

BUILDING THE CHURCH OF GOD, ITS PRINCIPLES AND LIFE

by T. Austin-Sparks

Chapter 1 – The Conception and Origin of the Church

Chapter 2 – The Composition of the Church

Chapter 3 – The Spiritual Mind

Chapter 4 – The Spiritual Mind and Unity

Chapter 5 – Principles of Spiritual Growth

Chapter 6 – Some Practical Matters

Chapter 7 – The Ministry of Means

Chapter 8 – The Holy Spirit and the Building of the Church

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Chapter 1 – The conception and origin of the church

The New Testament is primarily and mainly concerned with the church of God. It might just as truly be said that its main and primary concern is Christ, for the church is His inheritance and He is heir of all things. But if we look again, we shall see that, without the church, even His heirship loses its meaning. His own personal eternal election, His prediction throughout the Old Testament, His incarnation, His life, His cross, His death, His resurrection, His exaltation, His heavenly session and His coming again are all in the first instance linked with His church. The church was secured in Him and unto Him eternally. He came to possess her, He died to secure her, He lives to intercede for her. He is coming again to fetch her. Not for a moment would we put the church before Christ for "*He is before all things*", but the church is "*the fulness of Him*", and is indispensable to Him.

What is true of the Lord Jesus with regard to the church is true also of the Holy Spirit: that is to say the advent of the Holy Spirit, and the work of the Holy Spirit in manifold ministry and service inspired by Himself has to do with the church. While it is true that there is a sovereign operation of the Holy Spirit in and towards the world, in this dispensation, His chief concern is in securing and perfecting the church, both numerically and spiritually. It will be a sorry day for the world when the church is gone. As in the case of Israel in Egypt, and later in Babylon, much of divine judgment and of trouble in the world is because of the presence of the elect and the attitude of the world towards them, especially that of "*the prince of this world*". If the Holy Spirit convicts the *world* of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8), it is on the basis of Christ and His work — the significance of Christ — as the completion of the statement makes clear. This significance is embodied in the church, as its testimony, by the Holy Spirit (See Acts 2).

All Christian experience is a related thing; never, in the thought of God, merely and only an individual thing; and so I think we have very much ground for saying that the Word of God, and particularly the New Testament, is primarily and mainly concerned with the church of God.

The origin of the church with God Himself

We proceed now to consider the conception and the origin of the church. We know where to look, I think, for reference to that.

"For this cause I also, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is among you, and the love which ye show towards all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ, when he raised Him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; 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" (Eph. 1:15-23).

The conception of the church, the origin of the church, was with God Himself in eternity past. When we ask about origins in other matters, it is not difficult to trace them. When we ask about the origin of the human race, the answer is Adam; the origin of the Hebrew

race, the answer is Abraham; the origin of the house of Israel, the answer is Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. When we ask about the origin of the church, we go back behind them all and find it in one little phrase of three words — *“the mystery which for ages hath been hid in God”* (Eph. 3:9). It is called the church of God. *“The church of the Lord (margin ‘God’) which he purchased with His own blood”* (Acts 20:28). God’s church: dateless in origin, not of time, not of man, not essentially and solely of the earth; hid in God from all ages and generations, hid in God from eternity.

God committed to the church

And, being God’s church, it means that God is involved in it, by having committed Himself to it. God is involved in that which He has so completely committed Himself; and God is infinite wisdom, infinite power, infinite love, infinite glory; and God is eternal. Therefore the church, which is God’s church and was hid in God, must embody and represent the expression of all this. It must carry with it the eternity of God. It must carry with it the infinite wisdom of God, the infinite power of God, the infinite love of God and the infinite glory of God. And those four things are stated concerning the church quite definitely and concisely in this very letter to the Ephesians, and are also found elsewhere in other relevant passages. It is no small thing to recognise and realise the full import of this being the church of God, to which He is committed, He being such a one as He is. It will have to be above time and beyond time; that is, it will have to wear out all that is of time, it will have to overcome all that belongs to time, it will have to be when time shall be no more because it is God’s church and He is committed to it.

(a) As Infinite Wisdom

It will demand the infinite wisdom of God for its realisation and for the fulfilment of its eternal vocation. If we understood all that it requires to secure this church, through all the ages, against all the forces that encompass it and work against it, we should understand better the meaning of *“the manifold wisdom of God”* God — may I coin a word? — God ‘out-rising’ all other wisdom in His church. The church’s history and destiny will be a marvellous demonstration of the infinite wisdom of God, and He is wise enough to meet every kind of wile for, remember, that word — *“the wiles of the devil”* (Eph. 6:11) — is related to the church.

(b) As Infinite Power

“The exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe”: the infinite power of God is related to the securing of His church and its great purpose and intention. We surely know enough in our own little experience of the necessity for transcendent power in relation to any real corporate expression of God on this earth. Yes, that the church has not been shattered, broken, ground to powder and put out of business is not because the enemy has failed to draw upon all his forces in order to do it, but is because of *“the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward”*, and the ‘us-ward’ there is church-ward.

(b) As Infinite Love

And how much of the Word is occupied in speaking of the transcendent, infinite love of God, in relation to the church. Here we have it in its four dimensions — *“the breadth and length and height and depth ... the love of Christ which passeth knowledge”* — knowledge-surpassing love (Eph. 3:18,19). This is church-ward. *“Christ ... loved the church, and gave himself up for it”* (Eph. 5:25). It is the object of His infinite love. We will come back again to that later.

(c) As Infinite Glory

As for the infinite glory of God, the last picture of the church given us in the Bible is in the simile of the New Jerusalem. "*The holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God*"; "*the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God*" (Rev. 21:2,10-11). And alongside we may set that other word, "*called ... unto His eternal glory*" (1 Pet. 5:10). And "*our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory*" (2 Cor. 4:17). The infinite glory of God is bound up with the church.

He is thus, in His infinitude — to say nothing for the moment, of His infinite grace — He is thus in these dimensions committed to the church, in these dimensions, in these magnitudes.

The church hid in God

(a) From man

Yes, that is all true, and the church is the object which draws it out, and yet, with all, it is hidden and not visible to man unless revealed by the Spirit of God. Of course, according to 1 Corinthians 2, that is true as to everything of the Spirit of God, but it is particularly true of the church, if it can be more true of one thing than another. What is commonly called the church of the mystery revealed to Paul, that church, like Christ, demands an intervention from heaven for its apprehension and understanding.

(b) From angels

It is hidden from angels. "*Which things angels desire to look into*" (1 Pet. 1:12) They watch and wonder. "*That now unto principalities and the powers in the heavenlies might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God*" (Eph. 3:10). I do not think that God is particularly concerned or interested in displaying His manifold wisdom to demons or devils; they will see it. The "*principalities and powers in the heavenlies*" are surely celestial — those who watch and wonder and worship. The display of God in any form through the church, as every display of God in any form, is the result in worship. This is the mystery, hidden from angels, which, being unfolded, causes them to wonder.

(c) From Satan

It is hidden from Satan. Whatever his ingenious deductions may be, this is something whereby he has to be a spectator. He may be seeing and drawing his conclusions, but this has not been *revealed* to him. He is not in the inner secret of the Lord.

The need of revelation in relation to the church

You see, being "*hid in God*", it must be a revelation or it is nothing. It is essentially a revelation. That means that it is still within the province and function of the Holy Spirit that we require the revealing Spirit in order to see this secret of God, the mystery hid in God. It is undiscoverable by man and inscrutable to angels. To New Testament words and statements and subjects and presentations there is an extra factor. That extra factor is indispensable and essential. Without it, if man just takes up what is in the New Testament the result is after all only an imitation, resulting in pretension, assumption, formalism — lifeless and without impact. I mean that it is possible to have the words and statements of the New Testament about the church. It is possible to have the whole subject of the church and for it to be entirely without effect in impact and life; the mere framework, albeit the New Testament framework, but nothing in it; a set of rites, ritual and form, a doctrine, but the lifeless, not registering tremendous impact of infinite God upon the earth and upon the heavens. That is possible. There is an extra factor that is indispensable to all New Testament statements and doctrines and presentations and

words. It is just as true of the New Testament as it was of the Old — *“the letter killeth”* (2 Cor. 3:6). The letter by itself is death, and close and scrupulous adherence to the letter is still death. No one would say the letter is therefore dismissed. I am saying that there is an extra factor — the quickening illuminating Spirit of God — needed to make it a revelation to every one, to individual.

Here in parenthesis let me add this. Because this is essentially a revelation, we do not therefore make revelation the basis of spiritual fellowship: that is, because some have more revelation than others on this matter you make a discrimination and put some into a church class and others into a non-church class. Beware! Do not make your light the basis of your Christian fellowship. You will do just the very thing that you do not want to do and do not mean to do — destroy the church of God. That has to be said as a safeguard when one is urging so strongly that the church is a revelation.

And let it be most definitely understood that that we are *not* saying that to be in the church the full revelation of it must first be received. All the implications of being “in Christ” may come to knowledge later, and ever progressively. To be “in Christ” is being a member of Christ and therefore to be a joint-member with all others in Him. Thus, union with Christ is the basis of fellowship, knowledge of all that union means corporately. But the work of the New Testament and of the Holy Spirit is to bring us into that revelation, or to bring it into us as soon as possible. When the Holy Spirit was absolutely Lord in the beginning, all the principles and life of the church were spontaneously in operation, without all the understanding and apprehension of the truth concerning the church. This is the right order, but it is obvious that the Lord meant that revelation and understanding to be given, for it was essential to intelligent growth.

Revelation by the Spirit

The church is one of *“the deep things of God”* — more literally the phrase is *“the depths of God”*; the things, as it were, *“hid in God”*, and the statement is that it is the Holy Spirit who searches the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10) and only the Holy Spirit can divulge those deep things to anyone. *“The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God”* — the depths of God. An intelligent person can grasp any doctrine and they can grasp the doctrine of the church; but grasp it mentally and, having grasped it by a keen mind and natural intelligence, they may go off thinking they know and have seen the church. The test of having seen is the difference that it makes. You can grasp the doctrine and it can make no difference at all. But once you have seen, all sorts of crises arise and adjustments become necessary. Things happen and you cannot help yourself. You are faced with issues. Revelation is a costly thing; revelation is an up-heaving thing. Revelation is a transforming thing. You can never be the same once you have really seen by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit: if you *are* the same, and if you have ‘seen’ because you have grasped the doctrine, you have not seen at all. No, it is the effect and result which declares whether there has been a true seeing. The one makes no changes; the other sets up many crises and issues.

The conception of the church as to its nature

Now a little about the conception and nature and purpose of the church. This is itself capable of very great expansion, but here are just a few concise things. The conception of the church as to its nature and purpose.

The end is brought into view long before it is reached in order that it may govern the whole course and explain all God’s dealings with the church in its several parts. Here in Ephesians 5:27 the end is said to be *“that He might present the church to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing”*. Now that touches on several aspects of the whole matter. *“That He might present the church to Himself a glorious church”*, a church of glory. Not until that is done will the church really enter upon its vocation in fulness. *“Not having spot”* — that relates, of course, to moral

blemish; a church without moral blemish. *"Christ ... 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",* without moral blemish. *"Or wrinkle"* — a wrinkle is the effect of time, the effect of suffering, the effect of care. The church is to be a glorious church without moral blemish and without any of those marks of time, suffering, sorrow or anxiety — all these are gone. That is the end so early brought into view so early, in order to show and explain what God is doing, what He is after in His dealings with us — to make His church something beyond the power of sin, to bring His church to a place where the power and effect of sin is utterly destroyed, where there is no blemish.

He is working that in His church. That defines the nature of the church. 'Churchmanship' demands progressive deliverance from and ascendancy over moral blemishes. As we get on later to practical, everyday matters of the church, we shall come to the Corinthian letter, and be very much occupied with it. There are the spots, the blots, limiting the vocation, retarding the glory; and the letter was written with a view to getting rid of the spots, to making the church what it really is in God's mind and delivering it from those wrinkles which speak of the effect of this world. We leave that for the moment. *"A glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing"*. The apostle seems as though he wants to cover a lot of ground in as few words as possible. 'Anything like that', he says in effect, that does not belong to the church according to God's mind — in the end it will not be there. Blessed be God, it will not be there in the end! For that Christ gave Himself.

The vocation of the church

Then an intimation is given of its vocation. If we ask the question, 'Why is Christ exalted to the right hand of God?' — the answer is 'That He may, being at the right hand (and the right hand is a metaphor, a figure, the place of honour and power), exercise authority at God's side'. And if you further say, 'And how long will He be there doing that?' — His dominion is forever and ever, it will never come to an end. Here is a statement; look at it again.

"... He wrought in Christ, when He raised him from the dead, and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and He put all things in subjection under His feet" (Eph. 1:20-22). "God ... even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved), and raised us up with Him, and made us to sit with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come ..." (Eph. 2:4-7). Transcendent elevation, transcendent authority, transcendent power, transcendent dominion, transcendent name — it is all there. And it is true of the church — *"And gave Him to be head over all things to the church"*. What is true of Him is said of the church, for the ages to come. It is tremendous. Government, dominion, rule, authority, throughout the coming ages, in union with the exalted, glorified Head, the Lord Jesus. This church with Him, as Body and Head, is to have, and already in God's thought and meaning and intention does have, the central place. *"He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church."*

With the change of metaphor from the Body to the City, we find movement of a twofold kind. We see the city with its gates on all side. We find firstly, that there is movement out through the gates: what is within is being dispensed to the nations. *"The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations"* (Rev. 22:2). Then we find the centre of the nations. It is an inward movement. *"The kings of the earth bring their glory into it"* (Rev. 21:24). These are they who represent the glory of redeemed nations, saved nations — for *"the nations shall walk amidst the light thereof"* (Rev. 21:24); and the glory and honour of the redeemed, the saved, nations, is going to be brought as a testimony into

the city. Thus we see the outward and the inward movement. It is the centre of all the goings and comings, the metropolis of the creation, the governmental centre.

But you have heard these things before. We shall never feel the force of practical applications — the application to all sorts of what we would call little, everyday things in our life — the necessity, until we have seen the setting. How great a small thing becomes in the light of this! Read this immensity into details and they take on a new significance. That is why we start at the circumference. We have to have a setting for appeal, admonition, warning, rebuke, exhortation, entreaty; an adequate motive for suffering and enduring, in the light of the transcendent glory and the immense vocation through all the coming ages.

The church foreordained in love

The church, we have already said, is the object of divine love — love predestinating, this letter says. He "*foreordained us in love*" (Eph. 1:4,5 margin), the 'us' being the church. Have you ever been tempted to feel it was anything but love that called us you into this way of suffering, difficulty, adversity, and conflict? Have you sometimes been unable to see the love that lies behind that side of the church's history? — the cost, the trial, the refining fires? Let us come back to the statement. He who saw beyond all time, and chose altogether outside of time, compassed everything in His love, and in effect said, 'In the light of what I know will be, the issue it is worth it', and we have constantly to say to ourselves, 'The time will come when we shall see that it was worth it all'. We have not yet come to the place to which the apostle had come, the man who had suffering of every kind heaped upon him, the loss of all things in this world and then a multiplicity and diversity of sufferings, sometimes catalogued by him but the deepest poignancy of which he probably never put into words, a man who could say, "*Our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory*", (2 Cor. 4:17) — we have not got there yet, but he had seen something, he knew, and he tells us. In another way and in other words — 'Listen, you church of God, 'purchased with His own blood'; the time will come when you will regard the greatest sufferings of your life as nothing compared with the glory — they will shrink into insignificance in comparison with what God intended and secured when He foreordained us.' So we have love predestinating stated in Ephesians.

Then we have love purchasing — He purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28). I would like to dwell upon that — the purchasing of the church. It is a doctrine in itself. Love cleansing the church, and preparing her for her great ministry in coming ages — "*that He might present it to Himself a glorious church*" — Love possessing — "*presented to Himself*". Love possessing is the very heart of God's heart.

Foreordained to be conformed to the image of Christ

I close with just one other word. Rom. 8:29 contains the phrase — "*He ... foreordained (us) to be conformed to the image of his Son*". When God said, "*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*" (Gen. 1:26), His idea was that man should represent *Him*. When He foreordained us to be conformed to the image of His Son, He meant us to represent Christ, be an expression of Christ, the image of His Son. Man was originally intended to reveal God, but he failed. *The Man* came and revealed Him. The church is "*the one new man*" brought into that eternal intention to be a revelation of God in Christ, not the church manifesting or embodying Deity, but God less Deity, if you understand what I mean. The church is not going to be deified and become God, but is to be such an embodiment and likeness of God, manifested in Christ, that for all ages God is represented, expressed and manifested in His universe by means of the church.

Such a church is a challenge, a challenge to all that is less, a challenge to all that is other, all that is contrary. Hence the necessity for the application of all this to every

detail of life in a child of God. That brings us very much nearer to the matter of *"walking worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called"*.

Chapter 2 – The composition of the church

In our last meditation we were occupied with the conception and origin of the church. We are now to be occupied with the composition of the church, with the question: Of whom is the church composed? The answer to that question has two phases: one, the eternal counsels of God; the other, the present dispensation.

The church's election

As to the eternal counsels and the composition of the church, you know that that word 'counsel' is found in Ephesians 1:11: *"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"*. That is to say, the counsel of His will first; then His working all things after the counsel of that will; and in the "all things" we were made a heritage. So the church was composed in the eternal counsels of God. There are some words connected with this past aspect of the church's constitution which take us entirely out of our depth. *"He chose us in him "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4).*

Here then we have the church's election. And then we are told that that was in relation to three things.

(a) According to foreknowledge

First of all His foreknowledge: *"whom He foreknew, He also foreordained"* (Rom. 8:29). *"Elect ... according to the foreknowledge of God"* (1 Pet. 1:1,2). We ought to be content with that statement, for it clears up a lot of mental difficulties. We can eliminate all other things. Our choosing was not according to this or that or anything else that you like to put in and which has been put in or has come into people's minds when they have tried to solve the problem of predestination. Just for the moment suspend all other things and be content with "according to foreknowledge" — the fact that God foreknew — all who would respond to His call, foreknew who would believe, and, foreknowing, could foreordain. According to foreknowledge the election took place.

(b) According to purpose

"To them that are [the] called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Or again, this passage in Ephesians 1:11: *"we were made a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His will"*. "According to purpose". It might be helpful to reverse that order and put the purpose first. Divine eternal purpose — that stands first in one sense, and then, *"according to foreknowledge"* — choosing in relation to the fixed determined purpose.

(c) In love

And the third thing related to this eternal election is that it was in love. The marginal rendering of Ephesians 1:4 is more correct than what we have in the text. *"He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love"* — that is our text. The margin is: *"... before Him having in love foreordained us before the foundation of the world"*, and that is more correct. *"He chose us ... in love"*. So the election or the choosing is connected with purpose, by foreknowledge in love.

Now what we have to do is to note exactly what the Scriptures say as to the church in the eternal counsels of God, and not to note before that how we find the church in our time. If we look at the church as we find it now, we shall have many difficulties. Indeed, we may have our faith and our hope destroyed if we take this as all. I repeat, we must know exactly what the Scriptures say about the church and God's eternal counsels. These are the things which the Scriptures say in this matter. "Foreknown" — that is what the Scripture says. We do not begin with things as we have them now. We get entirely behind all that is seen, all that presses itself upon our consciousness, all the problems that arise because of present conditions in the church. We get behind all that to God's foreknowledge, to God's choosing, right back there, to God's foreordaining in the dateless past.

Election relates to believers

Now I want to repeat what I said just now. *All this relates to believers*. We were foreknown as believers. Do you get my point? — not as unbelievers but as believers. God knew, before times eternal, who would be believers. It rules out that other difficulty and argument about some being eternally predestinated to be saved and others to be lost. That does not come in. This focuses down upon believers that seeing God's knowledge is never past, present and future, but eternal, full, the end from the beginning comprehended, it was as though He had a company of believers in existence before the world was, a company of *believers* as believers; not whom He had made to be believers, but who had believed: with Him they had already believed — not because He determined that they should believe, predestinated them to believe, but in His foreknowledge they were already believers. Although as yet they were not in existence, it says "*before the laying down of the world*" — the "foundation" there is the 'laying down' of the world — before the laying down of the world, before the first believer had a being, He had a company of believers in His knowledge just as though they were already created, already had heard the gospel and responded. And so, having them in His foreknowledge, He can determine what they should be as believers, determine what they should do, that is, what purpose they should fulfil, and determine what their destiny would be. He could do that with believers. I think you see the point. All this has to do with believers as such.

The church related to divine sovereignty

So we see that the church is a particular body related to a particular purpose, related in a peculiar way to divine sovereignty, the right of God to choose and decide and not explain Himself. In a very great deal of this God has not explained Himself, and we are told in more than one place in the Scripture that we have no right to ask, and we have no right to say to God, 'What are you doing? Why do you do this?' — no right at all. That remains with the divine sovereign counsels, and we simply have to take this attitude — God chose that way, God decided upon that; well, I simply have to accept it. And the church is in that peculiar way related to the divine sovereignty, secured from eternity unto a special purpose concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

(a) The good pleasure of His will

Now you have this threefold statement in Ephesians 1 in connection with that sovereignty. Firstly, in verse 5, it is "*the good pleasure of His will*". "*Foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will*" — "*the good pleasure of his will*". We must not stay for too much detail, but think about it. "*The good pleasure of His will*". The pleasure of some wills is not good. Some men find pleasure in fulfilling a very cruel will. The devil finds *pleasure* in doing his evil will and harming people and spoiling the things of God. But God's will is good, acceptable and perfect (Rom. 12:2), and it is His pleasure to fulfil a good, acceptable and perfect will, and the church is the vessel of the good pleasure of that will.

(b) The mystery of His will

In verse 9 we have: "*making known unto us the mystery of His will*" — the church, the thing hidden in God, now disclosed. His good pleasure concerning the church has now been revealed. And the completion of the statement is according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him "*unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth; in Him, I say*". The good pleasure of His will concerning His Son is revealed to us, to be fulfilled by this elect body.

(c) The counsel of His will

And the third statement in verse 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*". The good pleasure of His will, the mystery of His will, the counsel of His will. That, for the time being, must be sufficient as to the composition of the church in the eternal counsels of God, "*before times eternal*".

The securing of the church

Now we must come to its composition in this dispensation. This is the dispensation of the church. That of course, you know; it needs no arguing. As to the securing of the church actually, literally; as it was secured in the counsels and foreknowledge and pre-determinate will of God before the foundation of the world, so now that has to be put into operation, seeing that the people are actually in existence. So we find that the securing of the church is referred to in such terms as these: "*Christ loved the church, and gave Himself up for it*" (Eph. 5:25). This is the way of the securing of the church. Or again, "*The church of God which He purchased with His own blood*" (Acts 20:28).

Now between the eternal electing and the purchasing there is a whole history making the purchasing with His Blood necessary. I am not going to fill in that gap. I simply indicate it; it represents a tremendous happening, calling for the purchase of what He chose. "*With His own blood*". It is a statement of immense significance. "*The church of God which he purchased with his own blood*". I will not labour that too much, for I know there is a diversity of opinion as to the translation. But it is true to say that the Lord purchased the church with His own blood. I should like to stay with that, because it is an amazing thing to see those eternal counsels, with the choosing, the electing, and then to see the necessity laid upon God for *purchasing* with His own blood. But the strength of that phrase is this: that if the possession of the church involves purchase, then Christ will purchase it with His own blood, He will stand at nothing less than His own blood for its purchase.

The Composition of the church in this dispensation

(a) Not all who are called Christians

As to its composition in this dispensation, we are at this point compelled to observe some discriminations. Firstly, however unnecessary it may seem to many, we have to say, in such a consideration as this, that all who are in what is called 'the church' may not be, or are not, necessarily, in *the church* of God. When Israel came out of Egypt, many who were not of Israel came out with them, called 'mixed multitudes', and the mixed multitudes were the curse and the bane of their lives, a detracting force, a constant temptation in their midst. Paul makes a very strong and challenging statement when he says, "*They are not all Israel, that are of Israel*" (Rom. 9:6). The reference is not to mixed multitudes. It is to the seed of Abraham — all who could be called in the earthly natural sense Israelites; and what he is saying is that all they which are Abraham's seed, called Israelites, are not Israel. You notice the completion of the statement — "*In Isaac shall thy seed be called*." Within the seed of Abraham there is a seed which is the seed of the election. In the same way it could be just as truly said that not all who profess the

Name of Christ or who go by the name of 'Christians' are Christ's. That needs no labouring. There are many 'Christians' who are born of the flesh, by the will of man, taking the name Christian but not born of the Spirit. The Body of Christ is neither separate from, nor identical with, the sum total of 'churches' on this earth. It is something peculiar.

(b) Not the sum total of the ultimately saved

In the next place, the church is not the sum total of the ultimately saved. The following passage from Dr. Griffith Thomas sums up this whole matter admirably and capably. He says:

"... it should be carefully noted that the Bible does not merely separate men into two classes, the saved and the lost, for it seems to reveal not only one class of saved ones, but several classes or grades of the saved ... The highest salvation is clearly associated with what the New Testament describes as 'the Body of Christ,' or 'the Lamb's wife', and the various references to the 'elect' are to this community of 'heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ', who are said to have been 'chosen before the foundation of the world'. Yet the Bible clearly indicates that these are not the only ones saved. On the contrary, there are plain statements that, in addition to the body of Christians called 'the Bride', there are other communities of human beings who are saved from everlasting destruction, and yet do not, and will never, form part of the 'Body of Christ'. This salvation is outside of and altogether secondary to the salvation of those chosen persons who collectively make up His spiritual church. The following passages seem to indicate these grades:

- (1) There are peoples of the world over whom, according to Scripture, the members of the church are to reign with Christ as kings and priests (Rev. 5:10; Rev. 20:4-6). It is surely impossible that these people over whom the saints are to reign are the lost.*
- (2) Reference is made to "the nations" at Christ's coming to judgment, and, as the church or bride will have been previously caught up to meet Him in the air, it is clear that those who are sat on the right hand of the king and are described as blest, blessed, and invited, to inherit the kingdom, cannot possibly be either "the brethren" of Christ or the church, (Matt. 25:31-46).*
- (3) Then we read of people raised at the last resurrection, judged according to the deeds done in the body, and out of this number those whose names are found written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 20:12-15; 21:27). Seeing that the members of the church have long before been raised and glorified in the first resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6), who are these mentioned as in the Lamb's book of life long after the first resurrection?*
- (4) In Hebrews 12:23 we read of "the general assembly and church of the firstborn". If there be a church of the firstborn who inherit the full blessing, is it not a fair inference that there are second born ones who inherit a lesser blessing?*
- (5) When Paul writes that "all Israel shall be saved" we are again apparently concerned with a number of persons who are altogether outside the body of Christ.*
- (6) The heavenly city, the bride, the Lamb's wife (Rev. 21) is generally accepted as representing the glorified church, and if this is so, who are "the nations" who walk in the light of the city, and who are "the kings of the earth" who bring their glory and honour into it the city? There must be some distinction between these and members of the glorified church.*

A careful consideration of these passages seems to show that, while God made a selection of men to form His church, yet the members of this collective body are not the only ones who are in some sense saved.

Well, now, what are we faced with? We are faced with the question of two things taking place, and the question is — Are these two things taking place in the same dispensation, or is this the dispensation of the church only, and later others? I am going to state quite frankly that I do not know. There are those who believe that all believers in this dispensation are not in the Body of Christ. G.H. Pember, the writer of *Earth's Earliest Ages*, held that view most strongly. Mr. W. Kelly, the most voluminous writer among the Brethren, held the same view. Our friend Mr. G.H. Lang, whose books many of you know, also holds that view, and there are others. Of course, such a position gets over a lot of difficulties. If we could really believe it, what a lot of problems would be solved — why it is that so many who have the presentation of the full thought of God concerning His church never respond in any way — lots of questions like that would be solved if that view were really the right one. But such a position, while it might seem to solve many problems, has nothing in the New Testament which positively states that it is so. The New Testament says nothing precisely to this effect. It is a matter of inference and deduction.

The New Testament emphasis

Now what the Word of God does do is to keep on the positive line and give most solemn warnings as to the seriousness of falling short of God's fully revealed will. The Word of God never says anything to the effect that it is optional whether we go on to full growth, or that we shall have something quite good as a substitute if we do not like to accept God's full will. The Word of God makes no provision along that line. Its force is altogether to the contrary. Paul had the whole revelation of the church as the Body of Christ, but we cannot find any place at which we can draw a distinct line between his preaching of the gospel worldwide and his teaching concerning the church. You cannot divide those two things in the ministry of Paul and say that out to the world as a whole, in evangelisation, he preached the gospel, but within a certain circle he preached the church. Paul did not allow his knowledge of the full thought of God concerning the church to weaken his worldwide evangelisation; rather his worldwide evangelisation had as its motive the full purpose of God. Why, his revelation of the church in the eternal counsels, and its glorious destiny, was the very power and strength of his gospel preaching to the unsaved everywhere. There is not a hint that he was thinking that some people would only just be saved, and he was preaching to get them saved, but that others would come into the church, and they required a different kind of gospel. There is not a hint of such a thing.

And yet, when that is said, Paul is unmistakable in his emphasis that something primary can be missed and lost by believers and that something is not salvation or eternal life. His emphasis is upon God's full purpose; and that can be missed or lost. There are not two gospels in the New Testament, a gospel for one larger class and another gospel for a smaller class. There is one gospel. And there are not two churches in the New Testament. There is one church, one Body.

Of course, there are lots of other details in this whole matter which are not revealed or stated. If they were, they would only complicate the whole matter. Divine election and human responsibility; divine choice and all the 'ifs' and conditional and provisional factors in the New Testament — you can work, if you will, into some sort of system, or answer, but it all seems to fall far short of what is required, and you have to say 'Leave it alone', because there are many other matters in the same category, and these matters have divided Christians in the matter of doctrine. The matter of 'final perseverance', as it is called theologically — that is, once in grace, always in grace; once saved, it does not matter what you do, you can never be lost — that has divided Christians.

Well, what are you going to do about it?

I will tell you what the New Testament does about it. It says: 'Run no risks, take no chances, make no compromises.' All that the New Testament has to say is: 'This is God's full thought and He has not offered you anything less, so do not think in any terms of something less.' There is another thing called 'selective rapture', the view that the church as a whole will not be caught up, but in parts. I am not asking whether that is right or wrong; what I am stressing is that the New Testament says: 'Do not take risks, do not ask such questions as, 'Shall I be in first or second?' Say, 'By the grace of God, I am going to be in the first, and that settles the whole matter.' That is the New Testament position. You will never get anywhere if you take up these matters in that way and make a system of truth of them. The matter of election is among them. 'How shall I know whether I am in the elect?' Well, it is for you to make your calling and election sure. How are you going to do that? I will tell you in a minute.

You see, all these things are covered by the Lord's rejoinder to Peter. When the Lord had precisely told him what he was to do, he said, "*Lord, and what shall this man do?*" (John 21:21). "*What is that to thee? Follow thou me*", replied the Lord. 'Do not be inquisitive about all sorts of things; the thing which matters is — *you go right on, do not take any risks. In the right sense, you mind your own business; and this is your business to go on to full growth.*'

The essential and minimum basis of the church's constitution

(a) Response to a call

Now there is an essential and minimum basis of the church's constitution. The Greek word for the church in the New Testament is *ekklesia*, meaning the 'called out'. But its meaning includes response to the call. Paul always gives the call that full meaning. In the gospels, the call simply means invitation. Very often it was refused. But Paul's usage of the word 'call' and 'called' is much fuller. It always carries with it the effectiveness of the call, the implication that response has been made. It goes beyond invitation— it goes to an affirmative answer to the invitation, and this is the meaning of the church: those who have heard and responded to the call, and have acted upon it and have come out — the called-out. They heard, they answered, they came out to Christ. The Old Testament statement about Israel is that God said, "*I ... called my son out of Egypt*" (Hosea 11:1). There you have the whole range of the calling initiated by God, effectuated by God, and God being outside of Egypt. 'I have called out'. You cannot call anybody out unless you are out yourself. You cannot, standing inside a place, say, 'Come out!' — and stay there. You have to get outside and say, 'Come out!' God is outside of Egypt, and all that Egypt represents, as the world, the kingdom of Satan; and the church is that which has to come out to God; having heard His call, to go out to Him.

(b) The Holy Spirit received through faith unto obedience

Then, secondly, the church is composed of those who have received the Holy Spirit through faith unto obedience. "*In one Spirit were we all baptized into one body*" (1 Cor. 12:13). We have received the Holy Spirit by the obedience of faith. Faith unto obedience meant to believe and be baptized. Believe — that is faith; be baptized — is the obedience. "*The obedience of faith*" (Rom. 1:5; 16:26), and while the form of water may not be meant in this passage in Corinthians, the action of the Holy Spirit follows upon the faith unto obedience, and we are baptized in one Spirit into one body. This is how it ought to be.

Marks of election

Now you see that the church is composed of such, but there are these marks which go with this election.

(a) Separation

First, separation. There is no doubt about it. The call responded to is 'Out!' But be very careful of your usage of that word, that idea. This call 'out' is not from among the Lord's people. You say, 'Why say such a thing? It is preposterous to say such a thing!' Ah, yes, but a lot of people are acting as though that were what it meant: that to be in the body of Christ you must separate yourself from other people of the Lord who have not got the light, the truth, or who are not in the good of it. Be careful — No, it is separation from the world, separation from all that belongs to that.

(b) Conformity to God's Son

The second is conformity. An essential feature is that it is being conformed to the image of God's Son.

(c) Showing forth of Christ

And thirdly, its function. What is its function? Its function is that of representation and manifestation, to "*show forth the excellencies of Him who called (us) out of darkness into his marvellous light*" (1 Pet. 2:9). Called out — For what? To show forth the excellencies of Him. That is the function of the church.

A Question

Now here a question does arise. I do not know how much trouble I am going to get myself into by saying it, but I think there may be something in it. This has nothing to do with salvation, but does a question arise as to whether we shall know that we are in the church before the end? "*Whose house are we, if we hold fast our boldness and the glorying of our hope firm unto the end*" (Heb. 3:6). "*Lest by any means, after that I have been a herald to others, I myself should be rejected*" (1 Cor. 9:27 marg.). Clearly that has nothing to do with salvation. "*If by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead*" (Phil. 3:11). There may be ground of assurance that we are in the church, the Body. That ground may be that we have heard the call, have responded, are separated, are being conformed to the image of His Son, are showing forth the excellencies of Him; but it is always a question as to whether we can boast of anything very much like that. I mean that you may feel that you are doing anything but showing forth the excellencies of Him. You may often wonder whether you really are being conformed to the image of His Son; the likeness is so slow in coming out. It is as though you are in a darkroom, peering into things to try and discover whether there is anything at all of that image coming out on the plate. Well, often there are doubts and questions in some realms. There may be some grounds of assurance that we are in the Body, but there is so much in this connection which is hidden from us, and we may not know until the end.

It is just on that point that certain doctrinaires and theologians have, I think, mixed things up. They have put that to salvation. There is a whole body of extreme predestinationalists who say that it is wrong to say you are saved, that you never know you are saved until the end and you find yourself in glory. I say that that is a lie. "*We know that we have passed out of death into life ...*" — How do we know? — "*... because we love the brethren*" (1 John 3:14). That is one evidence, at any rate, and we do. "*The love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts*" (Rom. 5:5). We know we are saved, but we do not know whether we have obtained the prize of the on-high calling. Paul did

not. *"I press on towards the goal unto the prize"; "if by any means"; "forgetting the things which are behind"* (Phil. 3:10-14).

So we finish on that note. We have to *"make (our) calling and election sure"* (2 Pet. 1:10). Assurance will grow in us; the great fact will be manifested at last. It is a glorious calling, it is transcendent; but, even with such a calling, there is nothing left for us to boast of in the flesh, even with such a calling, for this reason, among others: that, however great, high and glorious may be the calling, it is balanced in our lives now by the peculiar sufferings, discipline, chastening and training which goes with such a calling. We will not lose our heads in the light of so great a calling. We will not become proud and self-sufficient and important, great as the calling may be. There are strange works of God with the church, with the elect, and I have sometimes comforted myself that I might be among the elect because of all the peculiar and deep ways in which the Lord deals with me. I say that because it may be a contribution to our steadfastness and hope and assurance. Why these strange ways of God, these peculiar ways of God, these deep ways of God, these unusual and extraordinary ways of God with some of His people? It is all in the light of the great destiny and vocation unto which they are called. It must be a peculiar people going through peculiar sufferings with a peculiar end.

Chapter 3 – The Spiritual Mind

We shall continue in our meditations in the building of the church of God and now come to the second half of the general title — its life and principles.

The church in Ephesians and Colossians

In the letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians, we have the church presented in its universal, eternal and complete form and nature. There are, as you know, certain things said as to conduct in the light of the great calling and vocation, but the church in those letters is seen as outside of this world and outside of time and outside of progress in the main. It is spoken of as though it were already complete or, shall I say, it is spoken of as complete in the mind of God. You know the great phrase in the letter to the Ephesians which governs the presentation there *"in the heavenlies"*, a phrase used four times in four different connections or aspects. Firstly as placed in the heavenlies — *"God raised us up with Him, and made us to sit with Him in the heavenlies, in Christ Jesus"* (Eph. 2:6); then graced in the heavenlies — *"blessed ... with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ"* (Eph. 2:6). And then as the stage of a great heavenly drama — *"to the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenlies might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God"* (Eph. 3:10). And then in the fourth place it is warfare — *"Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies"* (Eph. 6:12).

Then it is set in the main outside of time, that is, it is set in the eternal ages past and future. We go back before the foundation of the world and we go on to the ages of the ages; the timelessness of the church in the mind of God. And in the light of all this, the exhortations to conduct and walk — *"I ... beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all lowliness and meekness"* (Eph. 4:1-2), and so on. So the letter to the Ephesians and its companion letter to the Colossians is set in that heavenly, eternal, universal realm.

The instruction or revelation is gathered under three main words — the calling, the conduct and the conflict of the church as a heavenly body. But when we want to know about the actual building of the church, we have to come to localities and there meet all that is involved — extrication, constitution formation. They are very practical things, as we well know, in spiritual business, what a business it is in any place to extricate the church! Again, what a business it is to constitute the church! And yet again what a business to conform the church to the image of God's Son. And so, being concerned with this practical side of the church, we have to come to localities, and so we come to Corinth, for Corinth provides us with a first-class instance of building from the foundations.

The local church in Corinth — its foundation

To come into Corinth we, of course, have in the first place to note the retrospect of Corinth, looking back to what in a spiritual sense has gone before, because, as you know, the letters in the New Testament are not in chronological order but in spiritual order. Corinth looks back; it looks back to the Acts — the Spirit given. It looks back to the letter to the Romans — life because of righteousness. The very foundation of the church — the Spirit given, life on the ground of the righteousness which is of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Those two things are taken up in Corinth and are basic to all building.

Romans, as you know, brings out the inclusiveness of the cross and that in relation to the church. It is important to note that, with all that we have in the letter to the Romans, it is a church matter. It does not look like it when you read the first chapters, but you have

to take the letter as a whole, and Romans 12 makes it quite clear that the letter is a church letter, and that is particularly seen in Romans 6 and 8.

Romans 6 — crucified with Christ, buried, raised, that is the church. Of course, it includes the individual, but Romans 12 makes it perfectly clear that it is the church, it is a crucified, buried and resurrected church. Romans 8 undoubtedly has the church in view. What I mean is this, that when you come to Romans 12, and rob it of chapter numbers in this letter and see the steady run on of the whole argument and reach the point which is marked in our arrangement by Romans 12, you are brought to the real and inclusive issue of all that has gone before. The Body is brought out in Romans 12 and we shall see in some other details as we go along how all that is in the Roman letter is a church matter, and therefore it is foundational to all building.

Take for instance this point, how that the letter to the Corinthians takes up Romans 8:5-15:

"For they that are after the flesh mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For the mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace: because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be: and they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit God dwelled in you. But if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies through His Spirit that dwelled in you. So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh; for if ye live after the flesh, ye must die; but if by the Spirit ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

You see how Corinthians takes up that section and gives us a life-sized picture-portrait of a man who walks in the flesh and the man who walks in the Spirit, or, if you like, a church that is in the flesh and a church that is in the Spirit. I repeat that Corinthians gives a life-sized portrait of these two entities.

A church in the flesh; look at Corinthians again. You know it well enough to know that that was the whole trouble at Corinth. Over against that, a church in the Spirit is what is brought into view as the object of exhortation, warning, entreaty, correction and rebuke.

Then you see as this section in Romans sums the whole of these two sides of things up in the two words — life and death; carnally minded — death spiritually minded, or the mind of the Spirit, life and peace; so you carry that over into Corinth and you find that carnal-mindedness there is working both spiritual death and physical death. *"For this cause many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep (1 Cor. 11:30)* — carnality in the church. It is the matter of life and death connected with these two things, the flesh and the Spirit.

Then, going back again in this retrospect to Romans, you see this whole question of life is the subject, or shall I say, the object, of the Roman letter. The whole quest is for life. True, it is a quest for righteousness, but righteousness is no end in itself. It is what righteousness leads to, and it is really a quest for life, so that the apostle, in writing that letter to the Romans, surveys this whole question of life in three connections.

Firstly, in Romans 1-3, it is a matter of natural life. Do I need to remind you of the content of these letters and go back and read it all? I am afraid I shall have to take a good deal for granted. You know what the first three chapters of the letter to the Romans

contain, and the sum of it all is that all have sinned, and the wages of sin is death. Natural life, the world seeking life in its own way, leaving God out, and the end is death.

Then in Romans 7, the apostle leads into another realm of the quest for life, and says that he was in that realm. It is as though a natural man in his quest for life had been so utterly disappointed in the world and not found it that he said, 'I will become religious and find life in religion', and Romans 7, as you know, is the story of the religious man in in quest of life by being intensely religious. What is the end? "*Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?*" So religious life, like natural life, is dead. It is not life at all.

But then he takes us into the third aspect in Romans 7, and shows us spiritual life in union with Christ, "*No condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death*" (Rom. 8:1,2). From that point it is life indeed, it is spiritual life, and this is life and peace.

Well now, over to Corinth with all that in your hand, and you see the whole letter to the Corinthians is an outworking of that. You are not going to find life as the natural man in 1 Corinthians 2 — he cannot. And you are not even going to find it as a religious man. Strangely enough, at Corinth they had much that was of the Holy Spirit in the way of gifts and endowments, but there was a terrible lot of spiritual death and limitation, as we shall see. The real life was not released and abounding, and so the apostle in that letter is on full stretch for the real meaning of Romans 7 — release of life in fulness.

Material which cannot be used for building

So when we come to Corinth with all that as the background, having brought that over — Acts, the Spirit given; Romans, the flesh and the Spirit; we arrive at Corinth, and we find here two things in the main. The stuff that cannot be used for building. There is a great veto in this letter to the Corinthians on all sorts of things which belong to the flesh and to the natural man. And in effect the apostle is saying, these things are not building material for the church. You cannot build with that, you must not attempt to build with that. Every man's work is going to be tried by fire ((1 Cor. 3:13). You notice that here, the repetition of that idea of building. "*According to the grace of God which was given unto me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation; and another buildeth thereon. But let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon ... if any man buildeth on the foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble; each man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work shall abide which he built thereon ...*" (1 Cor. 3:10-14) and that is carried on to the end of chapter 3 — "*Ye are a temple of God ... the temple of God ... the temple of God*" (1 Cor. 3:16,17) — three times. But in this temple of God you have got to be careful what material is brought in, and with the Corinthians on the one side, it was a matter of getting completely rid of a whole lot of material that they were trying to use as church material, trying to build the church on this and this. But the Spirit says through the apostle, Oh no, you have got to be careful what you build on this foundation, what stuff you use, and wood, hay and stubble are only words for this carnality that is at Corinth, and it will all go, it will not stand. So that, on the one hand, all the life of the flesh has no place in the building of the church of God. It is vetoed and forbidden.

Material which can be used for building

On the other hand, the Holy Spirit is never only negative and destructive. We have here the material that is for building, and it is shown to be all that is of the Spirit. You know that there are different words here used. The flesh is a word not referring here or applying to the physical side of our being. It is a principle. It is only another word for carnality, the fleshly nature. Alongside of that we have the natural, and you know quite

well the meaning of these words, the natural or the soulful, but it is perhaps important and necessary, to note that while the natural when it is passive just amounts to what a man is naturally or what a person is naturally, when the natural becomes positive, it becomes fleshly. We are 'soul' people — that is the word for natural here. We cannot help that; that is what we are. But let our soul become assertive and we become fleshly, carnal. The drive of the soul upon any situation means that there is going to be a mess sooner or later. Carnality — and that is what the apostle is getting at in this letter. He says, "*Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them*" (1 Cor. 2:14). That is negative. That is because of what he is just as a soul man. But he goes on and makes it perfectly clear that if you, by means of your soul which deals with such things as wisdom, the wisdom of the world — that is a soul thing — if you begin to get positive on this soul line, you soon find you are in another realm, not in the passive realm of soul-life, but you become fleshly, carnal. There is a positive thing that gets in. That by the way. It is a little technical but important to notice.

The spiritual mind the first thing in building

Here at Corinth, then, we have the beginnings of building, and we have to note the very first thing in actual building. The very first thing in the building of the church is the spiritual mind, the mind of the Spirit. Now note chapter 2:

"We speak wisdom, however, among them that are full-grown; yet a wisdom not of this world, nor of the rulers of this world, who are coming to nought: but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, even the wisdom that hath been hidden, which God foreordained before the worlds unto our glory; which none of the rulers of this world hath known; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but as it is written, Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love Him. But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God. But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual. Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ" (1 Cor. 2:6-3:1).

A renewed mind

The first thing, then, in actual building is the spiritual mind. You never get anywhere until that is present. What is the spiritual mind? Well, Romans will tell us in the first place what it is. It is a renewed mind. "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. And be not fashioned according to this world (this is Corinthians, is it not?): but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind (or making anew of your mind), that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God"* (Rom. 12: 1-2). A renewed mind is the spiritual mind, a new mind, a mind made over anew. It is another mind. Here at the end of 1 Corinthians 2 is "*We have the mind of Christ*". It is another mind and another mindedness. "*The mindedness of the Spirit is life and peace*" (Rom.8:6) — that is the force and meaning of the statement, that we are minded towards the things of the Spirit because we have another mind, the mind of the Spirit. It is another mind. Nothing can be done in the way of building until that other mind and

other mindedness is there. There must be a new mind and a new mindedness going out after the things of the Spirit, always reaching for and seeking to know with a view to obeying the mind of the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. It is a disposition, a new disposition of mind.

And then of course it is the resident Spirit of God, the *Holy Spirit*. In that very connection, as you notice in the context, of the mind of the Spirit or spiritual mindedness, the statement is made — “*If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His*” (Rom. 8:9). “*If the Spirit of his that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you ...*” (Rom. 8:11). Now Paul takes that up in Corinthians — “*Know ye not that ye are a temple of God ...?*” (1 Cor. 3:16). “*Know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?*” (1 Cor. 6:19). It is the resident Holy Spirit that makes for this foundation of building. We are so familiar with truths of this kind, but it is something about which you and I need to have constant exercise. This letter to the Corinthians is a letter capable of creating tremendous shocks if you recognise the significance. You think for a moment. You can have all the endowments of the Holy Spirit, tongues and healings and all the rest, and not be a spiritual person and not grow up spiritually, and these marks of babyhood still be present. That is what Corinthians says. The whole thing points that out. “*Ye come behind in no gift*” (1 Cor. 1:7), but gifts do not always mean graces, gifts do not always mean spiritual maturity. The one church suffering more than any other in the New Testament from lack of development spiritually is the one church about which all these things are said as to gifts, endowments. That is capable of bringing a tremendous shock. If you had some supernatural gift so that you spoke genuinely in other tongues, for there is a genuineness of gift, and another had the supernatural gift, not knowing other languages naturally, of interpreting what you said, you would be inclined to feel you were a very spiritual person, that you had got somewhere. If you had the gift of healing and there was a poor incurable and you laid your hands on him and healing took place instantaneously, you would be inclined to think you were some spiritual giant.

But this letter argues differently. No, that is not inevitably building material. It can be building material, as we may note later, but it is not always so. It has been noted that, whereas in many instances in churches or converts coming out of heathenism these supernatural gifts have been very much marked among them, after a time when they have gone on with the Lord those things disappeared and they are no longer allowed by the Lord to lean on manifestations. They have to live upon faith, they are growing up; they have been counting too much on manifestations. Their faith is on a sight basis very largely, and that is not necessarily a mark of spiritual maturity. Spiritual mindedness, whatever else there may be or may not be, is the first essential of spiritual growth. I repeat, we will never get anywhere without that.

The spiritual mind an organ or faculty

This spiritual mind is an organ or faculty. It is something in the very constitution of the spiritual or the spiritually new born. It is there. In the beginning it may not be very marked, but it is there. Even a very young child knows what it wants and what it does not want — it has a mind. You do not think much of any creature, though it be a baby, who has not got a mind of its own. You may find it rather difficult to cope with and it may make life a bit complicated that this very young child has such a mind of its own, but you would not have it without a mind. You would say, it is far better for it to have a mind of its own — there is something to work on here, at any rate, this child is alive. It is not some poor little lifeless thing without any mind at all. But there are a lot of Christian babes like that without a spiritual mind, and that is what Paul means by being carried about by every wind of doctrine. In the Greek that is a picture of a nurse rushing into a room, picking up the baby and dancing it about for a few minutes; then putting it down, going away and then coming back and doing it all over again. The baby carried about by every whim of the nurse. Paul used that actual Greek figure to say “*carried about with every wind of doctrine*” (Eph. 4:14), anything that comes along, carried about, carried

away, have not the mind of the Spirit. It is tremendously important for building purposes, for spiritual growth, is this faculty, this organ, in its most elementary forms of expression, of course, in a new convert — there are signs that there is another mind, and now they are aware in general ways of differences, that what they once did they cannot do any longer, what once they would not do, now they do. There is another mind, and they are aware of the Holy Spirit being grieved or being pleased in major matters. It is there from birth.

The spiritual mind a capacity

But that has got to go on and grow as the very faculty or organ of spiritual increase. It is not only an organ or faculty; it is a capacity. It provides us with an ability. We have a capacity now for spiritual things. A lot is possible by the spiritual mind that was never possible before. That is what the apostle has said. *"Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love him. But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God ... Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged"* (1 Cor. 2:9-14). There is capacity now; things are possible.

The spiritual mind a potentiality

And it is not only a faculty and a capacity but it is a potentiality, that is, it secures the future or the future is secured in it. God has much more to show, a vast amount to reveal. His only hope of revealing what He has to reveal is that we have a mind suited to that revelation, we have the faculty, we have the capacity. Blessed be God, that is so wonderfully true that if we have the faculty and we are going on in obedience to the Spirit and the spiritual mind, God has the ground on which to reveal more and more and keep on revealing so that to Ephesians He is able to say — *"that ... God ... may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised Him from the dead"* (Eph. 1:17-20). Now this is not elementary, not baby knowledge. *"That ye may know the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward"*, filled unto all the fulness of God. *"That ye may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ"* (Eph. 3:18-19). That is not elementary, but the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, you see, indwelling the renewed mind — that is a tremendous potentiality.

The discernment of the Spirit

To some He has to say, *"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now"* (John 16:12). To others — *"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"* (Heb. 5:12), What is the matter? Well, it is lack of this capacity, this faculty, this potentiality of a spiritual mind. What the apostle is saying to these Corinthians is this. If you have the spiritual mind, that spiritual mind in you will judge all that is of the flesh. The trouble is you are not judging what is of the flesh, therefore you are not spiritually minded, you are carnally minded; the spiritual mind in you will judge what is of the flesh! This is not unimportant, I feel more and more the importance of saying these things to those who have heard the teaching for many years because one does find that there is such a lack of this faculty in operation in the Lord's people, that they are alive to what is of the Spirit and what is of the flesh. They seem to be able to do all sorts of things, behave in all sorts of ways, retain all sorts of relationships without being checked up, without a spirit of judgment going on inside them, and there they are, the things still go

on and on. It is not so with all but it is so with many and it is most important thing if the church is going to be built, and how can the church be built unless each individual of it is being built, is growing? If the church is going to be built, there must be present this active new faculty, this capacity and this potentiality as the basis of all the building.

And what we have said about this mind of the Spirit judging what is of the flesh is also true in the other way, that by it all that is of the Spirit will be known. If a thing is of the Spirit, you will know it, or you ought to know it. People ought to be in that position where, immediately there is something that is not of the Spirit, they register it, and immediately there is something of the Spirit, something inside of them clicks and that they say, That is right! That is how the church grows. You do grow when people are like that. That is very different from addressing chairs full of sandbags! We grow when it is like that. So it needs to be for building.

The mind of the Spirit the means of growth

This mind of the Spirit, this spiritual mindedness, is the means of growth, of spiritual maturity. That is why I ran right on from 1 Corinthians 2 to 3 — *“We have the mind of Christ. And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal”*. The Holy Spirit is the Builder and everything that comes from Him is intended to be for building but it must come to spiritual people for the building to take place. The Spirit is the Builder. He provides the material for the building, but He must provide it to a ground that is of His own nature, Spirit. If he gives all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus, the spiritual blessings are for building. Now let us allow every statement to challenge us. Has He given us spiritual blessings, a blessing? What are we doing with it? Keeping it to ourselves, enjoying it, going round and round it, saying what a lovely thing it is? Are we really using it for building? Every blessing, spiritual blessing, that we have is given by the Holy Spirit for building purposes. Unless we share our blessings, unless we make our blessings a ministry, we are making blessings an end in themselves and defeating the very purpose for which blessing was given and setting a limit to blessing. The Holy Spirit will not give blessing which is not working out to the end for which He gives the blessing. The blessing is in keeping with this gift of life and life is a trust. Immediately you stop life developing or reproducing, you defeat the very end for which life is given and all these blessings are blessings of life. You cannot divorce the very thought of blessing from life, and therefore it is supposed to be reproduction. We must use our blessings or else our blessings will stop and He will not bless.

I am not giving a detailed microscopic exposition of the letter to the Corinthians, but you can see the broad lines, how much the apostle has to say about generosity, magnanimity in giving, sowing sparingly and sowing lavishly, and the labourer is worthy of his hire. *“Thou shall not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn”* (1 Cor. 9:9). All this is a question of your generosity. We shall come to that later when we move on to the very practical matters, but here is the point, blessing is given for ministry, for the help of others, for the good of others, and only as it is so used does the church grow and we grow, and only so does the Spirit continue to bless. Turn in on ourselves individually or as a local company with our blessings and put a hedge round and we will soon die and the blessings will soon wither in our hands, even the grapes of Eshkol, as someone once said, turn to raisins in our hands; yes, if we use them only on ourselves. Blessings are given for building.

Gifts are for building

And again the apostle says that gifts are for building and he speaks of two kinds of gifts. There are the gifts as persons — *“and He gave some ...”* — this is Ephesians (4:11)) of course, but it is implicit in Corinthians. *“Some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, pastors and teachers”*; these are personal gifts. What for? For the building of the Body of Christ. Or powers, endowments, tongues or healings or whatever they may be, they are

for building. The trouble at Corinth was that they had turned in on these endowments and made the endowments something in themselves for their own glory and gratification, and the building side of this was not taken into account at all. Therefore the things which were meant for building became their judgment, their condemnation. All revelation is given for building purposes. Everything that comes from the Spirit is for building. If our faculty or our function or our organ is put to a wrong case, that is, an abuse, nature will take revenge. It is in the very constitution of things. We know that naturally. Now, what is true naturally is true spiritually. If any faculty or function or organ or gift is abused, put to a wrong use or not put to the use for which it exists, the result is disorder, derangement, suffering and death. That is the argument of this letter. Gifts — yes; blessings — yes. They had the personal gifts, for they were saying “*I am of Paul*”, and others, “*I am of Peter*” and others “*I am of Apollos*”, but they were using them for ‘*I am*’, for selfish purposes and interests, to gratify their own likes, that which appealed to them, instead of recognising that these men as ministers of Christ for the building of the church. Or their gifts, their endowments, their powers — they were making shows of them, demonstrations, using them like that. The result was, as you see, disorder, disruption, derangement, suffering, death. That is Corinth. The point is that everything must be put to building purposes and what does not serve the purpose of building can be left out or regarded as not so important as we might have thought it to be.

Building by love

You see what I have said. “*If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love ...*”. Oh, I thought that prophecy, tongues, etcetera were the primary things.’ Not necessarily. If they are not building, they are of much less importance than you thought. Love builds up, therefore it serves the very purpose of the Holy Spirit, it justifies the existence of the church. Building is the one thing. Love builds; these others do not necessarily build. They ought to build but they may miss that purpose. But love cannot miss it; it will do it every time. Love will build. This is spiritual-mindedness in the full and final issue. Love is the way of knowledge. It is the eyes of the heart. The proof of spiritual-mindedness is primarily love. We may not have any particular power or gift, endowment, and we certainly may not be a personal gift from heaven, an apostle or prophet, but if we have love, we can be the very factor that the Lord wants more than anything else, the complete factor. Love will make you a prophet, in effect, that is, a builder. It will make you a teacher, in effect, a builder. It will make us in effect anything that may be in the category of builders. Love builds. So you do not need to be called by this name or that, and do not need to have miraculous supernatural gifts. You can fulfil the purpose of them all by love. That is what Paul argues — by love.

I will leave it there now and as we move on I think we will become more and more practical.

Chapter 4 – The Spiritual Mind and Unity

Reading: 1 Cor. 1:10-13; 3:1 -9, 16-17; 12:12-27.

We are continuing these meditations concerning the building of the church of God. In our first evening we were occupied with the conception and origin of the church in the eternal counsels of God. On the next occasion we were concerned with the composition of the church, who composed the church, and then we began on the principles and life of the church and we were occupied with the great basic principle of everything the spiritual mind, as in Romans 8 and in 1 Corinthians 2. Now with that first letter to the Corinthians open before us, now we take up the matter of the spiritual mind in specific connections, the first of which is unity.

The importance of oneness

The Lord has placed immense importance upon unity or, to use His own word, oneness. He said by reason of this the world would know that the Father had sent Him (John 17:23), and that is no small matter. The evidence that God sent His Son into this world is found in the oneness of the Lord's people, and of course it is quite obvious that it is something that the world can take not of, therefore it must be manifested oneness.

Spiritual growth bound up with unity

And the matter of spiritual growth is bound up with this matter of unity. It works both ways. Unity is essential to growth. We shall never grow apart from unity or oneness. Spiritual growth will be arrested immediately the principle of oneness and unity is violated. Then evidence is found in the first letter to the Corinthians and perhaps in our own experience it is a fact. No matter what we may say about it, we do not advance spiritually and develop in spiritual measure in separation, isolation, schism, or violated oneness or unity. It works also the other way. Spiritual growth leads to deeper unity, fuller oneness. If we are going on with the Lord, we are going on in ever-deepening fellowship with all the Lord's people. That is a fact stated and a test of our spiritual measure. The spiritual mind, of which we have been speaking, or spiritual-mindedness, is the basis of spiritual growth, and spiritual growth is the determining factor in all matters of life and conduct.

Take the matter of unity or oneness in itself. Our actual, practical and manifested oneness, will depend entirely upon our spiritual measure. The baby stage and state referred to by the apostle at the beginning of chapter 3 of this letter is characterised by 'I' and you can follow the 'I' with whatever you like. *I like, I do not like, I want, I do not want, I will have, I will not have, I am.* That is what Paul calls babyhood. When you grow up that goes, and from the *I* of the individual being in the ascendant, it is the *we* of the family. That is characteristic of growing up, so that spiritual growth is a determining factor in the matter of oneness. Oneness rests upon our growing up.

Again, that is a test. When you and I are found in a spirit that contradicts oneness, we are found out as to our spiritual measure, we are betrayed as to our spiritual growth. It is an expression of just how far, after all, we have grown up into Christ in all things who is the Head. *The problem of divisions is the problem of spiritual immaturity.* It is the problem of spiritual weakness, debility in the Body of Christ, ignorance. How can the problem of divisions be dealt with? In no other way than in an enlargement of spiritual life. That is the way to solve the problem of divisions. Whether the division is between two or between a company and other companies or another company or in the whole church, to solve that problem is not possible by any kind of organised union, any means or methods of trying to patch up the relationship and carry on. The only solution to that problem of divisions is a new spiritual position, an enlargement of the spiritual measure.

We are keeping to our textbook, the Word of God. It is perfectly clear here that that state of division in Corinth was being assailed by the apostle along this very line of spiritual growth. 'Grow up' — that is his answer to it all — 'Grow up; you are babes, I have to treat you as babes, feed you as babes, because this is the situation; to get out of your divisions, your contentions and your jealousies, I say, grow up — that is all; they will go with spiritual growth.'

A limited apprehension of Christ is the cause of divisions

If that is true, then it means that all this matter of divisions is included in a limited apprehension of Christ. It amounts to a limited apprehension of Christ. It really means failure to apprehend the true nature of Christianity, and a failure to have a life in the Spirit. Put that positively — a true and adequate apprehension of Christ and of the real nature of Christianity and a real life in the Spirit will drive out the spirit of schism and division and will leave no place for it. Therefore it is tremendously impressive that in this first letter to the Corinthians the apostle uses the name of Christ no fewer than forty-five times, and fifteen of the forty-five times are in chapter 1, showing exactly the basis upon which he is approaching the problem at Corinth. "*I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ*", so Christ, Christ, Christ, is the continual emphasis against this situation. It is also very impressive that in the letter to the Corinthians there occur a third of all the references to Christ in the letters of Paul, probably in the New Testament.

You see the significance and implication of that. We have just said that this whole matter of spiritual oneness which is basic to the troubles or which is symptomatic of the spiritual state in Corinth is due to failure to adequately apprehend Christ, and Paul challenges — 'Is Christ divided? You have not apprehended Christ if you are divided. Were you baptized into the name of Paul? — meaning, of course, you were baptised into the name of Christ, but you do not know what you were baptised into; you have not grasped the very significance of your baptism'. The very foundation of the spiritual life, the beginnings of Christianity, is involved in this question of divisions. So that, in the first place, Christ is brought into view for apprehension, which apprehension will deal with the troubles.

Pentecost a baptism into oneness

Then remember that Pentecost was a baptism into oneness because it was a baptism into Christ. Here it is in 1 Corinthians 1: "*Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized into the name of Paul?*" While of course the baptism here is water baptism, Pentecost was a baptism with the Holy Spirit. It was baptism into Christ, and the immediate manifestation of its value and meaning was their oneness. There is a great deal more significance in the little statement by Luke — "*Peter, standing up with the eleven*" (Acts 2:14) — we have recognised. Those eleven were all at sixes and sevens among themselves in the old days. They were always contending for first place. Jealousies and rivalries were rife among them, they were always eyeing one another with a view to getting the advantage over one another somehow. "*Peter, standing up with the eleven*". Now, there is a spontaneous movement of oneness, all the personal divisions and the grounds of personal division have gone. There is no more of that. When Peter stands up, others do not hold back, criticising his sermon, making a difficult atmosphere for him in which to preach, because, well, he is a bit too much to the fore. They all stood up together and Peter did the speaking in the first place. At any rate, the address is Peter's. They stood up together. It was just a spontaneous thing, unpremeditated, I think. Spontaneously they rose up together. It was the outworking of something that had happened inside by the Holy Spirit.

The fellowship of the Spirit

And then it says of those who were converted, that they continued in fellowship (Acts 2:42) — the great Greek word that runs through the New Testament which in itself is one of the richest, that word fellowship, and it is what is called the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (Phil. 2:1). It is the church drawn into oneness by its common reception, possession and Lordship of the Holy Spirit and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. *"They continued steadfastly in ... fellowship."* Why? Because they had been baptised into Christ, and the Holy Spirit was the Spirit of oneness. See that new oneness. Not long before they had been scattered abroad and every one of them broken to fragments, all over the place. Now they are together. What has brought them together? Why are they here like this? Well, it is this baptism into Christ by what we have read. *"There is one body, and one spirit"* (Eph. 4:4). *"In one Spirit were we all baptized into one body"* (1 Cor. 12:13).

The Lordship of the Spirit

But it did not end there. We pass up to Caesarea and you remember Acts 10 — Peter on the housetop, his vision, the sheet let down and a voice commanding him to eat. *"Rise, Peter; kill and eat"*, and there at once arose the issue of schism, disunity and division. *"Not so, Lord"*; the whole question of division between Jew and Gentile. The Lord won the initial battle and got Peter on his way to Caesarea to the house of Cornelius, and then he came in and things were taken in hand by the Holy Spirit. That is the point, the Holy Spirit took things in hand there in the house of Cornelius, right out of everyone else's hand, and brought Jew and Gentile together, and Peter had to say, *"I perceive that God is no respecter of persons"*. And then he was 'called over the coals', as we say, at Jerusalem, for what he had done. You know his report. *"Who was I, that I could withstand God?" "The Holy Spirit fell on them, even as on us at the beginning ... If then God gave unto them the like gift as he did also unto us, when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I, that I could withstand God?"* (Acts 11:15-17). *"On them — as on us"*, and the barriers crashed. It was a triumph of the Spirit on this very principle of oneness, and the church was moving forward, that is the point, it was going on. You can easily imagine what would have happened if Peter had stuck his heels in and said, 'No, I never will go into a Gentile's houses and supported himself by Scripture. He could well have supported his position by Scripture, the Old Testament, on things clean and unclean, unclean things forbidden. The Holy Spirit makes us do a lot of things that we have settled we would never do when He gets hold of us, and we will never move an inch until we obey the Spirit and let go our personal individual position. Well, there was Peter's controversy and the Lord's victory, the action of the Holy Spirit and the consequent summing of it all up as an issue of unity.

And we can follow that still further down through the centuries, for with every visitation of the Holy Spirit, the basic oneness of the true people of God has always been brought into manifestation. You see, when the Spirit visits, what are called revivals or visitations of God through the centuries, all the labels are forgotten, all the divisions are sunk, the tide of the Spirit has risen and all those subterranean rocks which make separate channels are covered over. They may still be there, and if the tide recedes back you come onto the old ground of divisions again, but when the Spirit is in the ascendant all these things are submerged; they are out of sight, they do not prevail. It is always like that.

If that was so at Pentecost and at Caesarea, if that has been so repeatedly in the history of divine visitations, is that to be regarded as the normal or the abnormal? Surely it is the normal for the Holy Spirit to be Lord in the church. That precipitates a very big question. We must be very subnormal seeing how things are with the church today; the spiritual tide must be very low. We must be touching earth very badly. This is all by way of emphasising this fact, that oneness is, after all, a matter of spiritual measure, and if oneness does not prevail, it is a proof that the spiritual measure is small, so that

divisions do betray this low level of spiritual life, this earthboundness which Paul calls carnality. And whenever it is like that, it is quite clear that man intrudes into the place of the Holy Spirit, men begin to be something in Christianity, human names, human reputations, human positions.

On both sides that works — Christians begin to make a lot of men, and men begin to make a lot of themselves. Men sport themselves in the things of God; they seek to serve their own interests and to realize their own ambitions in the church. Oh, what a horrible story there is of man, men with invisible labels on them, but you can read very clearly — “I am” set over against the absolute Lordship of Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Love the Spirit’s supreme manifestation

So Paul goes on to show that while gifts, either personal or as powers, are not necessarily the marks of spiritual measure, maturity or fulness, there is one thing which is the unmistakable mark, gifts or no gifts, of spiritual maturity. *“If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal”* (1 Cor. 13:1). Love is the Spirit’s supreme and inclusive manifestation, and what is love but unity? No, not ministry, that is not the supreme mark of the Holy Spirit; not gift — I am referring now to what Paul calls spiritual gifts, literally, *“Now concerning spiritual gifts ...”* (1 Cor. 12:1). No, not those, but love.

Does that not all amount to a spiritual mind, what you are minding, what the church is minding, the mentality of the church, the mentality of the Christian? It all comes back to that. Look again at chapter 1.

“Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, even them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, their Lord and ours. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus; that in everything ye were enriched in him, in all utterance and all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you; so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the revelation of our Lord. Jesus Christ; who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye be unrepugnant in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, through whom ye were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

Paul’s appeal on the ground of the Name

First, *“I beseech you”*, you of whom I have just spoken in these terms in these nine verses. I am not speaking to a lot of unsaved people who do not know the Lord Jesus as their Saviour. See who he is speaking to. *“Called into the fellowship of God’s Son”*. *“Sanctified in Christ Jesus”*. *“Coming behind in no spiritual gift”*. *“I beseech you”*. The word ‘beseech’ is a very strong word, stronger than our English word indicates. It is the outgoing of the heart imploring. Our English word ‘implore’ would be better. ‘I implore you’. Note — *“through the name of our Lord Jesus”*. *“With all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus”*, ‘I implore you ... through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!’ ‘I implore you through the name’. The Name is the matter involved, the Name is the issue, the Name is the concern. It is the Name that is affected by this state of things. He is saying, ‘I appeal to you in the interests of the Name, on the ground of the Name; I make the Name the vehicle, the channel, the trumpet through which I pass to you my heart longing and entreaty!’

And what is it? *"I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment."* What does he mean? That you just all agree to certain things, come to mental agreement, and have the same kind of judgment upon which by discussion you have decided? Not a bit. The mind and the judgment here is what he means in 1 Corinthians 2:16 — *"But we have the mind of Christ."* 'I beseech you to have the same mind, which is the mind of Christ; be of the same mind, of the same judgment; it is Christ's mind, Christ's judgment, about all these things that I am going to deal with; you have got to have Christ's mind on divisions, Christ's judgment on divisions, and Christ's mind and judgment upon all the other things that are going to be mentioned in this letter'. We come to oneness by having the mind of Christ or by being spiritually minded. *"We have the mind of Christ."* *"There is one Spirit."* The point is that the Holy Spirit is not multi-minded. He is not even two minds in contradiction, to say nothing of as many minds as there are divisions among Christians. He is one Spirit and one mind.

That, looked at humanly, presents an impossible situation. How are you ever going to get all Christendom as it is divided up to be of one mind? The Holy Spirit is sovereign — that can happen and will happen. There is no other way, but this is the way. *"That ye be perfected together in the same mind."*

Progress from a basic oneness to perfection

That introduces something else. *"Perfected together"*. You have to come back to John 17, the Lord's prayer. You know how much in that prayer was on this very matter — *"that they may be one"*. The first part of His prayer on that matter was: *"that they may be one"*. The tense of the verb there is that they may keep on being one. But then later in His prayer He prays, *"that they may be perfected into one"*. There is a basic oneness upon which progress has got to be made unto perfection. There is that basic oneness, but the goal in view is *"perfected into one"*. It is all in keeping with our point that spiritual progress shows itself in growing oneness. *"That they may be perfected"*. Now Paul says, 'That you may be perfected together in the same mind; you are in Christ, you are called into the fellowship of His Son, but now you have to be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment.' It is a progressive thing, a matter of spiritual growth.

A little while ago we referred to failure to apprehend Christ. Now you see that this whole matter is failure to stand on the foundation and to build on the foundation. They were not standing in the first place on their foundation. Paul speaks about the foundation. *"According to the grace of God which was given unto me, as a wise master-builder I laid a foundation; and another buildeth thereon. But let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon. For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ ... Know ye not that ye are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"* (1 Cor. 3:10-16). You corporately are a temple of God; the foundation is Christ. They are not standing on their foundation. If you are standing on Christ, you do not stand on Paul, or Apollos or Cephas; you stand on Christ. If you are building on your foundation, you are apprehending Christ increasingly. It is growing apprehension of Christ.

The apprehension of Christ the unifying factor

And before I close, I do want to get this in or get this out. This building on the foundation, this laying of the foundation and building thereon is a part of the unity section of this letter. The unity section runs from chapters 1 to 4. It is all about unity, oneness, and so in that very section Paul said, 'I laid a foundation, you build thereon; the foundation is Christ; you build, you build on Christ, and therefore the unifying factor is your apprehension of Christ and your still greater apprehension of Christ; you are seeing

Christ, the meaning of Christ, the significance of Christ, and as you see that by the spiritual mind and revelation of the Holy Spirit with which chapter 2 deals, you are seeing that the divisions and schisms have no place at all; if Christ governs, it just cannot be; you are building according to your foundation and your foundation is Christ.'

What does that mean? How does that work out? It is a matter of Christ as against all personal interests, to begin with. 'I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos!' It is what I like and choose and want and prefer. All personal interests go out when it is Christ. All personal considerations are set aside when it is Christ, "*we have the mind of Christ*", we are Christ-minded, and "*even Christ pleased not Himself ...*" (Rom. 15:3). It is Christ as against all sectional interests. Those sectional interests may be a circling around persons, ministers of Christ by whom ye believed. You begin to circle round persons, even though they be ministers of Christ who have been greatly used, a great blessing to you, to whom you owe much in the Lord. You begin to make up circles around ministers or ministries, and you are involved in this whole question of sectional interests, and it will not be long before Christ is lost behind that particular and peculiar interest. It is Christ as against things, institutions, missions, denominations, movements, a work of the Lord. These things have become of such account to many people as things in themselves that really Christ — though they never intended it to be so, though they would be shocked to have it said to be so, nevertheless Christ has taken a second place to the thing, and the proof of it is everywhere. If some people go from one church to another because in the "another" they find more of Christ, it is a charge of schism instead of — If they find more of the Lord, well, let them go; I have not anything to keep going, to uphold, to maintain, let them all go after Christ! But how often is that said? No — it is sheep-stealing. Forgive me being blunt, but we have to face facts in dealing with this matter of divisions. If we dropped those sectional interests, if they lost their place of primary concern for us keeping something going, maintaining the support of this, if all went and it were only Christ, you get rid of nine-tenths of the divisive factors. We become bound up with a movement, bound up with work, bound up with an institution, and that becomes our life interest, and let anybody touch that and they are divisive; let anybody leave that, it is schism. No question as to why. Oh, do you see that it is all a matter of an apprehension of Christ, the place of Christ? People become attached to Christian things, to a certain form of procedure, to a teaching, and the word 'church' itself is even attached to a country. Its country name may be taken to other countries, it is not native to that country it is still the name of something belonging to another country; bound up with that. It is not Christ.

What matters is the measure of Christ present in this world, nothing else, and everything has got to stand or fall by that judgment, everything has to be tested by that — its measure of Christ; not its size, its bulk, its human support, its name or anything else, but the measure of Christ. And this is a matter of the Body of Christ being here. He is Head in His own Person, not lost in identity in the Body, but so related to the Body that the Body is the expression of Christ. That is, the Body is intended to be the measure of Christ, the fulness of Him. It is a matter of the measure of Christ in this world; Christ risen, which means Christ triumphant, exalted and Christ in spiritual authority. You see what that means. That is Christ present in this world in life, death-vanquishing life — that is what matters. Christ risen, Christ present in this world as triumphant over all the inimical forces in this universe — that is what matters.

The whole issue is a matter of the authority of Christ being in this world, the established authority of Christ by His exaltation to the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, present in His Body. Where is the authority of the church, where is the life, where is the exaltation of Christ? Well, it is sadly lacking in the church here. That is the trouble, and everybody knows it. At the beginning it was not like that. The church was born in the power of His resurrection, filled with His death-conquering life, moving out on His mighty triumph, proclaiming His exaltation and wielding His authority, and the powers of evil said, 'We must stop it, and the only effectual way of stopping it is to divide those

Christians, divide their forces and break up their unity.' That is the picture. Oh, what a lot hangs upon not only basic oneness but progressive oneness in manifestation!

We could say a lot of other things, sharp things. It is so easy to charge seekers after greater spiritual fulness with divisiveness. Some go after greater spiritual fulness, and to do so they have to leave something that is stuck, limited and will not yield to the principles of Christ. Then, of course, that is schism. It is easy to charge those who are, after all, only seeking a greater measure of Christ with divisiveness, and after all it is only because they will not accept and cooperate with a divided system; they are after Christ. Slogans are cheap, superficial things. It is so easy to take a fragment of Scripture and make a slogan of it. "*By their fruits ye shall know them*" (Matt. 7:20). Cheap; unworthy of any spiritual intelligence. That could have been said to Christ Himself. 'You are a divider, you are a cause of schism.' "*I came to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law: and a man's foes shall be they of his own household*" (Matt. 10:36). And Judaism rose up and said, "*By His fruits ye shall know Him*", in effect — 'the cause of divisions in homes.' Do not misunderstand me. That is a wrong thing, but there is the effect of going after Christ which sometimes involves in this charge. Oh, Paul could have had this flung at him many times. "*By their fruits ye shall know them.*" See how he goes into every city and the effect of this man coming into the city is to split the synagogue, to divide the people of God! By their fruits ye shall know them — he must be wrong. Cheap, is it not? A little deeper investigation of that very passage would dismiss a great deal of that which those who use it think supports their use of it. No; I am not saying that divisions are right always, but I am saying that you can use a passage, a fragment, like that for anything, but you have got to look behind and say, 'Why are they using that slogan?' Is it after all a campaign of divisiveness or is it the spontaneous effect of going after the Lord? That decides.

I have said this, not because I think that you need to be hammered on the matter, but it is necessary for us to know where we are and know how to be able to meet the situation, for after all what I am saying is this — Christ is the cure for divisions. If only people would make it Christ and not Christian things! If only we would get away from our own ground, personal, sectional, anything else, and make it Christ, we would flow together. Spiritual mindedness is the basis of unity because it brings about that oneness which is basic to growth. "*In whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord*" (Eph. 2:21). Note the tense of the verbs. "*Ye are a temple of God.*" But, the whole Body "*fitly framed together groweth into a temple*". You have got to be what you are, grow up as what you are basically. In Christ we are one, but in our things and ourselves we are a thousand and one. It must be only Christ. That then is the key to our own growth. It becomes a personal matter. It is the key to the growth of the church, spiritual growth, and by this shall the world know that the Father sent the Son, and that is no small thing.

Chapter 5 – Principles of spiritual growth

"So also it is written, The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. Howbeit that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; then that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is of heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly (let us also bear the image of the heavenly. R.V.M.) (1 Cor. 15:45-49).

"And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing (a renewal) of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2).

"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 Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven ... But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art a stumbling-block unto me, for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men" (Matt. 16:16-17,23).

"For ye are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal, and do ye not walk after the manner of men? For when one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not men? (1 Cor. 3:3,4)

"... having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; that he might create in himself of the two one new man, so making peace; and might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross" (Eph. 2:15-16).

The standard of the Heavenly Man

We are concerned with the matter of growth and progress in the spiritual life, in our spiritual lives, and we are therefore seeking to discover and know the principles which govern our spiritual growth. Paul in this letter to the Corinthians is dealing with everything from the standpoint and by the standard of the heavenly man — Christ. We saw earlier how often he speaks of Christ at the beginning of the letter, and as the foundation of everything right on to the end. I do not think that Paul just sat down to write and then without any premeditation put down the next thing that came into his head. Paul had thought this whole thing out. Perhaps it would be truer to say that this whole thing had come to him by a tremendous revelation and that he was setting down the content of that revelation. The heart of the revelation and the sum of the revelation was Christ, the heavenly Man. He had known Him after the flesh; he knew Him so no more (2 Cor. 5:16). He had seen Him, Jesus of Nazareth, the Man, transfigured, glorified, and for him everything was governed by what he had come to understand the glorified Man meant.

It is important to recognise that and to keep that in mind whenever we come to anything in the Scriptures. We must be saved from looking at these things just as bits of teaching, aspects of truth, Christian regulations, ordinances and obligations. We must see behind them the heavenly Man. Unless we do, we just miss the whole point, and we fail of the essential power by which they are to become real and active and practical in the matter of experience. I would urge upon you to think about that continually and whenever you open your New Testament bring that to mind, that everything is governed by the heavenly Man. All things in our lives here — and there are numerous things as to our lives here mentioned in the Word of God — all things as to our lives here have got to be seen in the light of the heavenly Man, touched by Him. We shall proceed to see what that means to some extent in this meditation.

The Earthy Man the cause of spiritual weakness

What I was saying is that in this letter to the Corinthians, Paul is dealing with everything from the standpoint and standard of the heavenly Man. The cause of all the spiritual weakness in Corinth was the presence and activity of the earthy man, and all that was centered in the mindedness of the earthy man. We have seen Peter's crash from heaven to hell — "*My Father revealed it to you.*" "*Get behind me, Satan.*" From heaven to hell — and the cause was his earthy-mindedness. "*Things of men*", Jesus called them. "*Thou mindest ... the things of men*"; earth mindedness. You hardly recognise or identify the Corinthians in the terms of the introduction to the letter as you read on in the letter. You have to say, Are these the same people? What Paul has said about them as to their calling, as to their standing through divine grace is a glorious and wonderful thing, high and holy, sanctified in Christ Jesus, and then all the unsanctified life that follows. It corresponds to Peter's terrible descent from the heights of calling and of standing in Christ down to the depths of such carnality, fleshliness, grossness, that we are shocked as we read on in the letter, and Paul says the reason is the same. "Are ye not men?" Earth-mindedness — that is the trouble.

The need for transformation of the mind

It is only the reverse way of pressing what we have already been seeking to press — the indispensable, essential spiritual mind for spiritual growth; the revolution of mentality, or, shall I say, the translation of mind from earth to heaven. We are familiar with these words in Ephesians 4:13: "*Till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, into a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.*" But this word 'attain' is by mental transformation, for look just a few verses on to verse 17, speaking of their former condition — "*in the vanity of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God*". Attaining unto the full-grown man, therefore, is so clearly a matter of the transformation of the mind, that is, having the heavenly mind of the heavenly Man, attaining unto the full-grown man, or, to use other words of the apostle — "*Ye have put off the old man ... and have put on the new man*" (Col. 3:10-11), and that is why I gave you that which seems to be the most correct translation of the last clause in 1 Corinthians 15:49 — "*Let us also bear the image of the heavenly*"; not "we shall"; but "let us". The force of that, perhaps, is not immediately grasped.

You see, while the apostle is speaking in that chapter about resurrection, and especially about the resurrection of the body which lies in the future, he is saying that there is a seed which is to be clothed with a new body. "*To each seed a body of its own*" (1 Cor. 15:38), he says. Now we have had an earthy body or an earthy body of flesh and blood, and he says that that cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor. 15:50). But we have now in us another seed, the seed which is of God, and that has to have a body like itself, according to itself, in keeping with itself; it is a spirit or a spiritual seed. We are now spiritual people in the innermost truth of our being through new birth, heavenly birth, birth from above, and that new spiritual man, will be given a spiritual body and a heavenly body.

Now the force of the phrase — "*Let us bear the image of the heavenly*" means, "Let us be spiritual people and not earthy; let us be heavenly people and we will get a heavenly body." That is the argument, and that comes right into the whole course of this Corinthian letter, and the force of Paul's effort and teaching here is gathered up into a phrase like that — 'Let us be spiritual people, not carnal people; let us be heavenly people, not earthy people; let us in the deepest reality of our personality be born from above and live accordingly.' Well that, I think, is perfectly clear, that he is all the time speaking with the heavenly Man in full view, and saying, 'Now then, bring everything into the light of heaven and the heavenly Man', and so he goes on with many things.

National characteristics must come under Christ

First of all, heavenly conceptions and standards. Now, this first letter to the Corinthians contains a very large number of practical matters. We are not engaged upon an exposition of the letter to the Corinthians, therefore we are not going to deal with the full content of this letter. What we are engaged with are the principles of spiritual growth, so what we are looking for here in this letter are the principles of spiritual growth. I shall pass over quite a lot in seeking to bring out the principles which govern all the rest. If you get the principles, then you will be able to take them and see the whole of the content in the light of these principles.

As to heavenly conceptions and standards, the apostle first of all comes upon the matter of the fact of birth, upbringing and training. In 1 Corinthians 1:22 — *“Seeing that Jews ask for signs, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumbling block, and unto Gentiles foolishness; but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”* Here, you see, the matter of nationality is brought into view, and it is a matter of the effect of your national birth, upbringing and training, the effect of that upon yourself and upon other people.

What was the mentality of Jews as such? Well, their whole mentality was a matter of the externals of religion, the exact, particular, meticulous observation of the external details of religion; the whole mentality was bound up with that. With the Jews, righteousness was that. The sum of righteousness was this meticulous observation of the laws and regulations of the Mosaic economy. How vast that system had become! — and you were, according to their mentality, more or less righteous according to your observations of those regulations. Now the Lord Jesus comes along and says to those who are so carefully watching all the points of their religion, dotting all their i’s and crossing all their t’s, and says to His own in the centre of this Jewish encompassing, *“Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven”* (Matt. 5:20) — a tremendous statement, is it not? *“Except your righteousness shall exceed”* — really the word is ‘transcend’, go far above and beyond *“the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven”*. That was their mentality, therefore something had got to happen with them as Jews, because, you see, our mind is ourselves, we are our mind. Something had got to happen with their nationality, and for them a transformation of mind had got to take place with the result that they got a mentality which resulted in their judging everything from the inside and not from the outside. That is, that righteousness had got to be an internal thing, not an external thing, and that would require a tremendous upheaval, an entirely different mentality, and the transcendence or the exceeding is just that, your mentality as to righteousness within the life.

Well, leave that for a moment and pass to the Greeks, interchanging here the word Greeks with Gentiles. Again, it is something national. With the Greeks, the whole mentality was summed up in two words — wisdom and power. Their mentality was in the first place an intellectual thing, that is, everything was judged intellectually, the explanation of everything and the solution to everything was purely a matter of intellect. I am not going to talk about philosophy, but that was their great line, and that simply means knowledge, man’s knowledge, and by man’s knowledge solving all the problems of human existence and human destiny, all the problems of Deity and everything else. The intellect was the object of their worship. On the other hand, the matter of power, expertise, the mastery of life and of the world. They worshipped the superman, the man who had the power to bring everything into subjection unto himself; he was their God. Their mentality and constitution was worldly wisdom and power.

In both of these cases, Jew and Gentile, the root of everything was pride. That is obvious with the Jews. It is as obvious with the Greeks. Pride in religion — they loved to make

long prayers to be heard at the corner of the streets. They play-acted at the corner of streets to be seen of men, to be heard of men — display, ostentation, sheer arrogance. What a splendid creature I am! It is the peacock spreading his feathers at the corner of the street and strutting round. And the Greeks in their own way did the same thing. Their mentality was pride.

And Jews and Greeks in the church were viewing everything from that standpoint. These divisions at Corinth were the result of that mentality, when it was divisions over men — *"I am of Paul"* — putting man up and making a god of the man. Splendid man, he is better than all the rest. Or Apollos or Peter. Paul simply cuts the ground from under it and says, *"Who is Paul? Who is Apollos?"* Oh, he gets down to the root of this thing, this pride. *"Ye behold your calling, brethren"* — that is, you see who you are that God has called, what it is that God has called. *"Not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God chose the foolish things ... the weak things"*. We are things — that is all. We are not even called persons, we are not given the dignity of persons, we are just things. God has deliberately — for the word there means that God of deliberate choice had done that. Knowing what He is doing, deliberately considering this matter; He has chosen things with which to bring down the wise and the mighty, the things that are not. And Paul is saying, Get that mentality; before God, you are nothing, Jew or Greek in wisdom or in power, you are a thing, and when you get there, God can use you, do something with you, bring down the wise and mighty when you have got that mentality. You think that you know something and can do something; you think that you are well-informed and you have something, an intelligence; you think that you have strength and power; you are on the side of the Jews and the Greeks and God is not using them. When you come to the place where you are, in the sight of God, only a thing and no-thing at that — you cannot be much less — God has deliberately turned in your direction.

Now note — all this Jew and Greek, with all that they have and are in themselves, do not effect or count for anything with God. They both leave man just where he is — unchanged. The Jew with all his religious observance leaves man just the same, unchanged. The Greek with all his wisdom and power leaves men unchanged and the world none the better. That is the issue.

So Paul comes right in there. He says, *"We preach Christ crucified"* (1 Cor. 1:23). *"I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified"* (1 Cor. 2:2). *"We preach Christ crucified"*. What does that mean? It means the great fact that both Jew and Gentile are crucified as such. That is, your nationality is crucified with all its constitution. It is the death of the natural and earthy man. That is Christ crucified. The problem for wisdom is the changing of man and the world. The problem for power is that — the changing of man, Christ crucified, the wisdom, the power of God. That solves the problem of change, of the man, by putting him out and putting another in. The earthy goes out in the cross and the heavenly comes in. The problem is solved.

Now the principle. We must forget Jew and Gentile — the principle is of far greater and wider application. National characteristics have all to come under Christ. We should take account of our national constitution and characteristics, just as we should of our personal make-up. The old Greeks used to say a very wise thing — *"Man, know thyself"*, unfortunately they left it there, and there is not much hope along that line, but it is a beginning and a wise beginning. We ought to take account of our national make-up. If you were fulfilling an international ministry, going from nation to nation, you would find that this is a very real and acute matter. People in different nations are always seeking to judge Christians of another nation by their own national make-up and standards. We British have a superiority complex and it has been almost the ruin of the Eastern countries. We are a proud people, an independent people, and that can come right in the way of Christ. It will not be until British people become the servants of Indians and Chinese that they will win them for Christ. This terrible thing that is happening now in

Africa, in South Africa particularly, is the most violent and iniquitous contradiction of the New Testament, perhaps, that this world holds. I only take our own case by way of illustration. It is the principle. We must not bring that up and let it get in the way of Christ or overshadow Christ; that we judge from our own standpoint.

Paul uses an ironical or sarcastic remark about certain people who measure themselves by themselves (2 Cor. 10:12), and he, in applying that thing, says that they are measuring everybody else by themselves. He means they are the measure of everything. Let us be careful that what is of our nationality, our birth, our upbringing, our training, does not come in and get in the way of Christ, overshadow Christ. Make things difficult for Christ and that does happen.

I have said what is true about nationality has got to be true about personality. It would be a good thing if we would not stay there but take ourselves into a corner and find out what kind of person we are for our own sake. How am I made? What is my temperament, my make-up, my propensities and tendencies and weaknesses? Let me look at myself in the light of the heavenly Man. If we would judge ourselves, Paul says here, we should not be judged (1 Cor. 11:31). Now that is not to send you all looking for corners and living with yourself in a corner. But it is an important principle of spiritual growth to know how you can get in the way of Christ, both personally, in your own personal make-up, and nationally, get in the way of Christ. Is not that your trouble all the time? You and I are in the way of the Lord by what we are, and we will so constantly project ourselves into the picture, and we ought to have gone clean out in the cross of Christ. We have no longer any standing. It is the heavenly Man not the earthy man at all? Heavenly standards.

Heavenly behaviour

Now I want to go on to heavenly behaviour, but there is such a lot of it. Heavenly behaviour in this letter covers a lot of ground. We have to lump together a whole lot of matters in this Corinthian letter. Certainly we cannot deal with them all. Let us look at some of them broadly.

What governs here — let us say it again, in the matter of behaviour — is *"Let us bear the image of the heavenly"*, or, to quote the Lord's own words in giving principles for prayer — *"After this manner therefore pray ye: ... Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth"* (Matt. 6:10). It is a matter of *"as it is in heaven"*. Now let us, with this first Corinthian letter, project ourselves into heaven if we can, and ask if it is or if it will be done in this way there. Can you do that? Can you imagine yourself in heaven, and then take up this letter on all its points — is it done like this in heaven? Is this how people behave in heaven? When I get to heaven shall I do these things, shall I behave like this? Can I imagine that heaven is made up of what is in the first letter to the Corinthians? You see how utterly impossible it is to accept that, how foreign to a heavenly mentality all this is.

But what is the argument? Heaven is supposed to be here in the church now. You have got to bring heaven here and now in the church because the church is a heavenly thing. Well, look at everything, then, from *"as it is in heaven."* We have spent a message on divisions, the first four chapters of this letter. Will it be like that? Is it like that in heaven? Paul says that it is not. That is earthy, that is men, after the manner of men, not the heavenly Man and not the one new man, but the earthy man. Do you really think that going to heaven and becoming heavenly actually and truly is just the precipitation of a sudden moment? At some time we shall all be taken up to heaven, the church will go to heaven. Do you believe that this is wholly, solely a matter of the precipitation of a moment, or do you not believe that it will be just one final step in a journey that we have been taking all the time? *"As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly."* *"Let us bear the image of the heavenly"* — present active tense. Do you see the point? If we are heavenly-minded and divisions are earthy and they have no place in heaven, then

they ought not to be now where we are concerned. It is earthiness pure and simple. So Paul judges these things.

Suffering wrong rather than doing wrong

And he follows on with these many other details — earthly rights. 1 Corinthians 6:1-8: *"Dare any of you, having a matter against his neighbour, go to law before the unrighteous?"* We ought to read that whole section. Will you read those verses carefully, and do not think that they have no bearing on you because you are not contemplating a lawsuit against any believer. Is there not a principle here? Are we not after principles? This is the business life evidently of these Christians, because it says they were defrauding one another. It was their life in this world as businessmen, and sadly enough, believers defrauded believers in business transactions — terrible. You say, Inconceivable! If it was not up to date, it would be. There are plenty of lawsuits going on now between religious bodies and Christian firms. But, apart from that, what is the principle? — suffering wrong rather than doing wrong.

That has a very wide application. It is not just a matter of an irregular, unjust, unrighteous business transaction. The principle comes out applying to all the life here. That is an earthy, carnal principle, that is not in heaven, that sort of thing is not in heaven and never will be. If you adjust to heaven in all matters of relationships between Christians, you will suffer wrong. You will take the spoiling of your goods joyfully (Heb. 10:34) rather than do wrong, rather than sin against heaven. Oh, see the magnitude of the principle! Be like your heavenly Lord Jesus, the heavenly Man, Who, though He was equal with God, counted it not something to be grasped to be an equality with God, but emptied Himself, stood not for His rights and let them go. That is the heavenly Man. Are you standing for your rights, fighting for your rights? Admitted that they are your rights and that you have been defrauded and wronged, what are you going to do about it? Assert yourself, fight? No, the principle is — Suffer wrong rather than do wrong, be like your Lord. This is stature, oh, this is stature! It is easier said than done, but it is stature. We must be enlarged spiritually to be able to do this. Well, that is the whole issue, the whole point. The principle of spiritual growth is so often a matter of letting go your own rights and suffering wrong, suffering wrongfully.

Care for the weaker brother

Passing into 1 Corinthians 8 — liberty, expediency. Of course, the background here does not apply today, at least, it does not apply in this part of the world, in the West, at all. They were meeting together as Christians in gatherings in homes, and when there were a considerable number of them gathering, they had to find food for a meal. They went into the market to buy food, and the only food on sale was the carcasses of the sacrifices that had been offered to pagan deities and they bought it and brought it home for their Christian gatherings in the homes, and some people had very tender consciences. That has been offered to a false God, I cannot eat that! It raised a whole lot of issues, as you will see in other connections here. A wonderful principle emerges. You may have for yourself no quibble. You may be so emancipated from these regulations, earthly things, you may be where you call nothing that God has created unclean, but you have a weaker brother who has not got to your stature yet, who has not got to your spiritual position yet. What are you going to do? Ride roughshod over his tender conscience? Violate his sensibility? Offend his feeling about such things? The principle is, be governed by your weaker brother, take heed that you do not stumble your weaker brother.

It works out in so many directions. I once knew a Christian man who felt that he had got so far on in the spiritual life, free from the law, that he could have his glass of beer with his dinner, and he had it. He invited to his home a man who had a wonderful conversion, a most terrible drunkard, whose home was the most pathetic and tragic thing you could ever look upon in his unconverted days: his children in rags, shoeless, his wife

bedraggled and trying to find some way of keeping a bit of bread for the children, for this man spent every penny on drink. He had a wonderful conversion, was gloriously saved, and the drink went. He was invited by this Christian man to his home and beer was offered him. From this other man's supposed emancipation from law he offered the new convert a drink, and the whole work was undone. Back he went into degradation. No care for the weaker brother.

But this can apply in a thousand different ways, what we do. Oh, we may be free in ourselves to do a lot of things, we may not feel anything about it between ourselves and the Lord, but that is not the last word. Where we go, what we engage in, what we do, may be the most awful snare to a weak Christian and trip them up and they stumble and lose. There is a wide principle here. Paul says, "*All things are lawful, but not all things are expedient*" (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23); "*All things are lawful; but not all things build up*" (1 Cor. 10:23). "*All things are lawful for me ... but I will not be brought under the power of any*" (1 Cor.6:12), he says. You see the principle. We will follow that a little further later.

You see, it is a book of principles. Marriage relationships, unseemly behaviour, the matter of your dress, women covering their heads in the assembly of the Lord's people, men uncovering their heads, and I often think that that is where the point is. You may think very little nowadays of a woman coming into a meeting with her head uncovered, but what would you think if a man came in with a hat on and sat in a meeting? You would all look, scandalised. It is the same thing. But all these things are not just regulations, laws and so on. They contain heavenly principles. "*Because of the angels*". We will explain that another time. What I am trying to emphasise is this, that here, on all things, you have heavenly principles and the observation of the principle, or rather being heavenly or spiritually-minded goes to the heart of everything and clears up all the difficulties. You do not start from the outside. It is the spiritual mind that checks, arrests, regulates and orders. You know, you ought to know because the Holy Spirit is in you, that that is doubtful, that, although you might proceed on certain lines yourself, the Holy Spirit in you says, Be careful, there is a weaker brother — and you do not feel you can do things you would otherwise do. You do not just do them in your liberty. The Spirit says, Not this time, not today, not in this company. You are not the last word, a law to yourself. There are other interests. Spiritual-mindedness, that is the way of growth, and we will illustrate that further some other time. But do recognise that everything bears down upon this matter of having a heavenly mind, and if we have that we will grow. The heavenly mind will put everything else right, and we shall see the heavenly order and nature of things taking shape. "*There come in one unbelieving or unlearned ...*", they will not say, This is the law and the regulation, the system that obtains there and they are all slaves to it, but there is something beautiful, something heavenly, something living, it is the Lord! (1 Cor. 14:24,25), and instead of being a burden, a weight, a dread, it is a life, and it is a lift, and people learn, and this is given to understand that that is how it is done in heaven, but it proceeds from the inside. It is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus making free from the law of sin and death.

Chapter 6 – Some Practical Matters

We continue with this matter of building the church of God, or, in other words, that which relates to the spiritual growth of the Lord's people. Last week we broke off early in our consideration of some of the practical matters which are raised in this connection in the first letter to the Corinthians. We shall continue later with such matters.

Before we come to the particular points, may I say, by way of general observation again, that spiritual growth is inseparable from practical matters and that our spiritual maturity does rest upon our observation of many things of what might be called very earthly concern. We shall most certainly come to a standstill spiritually, if we do not retrogress (and that is most likely), if practical matters of our everyday life are disregarded. That is clearly what this first letter to the Corinthians contains, perhaps more than any other part of the Scriptures — a whole bunch of very practical matters. Some of them cannot be spoken of in public, but there they are, and being in the Scriptures they are to be taken note of. If you find difficulty in grasping what the apostle is trying to say in some of these very personal and private concerns, I would advise you to read in the various versions which are to hand. Read any of the modern translations, and you will be greatly helped.

But the point is this. Here we have in this letter this whole group of very practical things and their particular relation to this one inclusive matter of spiritual growth. The apostle is most definitely and clearly saying, 'Now, you believers, who are in a state of arrested or retarded spiritual development, this and this are the causes; any one of these may account for this state, therefore any single practical matter of life here on this earth with the people of God can hold up firstly the life of the one concerned, and then, note, can interfere with the full development of the church, for this is a church letter. It is all summed up in 1 Corinthians 12 quite clearly as matters of the Body. And then it is a matter of the church's ministry. It is not only personal, it is not private, and it is not just a matter of a local company growing spiritually in itself. It is its ministry beyond itself, for this letter is simply packed full of the idea of ministry. We may note that at some other time, so that these things do become of very serious consequence.

I said in a previous message that this is not an exposition of the letter to the Corinthians, and therefore we are not dealing with the content in any analytical or microscopic way. My object is to take hold of principles, illustrate them by some of the matters mentioned, but to hold firmly to the idea that there is a principle involved in all these things. It is not just the thing itself. It is the principle that is involved and the principle is larger than its particular connection. The principle is a divine thought and a divine thought is an eternal thing and is a heavenly thing. It may be embodied in expression in that or some other particular thing, but the principle is much bigger than even the sum of things with which it is associated, and we have to get back behind the things to the principle, otherwise the things resolve themselves into a set of laws and regulations. You have to do this and must not do that. But if you get the principle behind them, you see why this should be and why that should not be, and you have something much more than being told you ought or ought not to behave in this way. It is the principles that we have to get hold of to give us an adequate motive for observing the thing with which the principle may be connected, or the various things. Having said that, then, and that must be kept in mind.

The matter of unity

Now, we have already spoken of divisions. Divisions are here clearly and positively said to be because of spiritual immaturity, meaning that spiritual growth on the part of the individual believer and on the part of the company and of the whole church, is along the

line of unity, spiritual oneness, and disunity, division, schism, is positively a mark of spiritual infancy. That is what the letter says. But, you see, there is a principle, and you have to get behind that and see that, on the one hand, the whole work of Satan from the foundation of the world right on, was to bring about a state of disruption, discord, division, conflict and jealousy and all those things in God's creation to spoil it and break it up into fragments. That is the work of Satan.

The undoing of the work of the devil — for the Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:3) — the work of Christ in His cross was to undo that, and the very sign of the cross is union. The very effect of the cross is to bring about a healing and oneness, therefore here in this letter — *"I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."* Christ crucified is set right against these divisions and says in effect, 'You know nothing about the cross if you still permit and foster divisions; you are countering the very cross itself. The vast principle of God sending His Son to deal with this whole work of Satan lies behind divisions between two or three in a company, or in the whole church. The cross of Christ is made of none effect where there are divisions. It is a mighty principle. Will you get over your differences? It is not just a little social affair; it is a mighty, universal, cosmic thing centred right in the cross of the Lord Jesus; a principle which goes beyond time and beyond any particular connection.

The matter of going to the world for judgment

We were in a previous message speaking about the church and the world, in business affairs and lawsuits between Christians. I do hope that you understood that I was talking about between *Christians*. Paul quite clearly says, *"What have I to do with judging them that are without?"* (1 Cor. 5:12). You are to judge between yourselves and not go to the world's courts against one another in the church. If you understood that, it is all right.

But here it is fighting for your own rights and worldly ground. What do you expect to get of spiritual growth along that line? — going on to worldly ground to get your own rights among yourselves as Christians. Almost unthinkable, and yet it is done. Believers even devouring one another. We spoke of that. We are not dealing with it in any fulness, but you can see the principle that is involved in that. Just think for a moment of using the world to settle differences between Christians. Again, it is a nullifying of the cross. *"Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world"* (Gal. 6:14). Therefore I cannot use a crucified world as an instrument for building the church. What a contradiction! You see the principle.

Passing on to 1 Corinthians, we have the apostle touching upon another matter. I shall touch upon it quite lightly and not deal with it in any fulness at all. These are all matters open to profitable discussion and consideration, but I just touch lightly upon things here to get at the point that practical matters do affect spiritual life.

The matter of secular employment

In this chapter, the apostle touches upon the matter of secular employment and positions in society. I use that word 'society' in its most general and broadest sense. I am not talking about class distinctions. I am simply using the word in this sense, that society means community life, life organized on the basis of people having to live and work together as different from merely isolated individual lives. The question has arisen about people becoming Christians, and when they are converted they are in a certain kind of work in this world — what we call secular employment. And then, when they are converted, they at once think they ought to get out of their employment to serve the Lord. That is the question that arises. They become restless in their daily work, wanting to be out, with a Bible, preaching all the time, being on what they call the Lord's service,

in the work of the Lord. That is here. The apostle touches on that and answers it in one word — *“Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called.”* In other words, you were in such a business capacity or position when you were converted and called by the Lord. ‘Called’ there means — you are called by His grace, called by the Lord to be His, and being called by the Lord into fellowship with Christ, you were in such a business. Now, do not begin to get unsettled and allow yourself to be unsettled by this idea of getting out of your business or work and serving the Lord. It is quite clear that you can become restless, unsettled, and your spiritual testimony can be weakened and suffer and your whole spiritual life come into a state of suspension, indefiniteness, because you are unsettled. You are not in this and you are not in that, you are somewhere mentally between the two, and you are not giving your full weight to your work and you are not really pulling your full weight in the Lord’s work because you have the idea that now that you are a Christian you ought to get out of what you call secular employment into spiritual employment. The apostle is very definite about it. *“Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called (converted)”*.

That is very practical. That does not mean that the Lord is not going to call out some, but there has to come a very definite second call. The first call is to Himself; the second call must be just as clear and as definite as the first call to leave everything else for His service. And, until you get a second call as clear as your conversion, abide in the calling wherein you were converted, and do not allow your spiritual life and testimony to be weakened and limited by restlessness, by being indefinite, by all the time wanting to get out of that into something else. That is very simple, but it goes to the root of a good deal of trouble. The apostle is saying, ‘Shine where you are and do it thoroughly just where you are’. *“Wherein you were called”* — give yourself wholly to the interests of the Lord there, be the Lord’s servant there, be the Lord’s minister there. And I think we can take it, although it is not said here, that you will never get the second call until you have done that. It is a great mistake to jump out of that realm before you have proved yourself in it. Well, that is practical.

But then the apostle applies it. He said, *“Wast thou called being a bondservant?”* ‘Were you called being a free man? If you were called, that is, if you were converted as a servant, do not think that because you have become a Christian, service is menial, is wrong, is not the sort of thing you ought to be in. Do not think that and want to get out of that kind of service. You call it menial, call it what you like — bond-slaves is the word here. Some of these converted slaves of the Greek and Roman social systems were evidently beginning to feel that now they Christians, they ought to be not slaves, but something better; they ought to get out of that, to be free or even to be masters. The apostle says, not a bit of it! Are you called being a bond-slave? Seek not to be free. If, of course, freedom comes your way, he adds, then take it, but do not get this complex, that because you are a Christian that kind of servile work is beneath you and is something that you have to get out of. Were you called, converted, being a free man? Well, use it for the Lord, the apostle says.

You see, we are getting at a principle. You must have a right view of these things — that is what the apostle says. The point is that the Lord’s interests must come before and above our own. We must not begin to think for a moment of our own interests, how much nicer it would be if we were in a different position, if we were not in the thing that we are in, how much more blessing and that sort of thing; now we are Christians and begin to use our very Christian life to serve our own likes and dislikes, getting a false idea of things. That will not do. The Lord’s interests must come before our own and be predominant in every matter. Now, then, you bond-slaves, why do you want to be free? Is the motive that you really could count more for the Lord if you were free? — and that is a question. There are those referred to as saints of Caesar’s household (Phil. 4:22) who must have been slaves. They must have been servants, those led to the Lord by the apostle in his imprisonment. He was in touch with the servants of the house of Caesar and it led them to the Lord, and evidently they were bearing a real testimony, doing a

real work as slaves, putting the Lord's interests to the fore and evidently they had concluded that they could best serve the Lord where they were in that capacity. At any rate, the Lord was going to be served to the utmost there. If the Lord made a way for them to change their position, well and good, but meanwhile His interests were going to predominate. That is the principle the apostle is getting at in this — the Lord's interests, not your ideas, but really how the Lord can best be served and where.

We pass on to two other matters, and yet we ought not to regard any of them as more important than the others, but there are two matters of very real seriousness which arise now from this point onward — the Lord's Table and marriage relationships.

The matter of the Lord's Table

Chapters 10 and 11, you note, deal with the Lord's Table. As to the actual situation, it is good that we have nothing today comparable to this, but principle again goes beyond any time or any particular involvement of the principle. Of course, what was here was this. At the beginning of the church's life, they used to gather together in homes for what was called the Love-feast, the Agape, and believers in any locality came together as Christians and they had a feast. At the end of the feast, they paused and turned the whole thing into a sacrament to remember the Lord's death. Now what had happened at Corinth was that they made this feast into an occasion of indulgence. Paul says, 'Have you not got homes in which you can eat and drink to excess, and then you pass immediately, in that state of drunken gluttony to observe the Lord's Table? You go straight on with hardly a break, and the Lord's Table becomes involved in that.' Thank God, we have nothing comparable to that. But again — principle. And so he says, "*I praise you not.*" His rebukes are very strong about this, but that leads him right into this whole matter of the nature of the Lord's Table and the Lord a Body, and he introduces his words about the Lord's Table and the Lord's Body with again this supremely governing factor.

"For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered onto you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took bread", and so on, you know the rest. What is this? A common thought is coming up in this letter again and again. "*As it is in heaven*"; "*as is the heavenly*" — the government of the heavenly conception. "*I received of the Lord*". This has not come along a parallel line of earth, even though it is from apostles. Where I am concerned, this has not come from men, it is not a tradition, it is not a part of the ecclesiastical order. I have received it personally and directly from the Lord Himself. I have given it to you as a direct heavenly revelation, I am not passing on something second-hand, this is straight from heaven to me and through me to you. It is heaven's government! What has to be recognised in this matter of the Lord's Table is the heavenly order. "*Let us bear the image of the heavenly*". "*As it is in heaven*". If the freshness of that were to light upon us every time we gather at the Lord's Table, it would entirely eliminate and rule out custom and habit and week by week procedure. It would be a touch of heaven every time, and that is what it has got to be. The heavenly had gone out at Corinth, and the apostle seeks to bring in the heavenly again and lift this whole thing from the earth right up, and that covers it all.

The Lord's Table is a heavenly thing, a thing under an open heaven. Heaven is involved, heaven is in it, and when you come to the Lord's Table you ought to touch heaven. It ought to be to you in the freshness of a new revelation.

There is an appeal of that principle to us. We cannot say much about it now, but let us be very careful about forming the Lord's Table and what is associated with it into a custom, a habit, a form, a repetition — that is how it is done here, dropping into some set thing here on this earth. Oh, let us be truly exercised that every time, no matter how often, we come to the Lord Table there is a heavenly freshness about it, that it is really under an

open heaven. It should be and it can be, that is what it is intended to be — governed by a heavenly revelation.

And then governed by its true meaning. Oh, how seriously and grievously they had lost the true meaning of this! What is the true meaning?

The Lord's Table is commemoration, communion, communication and covenant

1) First of all, it is a commemoration. "*Ye do remember the Lord's death*". How could they behave like this and remember the Lord's death? How could they remember the Lord's death and behave like this? This kind of earthy thing is no commemoration.

2) It is a communion. "Is it not a communion, a participation ...?" It is a communion. The force there — I think it is Conybeare who points it out — is our common participation, our mutual communion, in the body of Christ. It is collective, and this Table throws us together, it brings us into an expression of our real fellowship. It causes that what is true about us in spiritual oneness shall be expressed. It is the church as one Body speaking and acting here, not so many people gathered together doing this thing. It is a communion with our Lord, but that is all in our Lord.

3) And then it is a communication, for, while we have no place for transubstantiation, that is, that the bread and wine are literally changed into the body and blood of the Lord — that is heresy — there is a communication. It is a ministration of Christ, it should be that — not a performance, a rite, a ceremony, an ordinance, something that we do. It ought to be a communication of Christ, it should be a ministration of Christ, we ought to receive something through this. We ought to go away feeling that we have gained something of the Lord by this. It is a communication.

4) And then it is a covenant. "*This cup is the new covenant in my blood*" (Luke 22:20); (1 Cor. 11:25). Much could be said about that. It is a covenant which God has made with us in the blood of His Son to accomplish some glorious end. He has committed Himself, written in blood, to have a glorious church, to reach His intended and designed end, and we in this Lord's Table stand into the covenant and say we are in line with God's purpose, God's end, we are in the covenant, the new covenant. I cannot say more about the nature of the new covenant.

The true nature of the Lord's Table is that — commemoration, communion, communication, covenant. In the light of that, the apostle says, "*Let a man examine himself.*"

And now he heads this right up. This is where the principle comes in. It is startling; it can be devastating, for he says that this Lord's Table in its right or its wrong observance, is nothing less than a matter of life or death. "*For this cause many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep (die)*" — not discerning the Lord's Body, not lifting this thing off the earthly, not putting it in its right heavenly place and recognising its right heavenly meaning. Life and death related to the Lord's Body. Now that does not mean that all sickness is due to violation of this or any other principle, but it does say distinctly that some sickness is and some deaths are due to this; people need not have died. They have died because they have violated heavenly principles as bound up with the Body of Christ. Very serious, is it not? I believe if we were in the good of the meaning of the Body of Christ more fully, there would be much more life. I do not mean that we should not have illnesses, I do not mean that people would stop dying. But I believe there is a measure of life for the Lord's people bound up with a true fellowship in the Body of Christ which many are not knowing because they are not discerning the Lord's Body. Whether the principle is applied to Corinthian conditions or at any other time in any other way, to any other conditions, the principle is the same, that a right relatedness to Christ in His

Body is a way of life, and failure in that is a way of weakness, a way of loss and a way of death.

The matter of the marriage relationship

Having said that, I want to pass on to this next matter in 1 Corinthians 11. *"But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman praying or prophesying with her head unveiled dishonoureth her head; for it is one and the same thing as if she were shaven. For if a woman is not veiled, let her also be shorn; but if it is a shame to a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be veiled. For a man indeed ought not to have his head veiled, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man: for this cause ought the woman to have a sign of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, neither is the woman without the man, nor the man without the woman, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, so is the man also by the woman; but all things are of God. Judge ye in yourselves; is it seemly that a woman pray unto God unveiled? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a dishonour to him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given her for a covering. But if any man seemeth to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God"* (1 Cor. 11:3-16).

There is a lot of difficulty in that, and, as I have said, I am not going to try to deal with more than the principles. Marriage and behaviour — those two things are always linked together always in the Scripture, and the link which joins them is the word. 'head'. Look at this threefold statement. *"The head of every man is Christ."* Do you agree that the Scripture says that? Of course you women do. Do you women believe this next statement of the Scripture? — *"the head of the woman is the man"*. That is in the Scripture. Of course you believe the third statement — *"The head of Christ is God"*. But that is not as simple as it sounds, because God and Christ are equal in Deity, and Christ has said, *"I and the Father are one"* (John 10:30), and He put Himself on the same level as the Father. In Deity they are equal, but this is the point — in manifestation for purpose Christ is subject to God. There was a great purpose in view, a great purpose of God to be served. God had a purpose. That purpose was interfered with, but that purpose must be realised and someone must serve God to realise it. Therefore He became subject to God in relation to purpose, and it is in that sense God manifest in the flesh, in manifestation for divine purpose, Christ is subject to God; that is, God has the place of authority, for the word 'head' simply means government. Do you accept that? Is the head of our physical bodies the government? You know what a poor creature you are if it is not. You have only got to use a common phrase — 'Lose your head' — metaphorically speaking, and we know what that means. Head means government. Therefore Christ placed Himself right under the government of God, referred everything to the Father, deferred to the Father in everything, made the Father's will the governing principle of His life, and in that way was subject to God. And the head of Christ is God for God's purpose, and in the realm of God manifest for purpose.

See where that leads us. What was the nature of that relationship between the Father and the Son, the Son and the Father? — God, as the head of Christ? Well, firstly, it was fellowship. The relationship of the Son to the Father was fellowship. Oh, see the fellowship between them, marvellous fellowship! *"The Father loveth the Son"* (John 3:35). The Lord Jesus said, *"I love the Father"* (John 14:31). Get the idea of headship governed by the idea of fellowship. Headship here in the divine realm is not crushing despotism; it is fellowship.

Secondly, it is mutual activity. "*My Father worked even until now, and I work*" (John 5:17). "*The Father ... hath given all things into his hand*" (John 3:35). It is God and the Son working together. The Son, though subject, yet working together with the Father.

And thirdly, mutual respect and honour. "*My Father ... glorifieth (honoureth, A.V.) Me*" (John 8:54). "*I honour my Father*" (John 8:49). Mutual honour, mutual respect, mutual recognition; not oppression.

Now, then, that is all carried here into this matter of men and women and the marriage relationship. "*The head of every man is Christ*", the government of every man is Christ. "*The head of the woman is the man*", the government of the woman is the man, on exactly the same terms and basis as that which exists between the Son and the Father — for fellowship, for mutual activity, for mutual respect and honour, in relation to divine purpose as expressing God in manifestation. "*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it*" (Eph. 5:25). "*Wives, be in subjection unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord ... as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their husbands in everything*" (Eph. 5:22,24). That is the Scripture.

Now let us get behind all this, right back to the original conception. The statement in the beginning is "*Male and female created he them ... and called their name Adam*" (Gen. 5:2). "Their" — plural; "Adam" — singular; not, the two Adams, not Mr. and Mrs. Adam, not the Adams' couple; but Adam one, one Adam. Even as Christ and the church. "*The two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church*" (Eph.5:31-32). One of the old Puritans, commenting on that passage of the creation of male and female and the formation of the woman from the man, said, 'The Lord did not take her from his head and so make her superior; He did not take her from his feet and so make her inferior; He took her from his side for cooperation and companionship.' I could not put it better than that. As Christ and the church, so the man and the woman.

But note, the original conception was an order related to ultimate fulness. That was bound upon the first marriage relationship. It was an order of things here expressive of an order of things there in heaven with a view to fulness, that they were together to come to fulness, and God was to reach His fulness of intention and design through them on the basis of an order, and that order involved this law of Christ's subjection to the Father, as manifested in the woman's subjection to the man. It is related to fulness. We hate that word 'subjection', but have I not taken pains to point out that Christ did not hate that idea with the Father; He was subject to the Father. "*The head of Christ is God*". He found that that was the way of fulness, He found that that was the way to the realisation of the eternal counsels, that was the way to reach the end of the very creation itself, and that is no degrading, objectionable thing. Surely, if that is the way, if that is the end, it is something to be embraced. It is a reflection of what is in heaven, and it is brought here, the church subject to Christ and thus subject to God. It is mystery all, so I do not understand everything here.

We are on very delicate ground when we speak about "*the man is the image of God*". The apostle uses that here to say — and I do not think you will be able to really dispute this — that what the apostle is saying is that the woman, in recognising this headship of the man, is recognising the headship of God. That is how she recognises the headship of God. Of course, this is in the church, among Christians. The apostle here in this letter prescribes for other situations where one member of the party is not the Lord's. That is another subject altogether, what is to happen then. But here, where both are the Lord's, this is the divine order. And let me say this to young people who have not yet entered into this relationship, you young men, do not marry unless you are prepared to empty yourself as Christ emptied Himself, "*even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it*". Do not marry for your own ends, for your own gratification, to serve your own interests. Do not marry unless you mean to constantly serve the interests of others and

the other and forget yourself. Again and again through life that will be the issue. Am I going to stick out for my own interests, my own rights, my own pleasure? Can I let go myself? Provided principle is not involved, provided obedience to the Lord is not involved, this is a question of human relationship on the simple basis of denying ourselves.

Let me go over. Young women, do not marry unless the one whom you are going to marry is one to whom you can look up and whose authority you can accept. Do not marry on any other ground. Do not marry for the sake of being married, do not run at the first chance you get rather than be unmarried, or for any other reason — you must, if you are going to marry, marry the man whom you can accept as your head in the Lord. You can see the point of the unequal yoke. Well, that is not just my advice to you; that is my warning to you.

The matter of head covering

We ought to go on now with this question of head covering, I do not think we can. It is carried right through, you notice, this head covering. But note — *“Every man praying or prophesying having his head covered, dishonoureth his head.”* Who is his head? — Christ. *“Christ who is his head, for the head of every man is Christ”.* He dishonoureth Christ. *“Every woman praying or prophesying with her head unveiled dishonoureth her head.”* Who? — the man. How does she dishonour the head?

Firstly, here is one of these very painful and unpleasant things that lie behind this letter which we would rather not mention but which have to be mentioned in order to get the point. You see, in Corinth, the common prostitute of the street was recognised by her either shaven or unveiled head. That was how you knew them in Corinth, but it was so blatant, so open, it was a common traffic and a recognized and accepted feature of society in Corinth; there was no shame about it. If a prostitute was sought, she was found quite easily, recognised by her uncovered head, shaven or unveiled. Every woman coming into the church carelessly unveiled dishonoured the man, her head, most certainly. Does that honour her husband, is that glory to her husband for her to behave like those out there in the street? We have nothing like that actually today, but it is the principle.

Now the apostle carries it right into the innermost sanctuary. He speaks about praying and prophesying. I am not going to stay to point out that Paul would never have spoken about a woman praying and prophesying — for this is a church matter, there is no doubt about that — if they were not allowed to do so. Whatever he may have said elsewhere, you must settle it that the Scripture does not contradict itself, there is an explanation. So here it is recognised and provided for — women praying and prophesying as men do. Praying is addressing God on behalf of men. Prophesying is addressing man on behalf of God, and Paul says you cannot come into this dual function in the very presence of God without recognising the divine order. If you do, your praying gets nowhere and prophesying means nothing. Indeed, you are exposed to infinite perils — *“because of the angels”*, strange introduction of the heavenly order watching whether heavenly order is going on in the heavenly church, whether the heavenly order is repeating itself down here, taking account; angels are watching these principles, how they are working out. There is a lot more in it than that. *“For this cause ought the woman to have a sign of authority on her head, because of the angels”*, or, literally, *“authority over her head”*; that is, she should be covered by headship, made safe by being under cover, and the whole force of the thing is that if you violate these heavenly principles in earthly representation, you uncover yourself and really do become exposed to deceiving, destructive spirits, to spirits of evil.

And all this, difficult as it is to grasp in all its details and depths, lies clearly on the face of things. All this says, You will never grow yourself if you take a position contrary to this. The church will never grow if this sort of thing is going on in it, and the church will

never fulfil its ministry to the world unless it is ordered according to heaven in these matters. It is the principle of growth and testimony and ministry. So do not go away thinking for a moment that there is the setting up of some legal system of governments and dominations and all that. No. We are saying: Here is a heavenly order revealed, heaven is kept closely in touch with all this, and the whole Corinthian position and state of things is the most forceful argument that these things which were there were at the root of their spiritual weakness and immaturity and failure. On the contrary, put these things right — that is what the apostle said, put them right and you will be released into spiritual enlargement.

The Lord give us understanding.

Chapter 7 – The Ministry of Means

Reading: 1 Cor. 15:54 –16:2; 2 Cor. 8:1-24; 9:1-15.

“Now concerning the collection”

But I just want to say this preliminary word that in all that will be said, there is not a slightest tinge of reproach, for I know not of any cause for that. Neither is there the slightest hint of request. It is not an asking for anything in the way of gifts. Then I realise that it could easily be that what is said, might or could cause hurt in some directions, hurt in this sense that some might be acutely conscious of the strain upon them and their resources, and might feel a certain weight of charge or condemnation arising. But I want you to realise that the object of speaking on this matter is to helpfulness and blessing. For it is truly a way of blessing, and what I must trust for, whatever may be the reactions and the feelings in the meantime, what I must trust for is that subsequently you will be able to express real gratitude for this word having been spoken. Will you try therefore to look at it in that light?

Now we have read these passages, and they in the main fall into two parts or aspects of the matter of the ministry of means. Firstly, the spiritual relatedness and then secondly the practical method.

The ministry of means a spiritual matter

As to the spiritual relatedness, it is quite impossible to read 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 and add in those last verses of 1 Corinthians chapter 15 with the first two verses of chapter 16, without seeing that the matter of the ministry of means has a spiritual setting, becomes really a spiritual matter. There was no chapter arrangement in Paul's letters. He did not say, 'This is chapter 15. Now we will start chapter 16! He ran straight on, and it was not in the nature of an anticlimax from that glorious presentation of the resurrected and glorified body. It was not an anticlimax to suddenly say, "Now concerning the collection" as though he had dropped in an air pocket from sublime heights to mundane affairs. It is all of a piece. What he takes up or that with which he follows on closely relates to the fulness of the spiritual life of the Lord's people and of the church which will find its consummation in glory.

But let us look at and examine the spiritual relatedness of this matter as it is here set forth.

The motive for giving

Firstly, we are given the motive. We must have a motive. There must be a motive and an adequate motive for our giving to the Lord's interests and the Lord's work, and the motive is quite clear here. *"You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might become rich"* (2 Cor. 8:9). The whole thing is placed upon the motive of Christ's self-emptying. Paul more than once appeals to the self-emptying of Christ as a basis, principle and example of practical matters in the life of the church. And here he makes that appeal concerning this matter of our stewardship in gifts, in money, and thus says, in effect, over the whole thing, 'You must be moved in this matter by the same motive as moved the Lord Jesus', for right here in the heart of this thing he uses this word "for". *"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor"* — with an object — *"that ye through His poverty might become rich."* I think we need say very little more about that. It is lifted into a very high and great realm, a realm in which this spontaneous ejaculation comes from the apostle *"Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift"* (2 Cor. 9:15). That is your motive for giving — God's

giving and Christ's self-emptying for the pleasure of the Father. On that ground fulfil this ministry.

2. "This grace"

Then secondly it is called "this grace". You notice that in chapter 8 the word 'grace' occurs seven times. It might be as well to note it.

"We make known to you the grace of God which hath been given in the churches of Macedonia".

What follows is the ministry of the churches in Macedonia of temporal things in the work of God, and Paul says that was the grace of God.

"Beseeching us with much entreaty in regard of this grace" (2 Cor. 8:4).

"Insomuch that we exhorted Titus, that as he had made a beginning before, so he would also complete in you this grace also" ((2 Cor. 8:6).

"But as ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all earnestness, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also" (2 Cor. 8:7).

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ ..." (2 Cor. 8:9).

"But thanks be to God who putteth the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus" (2 Cor. 8:16).

"... who was also appointed by the churches to travel with us in the matter of this grace, which is ministered by us to the glory of the Lord" (2 Cor. 8:19).

In chapter 9 again we have the word three times.

"God is able to make all grace abound unto you" (2 Cor. 9:8).

"While they themselves also, with supplication on your behalf, long after you by reason of the exceeding grace of God in you ..." (2 Cor. 9:14).

"Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15).

That word 'thanks' is the same word in the Greek as 'grace'. The translators evidently saw some difficulty in putting "Grace be to God for his unspeakable gift, so they put 'thanks', but I think they took something away, they did not really give us anything. The word 'thanks' occurs twice where it ought to be 'grace'. The grace of God is His willing, free giving. We owe everything to the willing, free, lavish giving, of God, without any charge or demand. And so what is here recognized, acknowledged, declared, is the grace of God. 'Thanks be to God, grace, the giving, free giving, of God for His unspeakable gift.'

Well, you see, this grace is classed with faith, knowledge, utterance, earnestness and love. All those are features of a true Christian life. We would all agree that those things are really a part of our Christian life and our Christian growth — faith and knowledge and utterance, diligence or earnestness, and love. Paul just links with those things the grace of giving and makes this grace of giving a part of the Christian life. So when we think of the grace of God and when we use the word 'grace', let us remember that it is to beget grace in us, that is the same grace that we have received from God, His lavish, free, joyful giving.

3. The example of the Macedonians

And then the apostle goes on to the next to the example of the Macedonians.

"Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God which hath been given in the churches of Macedonia; how that in much proof of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For according to their power, I bear witness, yea and beyond their power, they gave of their own accord, beseeching us with much entreaty in regard of this grace and the fellowship in the ministering to the saints: and this, not as we had hoped, but first they gave their own selves to the Lord, and to us through the will of God" (2 Cor. 8:1-5).

Then in chapter 9 he refers to Macedonia again.

"For I know your readiness, of which I glory on your behalf to them of Macedonia, that Achaia hath been prepared for a year past; and your zeal hath stirred up very many of them. But I have sent the brethren, that our glorying on your behalf may not be made void in this respect even as I said, ye may be prepared; lest by any means, if there come with me any of Macedonia and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be put to shame in this confidence" (2 Cor. 9:2-4).

I cannot help smiling. I think there is a touch of humour about this, but we will not dwell upon that just now. The point is here that he takes the churches of Macedonia as an example, and what he says in pointing out the example and making them a basis for something in like manner, is that they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to the apostles and the churches in the will of God. It does not say they first gave themselves to the Lord and then their substance. They gave themselves to the Lord and they gave themselves to the churches and to the apostles, which means that a personal consecration carried everything else with it and that the giving was not something detached that they did apart from themselves. It was not just an act, making a contribution. They gave themselves and with themselves they gave everything, and the very spirit of it here, as you notice, is that in great affliction and much poverty they gave themselves, they gave everything. It was a laying of themselves upon the altar of sacrifice, because the whole thing here breathes sacrifice. Here are people not in affluence, people with plenty who could well afford to make a good contribution and not feel it, that after they had made their gift the bank balance was quite safe. Here — in much affliction and deep poverty. They felt it, it cost, it touched deeply, it was personal sacrifice. They went with their gift; they went in the gift. It was not taking up a collection in an objective way. It was, in their case, the going out of their very lives. *"They gave their own selves to the Lord, and to us through the will of God"*. Paul says, We were surprised; we had not expected that. We had expected a gift, but they gave themselves, something beyond our expectation; they altogether carried us beyond what we had perhaps laid down as the measure to be expected; they gave themselves to God and then to us in great trial of affliction and deep poverty; not a detached giving but a personal consecration!

4. Giving shows the inward spiritual measure

Then the apostle says that in this way there was an exhibiting of the spiritual and inward measure, that this giving, this ministry, showed the inward spiritual measure.

"He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Let each man do according as he hath purposed in his heart; not grudgingly, or of necessity" (2 Cor. 9:6-7).

You see, this is a heart matter, an inward life thing, and it discloses the spiritual measure; it manifests the state within. How spiritual this is then, and what a realm it is

lifted into when it has that effect, or when it represents that and discloses the measure of spiritual life.

5. The outworking of fellowship with Christ

Further, this is an outworking of fellowship with Christ. You notice how the apostle opened his first letter to the Corinthians.

"God is faithful, through whom ye were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (verse 9).

Now note, he is getting to the end of that letter, and he says,

"Wherefore my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

"Ye were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord"; "wherefore ... always abounding in the work of the Lord". Fellowship with Christ; the outworking of that fellowship with Christ. What is the outworking? Well, *"now concerning the collection"*. That follows right on. *"Always abounding in the work of the Lord"*. *"Now concerning the collection"*. *"Abounding in the work of the Lord"* and so he goes on in the second letter in the same strain. *"God is able to make all grace abound unto you; that ye, having always all sufficiency in everything, may abound unto every good work."* This is the work of the Lord, abounding in the work of the Lord, abounding by the abounding sufficiency and grace of God. It is the expression of your fellowship; the fellowship into which you were called, fellowship with His Son. It is an expression of that fellowship.

I think we have said enough to show that this is a very spiritual matter, has very big spiritual issues bound up with it. That is what I really want to stress and to lay down, that it is a spiritual matter; it is not a legal matter at all. It is a spiritual matter and it has a very great deal to do with our spiritual life. There is no doubt about it that if we are lax, careless or limited in this matter, our spiritual life is going to be the same. It says so here.

The Practical Method

1. Systematic and regular

Well, let us go over to the other side, the pattern that is given here. Paul says he gave a pattern to the churches in Galatia and passed it on to the Corinthians, and the pattern is quite simple as we break it up. *"Now concerning the collection ... Upon the first day of the week"* — that means that it has to be systematic and regular, not haphazard. *"On the first day of the week"*. The first day of the week is the day when the church meets for worship, and this is a part of the worship of the church, a part of the church's worship.

2. Individual and personal

"Each one" — it must therefore be individual and personal, each one has to make a personal exercise of this before the Lord. Need we comment much upon that? This must not be just regarded as something lost in the crowd. It is to be as though you and I stood alone before the Lord in this matter as individuals. It is a personal matter between us and the Lord and the Lord and us.

3. Proportionate

It is, thirdly, to be proportionate. *"As he may prosper"*. That means two things. There is to be a fresh consideration every week. We, I am afraid, may have got into the way of

regarding a certain amount as the weekly offering, and week by week, month by month, year by year, that has been the fixed gift week by week every time. Here it says — every week reconsider this matter in the light of how you have prospered through the week. It will be perfectly legitimate for you to say, 'I have not been prospered this week, things have dropped this week, and therefore my offering this week is not what I would like it to be and what it would be otherwise.' The point is that you have to take this matter week by week and give it due consideration. And it does mean that we have got to think about this thing. It is not to be done mechanically.

4. Prepared

I want, if possible, to be understood in what I am going to say, because I am very well aware that there could be a misapprehension. You see, offerings of old to the Lord were prepared beforehand by the offerer, considered, looked at, made ready for the worship of the Lord. I am not speaking now only of financial or monetary gifts — all the offerings — our worship. I do not want to stay with this because it is a little extra to our particular point, but it may help. Our worship on the Lord's Day ought to be a prepared worship, but where I can see the possibility of misapprehension is that you will begin to prepare some passages of Scripture to quote or some verses to recite or something like that prepared. It will become very mechanical. And yet it ought to be prepared. It ought not just to be something that suddenly comes into your head while someone else is worshipping that you never thought of before. We ought to be in a prepared state to worship and have something that is really livingly in our hearts between us and the Lord that we can offer. There is a very great deal that misses the mark because it is the time of worship and there is something we must offer. I want you to understand me in that matter. Please do not write out a sermon to give at the time of worship and have something mechanical, but do remember that there is a time before you come when you ought to be quietly before the Lord about this, you come prepared to worship and come with a prepared offering from the heart.

And so it is with all forms of worship, for this is a form of worship. On the first day of the week reconsider this matter. Do not just go and do the same as you did before and ever have done. Reconsider it; think about it again. The Lord wants us to really be taking this thing to heart and to mind. All that we do for Him must be like that. So on the first day of the week, each one — you see how particular it is, and how it calls for constant reconsideration week by week, "*as he may prosper*" is the word here.

5. From the heart

Then it must be from the heart, not of constraint, not legal. "*God loveth a cheerful giver.*" I know some of you are expecting me at once to tell you that that word 'cheerful' in the Greek is 'hilarious'. We should probably have found some difficulty if it had been so translated in our version, but there it is. It is quite clear in the Greek, it is "*God loveth an hilarious giver*". It is the spirit of the thing, what is glad, from the heart, a cheerful giver, if you like; not of constraint, not of compulsion, but spontaneously from the heart.

6. Thoughtful

Further, it is not to be impulsive or of caprice, but thoughtful. Willingness was here with the Corinthians. Paul repeats it. Willingness. Oh yes, there was a will, you were willing, there is no lack of willingness, but what about the doing? Oh, willing, yes, but no doing. I think that is where the humour comes in — if it is humour, at any rate so it strikes me. Paul has been talking about this willingness to them of Macedonia and simply working the Macedonians up by the example of the willingness of the Corinthians. Now, he says, do not let me down! Do not let them think I have been saying what is not true; do the thing you have professed such willingness to do! We must not be impulsive. Impulse can get to

the point of great willingness about it all, but being thoughtful and practical carries you beyond willingness.

7. The normal thing

Then one other thing. Here the apostle says as to the pattern that it is not to be on special occasions only, it has got to be there all the time. You notice how he is saying *"that no collections be made when I come"*. Get this all settled among yourselves, let it become a normal matter, not a special occasion when a special preacher or special interest is brought before you and then you take a special collection. That is wrong. There should be no special collections, no need for special collections. The whole spirit of this is that you are doing this right up to the limit all the time, and you cannot go beyond the limit. You do not need a great apostle to come along and by his powers of persuasion and exhortation and so on, wring it out of you. *"No collections ... when I come"*. Get this normally settled in my absence. The point is that the normal life of the church should be right up to the high water mark.

The result of this ministry

1. The blessing of the Lord

Well then, we come to the result of this kind of spirit, this grace, this ministry. First of all, there is a blessedness from the Lord resting upon it. There is no doubt about it that it brings the Lord's blessing. We see that these words about God being able to make all grace abound unto us that we may abound is connected with this matter. That is said when you have gone to the limit. When you have gone to the limit and you cannot do any more and you are faced with the real cost of what you are doing, then God comes in and makes all grace, that you have all-sufficiency, and this all-sufficiency is to be able to do more. But that comes next. The first thing is the blessedness. The Lord loves and God makes all grace to abound to people like this. He makes grace to abound. There is a real blessing attached to this spirit and this practical ministry. The blessing of the Lord is there. It will be like a field which the Lord hath blessed. In the Old Testament you know the tithes were the symbols, and the Lord blessed the field from which the tithe was given to Him. Do not think that the Old Testament tithe system comes over as a legal imposition upon us. You would very soon find yourself in trouble if you start trying to work the tithe business, because really the Old Testament demands upon the Israelites amounted to about three-tenths of all their income, not one-tenth. And even then the tithing was a testimony to the fact that not only the tithe or the tenth but the whole was the Lord's. It was their way of saying, 'All is the Lord's'. So we have to be careful about this tithe business. The Lord's blessing comes undoubtedly where there is this heart relationship to His interests to the point of sacrifice.

2. Enlarged ability

Then comes the enlarged ability. *"That ye, having ... all sufficiency ... may abound"*. Enlarged ability, enlarged capacity. We could tell many stories from our own and others' experiences in this matter. We have even known those who have tithed strictly their income, and have had a wonderful testimony of the blessing of God in prospering so that they were able to do more and more and still more. It is like that. We could tell some wonderful stories about that, and there is no doubt about it that a result is enlarged ability.

3. God takes responsibility

And then in the third place, God takes responsibility. When you have done this, God is able to make all grace to abound, and right throughout His Word in this connection, it is

made perfectly clear that if you seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, God will look after you. He will take care of your affairs if you take care of His.

4. The strengthening of fellowship

Then the apostle closes by saying two lovely things as the result of this spirit, this ministry, activity of this kind. Two things will happen. Many faces will be upturned to the Lord in thanksgiving. That is something to inspire praise and worship to the Lord. And the other thing seems a little more selfish, but it is good. 'They will long for you'. That does not mean they long for your gifts. They long for you. In their earnest prayer for you, they long for you. It is a way of strengthening spiritual fellowship and relatedness, bringing together in heart. You minister to my necessity, you relieve the strain, you have bound me with heart ties. That is quite all right, there is certainly nothing wrong about that. Thanks to God and thanks to God for those whom He used, in whom His grace was manifested in this way.

I had to say this, as I said at the beginning, not by constraint, not because of any complaint, not for a moment to try to put you right, but every company of the Lord's people ought to be instructed in this matter. There was a time when we all were brought face to face with this for the first time in a very definite way. We were faced with it, and we had to have a transaction with the Lord about it, and it became part of our spiritual life, and the Lord's blessing followed. That is true of the individual. It is true of the company as well. It is a way of spiritual prosperity; it is so linked with the spiritual life. And if what has been said does not touch you, for this reason that you are all right in this matter before the Lord, you are quite clear before the Lord and it does not really apply to you, everything is straight, that is all right. But it might just be that some have never been instructed in this matter, and therefore may be suffering spiritually and it may be that the work of the Lord is suffering. The Lord wants to do more, to enlarge, increase, extend. It may be that His time has come, is coming, for much more to be done, and which will need resources. I do not know. He may be speaking in connection with something that He has in view. Let us seek grace to regard this not as something off the line and something very much less heavenly than what we are used to. Let us ask the Lord to renew us in this matter. I think all of us will have to think again and review our situation and then be obedient to the Lord, give Him an opportunity for enlarging, for His thought is enlargement all the time. But you see, His ways of enlargement are very practical, and this is just one of the whole series in these letters, a whole series of things. The Lord is saying, Now then, this relates to spiritual growth, spiritual maturity — things we have mentioned before, and this one. "*Now concerning the collection*". Incidentally it is significant that Paul had said these things to the churches in Galatia and brought the same thing to Corinth. You know what happened at Galatia. You know that the letter to the Galatians is one of the strong letters of Paul about going on spiritually. The peril in Galatia was stopping and going back, retrogression spiritually, dropping down; what he called "*falling from grace*". So he had to speak about this matter to such people. And as for the Corinthians, well, there is some point in his closing his second letter with "*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit*". Grace. Going on includes all sorts of practical matters, and among them this one. The Lord give us this grace.

Chapter 8 – The Holy Spirit and the Building of the church

We are coming to the conclusion of this present course of meditations. You will remember that at the commencement we said something to the effect that what is in the letter to the Romans as the foundation letter of all spiritual doctrine and experience is taken up in later letters, and led out to its much fuller explanation and meaning.

This evening we are going to be occupied with the Holy Spirit in relation to the building of the church of God, and in what we have just said it is very clear that the first letter to the Corinthians leads out in considerable fulness what is mentioned in this connection in the letter to the Romans. We shall note that transition and development as we now consider this matter of the Holy Spirit this evening.

1. The Holy Spirit constitutes us the Lord's

In the letter to the Romans, we see that the beginning of the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the church is the constituting of us as the Lord's. He constitutes us the Lord's. In Romans 8:9 we have the familiar words — *"Ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. But if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His"*. We are constituted the Lord's by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

When we look to see what that means, we find that in the first place it means that He is the Spirit of the indwelling life. *"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death"* (Rom. 8:2). The Holy Spirit dwelling within becomes the Spirit of life, or is the Spirit of life indwelling, and by His presence as such — the Spirit of life — He constitutes us the Lord's. Inwardness of life.

When we pass to the first letter to the Corinthians, we find this — *"... unto the church of God which is at Corinth, even them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, their Lord and ours"* (1 Cor. 1:2). That is only an enlargement of the simple statement or truth in the letter to the Romans that the Holy Spirit constitutes us the Lord's. It is a comprehensive statement of who are the Lord's. *"Them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus"*, and that work is the work of the Holy Spirit — *"through sanctification of the Spirit"* (2 Thess. 2:13).

Well, the Holy Spirit begins to build the church of God by constituting us in this way the Lord's; that is, by a definite work of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us in terms of life, we are made the Lord's. 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ as life and sanctification, he is none of His'; or, the other way round, 'If any man has the Spirit of Christ indwelling as life and sanctification or consecration (the same meaning) he is the Lord's.' That is the beginning of the house of God, the church of God.

2. The Holy Spirit constitutes us as the Lord's

But then the next thing. The Holy Spirit not only constitutes us the Lord's, but He constitutes us *as* the Lord's; being the Lord's, He constitutes us. In Romans 8:5,6 we have the touch there upon how we are constituted as the Lord's. *"For they that are after the flesh mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For the mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace"*. Constituted as the Lord's by a spiritual mind. Now you will recall to remembrance all that we had to say early in our meditations upon the spiritual mind as in 1 Corinthians 2; the natural mind and the spiritual mind. Here, then, in 1 Corinthians 2 we have Romans 8:5,6 enlarged upon, covering a very large area, as to heavenly wisdom, worldly wisdom, mentalities and so on.

Now here in this Corinthian letter one or two things are made perfectly clear in this connection of the Holy Spirit's work in constituting us as the Lord's.

(a) The Holy Spirit brings to light another world

First of all, the Holy Spirit brings to light another world. *"Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love him. But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit"* (1 Cor. 2:9,10); another world altogether from the world of our natural seeing or hearing or conceiving. An entirely different and new world is brought to light by the Holy Spirit. In more or less fulness everyone who is constituted the Lord's knows that to be so. It is a fact and it is also a fact which tests whether we are the Lord's, whether for us another new world entirely beyond our human capacity for comprehension has been brought to light for us. That is a thing said, but it ought to be considered. We have another, a new, world which has opened to us by the work of the Holy Spirit. We are in touch with another world, not only sensing its existence but having a touch with it in correspondence, in communication, in apprehension, in seeing. It for us is not a shadowy, dark world. It is a luminous world. The Holy Spirit has brought it to light for those who are constituted as the Lord's.

(b) The Holy Spirit brings to life another faculty

Then, as necessary to the other world, the Holy Spirit brings to life another faculty, for it is equally necessary to have the faculty for understanding and grasping that other world, as it is to have the other world at all. The things of that other world are altogether foreign to those who do not possess this faculty. Nicodemus was groping in the presence of that other world. *"If I told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you heavenly things?"* (John 3:12). He was altogether in the dark as to that heavenly world and heavenly things. That heavenly world may be brought near to us in our presentation, and we still cannot know what it is about unless the corresponding work of the Spirit is done, not only bringing to light the world, but bringing to life the faculty which operates in that world. Outside of a certain range of this earth, it is quite impossible for unaided human constitution to live. It is not fitted or constituted to live in that world. It has to have some other kind of faculty, ability, given to live there to corresponds to and with that world, and it is like that in the matter of the things of the Spirit. *"No man knoweth them but the Spirit of God and such as to whom the Spirit of God reveals them"* (1 Cor. 2:11), but what is the good of presenting anything to an eye that has no sight, has no faculty for seeing? So the Holy Spirit does constitute us as the Lord's by giving us this living faculty for heavenly things. Do not just take that as teaching. More and more one is impressed and distressed to find what little spiritual apprehension so many of the Lord's children have, how few really have the faculty operating. They listen, in a way they appreciate, they believe it is all right, but there is just something lacking which makes for that correspondence, that movement, in relationship with that new world that they get to a place where it is not necessary to always be telling them what they ought to do and what they ought not to do. They know; they have the faculty which is grasping heavenly meaning. It is a work of the Holy Spirit.

(c) The Spirit other than natural wisdom

And then what this letter brings out so clearly, fully and strongly is that the Spirit is altogether other than the natural wisdom or ability. The principles of this world are altogether at a discount here. That, of course, by the context, means the principles of this world's wisdom. *"We speak God's wisdom ... which none of the rulers of this world hath known: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory"* (1 Cor. 2:7-8). The Holy Spirit is altogether other than natural wisdom or ability and that works both ways. If you have not got any natural ability and wisdom, it does not matter in this realm. I mean that it does not put you out of court. The Holy Spirit is different, is

other. He does not necessarily demand that you shall have certain natural acumen. On the other hand, how true it is that the great learned scholars of this world are helpless children in the presence of divine revelation. So often you find people of advanced education who have so little spiritual understanding, and it does not matter what you say, they do not grasp what you mean. There is this complete otherness about the Holy Spirit from the wisdom and ability of the natural man to understand.

3. The Holy Spirit works in relation to the cross

Then the third thing about the Holy Spirit here in this building work is that the Holy Spirit always works in relation to the cross. *"So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh: for if ye live after the flesh, ye must die; but if by the Spirit ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live"* (Rom. 8:12-13). That is Romans. It would be very difficult to light upon any particular passage in 1 Corinthians on that matter. There are, of course, plenty of them. *"We preach Christ crucified"* (1 Cor. 1:23). *"I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified"* (1 Cor. 2:2). But the whole sense and meaning of the first letter to the Corinthians is this, that He works wholly by the cross. The letter was written to make perfectly clear that these Corinthians were not truly crucified people, that the cross was essential to spiritual growth, and so it is made abundantly clear that the Holy Spirit works wholly in relation to the cross. Such words as what we have in 1 Corinthians 3:16,17 — *"Know ye not that ye are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man destroyeth the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, and such are ye."* *"And such were some of you; but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God"* (1 Cor. 6:11). All that relates to the cross, a cleansed, sanctified temple, and you never do get a temple until you have an altar. The altar always precedes the temple, the tabernacle, the sanctuary. It is always before you enter that you have to go by the way of the altar. The cross is always before the church; the church comes out of the cross; the sanctuary of God follows the work of the cross. The Holy Spirit, therefore, in order to build the church of God, must work by the cross all the time. He must bring the cross all the time to operate in the life, and that was one of the troubles at Corinth, that the real meaning of a sanctified temple, a sanctuary of God, was being completely destroyed by an absence of the work of the cross in the realm of their carnal lives.

4. The Holy Spirit in charge of the believer's course

Fourthly, the Spirit is here revealed as in charge of the believer's course. Romans 8:14 is well-known — *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."* The Spirit is in charge of the believer's course. *"Led by the Spirit"*. Now we so largely tie that down to some particular matter upon which we need guidance, and think of being led by the Spirit wholly in relation to situations which arise from time to time in which we need to be led. That may be quite true and is true, but that is not all that it means here in Romans 8. You have to go into 1 Corinthians to understand Romans 8:14, for in 1 Corinthians it is clear that the way of the Spirit has to do with a very much larger number of things than our particular situations in which we need guidance. What the whole of 1 Corinthians does say is that this is the way the Spirit will take you; all we have been considering in these meditations, all those practical matters in 1 Corinthians have to do with the way of the Spirit, and what the letter is saying is that if you are being led by the Spirit, you will not go the way of the flesh, you will not do all those things you are doing, you will do just the opposite, you will be led of the Spirit to do just the contrary to what you do in the flesh. This is sonship. *"As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God"*, and that does not just relate to and become bound up with, 'Lord, shall I go here today or not? It covers the whole life; a Holy Spirit governed, directed, sanctified life. That is being led of the Spirit, and we may take it that we will not get guidance on specific issues, in specific crises, unless we are always under the Holy Spirit's government. It is no use going to the Lord in an emergency for guidance if we are

not living in the Spirit and walking in the Spirit continually, so that to be in charge of the Holy Spirit as to our course does mean that it is a life continually according to the mind of the Spirit and not according to the mind of the flesh.

5. The basis and firstfruits of the coming glory

Then fifthly, we come to the basis and the firstfruits of the coming glory. Romans 8:18-23 — *“I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward. For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only so, but ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”* The basis and the firstfruits of the coming glory is the Holy Spirit and a life in the Spirit.

Well, what is this coming glory? Look again at Romans 8:11, *“If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead, shall give life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwelleth in you”*. Verse 23 — *“And not only so, but ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves.”* What is this glory? Well, you have to turn over to 1 Corinthians 15 for the explanation of that. Oh, that matchless passage in 1 Corinthians 15 about the coming glory for our bodies, when this corruption shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality, the conformity to the body of His glory, the coming glory.

But what is the basis of that, what is the firstfruits of that? We have the Spirit. It is the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead who shall give life to our mortal bodies, and we have the firstfruits even now in our bodies, we are sustained by the risen life of the Lord, the power of the Holy Spirit. Resurrection is already a testimony in us physically and the firstfruits or the earnest of our inheritance, the redemption of our body. A life by the indwelling of the Spirit and by walking in the Spirit contains the tokens of the title deeds of the glory that is to be. *“Our light affliction which is but for a moment ...”* (2 Cor. 4:17) — it can only be said to be so if you have seen something of the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. You never call your afflictions light and transient unless you see the eternal over against the transient, the weight over against the light. Well, 1 Corinthians 15 is a marvellous unveiling of the glory that is to be and in a glorified body. So the apostle puts these two things together. *“Glorify God therefore in your body”* (1 Cor. 6:20) and then he points on to the day when the body will be glorified. Glorifying God now in the body leads to the glorifying of the body in God at the end.

The Corporate Aspect

1. The Holy Spirit constitutes the Body

Now we pass from what is very largely individual to the corporate, the Holy Spirit and the Body of Christ. We go back to Romans 12 now, and we know that in Romans 12 we have the Body introduced, the corporate aspect of things presented. *“For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members have not the same office; so, we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another”* (Romans 12:4,5) and so on. The Holy Spirit constitutes the Body. You turn to 1 Corinthians 12 and you have that enlarged upon very much, and in verse 13 you have this inclusive statement — *“For in one Spirit were we all baptised into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free, and were all made to drink of one Spirit”*. Constituted the

Body by the Holy Spirit; He constitutes the Body, and He constitutes the Body in this way — “In one Spirit were we all baptised into one body”. The using of that word “baptised” is not just haphazard, to give some kind of idea. The usage of that word is, as always in the New Testament, to show that the Body is constituted by a death and resurrection. Baptism is that in the New Testament. It is a symbol or type of death, burial, resurrection. To come into the Body, you have to pass that way. The Holy Spirit sees to it that you do. That is, the natural life has no place in the Body of Christ. A baptism must have taken place by operation of the Holy Spirit to come into the Body of Christ.

That is to be viewed again in the light of the whole of this Corinthian letter. It is all this that is being allowed to intrude into the realm where the Body of Christ is; not into the the Body of Christ, but into the realm where the Body is, into association with the Body. It cannot get into the Body. It has been brought into association with the church, and it is a contradiction. The presence of those things, the natural things that are in 1 Corinthians, where the church, is, is a contradiction to baptism. The meaning is that when you were baptised and came into the church, the house of God, the Body of Christ, you left all that outside; that was all stripped off in death. But in resurrection you bring nothing back of that. Baptised in one Spirit. He is the Spirit of the cross, the Spirit of sanctification, the Spirit of separation, the Spirit of holiness, and the Body is said to be all that, and by the Holy Spirit thus you were baptised into one Body.

2. The Holy Spirit sustains the Body

Then note the rest of the statement. We are sustained, or the Body is sustained, by the Holy Spirit. “*And were all made to drink of one Spirit*”. It is not the same word — baptise and drink, although oneness is the prevailing idea. Made to drink of one Spirit as we were baptised in one Spirit. Yet here baptised is — we into; drink — that is, into us. By baptism we are put into something. By drinking, something is put into us; that is, the Spirit. We are baptised into the Spirit and the Spirit comes in, and thus we are not only to be in a position, but we are sustained in that position by drinking of one Spirit.

3. The Holy Spirit unites the Body

Thirdly, the Spirit unites the Body. Here is this word ‘one’ occurring so often. “*As the body is one*” (verse 12) “*and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For in one Spirit were we all baptised into one body*”. Verse 20 — “*But now they are many members, but one body*”. The Holy Spirit creates or constitutes the oneness of the Body. You notice that it is with Christ and in Christ; united with Christ by the Spirit, and then united in Christ by the same Spirit, brought into oneness in Christ by the Spirit. The oneness of the Body is the Holy Spirit’s doing. It is a very serious thing, therefore, to violate the oneness of the Body of Christ, a very serious thing, because we are just doing despite to the Spirit of God, we are doing injury to the Holy Spirit’s work, we are setting ourselves against the Holy Spirit. Any kind of disunity is a contradiction to the work of the Holy Spirit. That is why, at the end of his Corinthian letters, the apostle uses what has become a very commonplace thing called ‘the Benediction’ — “*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.*” This fellowship is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Where fellowship breaks down in the members of Christ’s Body, the Holy Spirit is denied and countered.

4. The Holy Spirit qualifies the members to function

Next, the Holy Spirit endows and qualifies the members to function in the Body. You see all that is said here about the different members and different functions — eyes, hands, feet, and so many gifts, forms of expression, variety. The Holy Spirit has endless variety. When we have tabulated all that is said about spiritual gifts and qualifications and endowments in the New Testament, we have not exhausted the Holy Spirit’s forms of

operation. If you can exhaust the forms of operation of life in the natural creation, then you can exhaust the forms of operation of divine life in the Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit is not working on a stereotyped line, within a limited compass. He is always breaking out in some fresh way, using someone in a different way, in a new way, doing something fresh. Therein lies the tremendous peril of trying to systematise; the New Testament church is like this — you have it all so nicely drawn out, and you pour believers into that mould. It is a dangerous thing to do; the Holy Spirit will not have it. While there are certain established laws and principles, the Holy Spirit demands His liberty as Lord to do as He likes, and we shall only grow as we recognize the range of the Holy Spirit's liberties, as we let Him have His way to do things as they have never been done before if He wants to. Recognize that you never get to the end of the varieties of the Holy Spirit's activities through functioning members of the Body of Christ, and that is the glory of a church governed by the Holy Spirit that He uses people in all sorts of unusual, unconventional ways.

Variety and yet unity. These functions and endowments are never independent, never operating apart; they are complementary. We need to recognize this. It is one of our hardest lessons, one of the things we are slowest to learn, that someone who seems to be so different is nevertheless necessary in some way. There is something there that counts for the Lord, means something to the Lord. We would just like to take the pruning instrument and have the church made up of people who we think are "worthwhile", the right kind of people. The Lord is always bothering us with people we do not think are the right kind of people. We have to learn this lesson that in the Lord's family there are all sorts and conditions. Somehow or other He is going to get something as a contribution which is complementary; not contradictory, but complementary in the funny people as well as in the others we all like.

That is what is here. "*Members ... less honourable*" are mentioned. No member is allowed to say, 'We have no need of you, we can do without you', to any other member. Well, that is quite obvious, I think, but that is the way the Holy Spirit is building the church. He builds the church with lots of people who are very different, but by the Holy Spirit indwelling — of course, we keep to that, the Holy Spirit has to indwell. We are not saying you can come along with all your funniosities and be as you like. You have to be governed by the Holy Spirit, but that does not mean you are going to be formed to a certain type and all going to be made exactly alike. You will still be different, have your own personality; indwelt by the Holy Spirit, you can make a contribution to the whole.

5. Growth by use

And then finally, we have growth by use. "*To each one is given through the Spirit the manifestation of the Spirit to profit withal*" (1 Cor. 12:7). The Body grows by the use that each one is making of their particular gift of the Holy Spirit, their particular endowment or contribution. Be quite sure that you are a positive factor in the Holy Spirit, that you are not negative, neutral, a passenger, and certainly not a parasite. There are far too many parasites in the church of God, people who are living on the church of God and making no contribution, taking from it and giving nothing — that is a parasite — a thing that takes everything for itself and gives nothing, and in itself becomes abnormal simply because it is not giving. There is no room for parasites in the Body of Christ.

6. The Holy Spirit works in the light of the day

I want to say one thing in closing. All that we have been saying and all that is here, is bounded by what Paul calls 'the day'. "*The day shall declare it*" (1 Cor. 3:13). That is very early in the letter. When you come to chapter 15 you are in the day. "The trumpet shall sound" (v.52). You are in the day, so that all that is between the beginning and the end is bounded by the day. The Holy Spirit always works in the light of the day. That means very much more than it sounds. That means that the day of Christ is implicitly

present now. I do not mean that it is not a day that is coming when the Lord will appear, but implicitly it is now. With the Holy Spirit, the future is present. All that He is doing now is in the light of the day. Therefore He brings the day into every activity of His, and the day is here. Do not think of the day of the Lord, the day of Christ, as being some isolated time marked in the calendar of God. It is that. There will be an actual time when the trumpet shall sound. We shall reach a point in the course of the ages when it takes place literally and actually, but the truth is that that day is here now in the operation of the Holy Spirit. What He is doing now, He is doing in the light of that day. That day is the day when full manifestation will be made of all that has taken place here now, all that has been going on in us under the operation of the Holy Spirit, will then come out into the light, it will be made manifest.

Very well then, today the Holy Spirit must work and I must live as though at the end of this day, this very day, this day of twelve hours, the Lord might come, that day might arrive, and that is the end of my spiritual growth or my spiritual discipline, my spiritual training; that then fixes my measure so far as the present operation of the Holy Spirit is concerned. I do not mean that we may not grow, enlarge, afterward, that everything is going to become static, but I believe what the Lord adds in afterward will be according to our obedience to the Holy Spirit now. Therefore my response to the Holy Spirit today is setting the measure for that day. It will be that everyone shall receive accordingly. Do you see this point that I am trying to make? — it is an important one. Implicitly, though not wholly and literally, this is the day of the Lord for you and for me. How can I convey that? Supposing the day were fast approaching? The Holy Spirit who knows, knows that the day is just a little way ahead. He might begin operations in the church and in you and in me of such an intense character as to mean the swift maturing of our spiritual life. He might interfere with a lot of things we are occupied with, a lot of our pleasures, and cut us off from them and put us into conditions and situations where we are compelled to recognize the supreme importance of spiritual matters because He has brought the day right into this, the day has now come so far as spiritual meaning is concerned. I think that is exactly what the church may expect, such an intensification of the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit as to simply press her up into spiritual considerations by cutting off all sorts of other things, and we have to look at things in that light. In the life of one indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who is in Christ, one who is a member of His Body, this is not just an unfortunate happening, a misfortune. What does the Holy Spirit mean by this? This is not just an accident. Is not the Holy Spirit out to draw us away from things that in His mind do not matter and that would be drawing us away from the things that do matter, pre-occupying us? He has come right into this very thing with the day of the Lord in all its implications. All is bounded by that day. *"The day shall declare it"*. Declare what? — what you have been doing every day, just how much you have been living in the Spirit every day. If we have been living and working in the flesh, the day will declare it, we shall suffer loss.

You can never consider the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the church without recognizing that while the Holy Spirit begins with the cross, the Holy Spirit ends with the coming, with the day, and brings those two things together — the cross and the coming of the Lord, the day of the Lord. He is working with those two things ever before Him — by the cross unto the day — and applying the cross because the day is in view. I do wonder whether we have recognized this, that the coming of the Lord — whatever phrase you may use, the second coming, the advent, the day of the Lord is not just some prophetic day. It may be that but it is not just that. If it is regarded as such, you can always be objective about it. It can always be out there outside of yourself, beyond yourself, an interesting feature of prophetic studies, something that is going to take place in the course of the world's history. But if you realize that a life in the Holy Spirit brings that day right into this very hour, the day of the Lord is a living thing to you, and you will find that occupation with the Lord's coming in the Spirit and not in prophecy makes the Lord's coming a glorious reality in spirit now. You cannot sing a hymn about the Lord's coming in the Spirit, except it is as though the Lord were right there, coming at once;

there is life in it. The Lord's coming is a Holy Spirit matter, and so He would bring that very near. Do not go away and say, 'He has been saying that the Lord's coming is not an event, it is a process.' I have not said that. It is an event, a glorious event, to which we all look forward, but do not let us forget that the Holy Spirit has got that day now. He is not in time. There is no tense with it. The future is present with the Holy Spirit. So He says to Corinthians and all who are like them, 'All these matters that I have been laying before you of behaviour, relationships, conduct, your giving, your stewardship, all these things have to be looked at in the light of the day. The day has to be brought in. How do you want to be in that day? — an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom? "*He that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully*" (2 Cor. 9:6). The principle of the coming is a present principle, while the event itself may still lie ahead.

May the Lord really make us Spirit-filled, guided, governed, sanctified and glorified members of Christ's Body!