth for that hour.

But a new hour has come! The truth of gathering together living stone into a pile has now been properly focused and a present truth for this hour has emerged. How foolish it was to assume that a mere "*gathering together*" according to Church truth was sufficient to build up the stones. Without realizing it, Bible churches, fellowships and independent groups tried to hold individualistic stones merely on the principle of unity or Church truth. Even those who most boldly championed the cause of Church truth fell into the snare of making Church truth itself as a gathering point.

It would seem the present truth of this hour includes this three-fold thrust: There is a (1) "*gathering together unto Him*" but also a (2) "*building up*" of living stones in Him through the (3) fivefold ministry given by Him.

It is not sufficient to have a pile of stones merely called out of the world or out of a religious system. God must build a spiritual house, often called the temple or body, where there is a functioning together of the living stones.

One look at our present religious system and the almost impossible task of building these living stones into a functioning temple, has caused many to insist: "it can't be done in this age." We are well aware there is a widespread doubt as to whether we are to expect anything in the way of a corporate building up or expressive testimony at the end. Some hold strongly that everything at the end is individual—a conviction that rests for the most part upon the use of the phrase, "*If any man ...*" in the message to the Church of Laodicea (Rev. 3:20).

It would seem there are two things which hinder many from receiving what the Scriptures indicate to be God's way of achieving this glorious purpose. First, they have a wrong conception of the Church. The real failure in grasping God's end-time working is to assume an organized movement, a sect, a society wholly unified is His goal. But in God's sight the Church of the New Testament has never been an organized affiliation of believers and workers. It has always been a purely spiritual thing, spontaneous in life, united only by the Holy Spirit in mutual love and reality. So the Church He is now building and the Church which so many are looking for is indeed quite different. Second, let us see how God designs for the fivefold ministry of Ephesians 4:11 to be the means for building His church.

Fitting the Living Stones into a Corporate Expression

Unfortunately, the word "*build*" as used in Matthew 16:18 is most often rendered as "*edify*." Now the original does not imply (as does the word *edify*) to improve morally or to benefit

spiritually but rather to build up. So it is something which happens to the stone but really not *for itself*.

Christ has designed that His gifted men—workmen given to the Church after He ascended on high—should perfect each stone *"for the work of the ministry."* With his tool in hand the gifted worker begins to shape the stone until it will fit into a certain place—having a gift and ministry to fulfill as a functioning member. Suppose the stone is triangular and the space is rectangular! The stone must be chipped and shaped until it perfectly corresponds to that space allotted by the builder.

What a day when God's gifted ones (those given to the Body at large) awaken to see they are not to minister instead of the stones, but rather their one calling is to develop the ministry of each living stone to fulfill its own ministry. What a misunderstanding of God's design for individual members to sit in the church week after week waiting to be ministered unto, when God intends for their own ministries to be developed so that fulfill the work of the ministry. How can we expect any full stature in individuals or in the local church when the pastor does all the ministering? It is no wonder the present-day servants are breaking down in despair and depression. They are in a squeeze and caught in a religious system which cannot develop lives who can minister. They must preach, must share, must perform whether they have a special word from the Lord or not. Because they have not discovered God's design in a body-ministry where every member waits for directions from the Head, they are forced to speak whether they have *"the burden of the Lord"* or not. How sad when men cannot say: *"the hand of the Lord was upon me."*

What do we mean? The present order and design of services can never build living stones to fulfill their own ministry. When a man is required to speak at stated times, he must get something—he must sermonize—and this necessity means either God must be offered our program and asked to fit into it (which He will not do), or the preacher must make something for the constantly recurring occasion.

No wonder servants who face people with desperate spiritual needs each Sunday are going down under the pressure. They are trying to fulfill a place God never intended. It is the individual members of the Body who must be prepared to minister to the others in the Body. God's gifted men (Ephesians 4:11) are given to prepare individuals for their work of ministry. Until we become rightly adjusted to the Head we shall hardly understand how every part must be functioning instead of merely being ministered unto.

J.B. Phillips, Eph.4:16

"For it is from the Head that the whole Body, as a harmonious structure knit together by the joints with which it is provided, grows by proper functioning of individual parts to its full maturity in love"

Perhaps there is nothing which has so hindered the growth and development of living stones as our wrong conception. How often we have met with delightful individuals whose lives are well-ordered; they are careful about the early morning quiet time and earnest in witness and ministry; they are well-edified individuals who call forth the commendation of others. Yet they

remain individuals who cannot be “built”. They are precious stones who love to receive and develop their own stature; but they are so precious they cannot be fitted together with common clay or stone. It would seem they are too beautiful to be built up into one building with others, so they remain individualists—lovely for display but no good for building. They are motivated in their own spirituality than in functioning to build others.

All of this is to emphasize: the full stature which God intends to each living stone cannot be reached apart from a proper relatedness to the corporate stature of the Body of Christ. How this wounds our individualistic yearnings! God is not primarily after a lot of separate stones, however polished and beautiful they may be. He wants a complete spiritual house, as one of our Chinese brothers has illustrated so aptly: “One sister, speaking to me of another said: ‘Oh she’s such a precious sister, so spiritual!’ When I asked more about her, she said: ‘Oh she’s so humble, so quiet, so gentle; we have never known her to be irritated.’ And again she added: ‘She’s so spiritual!’ ‘Who is she spiritual with?’ I asked. ‘Is she an isolated spiritual sister, or has her spirituality related her to others?’ ‘Oh,’ replied the sister, ‘singers who strike such high notes as she, find few who can sing with them.’

“Alas, that sister was so spiritual that no one could be her spiritual companion. Such a sister is all right for display purposes, but she is no use for Church building. The kind of sister needed in the Church is one who can have another placed behind her and another in front, another to her left and another to her right, and one below her and one above. And that is the sort of Christian God is seeking today.”

Let us be honest. Our real problem in the local gathering is that the “most spiritual” cannot work together. They soon find legitimate “reasons” for their own private kind of individualism. Behold, the time has come to rejoice and make way for God’s own moving! Nothing can hinder His design for accomplishing a spiritual building-up. God has been preparing those who have seen the divine method for building the temple where flowing life and flowing reality can meet every desperate need. Weary pilgrims need no longer endure empty meetings out of the mere sense of loyalty. The strain is gone for those servants who understand they must minister only as He gives utterance and shares his burden. There is a Spirit-wrought ministry of life coming forth to build the stones and pillars into their functioning place.

All Creation Awaits the Final Building

At the building of Solomon’s temple there was one thing which amazed the people of Jerusalem. The stones were brought together without noise of hammer or pounding of chisel and mallet. The timbers from the faraway forests of Lebanon fitted into their appointed places until, in silent harmony, the temple arose in all its glory. The noise was in the past. The forests of Lebanon had resounded with the shouts of men and crashing timber, while the quarry walls echoed back the babble of voices and the noise of working men. There had been hours spent in the picking and in the preparation of each stone or each pillar. Now that was all over. And all Jerusalem wondered as stone was fitted to stone and timber to timber in that glorious temple built by Solomon for the glory of God.

What does this temple as a former shadow teach us? Is it not God's way of unveiling the erection of that Eternal Temple for His habitation? We see both individual stones and pillars moving unto full stature as they become a part of that corporate stature. The Holy Spirit would focus our eye to see those quarries where the living stones have been under pressure and in preparation. Almost without noise or commotion—it is so silent—the Spirit is fitting prepared pillars and stones into their places. Wherever a few are gathered together and build into a spiritual house—the Greater Solomon has built a miniature. But we all with abated breath look for the grand placing when every miniature house will be absorbed into that vast Spiritual House. Who has eyes to see? We can imagine that only those who have learned to dwell "in Jerusalem" can behold the final gathering and building of every part into that glorious Temple. Paul must have seen it when he wrote:

J.B. Phillips, Eph.2:20-22

"... you belong now to the household of God. Firmly beneath you is the foundation, Special Messengers and Prophets, the actual foundation-Stone being Jesus Christ Himself. In Him each separate piece of building properly fitting into its neighbor, GROWS TOGETHER INTO A TEMPLE consecrated to God.. You are all part of this building in which God Himself lives by His Spirit".

What a picture of God's ultimate is this! Our individual stature finds its purpose in full corporate stature. Each stone belongs to the whole, yet fulfills its own unique place. But we must be careful to realize this is the work of the Greater Solomon, Himself. There must be no rushing stones out of the quarry before they are ready. This is wholly His work.

But it would seem the hour of commencement has come! We have observed in cities across the land how this moment of erection seems to have begun. Local expressions of His life are rising up. Almost overnight the Lord is bringing together those pillars who are prepared to give spiritual strength, character and direction. Then how easy to fit the living stones into their place when the great framework is properly established. Indeed we can rejoice. Things are almost silently slipping into their divinely ordained place. THIS IS THE GLORY OF HIS ERECTION.

(The original title was *This is the Hour when Living Stones are Being Built into a Corporate Expression*)

9. God's Eternal Plan for the Church by Watchman Nee

"... the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all."

Eph.1:22, 23

God's Eternal Plan

God conceived an eternal plan even before the foundation of the world. His plan, as we have said, serves the dual purpose of: (1) having all things to manifest Christ, and (2) making man to be like Christ—which is to say, for man to have the life and glory of Christ. In realizing His dual aim, however, God encounters two problems, (1) the rebellion of Satan, and (2) the fall of man.

In an earlier age an archangel became jealous, through pride, at seeing Christ the center of all things. He wished to exalt himself to be equal with the Son of God. Intent on grasping for himself the centrality of Christ, he rebelled. One third of the angelic hosts followed him in rebellion against God. Even the living creatures on earth followed suit. Satan's rebellion hurled all things into chaos, it being no longer possible for them to manifest Christ. All things today may still declare the glory of God (Psa. 19:1), but they certainly cannot manifest God Himself.

God therefore created man in order that (1) having the life and glory of Christ and being given dominion over all things, man might bring all things back to God; and (2) being united with God, he might be used of Him to deal with Satan's rebellion. Unfortunately, man fell.

Hence for God's dual purpose to be realized, He must now resolve these two problems. He must (1) redeem fallen mankind, and (2) eliminate Satan's rebellion. In order to realize God's dual purpose and resolve God's twin problems, the Lord Jesus came down from heaven to become man and accomplish the work of redemption. He is the Christ of all things as well as the Christ of mankind. He is the centrality as well as the universality. Universality means that which is not limited by time and space. Christ is not only the Christ of the Jews and the Christ of the church; He is the Christ of all things. He is all, and in all.

The redemption of Christ has three cardinal features: that of (1) substitution—for the individual; (2) representation—for the church; and (3) headship—for all things. Christ is the Head, therefore He includes all. And the death of Christ is an all-inclusive death. So that just as the Federal Head died, so also all things included in the Head died too. His death as Federal Head had brought all things as well as mankind into death, thus reconciling all things and mankind back to God.

Christ has resolved every problem on the Cross. There He crushed the head of the serpent. He has solved Satan's rebellion and destroyed all the latter's works. There too He redeemed the fallen race and reconciled all things to God. Through the Cross He imparts His life to men that they might be like Him.

In short, by the Cross Christ has realized God's double purpose and resolved God's two great problems.

The Position and Responsibility of the Church

What position does God give the church? What is the vision God entrusts to the church on earth? Why does He permit Satan, whose head is already crushed to remain on the earth?

God leaves the church on earth not only to preach the gospel to save sinners but also to demonstrate the victory of Christ on the Cross. He permits Satan to remain on earth for the sake of creating opportunity for us to exhibit the victory of His beloved Son. Consequently, a defeated believer brings disgrace to God.

The church is the body of Christ. And the body ought to carry on the work of the Head. The church is the fullness of Christ. As Christ overflows, there is the church. The church is to continue to what has already been done and taught as recorded in the Four Gospels.

There are three principal points to be found in the New Testament: (1) the Cross, (2) the church, and (3) the kingdom. On the Cross Christ has accomplished redemption and won the victory. The kingdom is to manifest the redemption and victory which Christ has achieved. But in the meanwhile the church is now to maintain on earth that which Christ has fulfilled on the Cross. The Cross speaks of God's legal judgment. The kingdom is to reveal the execution of God's authority and power. But the church stands between these two to affirm what the Cross has accomplished and to foretaste the power of the kingdom age to come (cf. Heb. 6:5).

Satan cannot overcome the personal Christ. Yet he is able to put the personal Christ to shame through the corporate Christ—because the defeat of the body is construed to be the defeat of the Head. And the failure of one of its members is taken as the failure of the whole body. We are the complement of Christ ("*... he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days ...*" Isa. 53:10), just as formerly we were the extension of Adam. God leaves us on earth for the sake of our fulfilling His eternal plan and arriving at His purpose of the ages.

Before the ark was brought into Jerusalem it remained in the house of Obed-Edom (2 Sam 6). May we faithfully guard the blood—the work of Christ, and the cherubim—the glory of God, which are both connected with the ark.

The Nature of Christ's Victory and the Church

The Bible tells us that we have three different enemies: (1) the flesh—in us, (2) the world—outside of us, and (3) Satan—above and below us. According to the ascended position of the church, Satan is under us.

The Old Testament uses three different tribes to typify these enemies. The Amalekites typify the flesh, which is to be overcome through constant prayer. The Egyptians signify the world, which needs to be buried in the Red Sea. And the Canaanites represent the powers of Satan, which must be conquered and destroyed one by one.

The flesh is set against the Holy Spirit: "*the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other*" (Gal. 5:17).

The world opposes the Father: "*If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him*" (1 John 2:15).

And Satan contends with Christ, *"To this end was the Son of God manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil"* (1 John 3:8). We thus see that the flesh is overcome by walking after the Holy Spirit; the world is overcome by loving the Father; and Satan is overcome by believing in Christ.

The first enemy that appears is the flesh. In the earlier era an archangel became self-centered and willed to exalt himself to be equal with God. This is how self first entered the world. This marks the beginning of sin, the world, and Satan.

When God created man He gave the latter a tremendous power, that of reproduction. Man is able to pass on his life to his progeny. Originally God had the hope that man would eat the fruit of the tree of life, thus possessing God's life and transmitting the same to his descendants. Accordingly, He forbade man to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Satan slipped in and committed spiritual adultery with this first couple. He injected his poisonous seed into them for them to reproduce it in their descendants. Satan is the father of liars (John 8:44). His seed is the lie, whereas God's seed is the truth. The principle with which Satan tempted Adam to sin is the same principle on which he himself sinned.

Satan has his kingdom as well as his family. He gets people to become children of his family and to be citizens of his kingdom over whom he then acts as king.

After Satan had tempted man to sin his operation thereafter was confined to the earth, that is to say, to the world. The curse he received was that *"upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life"* (Gen. 3:14). He can rule, walk on the earth, and take man—who came out of dust—as his food. Accordingly, this is Satan's great defeat. Even in the fall of man God has won tremendous victory.

Satan has his organization on earth, and what he organizes becomes the world. He is king in his own organized world, and the whole world lies under him (1 John 5:19).

The Victory of the Cross

Before the Lord Jesus came forth for public ministry He was first baptized. This signifies that it was in death and resurrection that He carried on the work of three years and a half. There was absolutely no flesh involved in the work of His life. We call the life of three and a half years as a life of the Cross. The Lord Jesus never did anything according to His own will. He always did the will of Him by whom He was sent. He not only did the Father's will, He also waited for the Father's time (John 7: 6, 10).

In tempting the Lord, Satan tried to entice Him to act outside of the word of God—to entice Him, for example, to turn stone into bread. But the Lord answered, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"* (Matt. 4:4). He frequently said, *"The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing"* (John 5:19); and, *"I can of myself do nothing as I hear, I judge"* (John 5:30). "Of Himself" means a coming out of himself, that is, a drawing upon himself as the source. Satan often tempts people to verify themselves after they have been validated by God. How he lures the Lord to prove himself to be the Son of God after God has already borne witness to this fact (at His baptism).

The Lord's crucifixion is wholly in accordance with God's will. For he prayed this in the garden "*Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt*"; and, "*My Father, if this cannot pass away, except I drink it, thy will be done*" (Matt. 26: 39, 42); and finally, in speaking to Peter He said, "*The cup which the Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*" (John 18:11). His being able to accept the Cross is victory. No flesh activating itself within, no worldly attraction or instigation stirring without, and no Satanic ground being yielded to beneath—that is victory. Throughout His life our Lord never lived according to the flesh. He had set the flesh so completely aside that He was the first man in whom Satan had absolutely nothing. Neither the flesh nor the world nor the devil had any place in Him.

Living Out the Victory of Christ

God's Desire is for the Church to live out the victory of Christ.

In saving men God saves them from the flesh, the world, and Satan. He calls us to deny everything which comes out of the world, what is earthly; to deny everything which emanates from self, what is of the flesh; and to deny everything which proceeds from Satan. Satan uses the world and the flesh to assault us. Only in those who are truly spiritual will Satan attack directly. Those who wholly reject the world as a system and deny the mind of the flesh will be directly assaulted by Satan.

The Cross of Christ needs the body of Christ. If sinners only accept the Cross objectively, they alone will gain. But if in addition sinners receive the Cross subjectively, God too will gain. The Cross of Christ acts like a sword which cuts off all which is of the old creation from us; the resurrection of Christ gives us a new beginning.

Through the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ the church is to live out His victory on earth. The Cross ought to be planted in the center of our life. God holds us responsible for letting the Cross cut off all the old creation known to us (but not, incidentally, for what we are unconscious of).

Let us bear in mind that God's eternal plan for His creation hinges around His church.

10. The Church According To God's Thought *by T. Austin-Sparks*

Our hearts have been directed anew to the relationship between the Cross, the Church, and the spiritual conflict, and what we are seeing in the first place is that, in the purpose of God, the Cross is intended to lead directly and immediately to the Church. You will just suffer a word or two of re-emphasis in that particular matter before we go further.

The Expression in the Church of the Life of the Lord Jesus

It is possible to have an evangelism of the Cross which does not lead directly and definitely to the Church, and it is possible to have a teaching about the Cross in its fuller meanings; that is, the Cross beyond the elementary matters of new birth, justification and such matters; it is possible, I say, to have a message, a teaching, which is fuller concerning the Cross than that, which, nevertheless, does not really and actually lead to the Church; in both of which cases the Divine intention is missed, the purpose of God is not reached. Now, probably someone might say, But surely everyone who is born again is in the Church, and the Church comes into being in that way: what is the Church but the company of those who are born again? Yes, but that is not what I am talking about. That may be true, and yet, for all practical purposes, the Church may not exist; for all practical purposes, in the real, present, practical values of the Church, the Body of Christ, it might not be in existence. I am speaking now not so much about the Church as it is called mystical; that is, that somewhere outside of this realm, in the unseen and the unknown, all believers are one, spiritual oneness obtains, and that is the Church. That may be true, I do not dispute that, but there is something more than that. If that were all, then perhaps we should be excused for all the things which exist here on the earth, and we could accept them without any question or heartache, and we could just go blithely on our way, saying, Oh yes, it is quite true that all the Lord's people are divided up into thousands of warring sections and parties, nevertheless we do not take any notice of that; they are all one in heaven, they share one common life! I am quite sure that some of us do not feel that is what the Lord would have us accept. No, I am not speaking about the Church "mystical", to use a word of which I am always a little afraid. I am speaking about the Church actual. The Lord Jesus died that there might be an expression here on the earth of what He is in heaven, to have a working expression of His life.

Surely the very term "Body of Christ" means something more than just the fact that the life of the Body is one life. It signifies that the members of the Body are one Body. You see what I mean. Take the physical body. You or I may be alive physically more or less, but as for the members of our physical body there may be something that has altogether upset their unity; a germ, an injury, and there is no co-ordination of the members; they do not work together in co-operation and harmony, there is no proper control. There may be an acting of certain members out of relation to the others; yes, all sorts of things like that, where we would not say for a moment that that is because there are two or three different kinds of life in that body. We should say the life that is there is only one life; that is, that that man or woman has not the life

of a man and of a dog, and of a bird, and of a fish, all different kinds of life, and that it is this that explains the contradictions in their make-up; that one moment you come on the cat life, and another the fish life, (whatever those things represent!). No, it is one kind of life, human life, and so far as the life is concerned, it is a unity. But the expression in the body is not the expression of one life; it is not showing itself in a coordinated activity.

And the Church, all who are born again, may be sharing the one life of the Lord Jesus, and yet in the Body that life may not be showing itself in a coordinated, properly ordered organism in expression: and do you think the Lord can be satisfied with just the life being there and the expression being full of contradictions? Surely not! So that there is something more than being born again and receiving the life of the Lord. That life is given for a purpose, and that purpose is to bring about this properly governed and ordered and regulated and coordinated organism, the Church, which is His Body. I am speaking about that, not the mere existence of the Church, not the one mystical life of the Church, but the Church as a functioning thing under the sovereign government of Christ as its Head. The Cross was intended to lead to that.

Now I repeat, it is possible to have an evangelism that does not result in that at all, and such evangelism is falling short of the intention of the Cross. It is possible to have a teaching of the full meaning of the Cross which does not work out in the Church according to God's thought, and such a teaching is falling short. We have known such teaching, full teaching on the meaning of the Cross, but what has remained has just been everything that is here amongst men; every kind of division going on, every kind of distinction in Christian sections continuing, all the differences and the conflicting differences just persisting in the presence of a fuller message of Calvary. Then there is something wrong somewhere, for the Cross, when really known and really operative, will deal with all that which contradicts the real Divine thought about the Church. The Cross is intended to lead to the Church as God has conceived the Church. Well now, we were saying this afternoon that the Cross has certain specific aspects or directions in which it deals with things that are in the way of God's thought concerning the Church. We shall go on now with some other things that the Cross effects.

But let us recognise that the Cross provides the ground for the Church and the Church is intended to show what the Cross means. When the Church does approximate to the Divine thought in reality, you will see there exactly what the Cross has meant and has accomplished. The Church will be the embodiment of Calvary. The Church is to preach the Cross by what it is first; and that is where you begin in the book of the Acts. You can see all that obtained in the pre-Calvary days, even with Christ amongst men, and Christ with a company round Him. You can see all the old elements of divisions, strifes, ambitions, avarice, pride, self-assertiveness, all these things are there in the Gospels, even amongst disciples, and the inner circle of disciples.

But when the Cross is an accomplished fact, and the Holy Ghost brings it right into the life of that company, then you find a wonderful revelation of what that Cross has done; for they had all things common, not one said of the things which he possessed that they were his own, and so on. You have something done. All self-interest has gone, all that rivalry has disappeared. Now it is all for the other; it is love, it is joy, it is peace. The end of Acts 2 is a wonderful revelation of what the Cross has done in people. And that is how the Lord wishes it to be. And

when you come to Corinthians, to conditions which are such a violent contradiction of the Church according to God's mind, the only thing to do is to know nothing save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. You have to get back to the Cross, in order to get the Church as it should be. So the Cross provides the ground and the means for the Church, and the Church becomes the embodiment of the meaning of the Cross. That is what obtains when God has things according to His mind.

Well then, if the Church is the Divine outcome of the Cross, it must define the nature and meaning of the Cross. What does the Cross do? What is the function of the Cross? We have viewed that in three directions in our previous meditation - God-ward, man-ward and Satan-ward. Now, let us see it in one or two other connections which touch all three of these at the same time.

The Cross Brings an End to All Idolatry

Firstly, the Cross puts an end to all idolatry. Take that away and think about it. It is a long story, and it is a very far-reaching story, is idolatry. I am going to say something which would take a very long time to verify, so far as the data and events are concerned, but which can be verified from the beginning to the end of the Scriptures. It is this: if we knew the truth, idolatry lies behind *everything* for which the Cross of Christ came into being, and when the Cross is really made active, what it is doing is to deal with idolatry in some form or another. Now that, perhaps, you cannot grasp for the moment. But we will go a little way further with it.

You see, the Cross, right at its very heart and centre, relates to worship. That is the final word, the ultimate matter in this universe, and now the universe has become Cross-centric; that is, the Cross of Christ now, since the Fall, has become the centre of this universe, and that Cross is to touch this universe from centre to circumference. There is a centrality and universality of the Cross, and at the very centre and circumference of this universe the one thing which is pre-eminent is worship. If you understand what worship is, then idolatry is simply, but comprehensively, anything and everything which in principle takes from, or even tends to take from, *the utterness of God as the very life of man*. God has made Himself the spring, the source, the centre of life, and for his life man is utterly dependent upon God, and can only find his life in God. God has bound man to Himself inseparably for his life, and will not allow man to have life, in the real sense, apart from Himself. He has made it a law in His universe that man cannot live apart from God, in the sense in which God means him to live and in God's meaning of life. God is man's life. Anything which becomes for man a substitute for God in life, for God Himself for life, is idolatry. Anything that draws man away from God, or tends to draw man away from God, is idolatry in principle: and, mark you, it is God Himself in Person Who is man's life, and man's centre. In a moment, I will say more about what that means.

What Idolatry Is

Idolatry is all that is not God as the basis or object of man's life. That is tremendously comprehensive. We think of idolatry, of course, in terms of heathen idols. We might perhaps bring it into a closer realm, where people clearly put things in the place of God but oh! it goes

much deeper than that, and, in the Scriptures, idolatry is never regarded as merely negative or passive. There idolatry is always seen to be an active thing, inasmuch as it is the work of an intelligence which is opposed to God; and that Satanic intelligence is always making it its first object and aim, persistently, continuously, and by every means, to get something into the place of the Lord personally. You see, it is possible to have the things of the Lord in the place of the Lord Himself; and that is idolatry in principle. Yes, it may be the things of Jehovah, not other gods. In place of the Lord, Who is the object of man's life, His things may be given precedence, and in principle that is idolatry, and the Cross is ever being used by the Holy Spirit to strike at everything, no matter what it is, that comes to occupy the place of the Lord Himself, the place that the Lord Himself should occupy. Idolatry is always religious, and it may be the Christian religion as well as any other religion that is marked by idolatry.

I am saying some strong things, but there is cause. You see, idolatry exists in principle whenever or wherever anything, even good in itself, becomes an object in itself rather than God, the Lord Himself. There are many things which are not only harmless but good in themselves, which have, nevertheless, been allowed to take the place of the Lord Himself, and good things can therefore embody the principle of idolatry in the one in whom the devotion is found. Touch some Christians, or Christian institutions, and let the touch be even in relation to something more of the Lord Himself, and you will find an uprising of jealous regard for the institution which utterly blinds to that possibility of an extra measure of the Lord Himself. You can be so devoted to a denomination, a missionary society, a piece of Christian work, that there is no room for any extra measure of the Lord. The thing itself has become the end, the object for which you live, and when the Lord wants to get you moved on into something more of Himself, the obstacle is that good Christian work, association, institution, tradition, connection. Yes, and that is idolatry in principle, and we see from history how the Lord again and again has had to smite with smashing blows things which in themselves were good, in order to save His people unto Himself personally. Even things which He gave at one time, have had to be taken away or shattered because the gift has become the end, the object. That is what is happening: and a very necessary thing it is too. The Lord is not protecting good things today. If those have become something to which men have become devoted, with which they have become bound up, He is allowing them to be broken and destroyed.

God Himself Man's Life and Entire Good

What is He after? It is Himself which He is seeking to establish as the object of man's life, and not the things that have relation to Himself: and I say again, you meet something intensely fierce if you touch a thing, even though you are touching it maybe with a view to getting people to move on with the Lord Himself. To put that in the other way, if your appeal for moving on with the Lord seems to people to involve their having to move away from this or that or some other thing, then there is warfare; which shows that Satan in his eternal campaign of idolatry, has got a footing amongst Christians in relations to things which take the place of the Lord Himself, good things though they be in themselves; and you find, if you are spiritually sensitive, that you are not just encountering the established institutions, but you are encountering a terrific spiritual force. Is that true? It is true. Had I never come up against it, never would I have believed the terrific force there is lying behind Christian institutions if your ministry

touches them. You meet something which turns upon you, and it is not just the thing or the people. It is something that threatens your very life, to slay, and this in principle and essence, beloved, is idolatry; because its ultimate effect is that even the Lord cannot have what His heart is set upon and get His people spiritually where He wants them, because they are so bound up with His things. They are not able to discriminate between His things and Himself.

The Cross will deal with all that, and the wonderful thing is that this is just the spontaneous effect of a real work of the Cross, when it is by the Holy Ghost. Now, put it to the test, or bring in your test cases. What about Saul of Tarsus? You touch the institutions of Saul of Tarsus, Judaism and its whole system, you touch it and see what you meet. You not only meet the strength of a bigot, you meet the spiritual force of hell: and so it was. What is there in God's universe that can meet that, deal with that, break that down, put that out of the way, so that it no longer has any power over the man? There is no force in God's universe save the Cross of the Lord Jesus. That will do it; and it did it, and it did it right there the Lord is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?" What did Moses do? Fight for his position, seek to vindicate himself? Did he go into dark despair because he saw that his place was being usurped or challenged? No, he just went to the Lord and, in effect, said, If You put me into this position, while You want me here You must look after me and see to it that I am able to fulfil my ministry: if You want me out of the way, I am quite ready to stand out; if You want them in, it is all right! Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets! He took that position, and the Lord said, I can come alongside of a situation like that, I can commit Myself there: and He did. You know what happened to the company of Dathan and Abiram. The meekness of Moses is the great feature of his life. "*The man Moses was very meek, above all the men that were upon the face ace of the earth*"(Numbers 12:3). What did that mean in Moses' case? He held everything for the Lord, in relation to the Lord Himself, not for himself; and there is no difficulty whatever at any time in letting any given thing go when that is the case.

But oh, that is not always so with Christians. You chance to touch their work, or get in the way of their ministry, and you meet something. It is idolatry. Well, the Cross deals with that, and when the Cross has done its work in us, we will be very meek; in this sense, that we hold things only in relation to the Lord and His glory, and we have no difficulty in letting them go. We can stand back quite easily and let others go on. It is for the Lord to decide, and we give the Lord a clear way. The Cross does that. Beloved, no one need ever worry about the fulfilment of their ministry if, by the work of the Cross in them, they are thus abandoned to the Lord's interests. The Lord will see that, in the long run, that which He intended will be realised through that life, whatever men and demons do. It may not be as they thought it would be, but it will be. The values of their lives will be conserved by God, and not lost. All that is to the contrary is in principle idolatry, and the Cross is against it. That is why, as we were saying, the Lord so often has to take away His own gifts, because in the course of time they have taken His place.

11. “It Pleased God to Reveal His Son” by Jesse Jason

Eph.4:15-16 KJV

Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

Eph.2:15-16 KJV

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Eph.4:24 KJV

And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Col. 3:10 KJV

And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

A matter that concerns most Christians who seriously desire to follow the Lord is the great need to recover the freshness, vitality and power of the early Christian church. Why does the church today lack that freshness and vitality? What is the reason for the church today missing these vital ingredients of life? What accounts for the absence of that invigorating life that we see in the early Christians?

As one seeks to answer these questions, one is struck by the fact that much of Christianity is only concerned with what is traditional, doctrinal and formal. A large magnitude of Christians are involved in something that has become fixed and superficial, something external that has to be accepted, adopted, and conformed to. Christianity has taken the form of a Name without the life, a fixed shape, an inflexible religion that has its roots in the past and in history, but lacks the vitality of a living entity. Christianity has become an “it” and an “ism”, and one is called upon to accept “it”. People ask, “Are you a Christian?” People are not bothered with the kind of life one is called to live as a Christian. This is what we need to recognize today.

In the beginning, when the church was first constituted, everything was a matter of a living by an inward revelation of a Person; everything was a matter of a relationship with Christ, and His purpose in the earth; and everything was a matter of a revelation of Christ. Can we truly say that it is the same today concerning the church? Is it the living Christ that matters or the deadness of doctrine, tradition, ritual and form?

The Revelation of the Son in Us

When God brought Abraham into a relationship with Himself it marked a great step forward in the purpose of God. *"The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham"* (Acts 7:2). Here lies a precious principle. Abraham received a revelation of the God of all glory. It emancipated Abraham and linked him to God's eternal purpose. Abraham became a link in the chain of events that would lead to something stupendous and magnificent in the eyes of God. Something that would please the Father and lay the foundation for all that was to happen in the future.

Moses represented another step forward on the part of God, a fresh movement towards His final purpose. We know that the God of glory appeared to Moses in the burning bush on the mount. Moses saw that the bush was not consumed by fire, but yet it was aflame. He saw the Lord in a movement that meant everything to him. He beheld the Lord and that beholding kept him in a place of moving forward and onward all the days of his life. When he was struck with adversity, when hardships came his way, when the way seemed so difficult and intricate, when suffering brought him to his knees again and again, the one thing he remembered and recalled was the vision of God on the mount. This is what sustained him in the midst of every impossible situation. This is what kept his head above water as it were. Every time when it seemed that all was lost, he remembered the reality of the vision of God. He called to mind that day when he saw the Lord in the flame of the bush. The Lord appeared unto him, even him. This memory remained a strong part of his history. It was the foundation of his life and experiences. He knew deep within that that was the day that the Lord was pleased to reveal Himself to him. It was something that was burned into his bones. It was something that could never be erased. It was something so remarkable and so unique that Moses could not ever think of separating himself from it.

There were many men of God in the Old Testament who had an inner witness of the presence of God in their lives. Jacob said, *"I have seen God face to face"* (Gen. 32:30). Moses, Aaron and seventy elders saw the God of Israel (Ex. 24:10). Isaiah said, *"I saw the Lord high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple"* (Isa. 6:1). Job said, *"... but now mine eye seeth Thee."* It is not strange that the Lord was pleased to reveal Himself to many people in the past. What is seldom realized is that and in every case their lives were filled with the desire to see Him again, in greater measures.

This was also true in the formation of the church in the New Testament. What mattered was to see the Lord. The disciples had to base everything upon seeing the Lord. It was the one testimony that all the disciples yearned and sought after. After Jesus' resurrection He appeared by the space of forty days and they saw Him, but in another way, in a spiritual way, in a way in which they had never seen Him before. It was in a living way. Stephen witnessed and testified of this and said, *"Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God"* (Acts 7:56). Paul certainly based his whole history upon the reality of seeing the Lord; *"it pleased God to reveal his Son in me"* (Gal. 1:15-16). He saw the Lord and the seeing brought him into a greater desire to see Him continuously.

There is a principle of the progressive revelation of God that we must see and accept as a fundamental reality. A seeing is necessary to begin with but also to move on to whatever God would have for us. Every fresh work of God, every new development, every milestone in God's economy is arrived at through a seeing and a beholding of His person and presence. Let this be a foundational principle in every child of God.

During Christ's forty-day visitation, Peter saw Jesus in a new way by his senses. But that was not the end of Peter's seeing of Him. There was still a need for Peter to see Him again spiritually and that alone would help him to move on. Beholding Christ has to be an on-going movement in our lives. Peter saw the Lord again in connection with Cornelius and the inclusion of the Gentiles. In seeing the Lord again in a fresh way, Peter was emancipated in yet deeper ways. Peter was liberated from many traditional positions he had held. He was freed from the old legal bondage to which he was so prone. He was released from many things that were known after the flesh, the things that were earthly and merely historical. Every time He met Jesus in the Spirit he was released from a greater measure of his old self. He saw; and that seeing rendered him helpless. When he began to see Him in a spiritual dimension, he could no longer help himself. The old Peter nature could not assert itself. It was no use arguing; it was no use doubting. When he went up to Jerusalem and others disputed with him, called him to question over this matter of going in to the Gentiles, he could not defend himself. When a man sees, he cannot help himself. He is simply emancipated by what he sees, if he sees in the right way. Peter was unbound, he was liberated from within. This is what occurs within us when there is a seeing and a beholding by and in the spirit.

It was the same with Paul. Paul had seen Jesus on the road to Damascus but there was a further seeing through all his journeys. Once, as the Spirit of God burdened him with the need to spread the Gospel into Europe, Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia. Paul saw a man of Macedonia say, "Come over into Macedonia and help us". Though Paul had sought to preach the Word in Asia, the Lord opened a fresh door for him to go into Macedonia. *Acts 16:9-12 says,*

"Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days."

Although Paul had intended to go to Bithynia to preach the Word in Asia, the Lord said, No, and then showed him a man of Macedonia. Paul saw something of the hand of God in this. He saw it as a mighty movement of God to bring the Gospel to Europe. This seeing by Paul caused

him to immediately move according to the move of the Spirit. The way of advance was the way of the heavenly vision; the way of development was the way of new revelation; the way on in the purpose of God was by having the inner eye opened to see.

Whenever God wants to move on, He opens the eye anew. Not once or twice, but again and again. This is the principle that we must latch onto. It is God's way of advance and moving on. "*It pleased God to reveal his Son in me.*" It has ever been so; a living revelation, the eyes of the heart being enlightened, and a revelation of Christ. "It pleased God to reveal..." That is the opening of the inner eye, the eye of the heart, the understanding.

A Revelation Not of Things, But of Christ

All the purposes and ways and intentions of God are gathered up in Christ Jesus. God does not show *things* to His people, He shows His Son. "It pleased God to reveal His Son" - that is the comprehensive object. He does not show truths; with God truth is not an abstract thing; truth is not something conceptual and theoretical. No, Truth is personal; it is in Christ who alone is the embodiment of truth. Today, Christianity has become a system of abstract truths, the truths of the Gospel. God ever presents His Son as the incarnate truth. Truth relates to the living presence of the person of Christ and not to the doctrine of Christ as interpreted by man. Truth is never out of relation to a living Person. If we see the Lord by the revelation of the Holy Spirit, we have seen everything related to our salvation, related to our sanctification, related to our vocation, and related to our glorification. It is all in seeing Christ. It will be observed that whenever the Spirit of God has moved to bring about something fresh spiritually, it is always a step in relation to God's ultimate purpose in His Son.

Austin Sparks says that the recovery of the original spiritual vitality and freshness and power will only come along this line - a new revelation in an inward way, in a living way, of the significance of the Lord Jesus. If Christians were able to grasp this reality, they would spend more time in seeking a revelation of His person than in trying to do something of significance. There is nothing of significance beside Him. The very significance of this universe is centered in God's Son. "All things have been created through him and unto him" (Col. 1:16); He is the significance of all things. "He is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Col. 1:17). To see the meaning of the Lord Jesus is to be out of everything earthbound, time bound, and flesh bound. We cannot see the Lord Jesus and be limited to any of the things of this old creation.

It is amazing to see what happened after Paul saw the Lord. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." He was a man who was well versed in things of this world; perhaps one could call him a man of letters, one who was a possessor of great knowledge and human wisdom. Nothing in this world would have extricated Saul of Tarsus from his Jewish history, his Pharisaical bondage, his legal strait-jacket, from his very blood as of a son of Israel; nothing! But he saw Christ, God's Son, and that did it.

When Paul saw, he was totally released from the bondage of world knowledge and understanding. He was freed, free with God. You can get into many things of Christ which are historical and seemingly good and miss the reality of His presence. You can have a Christianity

that is no more than a systematized order imposed. People embrace "it" and become adherents to "it" and believe in "it" in a way, but you do not get the freshness, the vitality and the power that was there at the beginning. That comes when people are in a position to say, "Now I see for it has pleased God to reveal His Son in me." "I have seen, I cannot help myself; I am bound to take such and such a course because I have seen". Such is the response of one who has seen. It is a mistake to talk to people about the exploits of Christ, the miracles He did, about the "things" that occupy religious Christianity in the hope of freeing them from the bondage of the flesh and the limitations of the natural man. They cannot escape and come out of the world without truly beholding the Lord and all His glory.

Notice how hidebound Peter was - "*Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath ever entered into my mouth*" (Acts 11:8). Not so, Lord! If you and I see Christ, the things which are religiously impossible with us will become actualities, and religious impossibilities are much stronger than human impossibilities.

Austin Sparks says that today the need is not primarily for the recovery of doctrine and truth. There may be a need for the restoration of fundamental truth and doctrine to its rightful place, but when you have it, when you have exact doctrine, you have no assurance of having life. It is possible to be exact and correct in canon and doctrine and yet to be perfectly dead spiritually. Whatever may be the need of the recovery of lost truth, the need over all, greater than all, is the recovery of spiritual revelation as to the Lord Jesus, to see Him anew.

A Revelation Of The Corporate Christ

The New Testament casts Jesus Christ in a light that far exceeds the prophetic vision of the Messiah. The Scriptures show that there is a revelation of a two-sided Christ, a Christ who is the King as far as the individual is concerned as well as the Head of the members of His church. Firstly, we need a revelation of Him personally, Christ personally, the Son of God; and then following that, by revelation again, Christ corporately, the Head of the Church which is His body. These are not two diverse things or dissimilar entities. They are two sides of one Person. On one hand, Christ is the Lord who is the Fountainhead and source of an individual's life, but He is also the corporate Christ, the Head of the body, which is His church. The Christian in Christ is not only a new man in the sense of one who has put away the old man, but he is also a new man in Christ in terms of being joined to church and becoming a member of His body. This is a mystery but it is the reality of this life. The individual Christian and the member of the church of Christ are not separate and independent functions. The word 'man' is a collective term and is gathered up into the Christ who is One Spirit. Col. 3.10 (And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him), talks of the new man in whom Christ is all and in all.

Eph. 4:20-24

But ye have not so learned Christ;

If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus:

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;

And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;

And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

We are not called to learn "about" Christ but we are to learn Christ. To learn Christ is to put off the old man and put on the new man, being renewed in the spirit of your mind. That is worth thinking about because it is very significant. To learn Christ is to come to a place where we have put off the old man and put on the new man. To learn Christ is to see and embrace an entirely new order of man. A new and different kind of man has been inducted by God into the earth and even into this universe. Christ is the object of all spiritual education. So to learn Christ is more than a matter of acquiring knowledge about Christ. To learn Christ is not an academic thing, no it is not a thing at all; it is a Person. Christ the Person cannot be learned by observation or study or by any kind of outward application. Learning Christ is the exchange of something for Him, an old man for a new man. This is something that the world cannot teach us. It has to come by revelation of the Holy Spirit.

It is vital to really see Christ by the spirit. There is a tremendous difference between Him and every created being. He is utterly different from us. This is why the apostle Paul exhorts us to renew the spirit of our mind; that we "*should walk in newness of life*" (Rom. 6:4); that we should "*serve in newness of the spirit*" (Rom. 7:6). The Christian is one who is all new and all different. When we are able to really see the difference between Christ and us it will bring about a recovery of the vitality, freshness, and power of our lives. Christ is the first of a new kind of species. He is the model and type of a new family of people. The Holy Spirit has come to generate a new type of people after the order of Christ. The life in the Spirit is nothing but a progressive conformity to the image of Christ. The consummation of that kind of life lies in the bringing forth of the sons of God, that speaks of an altogether different order of mankind.

We need to constantly bear in mind that ever since the Garden, Satan the prince of this world has ruled and reigned to bring disorder and upheaval so that the kingdom of God is nullified if not destroyed. However, God has always retained and maintained a remnant unto Himself. He has always preserved a testimony of the kingdom reality in a people. He has secured for Himself a people who will not be a part of the satanic order despite all that Satan has managed to corrupt. No doubt the testimony is exhibited in just a handful of seeds but that will one day be magnified into a harvest the world is waiting for. It is no surprise that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God (Rom. 8:22, 19). Until this time in God, the world will be plagued by Satan and his agents. According to the eternal purpose which God has purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord it is the remnant, the church, the new creation and new order that will make known God's purposes to the principalities and powers in heavenly places (Eph.3:10, 11).

If it is the new order, the corporate new man, that is to bring about a change in the earth then our primary concern is to promote the development of this new order of beings. We must

first and foremost have a people for His name, a family that is linked eternally to Christ and to His reign and lordship. We have to make sure that this Christ centered people, this Christ species into which we have been brought by regeneration by the Holy Spirit is preserved and secured in the earth. It is His house that must first be conformed to His image before He is taken to the nations. This is the corporate vision that must grip all of His people in this hour. Our business is the completing of the Christ order in a corporate way in the Church which is His Body, and beyond that the bringing in from the nations of those who are eventually to make full that Body and be the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.

In all the emphasis upon evangelism that we see today in Christian circles let us not forget that evangelism is not the end of God's purpose for mankind. It is not the knowledge of Christ and the emancipation from sins that is the end product of all that Christ has done. No doubt there has to be a beginning as evangelism seeks to bring Christ to the newcomer, but it must cease to be a thing in itself. Evangelism must result in the building of the body of Christ because evangelists were provided to the church for the edifying of the body.

Eph.4:11-13

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

Everything must end in Christ being corporately expressed and ultimately universally manifested in that Body. To see the full vision of Christ as the Lord of the new man and the Lord of the church by revelation will bring about a deliverance from little ends and short term purposes in themselves, little circles constantly going round earthly things, ecclesiastical orders, religious systems, mere doctrines and teachings; all these things in themselves. Oh, to see God's one great end and it is enlargement, it is life!

There is a full, a mighty end that God has in view. How often we get bogged down in the nitty-gritties, in trivialities, in minor, inconsequential things that are far from the center. Let it be the cry of every one for God to illuminate their hearts. This is what the apostle Paul prayed to the Ephesians (Eph.1:18 *The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints*). That makes Christianity a living, fresh, powerful thing. That is the way of revival — to see the Lord again, to see the Lord in ever-growing fullness.

Revelation is the heart of our life in Christ. What it requires is for the Lord to reveal Christ to us, to break through upon us by divine power. However, let none believe this revelation of God's ultimate purposes will be without there being a cost to pay. Revelation is always accompanied with responsibility and cost. It cost Abraham a lot to see the God of glory; it cost Moses a lot to see the Lord; it cost Isaiah a lot to see the Lord; it cost Paul everything when he saw the Lord. They saw the Lord and having seen Him they were prepared to pay whatever

cost was needed of them. So also other prophets and nameless individuals in the history of the church. Seeing the Lord inwardly is the most precious thing for it brings spirit and life. If we truly desire to possess the life of Christ in greater measure let us leave aside all that brings mere religion and outwardness. What the people of God need is something real, something living, something that is a constant challenge. We need a living Christianity that others will be able to behold. We need a living testimony of Jesus Christ among Christians whose only desire is to fulfill the plans and purposes of God in their lives and in the corporate body of Christ. The secret of such a Christianity is seeing the Lord and seeing Him yet more.

12. God's End in God's Way by T. Austin-Sparks

"Having made known unto us the mystery of His will... to sum up all things in Christ... according to the purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the counsel of His will... He put all things in subjection under His (Christ's) feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:9-11, 22-23)

There are three main parts to that statement.

1. The eternal will and purpose of God.
2. Christ as the centre of that purpose.
3. The Church, which is His Body, the vessel of the full expression of the purpose - that is, of Christ.

We are shown God in eternal counsels purposing. In outlining and devising His intentions to create and constitute "*all things*," "in the heavens and upon the earth" (Eph. 1:10), He was moved and governed by a specific and definite purpose. This "*Purpose*" is mentioned a number of times in the New Testament, and various things are shown to be related to it. It is most important that we recognize that, however many phases there may be in Divine activity, the purpose of God is one. Nothing is an end in itself. The first law of spiritual *fullness* (and be it observed that fullness is what is in view) is to apprehend the fact and nature of God's all-governing purpose. It is an impressive and painful fact that there is very, very little of what is associated here with the Lord that is really marked by spiritual fullness. Smallness, weakness, limitation, poverty, defeat, ignorance, immaturity, and disappointment characterize so many of the Lord's people, and so much of the Lord's work. This is one of the things that is causing so much distress, inquiry, and effort in some quarters.

May not the explanation be that *nothing that is only a part of a whole can reach and realize the whole purpose?* To be in the way of fullness it is essential that, in the first place, we recognize and realize that God is not just a Busybody in a large number of good and merciful activities; but that He is wholly occupied with one all-inclusive, and all-related purpose! "*Who worketh ALL THINGS after the counsel of His own will.*" The measure of ultimate attainment and accomplishment will be according to our initial apprehension of a single purpose. When that is established, we shall soon move on to see what the purpose is, and how - and by what means - it will be realized. If a master-man has a single purpose to which he has abandoned himself, he will require that all who work *for* him are not just doing various things, however good they may be, even as parts of his whole work, but that they are seeing beyond their own job and part to the whole end and object, and are working positively to that. He will be favourable to any who come to work for him and to any means employed, only in so far as the full purpose is in their heart. The measure of his resource and fullness will be given on this basis alone. So it is with God. But let it be understood that it is *spiritual* fullness that is in view, not personal gratification.

Then the purpose is to sum up all things in Christ. It is a Person filled full, enlarged, and all-comprehending. The greatness, the magnificence, the universal fullness of Christ is God's goal. Again, it is not sufficient that we see the purpose, basic as that is, but that we see - in an ever-growing way - the fullness of Christ. There must be an initial seeing of this greatness, this majesty, this glory, this universality. It was such a seeing that accounted for the power, effectiveness, and glory of the Church's first days. That was the meaning of "Pentecost". It was such a seeing that made the Apostles the men that they were. Paul owed everything to God's revealing of His Son in him. But that seeing must go on. It must become ever fuller. We must not just date our seeing of Christ to some past experience. It is the Lord's will that we shall so live in and walk by the Spirit that we are able to say that what we see of Christ today is infinitely greater and more wonderful than ever it has been. That is only in line with God's *purpose*, and it is so for all who have truly come into a spiritual apprehension thereof.

Then in the third place we move to see God's method and means of fulfilling His eternal purpose. This is by way of "the church, which is His (Christ's) body". The Church is definitely stated to be "the fullness of Him that filleth all in all". That universal fullness of Christ is determined to be revealed and expressed in and through a vessel called the Church. What is this Church?

Firstly, it is said to be an elect company of people. Leaving all theories of election, let us be content, for the moment, to see that God has eternally determined to have such a company, and that election is related to purpose, not primarily - if at all - to salvation. God knows, He cannot help knowing, the ultimate reactions of people to His presentations, and *according to His foreknowledge* He has foreordained to His purpose. But God has never said to any *unsaved* person that he or she is so foreordained. He only calls. The Church is the company of the called who obeyed.

Secondly, the Church is something greater than the churches. Whatever we may mean by the latter, the Church may be in them all, or it may not be in many of them at all. The Church is essentially a spiritual thing; not sectarian, denominational, "ecclesiastical," traditional, etc. It is the spiritual relatedness as of a living organism; a body possessing *one life*; it is a single entity, an "all one in Christ". The measure of light does not make for a more or less membership of that Body, although that may affect functioning. The apprehension of "Church Truth" does not constitute Church membership, although it will greatly affect the matter of fullness. Vital relatedness to Christ is the basis of Body actuality.

But when we have said that, we must point out how important the recognition of the Church is. Next to the revelation of Christ personally in His greatness, the revelation of the Church is bound up with our practical progress toward fullness. Paul has a far greater fullness in his writings than any other Apostle, and this is mainly due to the specific revelation of the Church which was given to him. What arises from this revelation is that Christ and the Church are one, as Head and members of one Body.

There are one or two things which arise for our apprehension in this matter. Firstly there is the fact - so clearly and fully given in the Scriptures - that God has just as definitely chosen and appointed the Church for the realization of His eternal purpose as He has chosen and appointed

His Son. He has just as positively bound Himself and His fullness to the one as to the other. While one is subject to the other, and the medium and vessel of the other - as the wife to the husband (Eph. 5:22-24), they are one in the matter of purpose. This carries with it the jealousy of God for His Church, and means that for fullness there can be no allowing of an ignoring, belittling, or injuring.

Further, God will keep strictly - in the matter of spiritual fullness - to working Body-wise. That is, it is not *possible* for any units as such to know fullness. Fullness is a related matter. "The Church is the fullness of Him." No individual can be that. Therefore spiritual oneness, inter-relatedness, fellowship, mutuality, and interdependence are basic and indispensable to spiritual attainment of full-growth. "*Till we all attain unto... a full grown man, unto... the fullness of Christ*" (Eph. 4:13).

In the Old Testament, when things were constituted according to the heavenly pattern, God spoke out of the Tent of Meeting. So it is in the New Testament. For the answer to his inquiry on the Damascus Road, Paul had to go into the city and get it as out from the Church. For the entering upon his great life-work he had to abide in the Church at Antioch and get his commission confirmed there (Acts 13). All this does not mean that God has never sovereignly and in grace moved without the recognition of this law by those concerned for His interests, but we are speaking of spiritual fullness, and our ministry is concerned with that. It is not a committee, "General," "Executive," or "Advisory," but the "Body" in representation and spiritual functioning that is God's ordained way.

It would take much more space than we have at our disposal to set forth all the values and implications of an apprehension of God's place and purpose for His Church in all things. This is one of the matters which has had a considerable place in our spoken and written ministry through these past years.

This leads on to the churches; that is, the local companies of God's people. Times and conditions have changed greatly since New Testament days; that is, so far as the Western world is concerned. It was simple and straightforward to gather together believers in Christ in those times; there were only believers and non-believers. Today numerous other questions arise; such as "Connection," "Order," "Practice," "Belief," etc. But there are one or two things which must still govern this matter: they are

1. - The local church or assembly is intended to be locally all that the Church as a whole is universally. It must not be smaller in its vision, its vocation, its relatedness. Though locally placed, it is universal in nature, outreach, concern, and function. If it lives unto itself it will die. Fullness is dependent upon its *spiritual* length and breadth, and height and depth.

2. - The local church is the spiritual training-ground for all usefulness to the Lord. There all the essential lessons are learned, not by teaching alone, but by spiritual discipline. The very vital lesson of subjection to the Lord - which means so much in the matter of spiritual growth - is learned in a very practical way in a true assembly and fellowship life. All independent, unrelated, and merely personal life is impossible when the "Body" is truly recognized.

The spiritual support, upholding, encompassing, and covering of the Lord's people in something more than a general way is of tremendous value and consequence. Far from the local church being but a "congregation" or a preaching place, it is intended to be a local expression of the family of God, and to fulfil all the functions and provide all the values of a true family life and relationship.

3. - The matter of pre-eminent importance in the local church, as in the universal, is the absolute sovereign headship of Christ. Anything which usurps this, or in any way conflicts with it, will most certainly result in spiritual limitation and proportionate retarding of growth. Is this not why, in the New Testament churches, no one man exercised headship, but elders - not an elder - were appointed. The "Body" principle is upheld in the corporate, and individual sovereignty is prevented. At Antioch the "Holy Spirit said" *to a company of representative men*, who were together in spiritual responsibility. Eldership is representation - spiritual measure, not ecclesiastical. The New Testament plurality of eldership means that the church is brought - as in and by its representatives - under the complete sovereignty of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

4. - We must then see that the Apostles never set out with the plan to form churches. That was the spontaneous and necessitated result of the Holy Spirit's work in every place. Christ was preached and accepted, and relatedness spontaneously followed (see Acts 2:42). That which decides churches is Christ. This is the solution of and the answer to many of the problems and questions which arise, especially in this Western world in these peculiarly complicated times. What is to be our guiding and deciding principle in gathering together? It is to be Christ! We meet on that ground alone. Where God's end is most fully in view, and what provides most fully for its attainment - the fullness of Christ - decides where we ought to be, and no one ought to quarrel with that. It is because of a devotion to and jealousy for some "thing"; a "Mission," "Denomination," "Tradition," "Fellowship," "Movement," etc., that rivalries, and bad feelings spring up. All the talk about "sheep stealing" and "dividing the Lord's people," or a great deal of it, arises out of a concern for - not spiritual growth - but something here on the earth. How very much of this talk would be impossible if everyone concerned took the attitude that it does not matter what survives or ceases to exist so long as Christ is being increased in a spiritual way. This involves the necessity that all the Lord's people, and particularly those in "official" positions, and positions of influence, should be utterly and only devoted to the increase of Christ. Christ is not divided, therefore Christ is the ground of unity, not the things as mentioned above.

Whose sheep are they? Are they ours? Can Christ's sheep be stolen by those who are devoted to Him? If they are sheep of this or that, then things are in another realm. No, all this sort of thing is the cause of spiritual weakness and smallness, and a new mind as to Christ Himself is needed for fullness.

Finally, in this connection, and for the moment; everything appointed by the Lord is intended to be for the direct and positive *"building up of the body"*. That marks its object and direction, and its unifying law. Evangelism, Teaching, Gifts, personal and spiritual, etc., are all said definitely to be to this one end. The evangelist and evangelism are not an end in themselves, nor something apart. The New Testament overwhelms such an idea or procedure most

completely. All these functions are "Body" functions, and for a well-balanced Body they must be kept together; neither emphasized to the detriment of the other; neither left out. A teaching ministry must go hand-in-hand with an evangelistic ministry; and the other way round. Everyone who functions as a member of Christ's Body - and all members *should* function - should have in view - not souls being saved, not saints being instructed, but - through these, and all other means, the increase of Christ. Let us remember that the Church is not large or small; our work is not more or less successful according to the *number* of people represented, but according to the positive measure of Christ.

I cannot close this review without a brief reference to one or two other matters which are vital to this ministry.

There is the matter of the Cross. It will not be saying anything fresh or unusual when we say that the Cross of Christ is deeply bound up with the question of Divine fullness. But how this is so demands a continuous re-emphasis and growing unfolding. The Scriptures make it quite clear that right to the very end the Adversary will seek with all his might and by every means to revive the question of acceptance and standing with God. He is seen very late in the day (Rev. 12) as the "*accuser of the brethren*," and the destruction of assurance is one of his most determined endeavours. Everything that carries with it the idea of our doing anything and making ourselves anything to obtain the mercy of God and attain unto acceptance with Him, bears the hallmark of the Devil himself. Christ's death for us and our death with Him is the only, but the sure ground of full acceptance! Luther said it very utterly when he put it thus-

"O Christ, I am Thy sin, Thy curse, Thy wrath of God, Thy hell; and contrariwise, Thou art my righteousness, my blessing, my life, my grace of God, my heaven."

No wonder the Devil hated Martin Luther and assailed him so bitterly.

But there is not only the basic, initial, perfect value of the Cross for our full and unquestioned acceptance; there is a meaning of the Cross in relation to spiritual fullness and fruitfulness. It is what Paul calls "*Being made conformable to His death*" (Phil. 3:10).

This, let us emphasize, must be kept apart from our justification and access to God. How very much of the tragedy, scandal, defeat, weakness, deadness, limitation and unloveliness of many Christian people and Christian institutions, communities and churches is due to uncrucified "flesh" or natural life! How greatly Christ is hidden from view by men and things and methods which bring themselves into prominence! The need, if He is to come to the place of the Divine intention, and we with Him, is for a continuous and ever-deepening working of the Cross in us. We really must be in a position to say "*I have been crucified with Christ*". Yes, but also to complete the statement "*It is no longer I, but Christ*." Is it true - "*No longer I?*" "*No... I?*" That is what Paul meant, but who can know the depth of that "*I*". Only Christ knows how deep and thorough His Cross is, and we must hand ourselves over to Him for the Holy Spirit to work all His meaning of the Cross in us, if the way is to be clear for His fullness.

So the twofold meaning and message of the Cross is a very strong part of this ministry. There are many who do not like the latter and will not have it. We can only say that if they represent something far more than the average in spiritual wealth and their apprehension of

Christ, and if that with which they are connected is free from the common results of the strength of the natural life; then there is something in their antagonism to the subjective meaning of the Cross to which we must give heed. But we have been there ourselves, and know the difference.

We must close, and we do so with a reference to one other matter. Many may agree with much that we have written, but they will react to it by saying that it is "idealistic"; it is too high; as things are now it is not possible; we cannot hope for such a recovery. Well, there is one answer to that attitude. The Bible has always recognized and provided for a position like that. It was but a small number of the captive nation of Israel who returned voluntarily to rebuild the city, the wall, the house at Jerusalem, and the word which governed and characterized them was, "Whoso is of a willing heart, his God be with him".

In the Book of the Revelation it is clear that the majority had left the full thought of the Lord. The appeal there is to those within who have "*an ear to hear*". We find them called "*Overcomers*," and this clearly relates to the decadent conditions; a reaction to the Lord's full and original thought. It is hardly to be expected that all Christians will respond to the appeal and standard, but it is clear that they can, the Lord wills it, and what He wills is not out of the question. It may be a costly way; and the cost will be mainly acute because of the attitude of other Christians.

Hence, we realize that this ministry will sift the Lord's people, and only those who really mean business with God and to "*go on to full-growth*" will have a place for it. Our message is therefore one which will affect the "*Overcomers*," although we do not regard them as an elect of the elect, a select spiritual aristocracy. They will have a place of special honour because in them the Lord will have that upon which His heart has been set from the beginning. The difference will be that which is seen ultimately between Joseph and his brethren.

Such ministry as that of which we have spoken will be the outcome of His very deep and drastic dealings with us. It is not something studied and worked out mentally. We shall never be off the wheel as a vessel finished, but somehow the Lord will combine the moulding and the using. Surely this is as it should be. "The Lord's messenger *in* the Lord's message" contains the vital principle that the instrument should never be in advance of its spiritual history. Even prophets who spoke of things to come, and of many things the meaning of which was not fully clear to them, were made to have their ministry inwrought by practical experience. But the drastic handling is ever unto increase and progress. Such a ministry cannot be "taken up," or adopted. We cannot go into it as we go into any other kind of work, by technical or intellectual training or instruction. Indeed, it is something from which to shrink *naturally*, as did Moses, Jeremiah, and others. It is helpful and interesting or enlightening to see that, when the Lord spoke through Jeremiah to Israel about the potter's house, and the potter, and then Himself took the place of the potter, the moulding, shaping, correcting, adjusting, purging, unto usefulness was by means of the assaults and inflictions of enemy activity. There was a connection between the Potter's hands and a foreign ruler's opposition and besieging. So for fuller usefulness the Lord uses the enemy and his work, and we are not for long free from this pressure.

These, then, are the main things to which we are called and committed. "Here we stand, we can do no other, God help us."

The Lord give you all a heart to "*follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth,*" and to reach unto His fullness.

13. The Master Design in the Universe *by DeVern Fromke*

We need to be convinced --

"... that both God and life will maturity. But they do more than passively will our maturity: they conspire in every possible way, short of breaking down our wills to make us mature. Life makes us discontented and unhappy in our immaturities. Suppose we could settle down happy and contented in being a half-person, then that would be a tragic situation. But we cannot. Divine discontent is a goal that impels us into higher, fuller life. Life won't let us settle down – to nothingness.

"And what kind of Father would God be if He did not disturb us toward maturity? No earthly parent could be content to have a child who refused to grow up. The parents' joy is in development, in growth, in going on toward maturity. God cannot be otherwise and still be God, our Father. So the disturbances we feel in our immaturities are not signs of His anger, but a manifestation of His love. He loves us too much to let us settle down in halfway-ness.

"But if God should stop at the point of making us discontent, then he would step this side of being God, our Father. To be our Father, He must provide literally everything for our being what we ought to be—everything except coercion. There He draws the line, for if He coerced us into maturity—then of course we wouldn't be mature. The will to be mature must be at the center of our maturity.

"If God and life and we ourselves will maturity, then there is nothing in heaven or earth that can stop us from being the mature persons we ought to be. We are destined to be mature, and that destiny is written in every cell of our bodies. We can slow down or block that destiny. The choice is always ours.

"Hope begins to spring up within my breast, for if I am destined to be mature then I can and do accept that destiny and make it my own."

Whether we begin with revelation given to us in His Word, or whether we consider His design in the physical, celestial or moral realms, we are pushed to the same conclusion: Everything in the universe is made to work according to a master design. God has designed for centers to work within centers, yet all are to be properly related to Him, the Ultimate Center.

The heavens above declare His glorious design in the celestial realm. In recent years the Mount Palomar telescope has pierced the vastness of space to reveal that our solar system, with its nine planets revolving around the sun, is but an infinitesimal part of the vast system of the heavenlies. Scientists tell us there are at least 240 million solar systems like ours. These form an immense wheel called a galaxy. Each solar system revolves around its center or sun, and all the solar systems in the galaxy revolve around a common center. While this may stagger our imagination it is not all! There are at least 40 billion galaxies like ours revolving around an ultimate center—the center of all centers.

Thus there are three typical centers in the celestial realm. Our sun with its nine planets is the smallest. Next there is the center of the galaxy. And then there is the whirling galaxies revolving

around one ultimate center. Each of the 240 million solar systems and the 40 billion galaxy centers has its particular relatedness to the center of all centers.

God's design in the outer universe demonstrates that everything is perfectly controlled as it is properly related to the Ultimate center, which we are sure is the very throne of God. From this throne His will is to express itself throughout every realm. As our earth is related to its center, the sun; and the sun to its center, the galaxy; and the galaxy to its center, the ultimate center—everything functions in a balanced perfection like a great mechanism of wheels within wheels.

The Same Design in Miniature

In turning from the telescopic (magnitude of the outer universe) to the microscopic (miniature of the inner universe) we find the same design. Within every molecule there are entire universes of atoms moving around their center. And by probing even farther into the nature of matter, we find that in every atom hundreds of electrons (negative particles of electricity) are revolving at great speed around a positive center. So from the hidden universe within each atom to the majestic universes of the heavens, there is a sweep from miniature to magnitude which reveals this one basic law: Every center, from the most minute atom to the most gigantic center, beginning with the Ultimate Center—God Himself—has priority over every lesser center. Everything is made on the principle that it must exist for the whole (not for itself) if it is to function according to his ultimate intention.

This design also holds true in the physical structure of our bodies. Consider the cell, the smallest unit of life. We are told that all cells, when they begin their existence, are capable of being the whole. But they renounce this privilege and surrender themselves to be a related portion of the whole, in order to serve the whole (and fulfill their purpose in being). In this renunciation they can come to full realization of their existence. Each cell loses its life, so to speak, in order to find it. But when a cell refuses to serve the whole and tries to be instead of belonging to the whole, the result is CANCER!

A cancer, then, is a group of unsundered cells trying to be the whole, depriving other cells of their rights; a group of cells turned self-centered and selfish, wanting to be independent and unrelated. This is the characteristic of anything cancerous. And we shall see how every kind of cancer works against God's master design and therefore has the built-in seeds of death in it. In our body a cancer, if not arrested, eats its way to its own death and causes the death of the organism upon which it feeds.

There Are Various Kinds of Cancer

Now just as self-centeredness, selfishness, independence, and unrelatedness in cells produce physical cancer, they cause spiritual disease and death when carried into the spiritual realm. The sin of self-centeredness and spiritual independence really began in the heavenlies when the "Anointed Cherub" turned in ride to announce his five "I wills" against God. And we have had this spiritual disease, spiritual "cancer," if you want to call it that, spreading ever since. From the angelic hosts it spread to Adam and Eve in the Garden, and thence throughout the whole

human family. Whenever men get out of God's design and seek to be independent centers, unrelated to Him, moral or spiritual "cancer" is the result.

Now a closer look at history corroborates this fact! How often men have assumed wrong centers in their reckoning. You recall there was a day when men believed that the earth was the center of our solar system. They imagined that the sun and all other planets revolved around the earth. What confusion this Ptolemaic system of reckoning wrought. The calendar needed constant revision; the seasons were coming either too late or too early. Because men were off-centered in their reckoning, they were eccentric.

Then Galileo and Copernicus arose to challenge this wrong-centered reckoning. They insisted that the sun, not the earth, was the true center of this solar system.. But they were threatened by the Roman authoritarianism of that day which often burned at the stake those who dared to preach such heresy. Apart from an open mind or illumination, the religious hierarchy of that day could not see or would not accept any new conception. Is this not God's graphic was of picturing how fallen men have always sought to make everything (even God and His blessings) to revolve around them for their own ends. Men who are cancerous at heart will surely impose wrong-centered conceptions upon the world.

Alas, today we face the same wrong-centeredness. Just as men once assumed the earth to be the center, so religion has assumed man to be the all-important center as though all things existed for and revolved around him as the only center. What a BATTLE IS NOW RAGING! It is not between the modernists and the fundamentalists, nor between the liberals and conservatives, nor even between democracy and communism.

One can only see the battle array in spiritual realms. It is between all those who have become a living revelation of true God-centeredness and those who insist upon following Satan and Adam in attempting to be their own independent, unrelated center.

All over the world today there is an inward spiritual groaning for right relatedness to the stream of His will and authority. And what is happening? God has heard this cry. He is raising up those who see as Copernicus saw, and who will dare to challenge the authoritarian religious systems by insisting that man is only a related center, and not the ultimate center of all things. Perhaps there is someone now reading who has felt the inward tug to become a part of this present-day Copernicus company—someone who will dare to be the living expression of proper relatedness unto Him.

The Design for Spiritual Relatedness

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul deals with this fundamental problem by explaining how men and things can be out of their intended spiritual relatedness. He says, "*...For all things are yours And ye are Christ's and Christ is God's*" (1 Cor. 3:21-23).

We have pictured God as the Master gear with everything else perfectly meshed into Him. In this design for ultimate relatedness we can enjoy "the good, acceptable and perfect will of God." Anything else can only bring eccentricity and produce disharmony.

Paul explains how the Corinthians had spiritual cancer. According to their own tastes and preferences they were accepting certain men and rejecting the ministry of others. Some emphasized Paul, for they loved teaching and the intellectual diet. Another group gathered around Apollos, for no doubt his oratory and fluency of words stirred them to action. Still another group followed Peter, for his seemingly practical ministry and understanding was more in sympathy with their ups and downs. But there was a fourth group who insisted the others were divisive in their interpretations. These proudly insisted: "We are of Christ—you are wrong—we are the only ones who are right, for we follow only Christ." So they were selecting gifted men for themselves (as the center) without seeing all these men and their ministry in relatedness to that spiritual Body He is building.

Oh to forget divisions and factions! Paul would remind us that all God's servants belong to the whole Body. This means Luther is not only for the Lutherans, but he belongs to all. So with Calvin, Wesley, Finney, Moody—all these belong to you, but only as you keep them properly related to HIM.

Similarly the Corinthians were relating blessings, gifts, the Lord's table and liberty to themselves as selfish centers. Little wonder we use the Corinthian Church as the example of spiritual cancer. As with the little cells in our body, so with us as cells in His Body. The first law of spiritual life is this: We must lose our life to find it. If we seek to find it by centering on ourselves, our blessings, our gifts or our liberty—in no matter how religious a way—we will lose it. Life will crumble when it gets beyond the stream of His authority.

To become off-centered is to be out of the spiritual stream. Whether moral, physical, spiritual, or celestial, the laws of the universe do not support that way of life. There is but one stream of power and authority. Only as we discover how every gear is to properly mesh into our life and how we are made to mesh INTO THE MASTER GEAR, can we find the proper relatedness and ultimate meaning in life.

The Psalmist Gives the Answer

In union with God, the Master Gear, we find in Him all we need to fulfill what He designs to have from us. In religious circles men have become so power and knowledge conscious as though by their pleading and praying God would send them a package marked power, knowledge or wisdom. Not so! God has designed something far better than merely giving us these as a package. God's way is so different! He would bring us into a vital union with Himself. This means our gear is once and for all enmeshed into the MASTER GEAR. In this union with Him we do not need to ask for things: they automatically become operative. Surely the Psalmist (Psalm 31) explains what it means for God's will to become our will. It means He does not give us a mere package of knowledge or power, but He becomes our continual flow of all we need. He becomes the how, where, when and why.

THE HOW:

... for thou are my strength. Into thy hand I commit my spirit . . ." (Psa. 31:4, 5). What a day it is when we recognize that His gear turns ours. He becomes our continual strength and power. How often have we sought for resources from Him without being wholly enmeshed. If

we could, we would have pushed ahead by our own strength to drive the Master Gear. And when we knew that we had the right answer, our little gear got so anxious—we did not wait for Him, His timing and His placing. So often it is not a matter of our doing the wrong thing, but simply the matter of “doing it on our own”; this it turned out wrong. It is this bent toward acting independently—the living by what we know—instead of learning with the Psalmist that “*all my springs are in Thee.*” As we have said before, we are to living in the will; HIS WILL!

THE WHERE:

The Psalmist also knew, “. . . *thou hast set my feet in a large room*”(v. 8). Those who want their own freedom to enjoy boundless direction and their own placing, soon discover that it becomes the way of narrowness and limitation. Because they imagined that God would confine them, they ran from Him, only to be locked up in the prison house of their own selfishness. Yet those who have accepted what seemed like dependence and limitation in God, have found it was really God’s desire to enlarge them.

“The widest thing in the universe is not space; it is the potential capacity of the human heart. Being made in the image of God, it is capable of almost unlimited extension in all directions. And one of the world’s worst tragedies is that we allow our hearts to shrink until there is room in them for little beside ourselves.” (A. W. Tozer)

Indeed, there is nothing like the direction and largeness which God gives to that life which is fully enmeshed in his plan. Hear this remarkable testimony: “*Fifty years ago I thought I was accepting the life of bondage and limitation in yielding myself wholly to God; yet now I see what an enlarging experience it has become – far beyond my expectation. If I had been allowed my own selfish way, I should have died having seen only my little farm or at the most, my own small state of Nebraska. But in God’s great purpose He has sent me around the world several times to visit almost every country in the world. How can I ever doubt the Psalmist’s words: ‘thou hast set my feet in a large room.’*”

THE WHEN:

The Psalmist also found, “*My times are in thy hand . . .*” (v. 15). Who else but God can understand the proper timing in His universe? It was not in Moses to know as long as he was on his own. Knowing that he was called to be the deliverer of the slave people from Egypt, he rushed ahead of God and got out of the divine timing. Only when God had worked at both end of the line—first in preparing His deliverer by forty years on the backside of the desert and next in making Israel so sick of her slavery in Egypt that she began to cry out for help—yes, only then had the right timing come. Then His deliverer could deliver. This is the way God’s timing works. Moses was ready, he thought, forty years earlier; but the people were not ready to leave Egypt.

How blessed to leave our anxious will enmeshed into His own will and know in reality that “*there is a time and season to every purpose under the sun.*” Surely He who sets the timing of the universe will keep me in perfect timing as I live in union (enmeshed) with Him.

THE WHY:

Finally, the Psalmist explains that which is all-important: ". . . *therefore for THY NAME'S SAKE lead me, and guide me*" (v. 3). How significant for the psalmist to start with this—saying in effect: "*I am in gear with Thee for Thy glory, for Thy purpose and for Thy satisfaction.*" It becomes evident that the secret of living in His will is living wholly for His glory. What beauty and harmony when the Corinthians could keep every lesser gear related to them as they were rightly related to Him. And so shall we then announce to the Master Gear, if we are properly enmeshed—even as the Psalmist announced: "*Lead me and guide me.*"

And we shall better understand Thomas Aquinas: "It is clear that he does not pray, who, far from uplifting himself to God, requires that God shall lower Himself to him, and who resorts to prayer not only to stir the man in us to will what God wills, but only to persuade God to will what the man in us wills."

14. The Need for a Revelation of Christ by Jesse Jason

Matt. 16:15-17 KJV

He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

These verses loudly proclaim and establish the need for man to have a revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is something which comes only by the Spirit from the Father. Men cannot know the Lord Jesus except it be through a spiritual experience. We may know of Him and acquire a mountain of head knowledge but there needs to be a revelation that is not the product of *'flesh and blood'* but of the Spirit. Such a revelation is the source of Christian life and the fountainhead of further understanding of Jesus' teachings. Such a revelation of the Son provides a power to not merely 'see' Him but also to do His works.

Peter expressed something that was born of the Spirit for he said, *"Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God"* This was just a short confessional statement of his faith but it contained a depth quite beyond the understanding of the fisherman. That statement said many things. It brought out the fact that there is but one God; that He is the living God, has life in himself, is the fountain of life to others, and by this is distinguishable from all else: that Jesus is the Christ, the Christ of God, the true Messiah, that was promised by God, prophesied of by all the prophets, from the beginning of the world, and expected by the people of God. It spoke of the fact that this Messiah was not a mere man, but a divine person, the Son of God; not by creation, as angels and men are, nor by adoption, as saints, nor by office, as magistrates, but by nature, being his own Son, his proper Son, the only begotten of the Father, of the same nature with Him, being one with Him, and equal to Him.

Jesus revealed that Peter's expression was nothing short of a revelation from the Father. All true spiritual light and understanding emanates from only one source. Only the heavens can provide man the knowledge to understand the wisdom and the plans and purposes of the Father.

When John the Baptist said, *"He must increase and I must decrease."* (John 3:30), he implied among other things that there must be a growing revelation of Christ in our lives—that the revelation of Christ must increase in our lives, so that there will be a decrease of our old humanity as well. John did not say, "I must decrease and He must increase." It puts the increase of Christ first. God's answer for our spiritual increase lies in His increasing within us first. When we receive a greater revelation of Jesus we shall experience a corresponding decrease of our self life. When there is a growing revelation of the Son and a decrease of the old humanity within, there will also be a growing liberation in our lives. Everything flows out from a revelation. When we have a revelation of the Lord, we will also have a revelation of His house, His purpose and His plan for His people in the earth. We can say that in a sense everything concerning our spiritual growth is contained in a revelation of the Son. God's whole emphasis is centered in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. When the apostle Paul received a

revelation of Jesus Christ, it was followed by a revelation of God's purpose in the Son. Without a revelation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we will not be able to make any headway into the purpose of God for our life. What we need above all, therefore, is to receive a revelation of the Son in our spirit from the Father.

Matt. 11:25-27 KJV

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.

It is the Father who reveals the hidden things to whoever He likes. We have to humble ourselves and come to the gateway of a new realm, full of the unknown, the unfamiliar and the unexplored truth. At the very entrance, we are faced with the reality of the statement, "NO MAN KNOWETH THE SON BUT THE FATHER." The first thing we see is that we can approach the divine things of the Son only through this portal. If we approach this holy ground with a sense of confidence in our own knowledge or effort then we will immediately check our steps. Or if we come with a conviction that we already possess something, then this statement should bring us to a standstill at once, for it says boldly, "NO MAN KNOWETH." And if we approach this statement with a sense of contentment and personal satisfaction, or with a sense other than of needing to know everything, then that statement will challenge us and confront us with the reality that no man knoweth the Son except the Spirit of God.

No man can know the Son except the Father. Blessed are the people to whom the Father reveals His Son. Often we think we know the Lord and all the Scriptures concerning the Lord. However, we do not know the Son as we ought to. The Lord in His mercy shows us the need to have a revelation of the Son, but we do not grasp the seriousness of the necessity. We need to cry out for a revelation by the Spirit of the heights and depths of the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Beloved, it is not enough to know about the Son, to study the history of His life upon the earth, to know the details of all He said while He was on the earth, to know His teachings and His words. These are good in themselves, but they cannot lead us to a revelation of the Son. These activities will enable us to have an intellectual understanding of Jesus and His times but they will not help us to have a revelation of the Son. This may shock us but nevertheless it is the truth of the matter. Everything concerning the Son is hidden and locked up with the Father. The Father reveals the Son to whomsoever He pleases. There is nothing we can do to acquire a revelation of the Son on our own, using our talents and abilities. The revelation of Jesus can be likened to a house that is locked and cannot be entered because we do not have a key to the door. There is no way we can enter into the secret realm of the knowledge of the Son. There is no capacity within us to know Him in these realms. No human being can help us to open the door to the inner knowledge of Christ, the Son of God. We may possess all the Bible versions, all the commentaries, and even the writings of chosen men of God who have had a close relationship with the Lord, such as Tozer, Austin Sparks or Watchman Nee, but yet we would be

standing before a closed door! This is what we need to realize. We have no option but to cry out in desperation to the Lord to give us a revelation of the Son. There is no ability in any one of us to penetrate through the door that would give us a personal revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. We all have to depend on the grace and mercy of God for this.

Gal. 1:15-16 KJV

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

In this portion of the Scriptures it is very clear that the apostle Paul received a revelation of the Son in his life when it pleased the Father. The words "But when it pleased God" show that God alone has the full knowledge of His Son. Unless He is pleased to reveal His Son to us, none can know Him. In a sense the Father has locked up the revelation of the Son in Himself. None can see the Son unless the Father opens the door to see Him. Let this truth sink deep within.

Man is utterly dependent on God for a revelation of the Son. The knowledge that comes through a revelation is not something mental or intellectual. Human faculties and human abilities are ruled out when it comes to divine revelation. There is absolutely nothing that man can do but to cry out to God for grace and mercy to reveal His Son for God will only reveal His Son to whom He pleases. Our cries must enter into His chambers for only God has the key to that door that reveals the Son. The intellectual man is barred from entering this domain. The wisdom of man will fail. Human ingenuity, skill and expertise are ruled out. This revelation is of an inward kind—it is a spiritual revelation that comes to the spirit. It has an inward mould that enlightens the spirit. Human gifts, capabilities, and faculties will be of no use in this realm. Therefore, let our cry be, "Lord, please open my inward eyes to see the Son. I have no abilities to penetrate behind the door that leads to the realms of your Son. Lord, release your mercy and grace to reveal your Son to me."

A revelation of Christ is purely a matter of God's grace. We know and often say that we are saved by grace and not by works. We are saved by grace through faith (Eph.2:8). This is true when we renounce all trust in our works, and turn away from every form of self-reliance, self-sufficiency, self-assurance, self-trust and self-confidence in our education, language, intelligence, grasping power, and our reasoning abilities. Then alone it can be grace. If we try to know Christ by our natural intelligence, our academic capacities, or our inherent abilities, then we shall be relying on our works instead of grace. May God save us and help us!

If the initial knowledge of the Lord is by grace, then the subsequent knowledge of Him will also be by His grace. We should not begin in grace and then rely on the strength of the flesh. If we say that is by grace that we have come to know the Lord, then we should realize that it is the same grace that will reveal the depths of Christ to us and not our ability to grasp and know the Scriptures. Beloved, it is only the Father who can reveal the Son in us.

Saul of Tarsus realized that all that of the make-up of the natural man and of the natural sphere could never avail anything in the realm of Christ. The natural man was and will always be blind to spiritual things. He is ignorant, helpless, and totally 'ruled out', utterly needing the

grace of God for that first glimmer of the Light. The apostle Paul says that it pleased God to reveal His Son in me. That is a measure of His great grace. Many Christians are born-again by His grace, but then they make the mistake of attempting to know Christ by the power of their works. Can saving from sin be by His grace but the knowing of Christ by our own works? No, the true child of God must only depend on His grace from the beginning to the end. As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so walk ye in him*: (Col. 2:6 KJV).

Do you know what the object of God's grace is? Do not be surprised by the question. The object of His grace is the unexplored fullness of what God has Himself placed within His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. His grace is not merely for the purpose of the forgiveness of sin and reserving a place in heaven. In 2 Timothy 1:9 we read that we are saved according to His purpose and His grace. God has a higher purpose and objective in giving His grace to us from the beginning to the end. The object of His grace is to conform us to the image and likeness of His Son. God saved us and called us with a holy calling not according to our works but according to His own grace. This is the vision Paul was caught up with in his life. He went through many adverse, hostile and conflicting circumstances and through them all, he was more than a conqueror. He knew that nothing could separate him from the love of God (Romans 8:35-38).

Having a revelation of the Son by the Spirit of God would enable us to go through every kind of adversity and situation. If we have not seen the Son we cannot live the life of the Son. When we behold the Son then we shall be a liberated people. The great apostle not only had a revelation of the Son on the road to Damascus, but he received a growing revelation of the Son in his life. The thing that has been greatly impressed upon my heart is this ever growing conception of Christ in Paul's life. It had been growing all the time in his life. In the beginning Paul says, "*It pleased God to reveal His Son in me.*" And at the end of his earthly life, full rich and deep as it had been, his vision was such as to lead him to cry out even at that point, ". . . *that I may know Him.*" (Philippians 3:10). It is not as though he had known nothing of Christ! He had come to a place of discovering that this Christ was/is immeasurable and beyond the limits of his own thoughts and conceptions.

Phil. 3:13-15 KJV

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

Beloved, it's this ever-growing conception of Christ which maintained Paul's life and ministry. There was never any stagnation. All that he could say was, "I see dimly, yet truly, with the eye of the Spirit, a Christ is so great, so vast, so as to keep me reaching out and moving on. I press on!" It was the revelation of Christ that hid an emancipating work in him, leading him and freeing him all the time.

Christ is our Emancipator! This is the Lord Jesus that we need to know. Every worldly and soulful thing will move out of our lives as we see Him. Everything of the earth and of time will go as we behold Him. In the background of our lives there will be something adequate and it will take us through difficult and hard times. Saints, when we see the greatness of Christ, then we shall see the greatness of our salvation—our destiny—according to His eternal purpose. We have been saved with a purpose. We have been called with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His grace. Let the revelation of Christ increase by His grace in our lives. I see this to be the most important thing in our spiritual lives. Salvation is by grace, so also must we live by the grace of God. Have you wondered why your life is not changing? Do small situations and problems in your life continue to exasperate you. If so it is because you lack a revelation of Christ in your life. Paul said that no situation could separate him from the love of God. The Spirit must reveal the vastness and the greatness of Christ to us by revelation. Then we shall also have a revelation of the greatness of this calling. If we have a revelation of the Son then we will also receive a revelation of the purpose of God in His Son. Pray for a revelation of Christ. If you have seen the Son you will be able to overcome the world, the self and the devil. Your life will be different because it will be infused with the life of the Son.

God's purpose and divine counsel are centered in Christ. They are related and interconnected to the universe and to man in particular. Beloved, my prayer is that our eyes may be opened to see Him. There are several eternal conceptions of God in Christ which can only be ours by revelation!

15. Church – A Help Meet for the Lord by Joy Thomas

When God completed His work of creation, He looked at everything He had made and said it was very good (Genesis 1:31). This declaration was made after God created man in His own image (Genesis 1:27). With this divine pronouncement it seemed that the great work of God in creating the heavens and all the earth came to a glorious completion for mankind was made the crowning glory of God's creative genius. And yet in an intriguing and fascinating way there was something that was incomplete; something lay half-finished as it were.

As if to explain a hidden lacuna in the Word, God Almighty deals with the creation of man in greater detail in Chapter 2 of Genesis. If one reads Genesis 2:7-25 with sensitivity and delicacy of the spirit, one gathers the distinct impression that after creating man God came across a seeming incompatibility. Having formed man out of the dust (v-7), given him charge of the Garden (v-15), and providing him with food, the Lord finally said, "*It is NOT GOOD that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.*" (v-18).

Though Adam was made perfect from the hand of God, yet in some way Adam was still incomplete. This is implicit in the statement that it is not good for man to be alone. Does this not talk of the great love of God for man? We see God's wisdom in making the man of dust a little lower than angels, and yet highest in the creative order. We should not conclude that providing man a 'help meet' was an afterthought of God. Rather His decision was a definite part of His total creative plan and work, all of which is harmonious, brilliant and whole, within and without. There is no doubt that all that God created was perfect and utterly compatible, yet in the creation of Adam, the Lord had provided room for something to follow. We can get a clue or hint of what was incomplete from Genesis 2:18-20 where God asks Adam to name all the cattle, beasts of the field and every fowl of the air after declaring His plan to provide man a help meet.

All the animals were brought to Adam to name one by one. God's purpose was to reveal that none of the animals were suitable as a life companion for Adam. None of the beings created by God met God's requirement of a help mate for Adam. In the whole creation nothing was found worthy and apt to take the place of Adam's help mate. Is this not very significant?

Though God walked with Adam in the Garden, yet Adam felt the need of a companion to share in his delights and discoveries. He was happy in the Garden and content of spirit but he longed for companionship with another living soul who could be his partner in every way. God's love for mankind is seen here in all its enormity and magnificence. Although God had created man for His own pleasure, He comprehended Adam's aloneness and displeasure. And we know He made a way to provide him a help meet who would be bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh (Genesis 2:21-23). Glory to God!

Although God made a multitude of heavenly and earthly beings, He could not find a suitable partner for Adam amongst all the works of His hand. He could not lay His good right hand upon any living being and give it to Adam as a help mate! Why not? It is because the help mate of Adam had, first and foremost, to be in His own likeness. None of the other created beings were made in the image and likeness of the Triune God. Therefore, they were unsuitable as

companions for Adam who had already been made according to His own image. This is the reason why God put Adam to sleep and formed a woman from his rib. But there was another more important reason!

Adam in creation was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. Can we see the analogy of Christ as the Last Adam? Just as Adam was alone in the Garden of Eden, so also was the Last Adam alone upon the earth. There is a sense in which we can say that during His earthly sojourn He was alone and longed for a companion, even a help-mate, who would be bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh. This is not to say that He whose name is Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of peace, lacked something. There is no deficiency in Him, yet as in the case of Adam, there was something that needed to be brought to completion, even a help mate in His own likeness. He who left His glory, humbled Himself and became obedient unto the death of the cross also experienced a kind of loneliness akin to the first Adam. He who stooped down to take the form of man and embrace man's incapacities and infirmities also took upon Himself that aloneness which Adam had encountered. Yes, He was alone just as Adam was alone!

In corresponding manner, God the Father could not turn to any created being to give His Son a help mate, even a bride. Though there were many beautiful angelic beings, yet God could not see in them that which would satisfy a Father's heart. No doubt the angelic beings such as archangels, cherubim, and seraphs, had a radiant glory, yet the Father's heart was not content, for He looked for one that would be in His Son's image and likeness. Nothing in all existence met His requirements. Just as Adam was made to sleep so also has the Last Adam been made to sleep metaphorically, that from His riven side may come forth a glorious bride for the eternal Son. O the great wisdom of God! May the revelation of this reality truly enthrall our inner man.

Let us see this from a slightly different perspective. The Lord created man because there was a longing upon His heart to have a people who would walk in His ways and who would bear His image and His likeness. After the fall of the first Adam, God sent another Man, Jesus Christ, to fulfill His heart's desires. He lived apart and alone on this earth. Made a little lower than angels, He revealed the fullness of the Godhead in and through His life. While He was upon the earth He was tempted at all points yet without sin. Forsaken, deserted, alone, He had no spiritual companionship amongst His brethren. Just as His heavenly Father was alone in the heavenly realm, so also was Jesus alone during His earthly sojourn. We see here a reflection of the first Adam as well. Though the Lord was surrounded by many living beings yet He was without a suitable, compatible, help partner, Indeed He had to remain separated and alone on the earth for He said that except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone (John 12:24). Jesus was that single Seed that had to go into the ground and die, that there may be a great harvest in the fullness of time. The Last Adam was put to sleep as a corn of wheat buried in the earth, even as the first Adam was put to sleep so that the Lord God may bring forth a help-mate for Him. And in comparable manner the Father has allowed a sleep for His Son so that He may bring forth a glorious help-mate, even a bride for the Lord Jesus Christ. Glory to God! God's longing and desire is that a bride may be brought forth from His side. Oh, how marvelous are the works of His hand!

Gen. 2:21-22

And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;

And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

This is what the Lord is doing today. He is forming another life out of the life of the Last Adam, His own Son, that the new life may be the expression of His own image and likeness. The Bride, even the Church, is being made fearfully and wonderfully!

How great is the sum of God's wisdom! The bride (Church) is being formed marvelously in this hour. She is being formed mysteriously and curiously from the Last Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Psalmist says in Psalm 139:15, *"My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.* This can surely be applied to the Church prophetically. The body of Christ, which is the Church, is the very bone of His bone and the flesh of His flesh. And she will bear His very image and likeness, hallelujah!

The first declaration concerning the 'woman' in the Bible is that she is the bone of Adam's bone and the flesh of his flesh. She is called 'woman' because she was taken out of Adam, the first man. This is also prophetic regarding the Last Adam and the Church. The Last Adam shall triumphantly declare and proclaim that the living Church is the bone of His bone and the flesh of His flesh for she shall be taken out of the Man, the fullness of the Last Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Church shall be called 'Woman' for she has been taken out of the side of Man. The Church, which is the body of Christ is none other than the fruit of the Seed that fell into the ground to die and bring forth much fruit.

16. The Lordship of the Spirit *by T. Austin-Sparks*

The point is this: the fullness of Divine purpose demands that the Holy Spirit be continually in charge, that He be allowed to be completely in the place of government, and that we do not put anything in His place - nothing whatsoever; not a 'church', not a fixed order - so that at any point or in any way we could say, 'That is not what we teach, that is not what we have been brought up to believe, that is not what our church believes and teaches.' To do that is to put something in the way of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost must be in charge and must be free. It was on those very points that the Apostles themselves had firstly their battles and then their enlargements. We shall see that as we go on. The full Divine purpose is going to take shape when the Holy Spirit is in charge with us.

And then there is something infinitely greater than times and seasons. Be careful about times and seasons; they have a wonderful and pernicious way of bringing you into limitations. Many people are dwelling in times and seasons. But they have done that all the way through the centuries. Let us watch, observe, take note; but be careful. Things have been happening, for example, in Palestine. We were told that the times of the Gentiles ended when General Allenby entered Jerusalem; that a new Caesar had arrived to reconstitute the Roman Empire when Mussolini set up his great empire in Rome! That sort of thing has been going on for centuries, and it is all based upon times and seasons.

The point is this - not that there are no times and seasons, not that there are not movements in the plan of God which have their particular characteristics and can be noted, but that there is something infinitely greater than that. It is the heavenly and not the earthly aspect that is in view in the Book of the Acts. That is why I stayed at that point - "*When he had said these things... he was taken up*". From that point it became a heavenly matter. Later the apostle Paul will use a phrase like this: "*The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God*" (I Corinthians 2:10). "The Spirit searcheth... the deep things of God": that is something transcendently greater than times and seasons; and if the Holy Spirit really is in charge, there is no fathoming what God has to reveal. "*Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man.*" It is out there, into that vast realm, that the Holy Spirit would bring us, and we must be very careful that we do not clamp down on the Holy Spirit with man-made, man-constituted institutions. We must keep out in the open with the Spirit, and it is there that our surprises will begin - yes, and our very real discipline.

The Prophets' Ultimate Meaning Spiritually and Heavenly

Those referred to in Acts 13:27, or those of whom they were typical, had a kind of apprehension of the Scriptures. There was no doubt at all about their devotion to the Word of God. They were fundamentalists of a rabid kind, as far as the inspiration of the Scriptures was concerned. They stickled for the Scriptures; they dotted all the 'i's and crossed all the 't's. Many among them were particular about the smallest detail in the realm of outward observances, even to the point of fussy fastidiousness. Because the law ordained that a tithe of all the fruit of the land was the Lord's, they tithed meticulously even their mint and other herbs - but at the same time over-looked the things that were inward and which mattered much more to the Lord,

such as judgment, mercy and faith (Matthew 23:23). That was their apprehension, their mentality, their position. They saw everything on the horizontal. It was a matter of the exact technique of Scripture.

What was the result? Well, they were perpetuating an earthly system with the Word of God. Their 'church' was the 'church of Israel', the 'Israelitish church' - and you can put in the place of Israel any other denominational title that you like. That church had its own particular forms, its vestments, its ritual, its liturgy, and all according to the Scriptures. It had its reading of the prophets every Sabbath. It had the whole system; but it was right down here on this earth and as dead as anything could be. It was purely formal; it was not getting through to God's end at all. Scriptural, in a sense, though it was, it was failing to realise the eternal counsels of God. When the Holy Ghost came, He did not sweep away the prophets, the Old Testament. He took them up and showed that there was something more - something more than all that earthly, perfect technique of the Word of God, with all its accompaniments - without which all that other would have to be set aside. And it is going to be set aside. It fails to reach God's end, therefore it passes out; and that is the issue of the Book of the Acts - the great transition. There is a Divine meaning back of all that, and when you have the Divine meaning, you can dispense with the other - it can go. If you have the thing in the really spiritual sense and realm, in the living and heavenly way, it does not matter about the other; that just drops out and falls away.

That is what happened in the Book of the Acts. You can hardly see the point at which it happened, but there is such a point. The Apostles did go on attending the temple and the synagogues for a little while, and then they ceased to do so. They were continuing for a time, but then it was as though they were steadily, quietly, moving out, and eventually they were out. Something had happened. They had come into the real thing and the initial thing had gone. The one led to the other, but it had served its purpose. They came into the heavenly good and meaning of it all; it was not a matter of technique now.

There are many who will say about the fixed orders and rituals: 'Of course, we do not regard this as everything; it is only symbolic. We do remember that it implies and points to something else, and it is that something else we are thinking of.' Yes, but is it not true that, when the Holy Ghost comes, as He came then, and gets possession, and you go on with Him, more and more the emphasis of the merely outward and earthly and temporal aspects of Christianity fade away, and you become increasingly occupied with the glory of the reality? The Jesus of history gives full place to the Jesus of the Spirit, of heaven. That is exactly what is meant by "the voices of the prophets".

So, on the day of Pentecost, you start with Joel. Everybody in Jerusalem was saying, "What meaneth this?" (Acts 2:12) They were all bewildered, without any understanding or perception; and Peter, with the eleven, stood up and said: "*This is that which hath been spoken through the prophet Joel*" (vs. 16). "This is that..." What a crushing blow it was to tradition, what an upheaval it created in Israel, this - with its implications of Jesus of Nazareth! And the Apostle went on, quoting freely from the Old Testament. He quoted David. That sermon of his on the day of Pentecost was just full of Old Testament quotations. But who ever saw that - who ever knew that that was the meaning of it!

You see the point. It is something that really needs to come to us with tremendous force, because even New Testament Christianity can be reduced again to an earthly system of exact technique. You can write your manuals on New Testament procedure. You can have it exactly according to the letter - but it is all on the horizontal, it becomes legalistic, it ties up the Holy Ghost. Although the intention may have been to be more exactly according to Scripture, that the Lord might have a fuller way, it does not always result in that. The whole thing must be baptized in the Holy Ghost and lifted clean off the earthly level, becoming something entirely heavenly.

Our Responsibility to Yield to the Spirit

Now I think we can rightly say that, when the disciples asked, "Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?", they were seriously and genuinely exercised. The Scriptures must be fulfilled; what was written must happen. I think the disciples were very much occupied with this, burdened and perplexed; they wanted to know how things were going to work out. The Lord said, in effect: 'Do not worry about that. The Holy Ghost is coming and He will take all responsibility for everything - times and seasons and everything else. He is coming with the whole purpose of God in His hands, and He will work it out. You can be at rest - it is all right.' Those who get this earthly idea and conception of a system become terribly worried and burdened to work it out - burdened with the awful responsibility of this 'New Testament Church', of having things exactly as the Scriptures say! If the Holy Ghost were in charge, the burden would go. *He is* doing it. All that we are called upon to do is to get into the hands of the Holy Spirit, get completely free from all this harness, free to the Spirit of God. Matters will work out all right.

And even if the Holy Spirit comes up against some stones in us and for a time there is some conflict, He is more than equal to that situation. He is more than equal to Peter and his never having eaten anything unclean. When the Lord gave Peter that vision of the sheet let down with all manner of four-footed beasts and creeping things and said, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat", Peter in effect quoted Scripture to the Lord; he quoted Leviticus 11, with its commandments concerning the unclean beasts which must not be eaten. 'Lord, here is Scripture for my position; my position is soundly founded upon the Word of God!' What are you going to do with that? Now, listen - *I am not saying nor even implying that the Holy Ghost will ever call upon us to do something contrary to the Scriptures.* He never will. But He will very often show us that the Scriptures mean something that we never saw them to mean. Leviticus 11 had a meaning that Peter had not seen. He had taken the letter and the literal meaning of those things. He never saw the Divine, spiritual meaning at the back of that. Cornelius had never received the Holy Spirit, and therefore an angel spoke to him. Peter had received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and it was the Spirit who was speaking to Peter. The Holy Ghost had this matter in hand, and was dealing with the difficulties in Peter, even in his fundamentalism, to lift him off a merely temporal, earthly ground to a heavenly. Peter was living under an open heaven; and there are tremendous changes when you get there. It does not all happen at once.

The Holy Spirit 'Upon' and 'In'

Just one further word for the present: You notice here that there was a double operation of the Holy Spirit. In chapter 2, the Spirit lighted 'upon' them. These cloven tongues as of fire sat upon them; and then it says, "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." 'Upon' and 'in'. I do not want to be technical, contradicting what we have been saying about too much technique, but there is a meaning in the 'upon' and the 'in'. The coming 'upon' is the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in relation to God's eternal purpose. That is, the Holy Spirit has come as the custodian and administrator of the eternal counsels of God, of the purpose of God from eternity, and, coming like that, He imposes (I trust that it is not the wrong word to use) the purpose of God upon the vessel. He gathers the vessel into the purpose in a sovereign way. It is as though He circled around and took charge of the vessel in an outward way and said, 'This is the vessel of the eternal purpose of God.' He takes charge of it, comes 'upon' for that.

But then He entered 'in' also, and they were filled, and this had a further meaning. It meant this, that the inward life of the vessel must correspond to the outward purpose. That is tremendous. You see, the old dispensation was not like that, and this is the problem that the prophets were dealing with all the time. The outward form was there. Israel had their temple, they were offering their sacrifices, they were going through all the ritual, but their inward life was far from corresponding to that. God had to say, through the prophets, 'Away with your sacrifices - I do not want them!' (cf. Isaiah 1:10-14). The Lord Jesus took that up. "*Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body didst thou prepare for me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hadst no pleasure: then said I, Lo, I am come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God*" (Hebrews 10:5-7).

Formalism never does the will of God; merely external system, however much it corresponds to the technique of the letter, never does the will of God; and the Holy Ghost was having none of that. He did not come in sovereignty to take up a lot of new people in a new dispensation, and give them forms and order, and make them do things in such and such a manner, merely in an outward way. He was going to have the inner life of the Church corresponding to the purpose. You find before long that He very severely comes upon anything that does not correspond. Ananias and Sapphira will know you cannot carry on in an outward way, pretending all is right. The Holy Ghost has seen inside the contradiction, and is not allowing it to pass.

Many want the coming 'upon' because they want to feel the power, feel themselves taken up, manipulated and moved. There has been a great deal of that sort of thing, which has not carried with it an inward correspondence. But the Lord's end can never be reached fully while there is any lack of true consistency between the purpose of God and the life of the people called to that purpose. "I... beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called" (Ephesians 4:1). Oh, I do beg of you to have continuous dealings with God on this matter of the indwelling Spirit - not just for purposes of service, or power, but for purposes of life.

One of the tragedies of many Christians and many servants of God is this, that they can believe and give expression to things which are positively false, and propagate those things and

do harm to other Christians by propagating them, and yet the Holy Ghost never seems to be able to make them aware that they are not telling the truth. I do not mean in Bible teaching, but in relation to other servants of God, and other work that God is doing. The solemn fact that there are such prejudices, suspicions, criticisms, misrepresentations, and so on, ought to drive us to the Lord with earnest appeal - 'Oh, Lord, it is no good my being engaged in Thy work, doing a lot of things for Thee, being prominent among men, perhaps, and well known for my Christian service, if yet, after all, the Holy Ghost cannot correct me within, put me right, give me a bad time when I say something not true. Save me from saying anything that does not correspond with the truth, or of which my inward life is a contradiction.' The Spirit within is to adjust us to the purpose of God. If we habitually, constantly, fall into ways which are not according to the Spirit, so that we become known for that kind of unpleasantness, we had better ask the Holy Spirit to do a deeper work in us. It is no use our having the deep things of God, while people know us as most difficult to get on with, always making life unpleasant for others. It will not do; it is a contradiction of the indwelling Spirit. He does not want us to have the system of things merely outwardly. We must have the inner life to correspond.

So we see that He came 'upon' to possess for the purpose of God, and He came 'within' to see that everything in the inner life corresponded to that purpose.

17. The Reality of *Koinonia* by Jerry Coulter

***Koinonia* Today**

There must be a way that Christians today can be with their Lord, a way that they can be with Him where He is. And can behold His glory. There is!

This experience seemed to be the basic component of first-century Christianity. Those early Christians had a strength and solidity that seemed to be unshakable.

Witness Stephen standing steadfastly as stones rained down upon him. It was because part of him was inside the depths of his being with His Lord. Witness Paul and Silas in the stocks with bleeding backs, singing in the face of the pain. It was because they were beholding the glory of their Lord who dwelt within them.

And witness another thing. What held together those small, raw groups of Christians in the face of persecution? How was it that Paul, or another of the apostles, could come to a brand new area, preach the gospel, raise up converts, and then leave them after only a few short weeks?

Again and again, the apostles did this: in Antioch of Pisidia, in Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Philippi, Berea. Apostles would see a small group of Christians emerge, and then leave them after only a few short weeks. And what did the apostles leave with them? Bibles? No. Detailed instructions about how to conduct an effective prayer life? No.

But the apostles did leave! Time after time, they left those new believers. Frequently these young Christians would face severe persecution, trials, and testings to their faith. The apostle would then return after several months or years, there to find a group of solid, strong Christians who would never give a moment's thought to forsaking their faith.

What did these Christians have? They had the powerful Son of God actively living inside them. And they knew He was there! Daily, hourly they beheld His glory and fellowshiped with Him and drew life from Him. Each Christian had a vital, nurturing, continuous fellowship and dialogue with an indwelling Lord. His powerful presence within them set these Christians apart from their non-Christian neighbors. And both knew it!

Did these Christians in far-flung areas envy the disciples and apostles who had actually, physically been with Christ? Probably, a little. But not a great deal, because they knew how to be with Him in an equally real sense.

By and large, we modern Christians have lost the propensity to fellowship with our Lord in this manner. But it is still possible to go where He is and behold Him. Could we still behold His glory if someone forbade us to pray and took our Bibles away from us? Yes! That's what this book is all about.

Deeper into the nature of Koinonia

This book is offering a definition of *koinonia* which is very likely new to most readers. So that this new approach is clear, it may be well, at this point, to identify what *koinonia* is not.

It is not prayer. At least it is not the same as the traditional concept of prayer. It is true that Jeanne Guyon and others frequently referred to this inward communion with Christ as a special kind of prayer. It may also be true that some New Testament references to prayer (e.g., "Pray without ceasing") actually are talking about *koinonia*; but, in general, it is important to realize that traditional prayer – petition, intercession, (even praise!) – is not *koinonia*.

Prayer is when you turn away from the world and are preoccupied with the things of God. *Koinonia* is when you turn away from the things of God and are preoccupied with God Himself.

Nor is *koinonia* Bible study or even devotional Bible reading. This may be very difficult for some to see. For almost four decades, I understood the beholding of 2 Cor. 3:18 to mean the discovery of our Lord in the revelation of Scripture. And I still insist on the importance of discovering Christ in the written Word.

Nonetheless, *koinonia*, as referred to in this book, is different from all these. **It is a different way of beholding Christ.** It is probably the way that the incredibly strong Christians of the first century beheld their Lord because they did not possess written copies of Scriptures. Nor is it likely that they would go down to the local synagogue to request copies of the hand-written pages. Why? Synagogues were not lending libraries. Besides, very few of the first-century Christians could read.

Koinonia is not mediation, in the sense of transcendental meditation or "focusing" or any of the other new world or Eastern types of deep soul involvement. The differences between these two experiences are vast. These will be discussed below. But before we take an in-depth look at what *koinonia* is, let's review our points so far.

Koinonia is what the Father and Son have done from all eternity. Each has existed by beholding the glory of the other. Jesus, on earth, prayed that His followers might also behold His glory where He is.

Koinonia, fellowshiping with Him, beholding Him, can change us into His very image.

Where is He now?

In that fateful meeting with Christ, John and Andrew asked Him, "*Master, where do you live?*" He replied, "*Come and see.*"

We Christians today need to ask this same question. If we are going to be with Him and fellowship with Him, the first, obvious question is, Where is He?

Now let's be honest here. Most of us think that Jesus Christ is in heaven which means that the Son is right now sitting on a throne a bit smaller and just to the right of the Father's in a glorious, shining place somewhere in the general direction of "up".

How much would it take to convince you that that place and that throne are inside you? Inside your torso? And can you believe that your Lord, right now, is there? Longing for your fellowship! Remember, Jesus asked the Father that we who are Christians might be with Him "*where I am, there you may be also.*" (John 14:3)

Monai

There is an extremely important New Testament Greek verb which, in English, is pronounced "meno" along with its noun counterpart "monai." The verb means to remain, sojourn, abide, tarry. The noun names a place where one sojourns or abides. Both words carry an idea of permanence. A *monai* is a place where one lives permanently in contrast to a place where one might just visit temporarily.

Look at three important occurrences of this word. In my Father's house there are many *monai*. I go to prepare these for you so that where I am there you may also be (John 14:2).

My Father and I will come and make our *monai* in you (John 14:23) (The Greek preposition *para* used with a dative case pronoun frequently means "in" not "with".

Abide (Meno) in me and I in you. (John 15:4)

It seems obvious that Jesus was trying to tell His disciples where He would be after His death. He would abide, sojourn, and remain permanently inside them. And they could constantly live with Him there. And the Bible gets even more specific about where Christ is now.

Spirit/Soul/Body

Most Christians, of course, believe that the Father and the Son are inside us. The New Testament is very clear about this. And it is even more specific about where they are inside us.

God formed Adam's body using a basic constituent which scientists call the molecule. When Adam's body was finished, God inhaled deeply and then exhaled from His own being into Adam. When God did this, Adam became a "living soul."

A definition is in order. Adam's soul was very different from the soul that we humans now have. A living soul is a soul which is existing in conjunction with a spirit which is filled with the life of God. To put in another way, a "living" soul is a soul which continuously derives its life from God.

Adam was created a three-part being: spirit, soul and body. His body was the tent or covering. His soul consists of three parts: mind, will, and emotions. Adam's soul was unique to creation. Angels had to be awestruck by it.

Man's spirit was primarily a habitat. I was a divine abode (remember *monai*), a place in which the very life of God could live and grow, and could guide and control man.

God's plan for Adam was a progressive one. God gave Adam his three parts, and then His plan was that Adam himself would voluntarily add a fourth entity from the tree of life which was the very life of God. The process of this partaking was *koinonia*.

Adam did not co-operate with God's plan. Instead of partaking with the life of God, he cooperated with Satan and partook of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

God had warned Adam that if he partook of this tree, he would die. When Adam disobeyed his most important part, his spirit, did become lifeless. Nothing could have been more tragic. Adam's spiritual domain, his *monai*, died. And so, God could not live within him.

After Adam's death, man proliferated down through the centuries, but he was not the creature God had intended. Man did not consist of a body and soul being led and directed by God's very life in his spirit. Instead, man became a two-part being: a body dominated by a corrupted soul.

Man's spirit, not his soul, was designed to be his central part. And so the ensuing history of mankind is a sad chronicle of a creature limping through the millennia minus two of the four basic parts he was intended to have.

No wonder things got into such a mess. The angels sadly watched a being stumbling through history who had fallen far, far short of the glory that his Maker had intended - until Christ.

This is not the place to discuss all of the marvelous intricacies of redemption. It is necessary to the topic of this book to examine only one of them.

When the Son of God willingly went to the cross, he enabled man's spirit, which had been long lifeless, to be reborn, to be resurrected out of death.

When a person commits to Christ today, his being undergoes a vast divine mathematical operation. Something is subtracted from him (his sins), and something is added to him (a living spirit).

A redeemed Christian has Adam's three original created parts: his body, his soul, and his spirit. But a redeemed Christian still has two areas of incompleteness which are his responsibility to attend to.

The first lack is that while his soul is saved, it is not fully renewed or restored. It, however, has the potential to be. One of the main things that the Christian life is all about is the transformation of the soul.

The second need in a newly-redeemed Christian is that, even though his being now consists of a brand new, born-from-above spirit, filled with the life of God, this spiritual life needs to be continuously nourished.

The new Christian, just like Adam, is instructed to nourish the life of God within him. Just like Adam, the Christian must partake of the tree of life. Adam never did avail himself of this tree. We Christians now have the opportunity to do what Adam did not.

This Tree is our Lord Jesus Christ

The Lord told His disciples that they must eat of His flesh and drink of His blood. This means something more than the ritual of the Lord's Supper. But we must not move too fast. The topic of this section is "Where Is Christ Now?" From the above discussion we now have a specific answer. The Lord Jesus Christ lives in the Christian's newly-born spirit. The Lord is a spirit, and He must have a spiritual abode in which to live.

One further point: When God was creating, He did it in a never-failing sequence. He always created first a habitat (a domain, a *monai*) and then He created the being who would live in that habitat.

The very first thing that God ever created was a *monai*, a habitat, a domain. The first domain was a spiritual one called heaven (or the heavenlies). Then God created angels to inhabit this domain. God also enfolded Himself into this domain.

And then, to the amazement of the angels, God created a completely different kind of *monai*, one made out of molecules: the visible heavenlies. . . and earth. Then He created a domain to live there. Then He created a domain called the seas and inhabited it with beings designed to live there. He created dry land. He filled this habitat with "*creeping things*." Into the air, He put beings designed to live there. Then, of course, came man who eventually was to rule the earth and to inhabit the Garden. The point is that the domain was created first, then the living things were created to inhabit that domain.

Man's spirit was no exception. The Father and Son wanted to live inside man, so they first created a *monai*, a domain in which they could live. This abode had to be adaptable to the Father and Son who are spirits. Accordingly, they created man's spirit. This spirit, in a man, was to be the abiding place of the Father and Son. (Not man's soul, his spirit. This is a very important point which will be enlarged upon later.)

After Adam's disobedience disabled his spirit, God could not live inside man. Christ came to correct this. His atonement cleansed man of his sin, clearing the way for the Father and the Son to again indwell man.

But first, according to the pattern, the abiding place had to be created, or re-created. In this case, it was resurrected from out of a long, long death. Christ promised the disciples that He would be going to do this, "*I go to prepare a **monai** for you that where I am, there you may be also.*" The 'going' was to the cross!

It is interesting that in both cases the preparing of this spiritual abode inside man involved divine breathing! In Genesis the Father breathed into Adam. In the Gospels, the Son breathed into His disciples.

Adam received God's habitat, but he never got God in the habitat. Jesus gave the disciples back that habitat – first. Then He moved into His habitat.

One of the glorious benefits of the redemption of Christ was the revival of man's disabled spirit. And now God, at last, has an abode in man in which to live.

And if someone came to Christ today with John and Andrew's question, "*Master, where do you live,*" His answer would be the same, "*Come and see.*" We do not know where the Lord led John and Andrew in their day. But in our day the one asking the question would be led deeply within himself to his own human spirit.

There are Christians who have discovered this *monai* and have learned how to get there and be with their Lord. In the next chapter several of these unusual Christians will share this glorious experience with us.

18. A People of the Upward Way by George H Warnock

God has planned and ordained that there shall be a full and complete expression of the living Christ in His family that is in the earth. We dare not lower God's standard, or dilute the revelation of the Spirit with human opinions or methods, in order to make it "workable". This continues to go on. But in the end God lays it all aside, and brings forth that HOLY THING from His own creative hand.

What do we mean by the "*fullness of God*," or the "*fullness of Christ*" being revealed in and through His people? The Greek word is "*pleroma*" and means a "*completeness*," that state where there is "*nothing lacking*." In no place are the people of God to fall short of the glory and beauty of Christ. God is going to "*complete*" and bring to a glorious conclusion, all that He has purposed in His beloved people.

Now we know that the work of Redemption was completed when Jesus was here on earth, as far as His earthly ministry was concerned. He said in His great high-priestly prayer to the Father, "*I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do*," and we hear Him saying in His dying moments on the Cross, "*IT IS FINISHED*." His work on earth was FINISHED.

But there was a great work for Him to do in the heavens, and this has largely been lost sight of by God's people. They somehow have the notion that He is filling in time until His can come back to earth and set up an earthly kingdom. God help His people to believe Him when He says that His Son is NOW reigning in Zion, and will continue to do so until all enemies are subdued under His feet (Psalm 110:1; 1 Cor. 15:25 etc.)

He went to Heaven to set up His Kingdom; and He NOW rules and reigns from a heavenly throne, as both KING and PRIEST, "*as a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true Tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not man*" (Heb. 8:2). His coming back is not to set up a Kingdom, but to complete the work which He started when He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...to gather in the Harvest, to judge and consume the chaff and the tares, and to give to every man according to His works.

For almost two thousand years He has been ministering, and working, and reigning from Zion, the City of God; bringing to nought the devices of men, overthrowing, rooting up, tearing down ...as well as building and planting. This work is not finished yet, but it is going to be. The mystery of God is going to be "*finished*." Whatever God has planned and purposed for His people is going to be completed. He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is the Author, as well as the "*Finisher*" of our faith.

Now just where, and at what point in the Book of Revelation God completes His work in the Church is not our present concern. But we do want to emphasize that the people of God are in reality the "Finished Work" that God has in mind. We, His people, are the crowning work of His creation. "*We are His workmanship ...*" as the apostle said (Eph.2:10). Another translation reads this way, "*We are His HANDIWORK*." We are to be the very crowning glory of His creative power and majesty! Paul says,

"The Church which is His body, the fullness (pleroma) of Him that filleth all in all"
Eph.1:22, 23

That the Lord Jesus was Himself the *"fullness of God"* when here on earth, and NOW in the heavens ...is really no problem to the people of God. We know that *"in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily"* (Col. 2:9); because *"it pleased the Father that in Him should all the fullness dwell"* (Col. 1:19). And we know that it applies to Him NOW in the full measure of kingly power and authority; and that it applied to Him when He was on earth in the beauty of His life, and nature, and character. It was the *"glory of the Father"* that shone forth in His earthly life and ministry (John 1:14). For the Son of God was the express image of the Father, the One who radiated the nature of the Father lived by the life of the Father, spoke the words of the Father, and did the works of the Father. Truly God hath spoken *"by His Son,"* or more literally, *"IN SON"* ... the Son was HIMSELF, IN FLESH, the SPOKEN EXPRESSION OF THE FATHER (Heb. 1:1, 2). We know it means that all virtues, all graces, all attributes that pertain to God are and were wrapped up in Christ. In no area does He fall short. He is that *"fullness"* that *"completeness"*.

It is not to say that the totality of God's Being dwells in one human body, the body of Jesus; but rather the perfection of it, the fullness of it, the complete expression of it. If it be patience and longsuffering, God has manifested these in all of His dealings with men from the beginning of time. But we see the *"fullness"* of it in Jesus. Power? We see the glory of His power everywhere in the Universe. But the *"fullness"* of it, the *"completeness"* of it, we find in Jesus. In Him resides the *"full expression"* of everything, every attribute, every grace, every virtue that is inherent in the heart of God. Most of us have to problem in this.

But now that Jesus has been glorified, He has taken on an EXTENSION of His Body, to include the Family of God; and now the EXTENDED body, this ENLARGED body is said to be the *"fullness of Christ,"* or the full expression of the Lord Jesus Himself *"The FULLNESS OF HIM THAT FILLETH ALL IN ALL"*

Theology has a tendency to accept Truth as long as it does not become LIVING TRUTH...as long as it does not change the status quo ... as long as it does not start some kind of revolution. But this statement about the Church being the FULL EXPRESSION OF CHRIST is not something for theologians to analyze; it is something for God's people to appreciate. Listen to these words, which the Apostle did not feel he could utter without cloaking the revelation in a prayer that God's people might enter into it.

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge..." (Eph.3:14-19)

Perhaps there is nothing too controversial in what we have quoted. But we didn't finish it! In all that the Apostle had been saying we feel the crescendo of heart yearning for more and more and still more of God until we are literally lost, immersed in the FULLNESS OF GOD HIMSELFMay we finish reading this wonderful prayer.

"... And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with (or UNTO) all THE FULLNESS OF GOD!"

How dare we dilute the Truth concerning the Body of Christ to the level of human emotion, and settle for this sentimental idea of everybody getting together, patting one another on the back, and learning to love them and get along!

Only by the Spirit of God are we going to see in some faint measure the burden of God's heart for His people, and the yearning that overwhelmed the heart of the Apostle, as he contemplated the glory that God had in store for His family. And how clearly he revealed to us the step-by-step process that God would lead His family in; that they might explore and appropriate and be lost in this boundless realm of Divine LOVE! Oceans and fathomless depths of LOVE! Heights and depths of LOVE beyond all human ability to understand and comprehend! And the revelation of it all is couched in deep yearnings from the heart of God, and from the heart of the apostle, in a prayer that is born of the Spirit. For only God could enable a man to pray this way ...that His Family on earth might be able to "*apprehend*" this glorious revelation and experience; for the word is much stronger than "*comprehend*." It means RECEIVE and to RECEIVE FULLY the revelation of it until we are FILLED UNTO ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD...until in and through God's precious Family in the earth we might see, and the world might see, the full expression, the completion, the full display of the LOVE OF GOD.

Keep the Vision High!

Keep the Vision high; and as you do, do not yield to the temptation that it just must mean less that God says, otherwise we could never attain to it. For we are not talking about human achievement ...something you just try to do...we are talking about Divine enablement ... And still more, we are talking about New Creation life and what God is able and willing to do with earthen vessels. We are talking about the might of the Potter, and the futility of the clay. You have a part, I know. But your part and mine is to be the CLAY in the hands of the POTTER. Your part and mine is to let Him mold, and form, and plan ...as we simply yield, and let, and allow, and permit, and seek Him, and yearn after Him until He does it!

And God forbid that the pressing needs of mankind should deter us from the pathway we pursue, as we follow this Light; for we may recognize that this, and this alone, is God's provision for every human need. And furthermore, as we walk in this pathway and as we embrace this Vision, let us be assured that the needs of men are being met along the way according to the degree in which we are being conformed to the image of Christ, and not according to the degree in which we are conformed to the programs and the outreaches of religious zeal and enthusiasm. For it is only in the pursuit of the calling that God sets before us that we will become those channels of His grace and blessing that He desires us to be.

The High Calling

Let not the height of the Vision dismay you, or discourage you as you walk towards it. Remember this ...that the high calling is not too high for you, or God would not have called you to it. And take courage in the fact that the HIGH calling is really an UPWARD call, as the Greek word means, and as it is translated in some versions. It is an UPWARD call! This gives us hope and courage. If it were simply "high," I could very well look up and say, "It is just too high for me." I might gaze at the heights of the call, and flounder in discouragement. But it is an UPWARD call! God is saying to you and to me, "I am calling you UPWARD...I want you to go on...I want you to come up higher ...I do not want you to stay where you are, frustrated and perplexed and bewildered. The reason you abide in those realms is because you do not see the Vision. And if you see it you think I have set before you a goal that you know you can never reach. You do not understand that I only ask you to take one step at a time, and I only ask you to climb the steps with Me, as you take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me ... for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

And so we take but one step at a time, and God is pleased. But we must not lag behind or yield to the enticements that come our way from time to time to take a shortcut. For there are many that appear to be good. You can get gifts of the Spirit freely. You might even develop yourself a ministry, that may satisfy your heart for a season, and from which you might find a certain fulfillment. And certainly you need His gifts! But pray God that He will cause you to sit and learn from ministries that will lead you to His feet ... ministries that will encourage you to take His yoke, and follow His ways. Gifts and ministries must not be considered to be in any sense ultimate ... they are but means to an end ... and the end pursuit of gift and ministry is to come to know Him, to be joined in like spirit unto others in the Family of God who are seeking to come to the "*fullness*" of Him ... so that together you might be able to comprehend, to apprehend, to receive fully ... the living Christ, in the full expression of His Being.

And let us not be dismayed when in spite of all our noble efforts to climb higher we feel ...we just know ...that we are getting lower and lower. For as we travel this way we are going to discover, as men and women of all ages have discovered that ...

The way UP is DOWN ...

The way OVER is UNDER ...

The way to SUCCESS is through FAILURE ...

The way to true PROSPERITY is through spiritual BANKRUPTCY ...

The way to the true RICHES, is through POVERTY ...

The way to VICTORY is through DEFEAT ...

The way to LIFE is through DEATH.

And therefore, for the people of the UPWARD WAY God have set before us a very clear pattern and example:

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God (Or, 'He did not consider that equality with God was something He should grasp after'): but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name"
(Phil. 2:5-9)

For the Son of God, the Captain of our Salvation, the Author and the Finisher of our faith ... for Him the UPWARD CALL was one that brought Him lower, and lower, and lower ... even unto the death of the Cross.

And so it must be with you and me. God deliver us from all that striving we see today to excel ... striving for highness, for exaltation, for bigness ... even among many who profess to be heirs of the "Kingdom." Let us make no mistake about it ... the pathway to SONSHIP leads to none of these. It takes one lower, and lower, and still lower ... in order that in the Spirit of Christ we might rise higher, and higher, and still higher

19. The New Israel *by Jessy Jason*

That the church is the chosen vessel of God to bring about the realization of the full purpose of God is a New Testament thought through the revelation given to the Apostle Paul. He says it was a mystery that was not revealed in the ages past. However, the church at large has only recently realized this truth and has now begun to lay a greater emphasis upon God's purpose. The nineteenth and eighteenth centuries were focused more on meeting the needs of the man for salvation. But the Pentecostal revival in the early part of the twentieth century coupled with the Spirit-led teaching of the Body of Christ, spearheaded by people like Austin Sparks and Watchman Nee et al, brought about a drastic change in the goal and objective of the church. There is now a fresh attention in the church upon centering all things in Christ and the purpose of God in Him.

In the Book of Acts which concerns the birth and development of the early church no specific mention has been made of the 'purpose of God for the church' as such. There is however, a mention of the purpose of God for the apostle Paul (Acts 26:16 *"But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;"*). The first mention of God's purpose for the church appears in Romans 8:28, *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose."* The Greek word used for 'God's purpose' here is *'prothesis'*,⁵ which is interestingly linked to the *'shewbread'* found in the tabernacle. As representatives of the corporate nation of Israel, the priests partook of the loaves of shewbread daily. We see that God's 'purpose' was in type related to the corporate nation of Israel and not to individuals as such. The shewbread was also known as 'showbread' for the loaves set forth or showed God's intentions for God's people (represented by the priesthood).

There were two words used for "God's purposes" in the past. One was 'elect' or election, and the other was 'sovereignty' (of God). We need to bear in mind that these words were often used to indicate God's goal and objective for the individual rather than the church. The Greek *'ekloge'* translated as elect or election is used more in connection with the individual believer (see Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament words). Strangely, the word 'sovereignty' does not appear in the New Testament (KJV) though the sovereignty of God is implied in several places to indicate His will and purpose.

Before we move on to study about the church as God's vessel for the fulfillment of His purpose, let us first focus on the meaning of God's eternal purpose.

God's Eternal Purpose

The eternal purpose of God, who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will, is to gather in one all things in Christ, His Son. God's clear goal is to center all things in His Son. This is also reiterated in different words in several other passages of the Scriptures.

Eph.1:9-11 (KJV)

Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

God's eternal purpose, His will, His goal and ultimate intention has always been to and always will be to make Christ the center, the foundation, the beginning and the end of all things. God's eternal purpose is eternal because it was initiated and instituted before the world began. God purposed it before man sinned and fell, before the church was born, and before the Son was sent to the earth as the great Redeemer. His purpose existed before man was created; it does not depend on the situations and state of people on the earth. God's purpose did not come into being when man sinned; it does not depend on whether we accept the Son or not; it does not depend on the saving faith or upon the convicting work of the Spirit. God's purpose is a part of His sovereign will and good pleasure. We need to have a revelation of this truth with the help of the Holy Spirit. Then we shall begin to understand the whole economy of God which is centered in Christ and not in man.

Col. 1:16-19 (KJV)

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence.

For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;

God's creative work in the universe was motivated by His purpose to have all things centered in Christ. He created the heavens and the earth with this object in mind. His purpose stands as the one fixed, immovable, unchangeable, and immutable reality. Everything that is done by the Godhead is done in the light of the Father's plan and purpose. This purpose of God stands before and above everything else that has been created in the heavens and the earth. Neither time nor the conditions of created beings have in any way changed God's determination to fulfill His plan and purpose. God is single-minded and positive about all that He has purposed. He does not have two purposes but only one purpose. Though there are some short-term purposes, these all fall in line with His ultimate and eternal purpose. He works all things after the counsel of His own will. Everything the Trinity does leads to the fulfillment of this one purpose—Christ is all and in all.

Eph.1:22-23 (KJV)

And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,

Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

2 Tim 1:8-10 (KJV)

Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;

Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,

But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:

1 Cor. 15:28 (KJV)

And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

CHURCH – the Fulness of Christ

If we truly understand the truth of God's eternal purpose in the Son, then it will be easy to accept and understand that when God moved supernaturally to birth the church (Acts Chapter 2), He did so with the express desire that the church would fulfill His grand purpose in the Son. This is why it is written that 'the church, which is His body is the fullness of Him that filleth all in all (Eph.1:22-23). Furthermore, the eternal purpose of God which He purposes in Christ, looks to the church to propagate this eternal purpose of God to the powers and principalities in heavenly places!

Eph.3:9-11 (KJV)

And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,

According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:

The Amplified Bible puts it this way, "(The purpose is) that through the church the complicated, many-sided wisdom of God in all its infinite variety and innumerable aspects might now be made known to the angelic rulers and authorities (principalities and powers) in the heavenly sphere."

The Godhead has decided that all the workings of God would revolve around this one great goal. The Church is right at the forefront of God's plan to realize His great purpose to sum up

everything in Christ. Even the angels in heavenly places will be shown and led to this truth by and through the church!

God has a Person who must be the center of all things. His goal is that the Person of His Son be enlarged and magnified so that He fills the universe with Himself. Thus He alone will be the all-inclusive One, the all-sufficient One and the All-in-all. All things are to be filled with Him and He is to hold up all things. All things cohere (are held together) by Him. He is the sum total of the divine perfection permanently.

Col. 1:15-19 (KJV)

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;

What a privilege it is for the church to be a vehicle for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose!

We have seen that the church is the fullness of Christ, the express image of the Lord Jesus Christ even as He was the express image of the Father in heaven. The church is the expression and the earthly appearance of the Lord. She is His body. She is His enlargement. The heights and depths of Christ will be seen in a church that is made in His perfect image to be holy and without blemish. The church as the body of Christ is the fullness of Christ and as such is the manifold expression of the Son.

CHURCH – the Corporate Expression of Christ

Christ's vision was for a church to be His Bride. Christ is the Bridegroom, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross (Heb. 12:2). He waits patiently for the church to be perfected in Him. There are many passages in the Bible that portray the church as the bride of Christ in typology as well as in prophesy. The love between the Bridegroom and the bride is beautifully and amply expressed in the Songs of Solomon. The Body of Christ which is born in His love expresses its love in several ways such as worship, prayer, and communion.

God has created the church to express His purpose in the Son. God's objective is to have the fullness of Christ in all realms. And the church is the vessel that has been chosen to do so. It is God's desire that when we see His people in a church here upon the earth, we should see Jesus Christ. The fullness of Christ is to be reflected in the church. It should flow out of the church to all the nations. It should be seen in the things that the church is occupied in. Jesus should be the object of the church's representation. If this is not so then the people are not truly representing the Head and the church is literally not a part of His body. The life of Christ, the

person of Christ, the thoughts and the desires of Christ must be no different from the person and the personality of Christ Himself. Every member of the body must function fully to express the heights and depths of Christ.

The ministries have been provided to the church to make the members perfect morally and spiritually. The edification of the body is a work of the ministry. And the ministrations must continue till the church is made mature, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Eph.4:11-13 (KJV)

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

The church is a vessel that brings the cross to bear upon the individual lives of the members. The cross stands between the natural and the spiritual man. God uses the cross to change members and to join them in fellowship till they move and operate in unison and harmony. The church is the vessel that God has provided to bring individuals to spiritual fullness. Christians cannot attain the fullness of Christ outside the body of Christ. There is no place for individualism in the body; agreeing is not enough; there needs to be a corporate flowing in the anointing that rests on the body.

Eph.2:19-22 (KJV)

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Ps. 133:1-3 (KJV)

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments;

As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.

Israel as the chosen people of God failed to arrive at the fullness that God had for them (represented by entrance to the land of Canaan). Yes, there were Spirit filled people like Aholiab and Bezaleel, chosen to build the tabernacle of Moses according to the design of God, but they perished with others in the wilderness and could not enter into Canaan. Except for Joshua and Caleb none of the Israelites could enter into Canaan. That is why God raised up a new generation of believers to move into the fullness of the Son in the New Testament age of grace.

The church needs to experience the 'body' life in much greater measures than she does now for the church is the crucible of God for His fullness. No wonder the apostle Paul laid such great emphasis upon the corporate aspect of the church. We can see this in his exhortation to the believers in every church but more specially so in the Corinthian church.

1 Cor. 12:12-14 (KJV)

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

For the body is not one member, but many.

God desires that the Son present His church to Himself—a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:27). The Lord will present His church to Himself, and just as Eve came out of Adam, so also the church shall come out of Christ having His nature, character and life. Let this be the goal and the hope of the church today.

20. Church - God's Covenant People by Joy Thomas

In Chapter 8 of the book of Hebrews, the Apostle Paul first reminds Christians that they have come to a better covenant.

"But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away." Hebrews 8:6-13

We can well appreciate now that we are the people of the New Covenant, the old has gone, the new has come. The natural is of no account now, the spiritual realm is of the present. The things of the Old Covenant were of temporary nature, they have passed away and given way to a better, New Covenant. If the Old Covenant had been good enough there would have been no need for a New Covenant. Therefore, let us honestly assess whether the natural Jew, the chosen of the Old Covenant has any place in the purposes of God today or not.

"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God. What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God." Romans 2:28-3:2

The Word says that God committed His oracles (secrets) to the Jews in the Old Covenant. In the past the Jews were a privileged people for God ordained that His Son would appear as a Jew upon this earth! It was through the Jew that God made known His redemptive plan for mankind.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jews first, and also to the Greek."
Romans 1:6

The Jews held a position of privilege in the Old Covenant. The Gospel was first preached in Jerusalem and Samaria (i.e. Judah & Israel), and later it went to the 'uttermost parts of the world'. God's plan and hidden things were first revealed to the Jew. Esau was a privileged person, being the first born of Isaac, but later he relinquished his rights to Jacob. So also, the Israelites were once a privileged people but they rejected the Messiah and their place was given to the believer (Gentile or Jew). Paul had a great burden concerning these people-the natural Jews, possibly because he had been a zealous Jew himself:

"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises;" Romans 9:1-4

It is no surprise that Paul was burdened for those who were once the chosen people but were no longer holding the same position or privilege. Those who had prepared the way for the Messiah to come were now rejected of God because they had refused and rejected the way of the Lord in their lives. Yet, the Bible says that '*God hath not cast away his people*' and that '*there is a remnant according to the election of grace*'.

"I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life.

But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace."

Romans 11:1-5

We see that natural Israel has a remnant of believers who shall be GRAFTED into the NEW VINE which is the Lord Jesus Christ. There shall be a moving of the Holy Spirit among the Jews. But the traditional teaching that God has something special to offer the Jews is purely hypothetical. There is only 'one' way and that is the way of the Lord Jesus Christ; there is only one sacrifice, that is the Lord Jesus Christ; there is only one Foundation, one Root, one Shepherd. Let us believe that God will surely move among the Jews for He said that "*I shall pour My Spirit on ALL flesh in these last days.*" (Joel 2:28, Acts 2:17). The natural Jew shall benefit from this promise even as do the people of all nations "*for ALL flesh shall see salvation*" (Luke 3:6).

And that Israel (remnant) that God is keeping (literal Israel) shall be saved in the last days and it shall be grafted into the same vine into which we are also being grafted. The Jew and the Gentiles shall ALL be together in Him, for there shall be one Vine, one Body, one Flock, one People and one Church. The stones (lively), the Jews and Gentiles shall be built together into

one holy temple. They come as dead stones to the Living One, and are made to lively stones by the Spirit (I *Peter* 2:4-5).

"And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled." Luke 21:29-32

The State of Israel was founded in 1948. This was a sign of the times in which we live. The fig tree of Jerusalem has put forth her leaves. In the eternal purposes of God there has been a gathering of the Jewish people, even literally. The conversion and restoration of Israel will take place in the perfection of God's whole plan. The saved descendants of Abraham, bodily and spiritually, shall share in the final fulfillment of God's purposes and goal. Let us praise God for His abundant grace. But it is not right to teach that the hope of all nations lies in natural Jerusalem or natural Israel. This is not the sound teaching of the Word. Similarly, it is wrong to say that the Lord will raise up 144,000 Jews who will evangelize the world (*Revelation* 7) after the Church is 'caught up' to God. And to believe the teaching that implies that what the Church could not do for 2000 years with the Holy Spirit, will be done by the Jews without the Holy Spirit, is sheer absurdity. The hope of all nations is the Church of the living God (and not natural Israel). It is the Church and the Church alone that shall make known the manifold wisdom of God to the powers and principalities in heavenly places. Beloved, Christ Jesus is the hope of our glory, and He is the head of the church, which is His Body.

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." Revelation 21:1-3

John saw a remarkable sight! He saw God bringing forth the holy city, Jerusalem. He saw the city descending from the heavens. The city he saw coming down was none other than the mature, glorified Church of the living God. How could this be, one asks? According to God's Word those who have been born again by the Spirit of God are seated in heavenly places (*Ephesians* 2:6). They have entered a heavenly or a spiritual realm. So in a spiritual and divine sense, what John saw upon the island in the Spirit was the birthing of the glorified Church.

Beloved, the time is soon coming when there shall be a manifestation of this glorious Church upon the earth in a measure that the world has never seen. John saw a projection of the Church, upon His mind's screen, as it were. He saw her coming down from out of the heavens and descending upon the earth, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. He saw by the eye of the Holy Spirit of God, a pure Church without spot and wrinkle, descending and becoming a reality upon the earth.

John saw God dwelling among men. He saw the fulfillment of God's promises to mankind. He saw the church in all her glory-the glory of God. The Scriptures were fulfilled before his mind's eye.

"And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;" Revelation 21:9-11

We are the Church of the Firstborn. We have been called to be a New Covenant people who have been brought together to be built into ONE MAN in Christ Jesus. This is God's purpose in saving us, that we *'may be gathered together in one'*, even in Him. Therefore, let us be fully occupied with this city of the living God, this Body of Christ, this Church, this Bride of Christ.

As a Church we must understand that God is cleansing every false teaching concerning the special place of the Jew in God's economy. He has already ordained and formed *'one many-membered man'*.

We are God's chosen people. We have come to that heavenly hope of our glory, and He is the head of the church, which is His Body. We have come to that heavenly city, the holy Jerusalem. We are of the true Israel of God who are being built together into ONE NEW MAN in our local churches. There is enmity in the flesh, but God by His Holy Spirit is working the cross into our lives and is breaking down every wall of partition concerning our relationship with one another.

We have one hope of our calling, and that is that we may ALL be conformed to His image. There shall be ONE Body, ONE Company, ONE Flock; ONE Church; and ONE Bride. It is towards this end purpose that God is taking all those who have given themselves to this truth.

The time is coming when this beautiful Bride of Christ (the Church) will be brought forth in all reality. Beloved, we have been called to be a part of the Bride, of God's ONE NEW CORPORATE MAN. This is the will of God concerning us in Christ Jesus!

He that hath an ear, let him hear!

21. The Eternal Purpose of God by T. Austin-Sparks

Ephesians 4:10

He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all the heavens that he might fill all things?

Ephesians 1:22, 23

And he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all?

We are going, as the Lord enables us, to consider those two statements along four lines: firstly, the purpose which they indicate; secondly, the means by which the purpose has its realisation and fulfilment; thirdly, the method by which the means will fulfil its vocation; and fourthly, the obligation that rests upon those concerned.

The Purpose

We come to these complementary words that we have read, and beginning with the purpose that is indicated. You have this letter to the Ephesians before the so called '*to the Ephesians*', but you can just cross that right out, because it was not in the original letter at all. It was a circular letter. Ephesus may have been the first place, though we don't know.

When we take up this letter, this mighty document, we find that we are, as we read through it, moving in the realm of sovereign purpose. That is an unmistakable characteristic of the letter and its language. There are three phrases, or words, which constantly recur in this letter, and they indicate that when we come here we are in the presence of something very positive and very definite as to purpose.

The first phrase is 'His will', and you must look upon that not just as something willing, but as an object. It is a very definite thing. This will of God is something very concrete. You can look at the letter and move with me in it in these connections: '*Having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will*' (Ephesians 1:5); '*Having made known unto us the mystery of his will*' (Ephesians 1:9); '*In whom also we were made a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will*' (Ephesians 1:11). All those come so quickly at the beginning of this letter, laying the foundation for all that is to follow, and each phrase carries its own significance. Surely they do impress us with this fact: that we are here presented with something tremendous "*the good pleasure of his will*"; "*the counsel of his will*", and so on.

Then we turn to Ephesians 5:17: "*Wherefore be ye not foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is*". May I say again that we, of course, daily and continually ask that we might know the Lord's will, but in so doing we are thinking in relation to many details of our lives. We want to know the Lord's will as to whether we should go here or not go here, do this or not do this, and so on. We say that we want to know the will of the Lord and we go to the Lord about it and ask Him to show us His will. That is specific and particular in its application. It is quite

right, but it is not what the apostle is talking about here. We must understand that this letter comprehends the church. Individual lives come into that, but it is the church that is in view and does that will, write it with a capital 'W' if you like. That is behind everything here.

Then there is that word '*purpose*'. As you know that is characteristic of this letter. We have just read the first occurrence of it:

Ephesians 3:11

"In whom also we were made a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will"

Ephesians 1:11

"According to the eternal purpose (the margin says 'the purpose of the ages') which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord"

And if we want a third emphasis we come to this word 'foreordained'. "*Having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will*". (Ephesians 1:5); "*In whom also we were made a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him...*" (Ephesians 1:11).

His will, big will: His purpose of the ages: foreordained accordingly.

So, if this all refers to the church and we are 'that' then we certainly are moving in the realm of tremendous sovereign purpose, something laid down, fixed, irrevocable, unalterable, and laid down by God before the foundation of the world.

One thing from which we and all the Lord's people and we might say further all men need to be delivered is this sense, this growing sense, this intensifying sense in the universe of futility, meaninglessness. There is a growing fatalism in men's hearts because they cannot explain. They cannot get the meaning, and fatalism is a most soul-destroying thing. It just says, 'Well, if it is to be, it will be. If it is not to be, it will not be, and that is all there is to it. You had just better give it up; take your hands off. It is going to be and you cannot alter it. It will happen', and so on. That is the very heart of weakness, of looseness of life, of uncertainty, indefiniteness, of insecurity, of utter aimlessness. It takes every sense of purpose and meaning out of existence. And that is a growing thing. Why is it that over this world today there is a wave of suicides as has never been known in its civilized history before? We don't dwell upon that, and you may not be acquainted with it. Some of you from the continent know about it, however, especially in northern Europe, where it is just like a terrible wave. It is growing, and it is because of this very thing, this feeling of fate and fate being against one; a hopeless impotence in the presence of forces with which men cannot cope and which they cannot explain. This fatalism is the most disintegrating thing in anyone's life, or in any society. There is no cohesiveness about this, no holding together, and that goes right to the heart of this letter... "*In whom each several building, fitly framed together*" (Ephesians 2:21). The answer is in Him. We will leave that for the moment.

In this letter for Christians, for the church, we are right in the presence of something which is so much the opposite of all that, such a contradiction to all that: His will, concrete, divine,

positive, settled, established from all eternity, which cannot be defeated, or deflected, or in any way frustrated in its full and final realisation. It is fixed and His purpose stands, and according to it you and I, and all who are in this body of Christ, are foreordained. That is fairly solid ground! And is it not true that the greatest need is to be on solid ground in days such as these?

So, over against all this state of things, which we have only touched upon so lightly, is God's fixed and established purpose, something that God has fixed and established and in relation to which it says here: "*He chose us in him before the foundation of the world*" (Ephesians 1:4).

The purpose, then, begins with God's Son. The thing, which God has settled in His unalterable, unchangeable, irrevocable will is that His Son, shall ultimately fill all things. This is the Bible, this is the Word of God, and, of course, we are confronted with whether we believe the Scriptures when we read things like that. You wonder, perhaps, why such a thing is said, because you all do believe the Scriptures. I venture to say, in the awful upheavals and shakings of the end times the faith of the most devout believer will be shaken as to the Scriptures, as to the Word of God. Forgive me if that sounds a wrong thing to say. However, whether you can endorse it by your own experience, or not, there is a tremendous shaking going on amongst Christians today as to whether the Bible can really be relied upon.

Here, then, is the statement, sheer, definite, positive, because it comes right from God Himself, that He has in His eternal counsel settled it, with full knowledge of all that would rise against it, with full knowledge of all history of this world and of the work of evil and seeming contradictions, that "In the end My Son shall fill all things".

But He has alongside of that, just as definitely, positively, categorically and finally decided and determined that a certain body, a certain elect body of people are to be a medium, vessel, channel, instrument for the fulfilment of that determined purpose concerning His Son. That elect body is known to us by various names, but in general "the church". Here in Ephesians it is "*the church, which is his body*" an elect body.

The Means of its Realisation and Fulfilment

That leads us, then, to the second thing, the means: the church, the elect body of Christ. God has foreseen this body and chosen this body before the world was in Christ: it is set down here in the Scriptures as a fact, a definite fact. And you know that God's facts are very awkward things and very stubborn things. If you come up against God's facts that is an end of all argument. And here is the fact. God has done this. It is stated to be so in the Scriptures of truth. There is the fact.

But then, God has not only fixed it from eternity. He has given the revelation of it in time. The Holy Spirit has come from God, from heaven, for the specific purpose of making known this very thing, first giving the revelation of it and then, by wonderfully sovereign means, raising up and choosing vessels, preserving vessels, anointing vessels, and enabling vessels, through untold opposition and adversity and suffering, to fulfil this ministry of bringing to the people of God the knowledge of this very thing. The revelation has come.

We have not measured, and probably in time we shall never be able to measure, all the tremendous triumph that lay in this one instance of Paul at last being able to give this

revelation in fulness. That man ought to have been dead a dozen, a hundred times! If the devil could have done it he would have been. That man ought to have been absolutely neutralized again and again, not only by the evil powers, but also by men. His battles were tremendous battles. Everywhere his steps were dogged, his path was followed. This man was marked down for destruction, and for the entire and final discrediting of himself and his ministry. But we have it on record in this fulness, as we saw in the last chapter. It looks like a little pamphlet, doesn't it, this letter to the Ephesians? What does it amount to on paper? Yet it is the greatest document that has ever entered into this creation! It is the embodiment of the exceeding greatness of God's power in a man's life for a ministry, and for the revelation of this eternal purpose of God for the church.

And so God has sovereignly done this thing to give it to the church, to make it known that there is an elect body in existence in the eternal counsels of God, and that that elect body is the object of this dispensation, particularly to be called out of the nations.

All the difficulties and problems, of course, arise there, theologically, for God does not say who belongs to this elect. He has never yet said to you and me directly and personally: "Look here! I chose you. You belong to the elect." He does not do that. This problem exists everywhere amongst people. "I wonder if I am one of the foreordained, predestinated. I have reason to question whether I belong to that." You know all the difficulty because God has not just said to individuals directly, in this way, that they are of the elect, but God works on this line.

We may touch this more intimately presently, but you are familiar with this sort of thing: that when the Lord brings to many people the light and the revelation and the truth that is here, when it comes their way, or when they come its way by the sovereignty of God, you watch and you see, either literally or metaphorically, their mouths opening and their eyes open wide. "This is what I have been wanting. I did not know what it was, but I have had a great longing for something, and this is it. This just answers to something in me which has prepared me for this. Something has been going on. Even in my unconverted state I knew that there was something more in life than I had. I was dissatisfied and I knew it. I went here and I went there, and I went somewhere else to find it, but could not find it. But this is it!" Isn't that true? Well, that is our experience, our own experience and the experience of many. God just works, you see. And when the revelation, the light comes, there has been a preparation, perhaps an unconscious preparation very largely, that is, an unenlightened preparation, in darkness, in distance, far away from God, and yet, something drawing, some hunger, longing and then the content, and it is just as though the hand goes into the glove: they fit! "This is it! That is how the sovereignty works in relation to the elect. And if you have not seen it in every case you have met yet, don't give it up. I mean, you may think of people who are not yet like that. They are showing no signs of that. Ah, but the end is not yet. The time may come when through deep experiences, through suffering history, their hearts will be prepared and touched and you will find they respond. That is all we need say about this matter of election, or ordination. God works accordingly.

I want to put this word in here. It is to remind you and point out to you that in this letter that we have before us the Gospel and the eternal purpose are united. That is a very important thing to remember. Some people, I am afraid, have a mentality: "Well, the Gospel, the simple Gospel, is one thing. All this is another." Indeed, we have known very strong reactions, people saying: "All right, you can have all your deep teaching, if you like. You can have all that sort of thing, if it appeals. We are satisfied with the simple Gospel." The Lord have mercy upon such people! Here you have the profoundest document, as I have said, that has ever been given from God to man, and it has, not as two different and separate things but as joined right in, the Gospel and the eternal purpose.

Look at the word 'Gospel' in this. Paul links it in himself. This ministry that was given to him, this full, rich, profound ministry he calls 'his Gospel'. He was chosen for this Gospel. Oh, if only our gospel were richer and fuller we would have much better results. Don't divide these things! Remember, this is the Gospel. What is it? It is the good news. "*He chose us in him before the foundation of the world.*" There is an imperative need of linking the purpose with salvation in our preaching, and not leaving salvation as something in itself, something smaller than it really is, but linking purpose with salvation always. And I don't think we shall get very far with the kind of Christians that will be until we have attended to that weakness and remedied it, and brought in relation to salvation the full purpose of God in salvation.

The Method By Which the Means Will Fulfil its Vocation

We come next, then, thirdly, to the method. The purpose... the means, the church, the elect... then the method.

Let us remind ourselves again that the apostle is particularly occupied with the church in this letter. It runs throughout, and then it emerges in one sublime definition, which he calls: '*This mystery*' (Ephesians 5:32). You must look upon familiar words to us in the light of the whole of the letter, the whole revelation.

Reading: "Wives, be in subjection unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the saviour of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. Even so ought husbands also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his own wife loveth himself: for no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as Christ also the church; because we are members of his body. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church." (Ephesians 5:22-32).

Now, we do not know all that was in the mental background of the apostle. We know that he had a very full and deep and thorough knowledge of the Old Testament, which was his only

Bible, and that it was ever with him, either in his full consciousness or in his subconsciousness. We do not know, but the Holy Spirit knew, whether behind what was being written here was an Old Testament story. Whether it was or not, when you come to think about it, it does seem that it is so. The Old Testament story, gathered into one little book... the Book of Esther.

Whether what I am going to say is the right interpretation to put upon that book or not, I am not very concerned about at the moment, because I believe that it does serve as a very good illustration of what we are now considering, that is, the method by which this means, the church, the body, is to fulfil its eternal vocation of bringing the fulness of Christ into expression.

I suppose you remember the story of Esther. It is not necessary for me to take you through it thoroughly. It opens with a picture of happenings in the great Medo-Persian kingdom and palace. Ahasuerus, in all his glory, power and authority, having a banquet lasting a long time for all the rulers, the princes and the governors of his great domain, from India to Ethiopia. That is no small thing! Gathering all these representatives and having this wonderful time, feasting, reveling and displaying his glory. And then, when that is over, gathering his immediately intimate company of counsellors for seven days of another feast. All this pageantry has been going on, and as it is in its full swing, Ahasuerus gives command to his eunuchs to go and bring in the queen, the Queen Vashti. It is said that she was beautiful, and he wanted to display her beauty to those who were assembled. He made a feast for the purpose.

Vashti refused to go in, to obey the king's command. She stayed away. The king was fiercely angry and appealed to his counsellors: "What does the law say in a case like this?" You know their answer: "Well, you know, it is not only to the king that she has done mischief. All our wives will begin to behave like that if you let her off." Well of course, that is persuasive. The result: the king stripped Vashti of her royal rights and cut her off and set her aside. She was no longer his queen.

There was a vacancy, a vacuum, an emptiness, for how long we do not know, but it must be filled if the king was to have all that he should have as king. And there the story opened concerning Esther, and you are familiar with that. She was there, a captive, an exile, an alien to that kingdom. She was in the king's harem, but exactly how it came to pass, what is the detail, we don't know, but somehow or other the sovereignty of that throne was at work, and Esther was seen, was known, was focused upon, was chosen, and was marked off for this high position. She filled this vacancy and she was given everything to furnish her, adorn her and make her suitable for that position. She was clothed with royal apparel and enriched with royal gems, and riches. She was called, released, redeemed from her exile, from her captivity and brought in as one of that race, that royal kingdom. We are not told of any marriage ceremony, but undoubtedly there was something by which she had to commit herself to a covenant of loyalty, of devotion, of faithfulness, to be what Vashti had refused to be alive only for the king, not for herself.

There are a great many more details. We are not moving on to the great and glorious end of all this in sovereignty for the release and redemption of a race, but it does not require a very great deal of insight to see spiritual meaning in all this. It seems to me to have a double application.

God chose man at the beginning for this very thing. Adam was created for this very thing, and brought into that glorious association with God at the beginning... and then he did this very thing, not to be for God but for himself, not to be for the glory of God but to retain the glory, as did Vashti, for himself. The result? Repudiated! And the story is written in history, not in the Book of Esther, that the period which followed was for Vashti a reign of vanity. Her life purpose was gone; all the meaning of life was gone. Only imagine what Vashti was thinking and feeling after this as things developed and Esther came into her place! Perhaps remorse, and many other emotions. But the fact is that it began a reign of vanity for her, meaningless, all the meaning gone out of life. Is not that the human race 'In Adam' called, given, potentially, dominion. And then taking it into his own hands and refusing to hold it for God's glory. Then he himself was set aside and there came this long-drawn-out period of meaninglessness in the human race.

That is one application. But what about Israel? Israel, chosen, called to the kingdom, and called in the Old Testament the wife of Jehovah. Called to that high position, and then what? Taking it all to themselves, and not holding it for God.

The great challenge of the coming of God in the flesh into this world had this great issue bound up with it. Will Israel hold everything for God, or will they hold everything for themselves? Well, we know what happened. "No, away with Him. We will not have this man." They were holding everything for their own glory. And then came these long two thousand years of vanity for Israel, the Vashti cut off and set aside.

It is a sad story, is it not? But when the race in Adam failed, God had His elect somewhere quietly hidden. From eternity He had His bride, there in His eternal knowledge, foreknowledge and counsels. She was there! When Israel failed God in this matter He brought in the church. She was there to take Israel's place, and all the vanity of the latter was reversed in the saints.

Now what does this all mean as an interpretation, if only by way of illustration, of this letter to the Ephesians, so-called? "Chosen in Him", that is Esther, the instrument and vessel. When the other fails, the element of sovereignty is at work, bringing in this vessel foreknown, foreseen and foreordained, knowing it, choosing it, and then, blessed be God! calling to Himself His Esther, redeeming from alienation, redeeming from exile and captivity.

That is the story of the church, isn't it? Released from the terrible embargo of the rejected world, of the rejected race. The rejected Gentile, Esther, called. What a word that is in the New Testament, called! Redeemed!

And here there rushes right in at this point, through the gap which we present, this word 'grace'. Thirteen times the apostle uses this word in this letter! That we should be "*to the praise of the glory of his grace*" (Ephesians 1:6). Well, is not that Esther? Who was she? What was she? Where was she? And now look, 'in the second place in the kingdom'! Adorned with all his glory, "*the glory of His grace*".

There is something which to our hearts is still more precious. What had she where she was? Nothing! But out of the royal store there was brought for her everything that she required, but which she did not have, not one fragment of which she had. There was brought to her

everything to make her suitable for that most august presence of the most high, she was clothed suitably, and provided with everything to make her not an offence to the king, but a pleasure. What a story of grace that is! What a lot comes in at that point!

What is this church in nature? Or, to come to ourselves, what are we in nature? Well, if we know anything about ourselves at all we are prepared to say "Anything and everything but suitable for His presence!" No hope, no chance, no possibility whatever of our standing in His presence as we are in ourselves by nature. No, we are exiles, in captivity, alienated and far off. But He brings us in and clothes us, with the garments of salvation... the robe of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10) and lavishes upon us riches. Have you traced that word through this letter? I would like to give you the passages which occur again and again. "*According to the riches of his grace*" (Ephesians 1:7). "*Unto me, says the apostle, ...was this grace given, to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ*" (Ephesians 3:8). Esther is brought in, adorned with all for His presence and for His service, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing (Ephesians 5:27). That is the end of the story!

What is the method by which the church will fulfil this high vocation? The marriage relationship with the Lord, with all that that means. That is Ephesians five, verses 22 to the end! The marriage relationship... "*I speak in regard of Christ and of the church*" (Ephesians 5:32). Oh, it is more wonderful the more you think about it! Married to the Lord, joined to the Lord by one Spirit. In the natural and the flesh, the twain shall become one flesh" (Ephesians 5:31). But in the spiritual these twain become one spirit joined to the Lord. Married, one flesh, one body, one life. There is no figure in all creation that sets forth oneness, identity in the thought of God more than the marriage relationship when it is according to God's mind. That is how God intends it to be and more or less it is like that in humanity, some more than others, when one does not, cannot live without the other. Sometimes we open our morning paper and look down the list of the departed, where we see two notices, the woman has gone and within a few days the man has gone, too. That is the ideal. I mean, there is something there, in that. When it is according to heaven "I speak in regard of Christ and of the church." I ask you, can you live without Christ? Listen: He cannot live without you. It is stated here: "*The church, which is his body, the fulness of him*". Literally that is, "*the fulfilment of Him*". He must have this relationship for His own fulfilment. The marriage relationship, that is the method.

What a lot we ought to say about it! But our time for the moment has gone and we come to the last thing, the obligation.

The Obligation Resting Upon Those Concerned

Well, if this is the truth, if this is God's revelation, if it is that and not some beautiful story, some spiritually or religiously romantic story, if this is spiritual truth, and not just doctrine or teaching, (God help me and God help you if that is all!), there is an application, surely resting upon Esther, surely resting upon this church. "*I... beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love*" (Ephesians 4:1, 2).

The obligation! If this is more than a beautiful picture, if it is something that really comes to us as God's word today, in this time, it puts us under a big obligation as to our demeanor and our conduct. Walk worthily... with all lowliness and meekness. That is the demeanor, the sort of people we ought to be, called to such heights, such a calling. Oh, no, there is no room here for conceit, for spiritual pride, no room for us to take the glory to ourselves and hold it to ourselves. That is the way of Vashti. No, with all lowliness and meekness. God's church and God's people ought to be like that.

And conduct. Here every relationship in this life is lifted by this concept of marriage relationship with the Lord. Husbands, wives; wives, husbands. That must come up on to a higher level, mustn't it, if it is a reflection of Christ and the church. Children, parents; parents, children, servants, masters; masters, servants. Every relationship is touched by this great concept of what the church is: its high, noble, honourable position, its wonderful dignity as before God. And that dignity ought to come down into our behaviour, our conduct, our relationships. We are talking, not in the court of Ahasuerus, but in a greater, the court of heaven, and we have a word, it is in the New Testament, 'courtesy'. Be courteous, says Peter (1 Peter 3:8 A.V). That surely is a very low level, good manners! Proper behaviour! Etiquette! Yes, that comes into this. In the court of heaven there should be good manners amongst those who make up this bride. I fear that we often fail in common courtesy to one another. It is true, we have failed. Very often there are better manners amongst the people of the world than there are amongst Christians! That is a terrible thing to say, but it is true. Our conduct in every relationship of life must be touched by this high conception, which is not only a dream, a teaching, but is stated as a fact. "*I speak in regard of Christ and of the church*", even as husbands, wives, servants, masters, children, parents, even as Christ, also the church.

It is challenging; it is practical. What are you going to do about this? Are we going to say now? Well, I determine that from this moment, by the grace of God, I will live up to that level of my holy, sublime calling. By the grace of God I will adjust to this. I will do something about it. I will watch my behaviour. I will be careful of my speech. I will keep a guard upon how I react to others. There is an obligation... "*I... beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called.*"

The Lord help us!

22. A Zeal for His House *by Manfred Haller*

The flesh presents an ever present danger to the church. Uncrucified flesh is what has crushed out New Testament reality and witness and brought about the church's degeneration. The attitude of Paul the apostle, "*not I but Christ in me*," is a fundamental prerequisite for normal New Testament church life. Restoring the church has nothing to do with recovering a certain set of principles or applying certain stipulations to achieve a truly biblical state of affairs, and it is imperative that whoever reads these lines understands that. If the flesh is not dealt with and put to death, nothing will result from our efforts except another independent congregation that does not in any way match what the Scriptures call church. The flesh cleaves to the Bible and prides itself on being biblical. The flesh likes to show a radically biblical face, and by its exclusiveness is able to impress and win approval. But God never identifies Himself with anything coming from the flesh, no matter how biblical it is. This is critically important when we begin to address ourselves to restoring the New Testament witness of Christ and His church. Understanding it helps keep us from new illusions and disappointments.

Let us assume for a moment that, by the grace of God, we have really come to a point where God has reached His goal with us and has us fully in the palm of His hand. Does being crucified with Christ mean that we fatalistically allow every event to run its course, hoping that God will someday restore His church up to its former glory and lead it to full maturity and perfection? Is the crucified flesh synonymous with spiritual passivity? Because we run the risk of acting in the flesh and spoiling everything as soon as we proceed to do something, many children of God have been bewitched by such a false conclusion; and nothing could be further from the truth. After the flesh has been put to death,, the desires and aims of the Holy Spirit rise in us instinctively. The Spirit awakens in us such a hunger for truth—namely that which God intended on Christ before the foundation of the world—that we are no longer satisfied until these purposes are achieved.

Of Christ it is written that the "*zeal for His house*" consumed Him. We know that nothing was able to keep David from obtaining materials for the erection of God's temple. This obsession was what made him a man after God's own heart. The same zeal will begin to well up and compel us to do and live according to God's will. No sacrifice will be too great for us, no cross too shameful, if only God can obtain that which has been His longing for so many ages. The Lord will begin to communicate to us His thoughts concerning the church. Scriptures we have known for years by heart being to speak to us anew; they take on meaning suddenly, and things begin to fall into places assigned to them by God. We will recognize a way and, full of amazement, we become aware that the way is the way of the church—a way transcending tradition and history, free of human will and organization—the way of sovereign, indestructible, divine and heavenly life.

This way is markedly by divine fullness—fullness of knowledge, revelation, power, life, wisdom, spiritual reality and truth. But there is also fullness of fellowship and unity that can be found nowhere else. Christ is everything there, because in Him "*are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*" Christ Himself is the principle and the method. Everything He inhabits

and everything that manifests or embodies Him is part of the church. Christ alone is the ultimate criterion having anything to do with the church, and this means the exalted, glorified, triumphant Christ shed abroad among the believers on the day of Pentecost. It does not weary me to say over and over again: This Christ, this Lord is the existence, the person and the life of the New Testament church. To the degree we find Him among men—not as a historical figure, doctrine or confession, but Christ personally present in the Holy Spirit—we find the church in our midst. No more and no less. As soon as we have rediscovered the New Testament Christ, we are on the path to restoring the New Testament church.

Whenever we examine the Scriptures in search of the church, it is of utmost importance that we search only for that which expresses this heavenly, indwelling Lord. The church of the Scriptures is an actuality, a spiritual reality. We search in vain for a constitution or determinate structure. For example, we have already established that the church in Corinth was Christ in Corinth. Whatever was found in Christ in that city belonged to the church in that city. A birth from above determined church membership. It was impossible for someone to join the church after being born again. The fellowship of believers was the visible embodiment of life from God, the heavenly man, the second Adam. Whoever was born of God was automatically born in the church, or as Paul would put it, grafted into Christ. Spiritually speaking, the church is an organic entity. One is born into it, just as one is born into a family. The constitutive element of a family is the life of the father who conceived the children, and the same is true spiritually. The book of Hebrews speaks explicitly on this subject.

Heavenly birth imparts to us life from God, the same life that was in Christ Jesus. Through resurrection, He became "the first-born among many brethren." Christ had to die and rise again in order to "*bring many sons to glory*" (Heb. 2:10). The church is the tangible embodiment of that spiritual substance. The constitutive element of the church is the divine life that we receive through birth from above. And just as we cannot say that one of our brothers doesn't belong to our family just because his interests or personal characteristics are different from ours, neither can we reject someone who sees things differently and who has other priorities, as long as that one is a child of the same Father in heaven, being therefore together with us in Christ. The question of church membership is decided at birth. This is the assumption of the whole New Testament for someone whose eyes the Lord has opened. All other definitions of church or body membership have been interpreted into the Bible artificially and are spiritually groundless.

If the birth issue is settled, then so is the question of just what the church is, as well as who belongs to her. The church is in every place where people are born of God and she consists of all of those born of God, with no exceptions. The sum of all those born of the Spirit in Corinth is the church in Corinth. Paul categorically rejected any other classification of the saints in that city. The essential nature of the church has nothing to do with the ones who lead us to Christ; nor is the spiritual condition of those who believe the deciding factor. There is only one critical question: Is he a brother? Is she a sister? If so the matter is settled. The church of God in Corinth is the family of God in Corinth, is the brotherhood of Christ in Corinth. And this church is indivisible! There can only be one church in Corinth! If this single entity were to be torn apart by human distinctions, then Christ would be torn apart, the apostle said; and one senses by the way he argues the case how appalling the whole idea was to him.

There is no other way to view the church. She is—inasmuch as we mean the New Testament church—the embodiment and the sum of all those born of God, and this goes for every place on earth. If we have spiritual discernment, then we will realize that, on the basis of this definition, the New Testament church cannot be brought about at all. It exists already. Anywhere there are people in Christ, there is the church; the church is an actuality. Whether or not she lives out and manifests that reality is another matter, but we will address that later. For now it is enough if we honor God and admit that we have been blind to the truth and reality of the church. We have been like ignorant children, convincingly conversant in religious language, while having no idea what the words really mean.

To put the theory to test: In the entire New Testament, the word 'church' is always connected with the name of its geographical location. Wherever believers live, they form the church in that locality, together with all the others there who belongs to Christ. That local congregation is not smaller than the site it is identified with, neither is it larger. It would not make sense here to substantiate this in detail. If the reader is interested in pursuing these questions further, Watchman Nee is a good source. What I want to emphasize strongly, however, is that this view of the local church did not originate with Watchman Nee, being, as it were, only applicable to his particular situation in China; but it is in fact insight into New Testament truth. Watchman Nee has simply rediscovered what was always there and has had the grace to proclaim it with divine clarity and urgency.

You can call it what you want to—after you take away what is merely human, historical or cultural, one single truth remains: The church of God is the material manifestation of the resurrected, ascended and glorified Christ in every place on earth. Christ in all the saints, where they live—that is the New Testament church. Certainly we must differentiate between the spiritual actuality of the church and the various forms of church life. When we say that by definition, there is only one church in any particular location, it does not mean that this one body cannot be represented by different gatherings there, provided that they all are closely connected to each other, and served by the same oversight. In Jerusalem, the headcount grew gradually to tens of thousands of believers. It is unthinkable that so great a number assembled every Sunday in one spot. Besides, the Bible says that gatherings took place in believer's homes, for a time even daily, and there must have been hundreds of these meeting places. But all of these smaller groups were one in leadership; all held to the teaching of the apostles and prophets. Each individual believer considered himself a member of one single body in Jerusalem, and what held them joined together was not only the apostles and prophets, but also the common life that each one had within. It is remarkable that despite these many gatherings, the Scriptures always refer to the church in Jerusalem, or simply the church (singular). Not once do we read of multiple churches in Jerusalem or in other places.

23. The Altar (The Cross) Governs Everything *by T. Austin-Sparks*

Ezekiel forty-three, in verses thirteen to twenty-seven, we have the great altar and its service. We will not read the whole section, but just the first verse of that section: *"And these are the measurements of the altar by cubits (the cubit being a cubit and a handbreadth): the base shall be a cubit, and the width a cubit, and its border on its edge round about one span; and this shall be the height of the base of the altar."* Then we are given more particulars about the measurement and the ministry. We all understand that the altar in the Old Testament is always a type of the Cross. This altar is the place of the WHOLE burnt offering, and this corresponds to Hebrews chapter ten, where the Lord Jesus is likened to the WHOLE burnt offering. So we are going this morning to think about the centrality and the universality of the Cross.

Now we have seen that the whole area of the temple was square. If we draw diagonal lines from each corner, those lines meet at the place where the great altar was. The central place in the whole area was the altar. You will recognize that this is different from the tabernacle in the wilderness. The court of the tabernacle was not square, and the altar of burnt offering was right at the gate; but in this temple, the altar is right in the center of a square. It is important to realize that. All the lines meet in the altar, and all the lines go out from the altar. The central place of everything is the altar.

The altar governed everything. It governed everything as to the house; that is, all that was actually in the temple was governed by the altar. It governed all that was immediately around the house. If you had a plan of this whole house, with the different course and the whole area, you would see that all the chambers of the priests were round about; and the places where the offerings were prepared were all around. Everything was gathered round the house, but everything in the house and in the whole area was governed by the altar.

And then, all the ministry of the house was governed by the altar. We could say that there was no ministry that was not related to the altar; and then beyond the house, and beyond the immediate area, right out to the whole land, everything was governed by the altar.

We shall see this when we see that the river, which came down through the whole land, came by way of the altar; but we turn inside the house first.

The Cross in Its Place

Here we have a very important and vital truth. When the Cross is in its place with its full measure, everything else will be in order, and everything else will be given its meaning, and its value. I feel that I cannot say this too strongly. We are so often concerned about the outside of things, about the order of the House of the Lord, about the ministry of the House of the Lord, about the people who are related to the House of the Lord. We are always beginning on the outside. We are trying to set up an order of the House of God. We are trying to put the people of the House right. We are very much concerned about the ministers, and the ministries. But if

the Cross was really in its place with its full dimensions, all those things would see to themselves. The people would be right if the Cross was in its place. The ministries would be living if the Cross was in its place. The order of the House would be right if the Cross was in its place. It just does work that way. IF THE CROSS IS RIGHT AT THE CENTER, in full measure, and note that it is a large altar, THEN EVERYTHING ELSE WILL COME INTO ITS RIGHT PLACE, AND INTO A LIVING RELATIONSHIP.

Although it is not said so here, I think we are right in concluding that this altar was of brass. The altar in the tabernacle was of brass, the altar in Solomon's temple was of brass, and I think that we can assume that this altar was of brass. We have already met brass. We have met brass in the Man in the gate, and we have said that with His reed He measured everything according to what He was. Brass is the type of the righteous judgments of God. This great altar represents the fullness of the righteous judgments of God. This altar of brass is measured by the Man of brass, so that this altar represents God's thoughts in judgment.

In this altar of whole burnt offering, the one unrighteous man is completely removed. That altar of brass sees one man brought to ashes. The ashes were taken from this altar and emptied onto the ground at the side of the altar. That is a picture of God's Mind about the unrighteous man, or the natural man. He is consumed in the fire of God's judgment, he is reduced to ashes, and he is poured out on the ground. THAT IS GOD'S MIND ABOUT THE NATURAL MAN. On the other side, it is only THE RIGHTEOUS MAN that can stand here in the presence of this altar. Of course, those are the two sides of THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE LORD JESUS. On the one side HE was made sin for us, and in that capacity He was wholly consumed and brought to ashes. When He cried, "*My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken Me*" - it was the cry of the ashes! He had been brought to ashes, and poured out on the ground.

But then there was the other side of the Cross - "*He knew no sin.*" In Himself, there was no unrighteousness, and, therefore, He can go through the altar, He can live after the fire! "*Thou wilt not suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption.*" Because in Himself there was no sin, He could not be holden of death. His Holy Nature could overcome all the righteous judgments of God! This is the meaning of the great altar: one man is brought to an end, and Another Man stands in his place. Everything had been judged at the altar. Everything IS judged in the Cross.

We have been judged in the Cross of the Lord Jesus, and in our own selves we have been brought to an end. Everything of the natural has been judged and brought to an end in the Cross of the Lord Jesus. It is a very important thing to recognize that. You see, that makes anything possible. That is why I have said that if the Cross is in its place, everything else would be right. The House will be right; that is, the Church will be right. The ministry will be right. The order will be right. You will not have to go to work to try and bring about a right order. It spontaneously comes out of the work of the Cross.

I do hope that you are writing that in your minds. You may meet disorders in the House of God. You may meet the natural man in the House of God. You may meet conditions which are all wrong in the House of God. How are you going to deal with them? You can only deal with them by the principle of the Cross. You cannot deal with the people themselves, you cannot

deal with the things themselves; but if only you can bring the Cross into that situation, you have solved the whole problem. It is like that. We do not start from the outside. We do not start with the people, we do not start with the order of the Lord's House, we do not start with the ministry - WE START WITH THE CROSS. And if only people see the Cross, everything else would put itself right. Everything is judged by the Cross.

The Letter to the Romans is the message of the Cross in its full measure. In that letter to the Romans, you see the great measurement of the Cross. There the Cross comprehends all things. It brings the whole race in Adam to an end, and it begins an entirely new race in Christ risen! It is very impressive that the first of the New Testament Letters should put the Cross there in its full measurement. You all know that the Letter to the Romans was not the first letter written by Paul, but the Holy Spirit has put it first in the arrangement. I think the Holy Spirit had something to do with the arrangement of the books in the New Testament, and in His sovereign arrangement of this book, He has put the altar in its fullness right at the beginning. Well, of course, you have to recall all that you know about the Letter to the Romans to see that.

In the First Letter to the Corinthians, the Cross is applied to the natural and the carnal man inside the Church. The natural and the carnal man has come in where he has no right to be. This unrighteous man has slipped in through the gate, and so the apostle BRINGS CHRIST CRUCIFIED OVER AGAINST THE NATURAL AND THE CARNAL MAN. The Cross in I Corinthians had to do with that man, not outside the Church as in Romans, but inside the Church.

The Second Letter to the Corinthians sets the Cross in relation to ministry. That letter shows us that ministry flows out of a broken and humbled vessel. I can only say these things and leave the full explanation of it.

In the Letter to the Galatians, the Cross is brought down upon making Christianity into another legal system, and bringing Christians into bondage. How strong the apostle is in that letter, but see how he uses the Cross. He uses the Cross tremendously against that effort to make Christianity into a legal system, and to bring believers into bondage again.

In the Letter to the Ephesians, the work of the Cross is to put the Church on heavenly ground. The Cross in Ephesians completely cuts the Church off from all earthly ground. It puts the Church outside of time. It puts the Church outside of the world.

In the Letter to the Philippians, the Cross is applied to that which is spoiling the harmony of the Lord's people. There is a painful dislocation inside the Church. There is a spot where things are unhappy, and that is because of personal interest and pride. Some people will not let go their personal interest. Some people will not let go their pride. They have been offended, and they are not going to forgive. So the apostle brings the Cross in there over against this discord, and dislocation; and he points out that if only the Cross were in those lives, everything would be put right.

The Letter to the Colossians - this letter shows that the Cross delivers from all false spirituality. The Cross sets aside all that is mere mysticism, and everything that would make Christ less than He is.

Then we have the Letters to the Thessalonians. Here the Cross is the strength for suffering - an inspiration unto the coming of the Lord. There may not be much said about the Cross actually, but the principle of these letters is the principle of the Cross. The people were suffering for Christ's sake. They were suffering the loss of all things, and they had thought that the Lord would have come to deliver them, and the Lord is delaying His coming. So the apostle tells them that their sufferings will issue in the coming of the Lord and glory. The sufferings of suffering with Christ. They are suffering for Christ's sake: it is fellowship in the Cross, but the sufferings issued in the glory. The Lord is coming, and then it will be all right. The Cross has a very real message for suffering believers. And then we just conclude with the Letter to the Hebrews.

In the Letter to the Hebrews, the Cross shows how everything is brought to fullness and to finality. Now all of this relates to the House on its inside. It touches conduct. It touches character. It touches order. It touches ministry. If the Cross is in its place, everything will be effective.

Now I have not just given you some Bible teaching. The Cross is the key to everything. Then what is true on the inside is also true on the outside. It is the Cross which effects the whole range of the Church's influence. The river comes by way of the Cross, that is, the influence that goes out from the sanctuary to the whole land. It is the Cross which gives effectiveness to the ministry to the whole world. So the apostles preached everywhere Christ crucified.

The Cross is the Defense against the World

And then we note another thing, the altar was the great defensive against the enemy. If you look in the Book of Ezra in chapter three, at verse three, you have this: *"so they set up the altar on its foundation, for they were terrified because of the peoples of the lands..."* Because fear of the peoples of the lands was upon them, they put the altar in its place. The Cross is a great defensive - the Cross defends us from the world. The world is the great enemy of the Church. The spirit of the world has always been the Church's great enemy. Satan has always tried to get the world into the Church and so wreck the Church and its ministry, to destroy the influence of the Church in the world. It is a very clever and subtle move of the enemy to destroy the influence of the Church in the world by bringing the world into the Church. For Paul said, *"God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world"* (Gal. 6:14).

A truly crucified people are never in danger of the world. It is only when the Cross has not done its work that the world has a place. The world has no place with a crucified man or woman, or a crucified company of believers. The Cross is a great defensive against the world. IF YOU WANT TO KEEP THE WORLD OUT, PUT THE CROSS IN ITS PLACE. If the Cross is truly in its place in fullness, then everything else will come into order. THE CROSS is the great defensive against the world. THE CROSS is the great defensive against evil powers. THE CROSS makes everything safe; it makes everything safe for the Lord.

You see, the Lord wants to commit Himself. He wants to trust Himself to His people, but if the Cross is not there at work, the Lord cannot trust Himself to them. The Lord says, "It is not

safe for Me to give Myself there, or I should be involved in their un-crucified condition." The Cross makes everything safe for the Lord, and the Cross makes everything safe for the Church. If the Cross is really at work in all of us, we can trust one another. It is quite safe to trust yourself to a crucified man or woman.

Now I close this morning by emphasizing that the Cross is not a doctrine to be taught. It is not a subject to be preached. Of course, it will be taught, and it will be preached. But in the first place, it is not a subject to be taught. It is not just a doctrine. The Cross is power. The Cross is an experience. The Cross is an event in our lives. The Cross is a crisis. The Cross is a revolution. The Cross is an earthquake. There was an earthquake when Jesus was crucified. If the Cross comes into our life, there will be an earthquake. Everything will be shaken, everything will be overturned. The Cross is an earthquake. It is something tremendous. The Cross is not just a theory, not just a doctrine: **THE CROSS GOVERNS EVERYTHING**. Well, that is our message about the centrality and universality of the Cross.

The Lord grant that we shall all be crucified men and women. The assemblies to which we belong - may they be crucified assemblies. The Lord grant that His whole Church may see and view the meaning of the Cross.

24. The Fullness of Christ *by George H. Warnock*

Therefore, as we have in the Lord Jesus Christ the fullness of God; so we have in His many brethren, His body, the very fullness of Christ. The manner in which God manifested His fullness in the Lord Jesus is the same as the manner in which the Lord Jesus manifests His fullness in the Church which is His Body. The fullness was not manifest in the Lord Jesus by virtue of His inherent Deity, but rather in virtue of the fact that He 'emptied Himself', and took a bondman's form, and was found in fashion as a man; and then in subjecting Himself to even greater humiliation, and walking in the pathway of total obedience unto the will of the Father. Likewise the fullness that is being manifest in the Church which is His Body is not in virtue of new birth and sudden rapture. Rather it is to be in growing up unto Christ, abiding in Him, and the word abiding in us, changing . . . transforming . . . renewing . . . purifying . . . and cleansing this Temple as we, too, walk in the pathway of total obedience unto the will of the Father.

Christ must go back to the Father, that as One who had glorified the Father's Name and revealed the Father through His obedience and faithfulness as a Son; so now from His exalted throne in the heavens He might glorify His Name in His many brethren that He with them, and not apart from them, might bring forth an even greater fullness of glory. This He accomplishes by bringing forth the perfections of the risen and glorified Lord throughout the members of the Church, which is the Body of Christ. For God hath given Him "*to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, THE FULLNESS OF HIM that filleth all in all*" (Eph.1:22, 23).

The same old theological block that hindered the Jews of Christ's day is hindering God's people today. Their minds were made up. As a Teacher, they would acknowledge Him. As Prophet from Galilee, they would readily accept. Even as king of Israel, they were ready and anxious to receive Him. Strange that so many are teaching that they refused to have Him as their King. They actually came by force on one occasion to make Him their King. There was really no problem in receiving Him as teacher, prophet, king, healer, or miracle worker. It was in making Himself ONE WITH THE FATHER that they took such great exception. Not that He declared Himself to be the Father, but rather He declared Himself to be the expression of the Father, the servant of the Father, the one in whom the Father lived, in whom He worked, whose works He performed. The Son of God was the living Temple in whom God the Father dwelt. He was not the Son of Man as to His humanity and Son of God as to His Deity. He was both son of Man and Son of God as to His humanity. "*That holy thing*" that was born of Mary was at the same time Son of Man and Son of God ... for God was the Father of His human nature, as Mary was the mother (Luke 1:35). This Son-of-Man ... Son-of-God ... was PERFECT MAN in every sense of the word.

In other words, the Son of God was God made weak, God made poor, God emptied out, God the Ruler of the Universe condescending to become a bondsman among men! For Jesus testified, "*I can of mine own self do nothing.*" Yet in union with the Father He could do ANYTHING. When the truth is brought forth concerning our union with Christ some seem to get the notion that we are seeking equality with Christ. But the exact opposite is the truth. For we must become utterly weak, that He might be All-glorious in power ... helpless in ourselves, that

He might be the All-sufficient One. In fact, we are to live the Life of Another. We are to manifest the fullness of Christ, just as the Lord Jesus manifested the fullness of God when He was here. He did nothing, absolutely nothing, independently of the Father, as God the Son working in contradistinction to God the Father. Never once is He called "God the Son." Everything He did and everything He said was in utter and complete obedience to the Father, as the Father dwelt in Him and worked through Him. So with Christ's Body ... His many-membered Body. We must come to that place where we do nothing in contradistinction to the Son, as separate from Him. We must come to that place where it is the living Christ living in us, speaking through us, thinking through us ... the risen and glorified Lord pouring into our hearts by the Spirit all the perfections of His glorified humanity. This we receive in virtue of the Spirit abiding within, and our complete obedience and submission unto the will of God.

This does not make us to be the Lord Jesus any more than it made Him to be the Father. But it does mean that we are to be ONE WITH HIM, in the very same manner in which He was ONE WITH THE FATHER. *"That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that THEY also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."* How could this possibly be? Simply and entirely by the risen and glorified Lord pouring that same fullness and glory in us, as the Father poured His glory and fullness into the Son. *"And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, EVEN AS WE ARE ONE . . ."* *"Glorious day of rapture"*, says one. But the Lord continues: *"That the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me"* (John 17:21-23). After this, and only after this glorious fruitful testimony, does the Lord pray that we might be with Him even where He is, right back in the heart of God (vs. 24).

Now someone would like to say, "Please explain the doctrine of the Godhead, in the light of what you have written." This we must refuse to do, for the doctrine of the Godhead cannot be defined. Church councils invariably assemble to define doctrine and creed when the Spirit and the life of Truth have ebbed away and departed. Sound doctrine does not submit itself to definition, because sound doctrine (Lit. "healthful teaching") is that flowing forth of living Truth, and simply cannot be defined. What about the Apostle's Creed? I have never studied it, nor am I really too interested in it, because the apostles were dead and buried when church leaders got together and made the Apostle's Creed. The apostles were not even at the council.

What we as the Body of Christ, must do in this hour is come back to the apostles' love and life; then we shall go on to that fullness of Christ, the seeds of which they planted in their ministry and testimony, but the fullness of which comes forth today in the day of harvest. This may stumble many who somewhat hopefully look for a restoration of apostolic glory, as if that were the ultimate. But it will rejoice the hearts of those who have the forward and the upward calling and vision, and are pressing toward the mark of the *"high calling"*.

"Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth ..." The Church says God is waiting till the last member of the Body of Christ is converted. God says He is waiting for "precious fruit" ... and has long patience over it till it receive not only the early, but the later rain. Not only the "seed rain" but the "harvest rain." Not only for the seed rain of conversion (*"being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible ..."*) but also for the harvest rain

of the FRUIT ... the rains that bring forth the fruit that is exactly like unto the original seed that was planted. Anything less is utterly unacceptable to the Husbandman. Anything less than the perfection of the fruit of the Spirit in God's people would cause the Name of the great Husbandman to be dishonored. God is jealous over His people with great jealousy. It is His own Name that He is so concerned about. He has planted a Garden, and He has done so for His own Name's sake, and He will yet come into His garden and partake of its "pleasant fruit." He shall yet find joy and delight and REST in the work of His hands. For we are *"the planting of the LORD that He might be glorified."* He is only truly glorified in His people as they manifest and show forth His glory and His excellencies. He created us that we should be "unto the praise and glory of His grace." The fullness that He would manifest in His many sons is for the purpose of showing forth the *"praises (the excellencies, the virtues, the glory) of Him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light."*

Growing Up Unto Him

"As the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven ..." It is not just another rain, another revival, history repeating itself. Every time it rains there is a new measure of fullness wrought in the earth. It rains, and the seed that has been planted begins to sprout and break forth under the soul. It might not even be visible. Silently does the Spirit of God come into the life and such a one is "born again" by the incorruptible seed of the Word of God. But it is really just the sprouting of the seed. It is a rebirth in the inner man. It is God becoming involved in the life of the individual, that before the entrance of the Word was nothing more than earth ... dark, barren, fruitless. Again it rains. Now there is springing forth of leaves, of twigs, of branches. There is a continual unfolding. One says, "Strange, I never saw that in the Word before." It was there, and you read it perhaps hundreds of times, but you never saw it. Why? Because you were but a sprouting seed hidden away in darkness or a blade, just beginning to come forth into the light. You have been growing in Grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Now you are able to see what was inherent in the seed, but was never revealed. It was in the Word, but hidden away in the letter, in the shell. It rains, and rains again. The process continues to go on. "Because through the process of Nature the sea yields its moisture back to the air, and the winds carry it across the land. The rivers are replenished as the clouds pour the water back to the earth again.

The day of harvest approaches. Things begin to change once more. We get accustomed to new revelation and settle back in satisfaction and delight of our new found joy, then God comes forth again ... and there is dismay. It seemed that we were on the verge of having arrived at our true destiny. Our plant begins to take on a new measure of beauty and glory. There is liberty in the Spirit. The flowers of grace appear. There is a beauty and a glory in the life of the individual or in the assembly, such as our hearts had longed for. But in rains again, and those beautiful flowers disintegrate and fade from the vine. Soon they are trampled in the mud beneath. The once beautiful orchard becomes a picture of desolation. We had looked for much. There was promise of much. There is nothing more beautiful than a blossoming orchard in the days of spring. But strangely enough the fruit-grower is not concerned about the fading of the flowers. In fact, he is happy. He must have the rain in the due season; but in the time of

harvest it is no longer necessary; because he is looking – not for rain, but for the FRUIT of the earth. So often in our lives we look upon and judge circumstances by what we can see. We know that God was using us in the past, because of the fragrance of the flowers of race, and the beauty of His Spirit upon us. Something must have gone wrong. But in reality God is looking for something deeper, something better, and something that will be to the praise of His glory. In short, something that will show forth His own life, His own nature, His own character, His own love. Christ must be formed within before the Husbandman can reach forth His hand and take that which will delight and satisfy His own heart, and that which will satisfy the hunger and thirst of mankind.

Restoration or New Creation?

We must view the work of God in the realm of Restoration in the light of the fact that God has from the very beginning progressively moved forward with his people into dispensations of His dealings with men that would eventually bring about an entirely New Creation. There are of course, seasons of refreshing and renewal wherein lost truths are rediscovered, forgotten gifts are restored, the book of the law is once again found in the temple, and the dimly burning candlestick is trimmed, and shines brightly with fresh oil. But this is by no means God's ultimate. Rather it is a GOING BACK that we might MOVE FORWARD with God in the path of the just *"that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."*

The prophet Isaiah said, *"For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron ..."* (Isa. 60:17). We ask for brass, because God promised brass. But in the hour of fulfillment God says, "No, I must give you GOLD." We look for iron ... we insist we must have iron. But God says, "No ...I promised iron, but my purposes are hastening on to fulfillment ... I must give you 'exceeding abundantly above all you can ask or think ... because with your limited understanding you do not really appreciate the nature of my promise ... I must give you SILVER."

And so Abraham looked for a land of promise, and longed to acquire it according to God's plan ... that is, until he caught a glimpse of the City which had enduring foundations, *"Whose Builder and Maker is God."* In great trial of spirit he looked for a son, a seed, and a nation that would inherit this land. But one day he saw the Day of Christ, and he caught a new vision. He rejoiced and was glad in what he saw. No longer was he to occupy himself with the brass of the promises ... now he would partake of the GOLD. Even God Himself was to be *his "exceeding great reward."* The iron of Canaan must give way to the SILVER of God's redemptive purposes, and the WHOLE WORLD was to become the inheritance of this great man of faith (Rom. 4:13).

And so we could go on and on. The glory of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness fades away, but in due season God raises up the Tabernacle of David, and all the furnishings and the ritual and the ceremony of the old Tabernacle is replaced with nothing more than the Ark of the Covenant and the Glory of God. But the Tabernacle of David itself was but a transitional dwelling place, and soon it will give way to the magnificent Temple of Solomon. The Temple of Solomon went into ruin, and in restoration we have the Temple of Zerubbabel . But this temple left the people of God somewhat perplexed. Where was the glory of the latter house that was to exceed that of the former? Where was the greater than Solomon? Where was the Urim and

thummim? But if the vision tarry, we must WAIT FOR IT. One day the promised glory stood in view of the old temple and declared: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." For He indeed was the true Temple of God in whom dwelt the GLORY that had occupied all former temples. But so sudden a transition from the old to the new was too much for the people of that hour. God was saying, I would give you silver for iron, and gold for brass, but they said, "No we just want the brass and iron." Then suddenly this new Temple was destroyed, and God raised it up again after three days. But to the consternation of the disciples He must tell them that He would no longer locate in Judea – but He would find His place at the Father's right hand ... in a heavenly Zion so that the Ultimate Temple that God had in mind from the very beginning might begin to take on enlargement in the earth. Jesus Himself would be the High Priest of the Temple, and He would also be the King on the throne of that temple. And more amazing still, we in union with Him would become living stones of that Temple, as well as co-priests and co-rulers with Him in an entirely different order, a Royal Priesthood after the order of Melchizedek!

As we look about us there oftentimes seems to be naught but barrenness and desolation. The trees remain stripped of leaves and flowers and fruit. The ground remains dry and cold and barren. Perhaps there is still a little snow here and there – and very little evidence of life. But here in Western Canada a crocus bravely lifts its head above the ground and declares, "As far as I am concerned, it is the time of Spring ... it is the time of New Life."

What is God doing today? As far as I am concerned, IT IS THE HOUR OF NEW CREATION.

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