

**God's Workshop**  
*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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### **Chapter 1 - The Entrance, the Ante-room, and the Beginning**

We are going to make a beginning with some meditations in relation to what I have called rather awkwardly "The Workshop of God" or "Vessels Meet for the Master's Use". The words, as you know, are taken from 2 Tim. 2:20,21.

*"Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some unto honour, and some unto dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these (vessels unto dishonour), he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, meet for the master's use, prepared unto every good work."*

In the Bible God is represented as working upon material, and believers are said to be that material. We will therefore put this into an imaginary form. Imagine God having a workshop, and, as we approach God's workshop, we shall find that there are certain words written on the door.

*"Called according to His purpose"* (Rom. 8:28).

*"The purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of His will"* (Eph. 1:11).

*"We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared"* (Eph. 2:10).

Those three things meet us as we approach the workshop of God.

They resolve themselves into God's purpose; God's calling according to His purpose; God's work unto the realisation of His purpose.

Now I hope you are very clear as to what is on the door, that you recognise what it is all about, what this workshop means.

We go inside, and inside the door we shall find a little room, which, if it were a doctor's place, would be the consulting room, but here, being a workshop, it is the place where the great divine Workman, the Lord, meets those who are to be His workmanship in order to have an understanding with them. Before He can begin His work upon them, He must have an understanding with them on certain matters. Now you must follow this very closely, it is very important. If we miss this, we are going to be in trouble very soon when the work begins. There must be a basic understanding with us by the Lord before He can really get on with His work.

### **God's Method of Working**

Firstly, He will say to us: I want you to understand that the work is not going to be pleasant to your natural life. In here, when I get to work, you will not find it always easy. Indeed, you will, in your own flesh, find it often very difficult indeed. You will even often feel like running away, getting out of this workshop, taking yourself out of My hands, and saying, 'I have had enough of that, I cannot stand any more of it.' Understand that that will be so from time to time. If you will settle that, and if you will accept that before we begin, we will be able to get on very much better, so that when those times come and you feel bad about it, you will remember that I told you and at the beginning we had that understanding.

You know quite well that that is only one way of putting other things that we have in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus warned those who were His would-be disciples that they were really in for trouble and difficulty if they came with Him. The Lord is very faithful at the outset and must have this understanding, because He knows that He will not be able to get on unless it has been accepted from the beginning.

Then He will say, 'You do understand, do you not, the necessity for this work, the necessity for all that is going to take place? You understand that human nature and human life is all in disorder, all wrong, it is all mixed up, and some very drastic work upon human life is a necessity. It is very necessary for Me to do things that are not going to be pleasant if we together are going through to the realisation of that great purpose. You see, because human life, human nature, is so twisted and mixed up and so other than I meant it to be, there will always be an element of correction in my dealings with you; there will always be an element of reproof, putting right. Are you prepared to be put right? If you are always going to be right and putting Me in the wrong, we shall not get on very far. If you are from time to time going to think that I do not know what I am doing, that I am wrong, I am not doing the right thing, or I am not doing it in the right way, which means that you know better than I do, then I shall have to stop, we shall not be able to go on. Do you understand and you accept that?'

It is a very serious talk He is having with us in His little ante-room before He starts work. If we get these things settled at the beginning, a lot of trouble will be saved later on.

### **God Deals With Us As Accepted Ones**

But then He will say another thing to us, a tremendously important and helpful thing. When He has said, 'I want you to understand how necessary it is for Me to correct the wrong, to reprove, but there is another thing that will always make it very difficult for Me to go on, and that is for you to give *too much* place to the ideas of condemnation, judgment and disapproval. While recognizing the need for correction and reproof, if you exaggerate that or make too much of that, you will make it exceedingly difficult for Me; again I shall find it necessary to stop.' He will say some things must be settled before we start and one is that you are a forgiven person. I am not dealing with you now as with the world. I am dealing with you as a child of God, and as a child of God you are a forgiven person. Remember that my forgiveness has gone through all tenses, past, present and future, and it has gone into all realms of conscious and unconscious sin. I know a great deal about your sin and sinfulness, and I have not only forgiven you what you know to be wrong; I have forgiven you all that is true about you that is wrong that I know, and you do not. You know the Old Testament provision in the sacrifices was for unconscious sin as well as known sin. 'If he shall sin unconsciously, unwillingly, unintentionally, there is a provision. The cross takes sin in its entirety and you must understand that you are forgiven. Just as far as my forgiveness goes, you are a forgiven sinner, and therefore you must not continually raise this question when I am dealing with you in a hard way saying, 'It is because of my sin.' You bring that up and the machine stops. We shall have to keep everything in suspense until you have got on the ground of "*no condemnation*".'

'Moreover, you are accepted. You came in through that door "*called according to His purpose*". You are coming in as a called one, you heard the call, you responded to the call, you came, you are accepted. If you constantly raise a question about your acceptance, the work is hindered. No, you are accepted!

Further you must understand that inside here it is all grace. It is under grace, not the condemnation of law, not judgment, inside here it is all grace, I am doing everything on the basis of grace. Do you understand that? That is favour without your meriting it. Settle that and we will get on. You are going to have bad times, but remember grace is governing.

And then do understand that all that I am going to do with you, although it will often seem altogether to the contrary, is going to be constructive. I am working on the constructive basis. I am not out to annihilate you, to destroy you, or to bring you to nothingness. I am out to make a glorious thing of you and everything is governed by a constructiveness of intention.'

The interview stops there. Well, what about it? He will say to us. Are you clear on all that, do you consent to all that, do you accept all that? Is that settled? We say, Yes, Lord, by grace we will seek to keep there about it all. Very well, He says, now we can get to work.

### **God's Starting-Point**

And we come next to God's starting-point, which includes all that we have said, for all His work with us and in us is in a phrase used by the apostle Paul about himself: "*a man in Christ*" (2 Cor. 12:2). We are supposed at this point to be in Christ. That means two things. Christ is our sphere and God is doing everything with us as centred in Christ, not apart from Christ. That will settle quite a lot of these other questions. Accepted, yes, but in the Beloved, that is, in Christ (Eph 1:6). Christ becomes to God everything for us, and from God to us. He is our world.

That means also that Christ is God's pattern and we are in Christ as God's pattern to be conformed to Christ. God is doing everything in relation to His Son. Christ is our realm and Christ is our mould.

Now you see first of all, if you and I are in Christ, God is utterly committed to His Son, and everything that He does with us is going to affect His Son, His Son's honour, His Son's glory, His rights of inheritance. That is why we say 'for Jesus' sake, for Christ's sake'. It is the ground of appeal. Not for our sake but for His sake, and the Father at once recognizes that His Son has a right above all others, a right to His attention, His care, everything is for His Son's sake. We are in Christ. It is very blessed and very important. 'A man in Christ'. So that what God does with Him He is not only doing with Him, He is doing *to* His Son. The Father does not need to be kept right, of course, or righteous, but if He did need to be, Christ would keep Him right because He has merited, He has paid the price for everything, not for Himself, but for us.

Then the Father is looking on the Son as the Well-beloved, the One of perfect satisfaction, and if we are in Christ He is going to make us Christ-like, conform us to His image, so that at last, He will be as satisfied with us as He is with His Son. We are in Christ. That is God's starting-point. Christ is our sphere and Christ is God's pattern to which He is working. And that means three things.

We are positioned, we are given a position, in Christ. We are provided for in Christ. Everything required for this work to be perfected, through all the difficulties and all the suffering, is provided for in Christ. We touch that again in another way presently. Positioned, provided for, conformed to Christ.

### **The Material upon which God Works**

Now we turn to the material that God takes up and upon which He is going to work. One great word comes in at that point where the material is concerned, and that word is redemption or redeemed. It is material that is redeemed. That means, of course, that it has been lost, it has been worthless, it has been out of the way of divine purpose. It has been altogether in another realm and of another kind, going in another direction, and from all that it has been redeemed.

It is redeemed material, but redemption has two aspects. It is redeemed *from* ... The words of the Psalmist are perhaps the best for describing that. "*He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay*" (Psa. 40:2). That is redemption — redeemed from a horrible pit, from mire.

And redemption is not only from, it is *unto*. We are redeemed unto the great purpose of God. It is redeemed material.

(Here three objects are introduced: a block of very rough wood; a piece of the same wood partly moulded; and a candlestick of plain wood brightly painted).

I am going to treat you as children and take an object lesson. I have here a very poor piece of wood. Some of you, with myself, will be quite prepared to admit that we are no better than that in ourselves. If we did not think so at the beginning, we have come to think that way as we have gone on. There is nothing of glory or worth in that piece of wood, and we would say nothing of possibility. Let us remember that. That is the beginning. Whether we do or whether we do not regard ourselves as being such very poor worthless stuff in ourselves, God knows that we are and has made it perfectly clear that we are very poor stuff. "*Thou worm, Jacob*" (Isa. 41:14), and some of us are quite prepared to accept that, and that "*all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags*" (Isa. 64:6). We could just pile it on — what God knows us to be in ourselves as we are. Remember that although the material may be ever so poor and worthless, may be just as poor and weak and wretched as anything can be, it is therefore neither condemned nor rejected by God. We have been perhaps taking a very disparaging attitude toward that. You are a poor sort of thing like this piece of wood, ugly, dirty, cracked! Of what good are you? You can say all that you can that is derogatory to us and it is true, but it is neither condemned nor rejected by God. If for that reason God were to reject or condemn, grace ceases to be grace. It is neither condemned nor rejected by God. To one who was being despised by the self-righteous, the Lord Jesus said, without making light of her sinfulness - "*Neither do I condemn thee*" (John 8:11). There is no condemnation, and the poverty of the material does not mean that the Lord throws it aside and says, 'That is worth nothing, I can do nothing with that.'

Now then He takes it into the workshop and onto His wheel. I have a little workshop, and I took the other half of this piece of wood and put it onto my lathe and got to work, and this is the result. Compare the two. What did I find? That when I put the block on and started to work, all unsuspectedly beautiful things came out? That I found it was much more worthwhile than I had thought? No, all the worthlessness began to come out. Really I began to discover that there was more worthless than I thought. All its weaknesses and flaws came out when I put the tool on that swiftly whirling block, it began to show up, and I had endless trouble, and I have given it up. Why? Because when I put the tool on, I found it was too soft to work, it went to pieces almost every time I put the tool on it. It would not stand up to it. Oh, how much reducing I have had to do because the thing would not stand up to it! It broke down, it splintered, it was too soft.

It does not serve the purpose for which I meant it. I had something in my mind that I was trying to get into that piece of wood. I had in my mind something that was needed for a purpose, but I could not make it because of the wood; it was too soft. But then I also came up against something that was too hard, and it broke the point off my instrument, it would not yield. On the one side it was yielding too easily, on the other side it had something that would not yield, and so at length I had to put it away; it is of no use.

However the analogy breaks down. (Analogies always do break down.) You have to admit two other things into this workshop. One is, supposing the wood had a will to choose; instead of being just a piece of dead wood it had a will so that it could choose what it would do. We are such. God is not just dealing with us as bits of wood or stone or even

clay. We have a will. But then, even so, another factor must come in. Supposing there are extra resources at our disposal, that if in ourselves we are too soft, there is strength that we can take, or too hard and there is something that can get rid of the hardness. Supposing there are those extra resources and we have a will to take those resources. That changes the whole situation. And that is how it is in the workshop of God. There are extra resources: there is strength, there is grace. If we are in ourselves too weak, if we cannot stand up to it, if we are too soft, if we break down every time the Lord tries to do something with us, what is the solution? Are you going to say, 'That is how we are made, we are too weak, the Lord will never be able to do anything with us?' Supposing the Lord answers, "*My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness*" (2 Cor. 12:9). You can choose My strength in your weakness and we will get through. There are the extra resources. Are you going to choose, to use your will over this?

It is just at that point that we pass from something that is only a parable to the spiritual reality.

### **The Lord's Covering of Poor Material**

What shall we do with this piece of wood? We could paint it. If I put two or three coats of nice bright lustrous enamel on this, it will be acceptable, you would be surprised. Well, would it? This candlestick does not look too bad. It depends on who paints it. If we begin to paint ourselves and cover up what we are by putting a cloak of righteousness on ourselves, the Lord does not believe in make-believe, (I was going to say make-up), He knows what is underneath and it will not pass with the Lord. It might pass with the world, it looks very nice, but I know the value of that. It is not worth anything. It is just something exceedingly poor, covered over with artificial goodness and false righteousness. That is one side of the Bible. The Maker knows. He knows all about us, He knows all about our pretences, all our make-believe, all our make-up. It does not pass. Sooner or later, if He gets hold of us, He will strip us of all that. He stripped Saul of Tarsus of it all, but that is only one side.

Supposing it is the Lord Who puts the paint on, and says, 'Yes, I know all that you are in yourself, how poor, how weak, how faulty, but I cover you with My righteousness, I put on you the garment of righteousness and the garment of beauty. It is not yours; it is what I give you.' We will always know what we are in ourselves; we know what is underneath. There is no room for boasting, pride, flaunting ourselves, and making believe that we are something. We know differently. We know it is all of grace. But is it not wonderful that that is just what the Lord does? We are still the same in ourselves as ever, poor stuff. We could not stand up to anything if we were left alone, and yet we are clothed with all the righteousness and all the grace and all the glory of Christ. It depends on who puts the paint on, whether we are putting it on ourselves or whether the Lord puts it on, and the Lord, by covering and hiding, and putting His beauty and glory on us, can make something very beautiful of what is otherwise very ugly and very worthless.

Vessels meet for the Master's use, prepared unto good work, called according to His purpose, His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works.

## **Chapter 2 - The Vessels of Mercy**

*"A vessel unto honour, sanctified, meet for the master's use, prepared unto every good work" (2 Tim. 2:21).*

*"That He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He afore prepared unto glory" (Rom. 9:23).*

What we are concerned with is God's forming of vessels. God is forming, or seeking to form, vessels. The one great vessel, of course, is the church as a whole. That, as we have pointed out before, is the comprehensive and inclusive vessel of the ultimate glory - *"Glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever"* (Eph. 3:21). Within the church as a whole there are the churches, and these are represented, also as vessels, lampstands, each respectively being a lampstand, something formed, a vessel, a light bearer, a life bearer. A local company is as much in the workshop of God and on the machine of God as anything else is. Do understand that the Lord is concerned with a company or with companies. Many of you are bound up with the company here, some of you with other companies of the Lord's people in other places, but remember the company is a vessel or an intended vessel. The Lord is dealing with that as not so many individuals and not only as a part of some greater whole, but as some local collective vessel, dealing with it on the great principles of a vessel for His glory.

Within the local company as within the church as a whole, there are individuals. They are each one meant to be vessels wrought by God to serve Him. The Lord's object is not just that we should know a lot. His object is that we should serve a lot, and the individual is dealt with not in the light of knowing a lot, but in the light of serving the Lord. We may have to adjust our minds as to what service is. Ultimately service is the manifestation to His glory, to show forth the excellencies of Him. However that may be done is with the Lord. But service is the object of the individual.

And then there are various other kinds of vessels. There are the vessels of particular ministry, different ones called, foreknown of God, foreordained of God, to fulfil particular ministries, and they come onto this bench, onto this machine of God in particular ways. And let me say any two being brought together as a vessel in marriage, have to have particular dealings of the Lord with them to be that united vessel to serve the Lord. God desires to form vessels, and the governing idea is vocation, service.

### **God's Beginning a Sense of Dissatisfaction**

Now, how does God begin with us? God does not begin objectively; that is outside. God begins inwardly, subjectively. And what is the first thing that indicates that God is making a beginning? It is the introducing into us as His own people of a sense of His own dissatisfaction. Every move of God in history has begun that way. Those concerned, for whatever purpose they may have been called, have become aware of some real dissatisfaction in their hearts, dissatisfaction maybe with themselves, with conditions as they are, but some deep sense of dissatisfaction. I am not talking about malcontents, the people who are always 'against the government' and who can never be satisfied with anything, always criticizing and finding fault, no matter what you do. They are just the contrary to what I am talking about. I am talking about a divine discontent which approves everything that is good and excellent, makes the most of the least that there is of the Lord. Such people say, 'This cannot be all that the Lord wants; I sense the Lord wants more than this This is either less than what the Lord wants, or it is altogether other than what the Lord wants.' This is a mighty working of this something inside that never allows you to settle down with the mediocre. The apostle Paul, who speaks so much as a chosen vessel concerning vessels was the most vehement enemy of anything mediocre. He would never accept anything less than the uttermost for God. There was

something in him. Look at all that he had by inheritance, by Judaism, his natural life. He said, *"I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."* *"I count them as refuse in comparison"* (Phil 3:8). Here is a man in whose being there has been inculcated this dissatisfaction of God, and we shall never get anywhere with the Lord and the Lord will never get anywhere with us if we are easily contented with the spiritual life, easily contented with something quite good and take that as the best. This is the thing that moved the men of God of old. It was this mighty impulse of God's dissatisfaction that extricated Abraham from Ur of the Chaldeans. He became aware that God was not accepting that world and that condition. God was after something more, and whether God appeared to him visibly or not is not the point. It was what came into his soul and what remained in his soul. And what was the mightiest force at work within him? It was, on the one hand, dissatisfaction with things as they were spiritually in this world. On the other hand, a sense that God meant more than this, and he was called to it. That is the beginning point with God, a oneness with Him in His divine, His holy dissatisfaction. This, surely, is the essence of conviction of sin, which is a rising up within of this sense that things are not right, are not as they should be and that God is not in this. Conviction of sin is divine dissatisfaction.

### **The Will of God**

Now the next thing. The will of God, which is the principle of this dissatisfaction. It is only giving it a phrase. What is this sense of discontent, dissatisfaction, this restlessness that has come into me so that I cannot settle down? Put into a phrase, it is the will of God.

*"Who*

*works all things after the counsel of His will"* (Eph. 1:11). God's will has got hold of you; you have been apprehended unto the will of God.

### **The Will of God a Battleground**

But then the will of God becomes a tremendous battleground. The will of God is always a battleground. It is always the ground of painful discipline, because by nature we do not accept the will of God, we do not fall easily into line with the will of God. The will of God for us inside ourselves is a battleground. It was with Abraham, it was with Moses, it has been with all the vessels, small and great. The will of God a battleground, a tremendous victory to be gained, a real ground of discipline, a breaking down.

### **The Will of God Focused in the cross**

Therefore, thirdly, the will of God finds its focus, its strength and its fulness in the cross. We see that with the Lord Jesus. He came to do the will of His Father. He did the will of His Father all through His life, but then He found that will focused on and came to fulness in the cross. The final, inclusive, immense triumph of the will of God for Him was when from the Garden of Gethsemane He approached and accepted the cross. That is the setting of the workshop.

### **The cross the Dead Centre**

Now the object lesson. I want you to imagine that what is on the board is the end of a piece of wood. That piece of wood would go onto the machine, and all the work would be done on it as it revolved swiftly on the machine. We are going to watch the first stages of the operation upon this material. We must remember we are the material with which God is working. Diagram No. 1 is just a square block of wood. It has come into the workshop in that form, nothing has been done upon it in the workshop at all. You and I are brought in, having been redeemed, recovered from our lost state, brought from the dark forest of sin and chaos and ruin, brought into God's workshop of His mercy, to be vessels of mercy, of His grace, under the working of His grace.

Now, what is the first thing that has to take place when the divine Workman gets to work upon this piece of material? Well now, I am speaking, of course, according to the technique of any craftsman in wood of this kind. The first thing that the craftsman will do before he can put that piece of material on his lathe will be to find the dead centre, and so he just draws these diagonal lines from corner to corner and where those lines cross he finds his dead centre. He will do that at both ends of the piece of wood. He must find his dead centre. He is going to inscribe a circle, but that circle will be inscribed from the dead centre. The workman will place the point of his instrument upon the dead centre, and that is tremendously important. A very great deal of trouble is going to be saved by finding the dead centre. If he should be off the centre a little bit and fasten that wood into his machine according to the centre, for ever afterwards there will be something crooked in that work. It will always be wobbly, always out of the straight, and it will mean that he will have to cut and cut very much more deeply because one side will be bulgy, and he has to cut off all the bulge, and that means loss of time and material before he can begin to develop the thing upon which he is working. So it is important to avoid all crookedness and wobbliness. There are a lot of wobbly Christians about, a lot of Christians with bulges. I am speaking metaphorically! This work has got to stand in the light of eternity, no matter what its use is going to be. And this Workman will make no mistake about this point. He is an undisciplined workman, an inexperienced workman, who is careless about the dead centre.

What do I mean by that? Right on the heart, the centre is a cross. The Lord is going to put the cross right at the very centre and heart of our being and work only from that, and it is not until the cross of the Lord Jesus has got right to the centre and heart of everything for us, to be the central pivot and governing point of everything, that God can really get on with His work. These wobbly, bulgy Christians, and these Christians who are such poor expressions of the thought of God are very largely such because the cross is not right at the centre. A great deal of work for God is unbalanced and crooked because the cross is not right at the centre; this is the very foundation of everything. Sooner or later, in order that the vessel might take shape, begin to come into use, you have to come to the place where the cross rules, governs everything, where it is *"no longer I, but Christ"*, *"I have been crucified with Christ"* (Gal. 2:20). The dead centre of the cross right there, not the cross out of the centre in some department. We must not say, Yes, I will accept the cross here but not altogether, I am quite prepared to surrender certain things to the cross, but not this and not that. We will be bulgy Christian and crooked Christians if there is anything like that. It has to have that place of absolute centrality in the whole of the kingdom and universe of our lives, of our interests, of ourselves. Nothing will go straight unless the centre is right.

### **The Circle of the Will of God**

Then from that centre, seeing the cross is planted there, God draws a circle, and that circle is the circle of the will of God centred in and governed by the cross. And when that circle is drawn, we have discovered the work that has to be done. We now see something of what is necessary if that circle of the will of God is to be all, everything, and nothing else. It has revealed what has got to be dealt with. Put the cross at the centre, draw the circle of the will of God in the life, and you begin to realise what it is necessary for the Lord to do. The circle reveals the basic work to be done.

### **Corners Dealt With**

What is the first thing that it reveals? It reveals four main corners to come off. The Lord begins to deal with our corners. Get into the will of God under the government of the cross, and the corners are the issue. We often speak glibly about having the corners knocked off, but oh, this dealing with the corners is not a pleasant thing at all! We come into the workshop of God with a lot of corners.

When we do really understand the meaning of the cross as set up in the centre of our lives, then to begin with there are these four major corners to be dealt with. I wonder what they are? I think that perhaps it would be almost better if I did not mention them because different people have different kinds of corners, but I think I could say this without being far from the truth. These four corners represent four major aspects of the self-life. It is the self-life sticking out all the time, in different ways sticking out, and not in conformity to the will of God. The cross has got to deal with the self-life. What might it be? Self-will that is a big corner, and self-will includes a great deal: self-strength, self-determination, self-assertiveness, self on that strong side. It is a big corner and it very often takes a lot of dealing with and it has to come off. To put it in another way, self-will has got to be broken and subdued and subjugated to the will of God, to the cross of the Lord Jesus. The cross of the Lord Jesus represents the end of self-will.

Let us be very faithful with one another about this. We are talking so largely from experience. We know it to be true in our own case and in the case of many others that as usable vessels, vessels meet for the Master's use, many are in a suspended state and an exceedingly limited state because of this strength of self-will. Their wills have never been broken into the will of God. They have never been subdued and subjugated under the cross. It is the tragedy of unusable vessels because of this corner which will not be dealt with. The will comes in. God is not dealing with a dead thing.

The second is self-sufficiency which I shall not stop to comment upon. The third is self-interest, how things affect us, a consideration as to how we stand to gain or lose by something, what it matters to us whether the will of the Lord is done in whatever connection the will of God may be applied or the cross may be applied, a consideration of our own interests. It is a corner that has to be removed. And make the fourth self-pity. Is it not a thing that is so much stronger than we realize? We think of it so very often as some kind of meekness, but really it is self-pity.

So it is possible that these souls of ours should get to a state where we are afraid to lose something by being joyful. Should we be caught smiling or having a good laugh we feel we are going to lose something spiritually, and therefore we will keep a straight face and no one will ever see our face bend. You can get to that state inside that you feel you are going to grieve the Holy Spirit if you do not keep a very strong hold of yourself and always be very solemn. This is artificial spirituality. Do not misunderstand me and think I am talking about frivolity, because that is a form of self-pity. We could enlarge upon that, but here you have the corners and they have got to be dealt with first of all.

But when you have taken off your four main corners, what have you done? You have only made eight corners; it seems like that sometimes. When you get through one big battle, you find you are up against half-a-dozen more. There is no end to this flesh. You congratulate yourself on having got past one big crisis, and you are up against a lot more. It is like that. The flesh has many angles. We are very angular people naturally, with many awkward corners.

But do you see it is constructive? The very way to the glory is the way of self-discovery. The way to God's perfect end is the way of disillusionment as to our own perfections, the discovery of how utterly worse we are than we ever thought. It is the way of the purpose, and do not think that as you come under the hand of the Lord and the Lord is perfecting that which concerns you that you are going to be able to think better of yourself than you did before. We never shall. The end of it all will be that we wonder if there is the slightest, remotest hint of anything of value in ourselves. Well, it is like that, but we are getting on with the work now.

So we come on this machine, for the Workman is working away, and He will steadily remove all these corners, subdue them until it is all the circle of God's will entirely.

### **The Lord Uses Vessels in Formation**

Now you will have mentally probably caught on a point which is causing you a little difficulty. You are thinking perhaps something like this. Has all this to be done and completed before we can be of any use to the Lord, before we can be a vessel? That is just where illustrations and object lessons break down. The truth is that if we are in the Lord's hands and He is having a way with us, He is being able to go on with His work, the truth is that we are being used proportionately to the work of the cross that is being done in us, proportionately to the triumph of the will of God over us. Two things are going on. He is working on us and at the same time He is using us. And it is a very serious situation for anyone to come to when they try to serve beyond the work of God going on in themselves. There are many who are doing a lot of work in the Lord's Name and there is no work being done in them. The work has stopped in them, there has been no shaping, growing formation, no working of the cross in them for a long time, but they are very busy in the work of the Lord. That is a serious position. The truth is that God works on with His mighty work within, even while He uses. You can see that in any man in the Bible. God never came to an end of His work in a person before He began to use them, but what He did do was to go on with His work while He used them and He kept them all on the lathe even while they were being used.

Well, the clean circle. We shall come there one day. It may not be in this life, it may be more or less in this life, where the angles and corners are dealt with in entirety. I do not think that will ever be perfected in this life, but some get near to the place where there is no kick against the Lord's will in them, where there is no rebellion or revolt, where the Lord's will is everything. We as all covet to be there and we all know we are not there. But that is what the Lord is seeking to do, to bring us to that place where there is nothing but His will, and when He does get there He will have the vessel full of glory. The glory is according to the measure of the cross inwrought, according to the measure of the will of God governing our lives. Usefulness in God's sight and according to heaven's standard is just how far you and I are governed by the will of God, which means how far we are wrought upon and within by the cross of the Lord Jesus.

We have got to that point. We have not got to design yet. Of course, the workman, when he gets the round with all the corners off, then he does begin his design. But God's design does so often wait upon a yieldedness to His will, it does wait upon whether He can have His way with us, whether we have become subject to Him, His design. We do not know what is in His mind concerning design or pattern. But so far I trust we are able to see from what has been said what God is after, the way of His purpose, the basis of it and the background of it, and that God can do something with people who have very big corners and who have almost endless corners. Sometimes it calls for a lot of pains and a lot of patience. You see the finished article today. It looks very nice and you may admire it, but you do not know the pains that lie behind, the fearful moments because of the reaction of the material. But God can do something. There is a piece of wood, not very expensive, elaborate or wonderful. I have another piece exactly the same measurements cut off from that. It was an extension of that, which I put onto my machine and it is now a bedside lamp, and it is serving a purpose. The pattern has been wrought into it and the light is shining, and that is what we want. The point I am making is this — God can make something very beautiful, out of something quite ordinary and commonplace with all its corners and with all the difficulty. And we are going to be very surprised and are going to worship and wonder in the end that ever the Lord was able to make anything out of us, and bring us into any place at all of service and of value to Himself. Oh, vessels of mercy which God afore prepared unto glory. I do not think that means that God prepared before they came into existence, but it means that when the glory time comes, they have been prepared before to that. You cannot come to glory without preparation and God prepares unto glory and He prepares beforehand; it cannot all be done at the last minute. It is going on all the time, but the great word is mercy, vessels of mercy.

### Chapter 3 - The Material and Its Seasoning

We are coming now to the second of those aspects of oneness with God. You remember last time we said that the very first thing in relation to a work of God is our union with Him in His dissatisfaction, that there must be born in us a sense of something very much more than we have ever attained unto, and that sense creates dissatisfaction in us, a divine dissatisfaction. God is not satisfied with the situation. He is after something very much more, and in order to move with Him in His work we must be in fellowship with Him in that dissatisfaction. The dissatisfaction is the negative side. What is positive in God's far greater intention?

Now, the second aspect of our fellowship with God is fellowship with Him, or oneness with Him, in His purpose, oneness with the divine purpose. Here it is in the letter to the Ephesians.

*"... making known unto us the mystery of His will, 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, in Whom also we were made a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His will; to the end that we should be unto the praise of His glory, we who had before hoped in Christ" (Eph. 1:9-12).*

That is the comprehensive statement of the purpose. Let us break it up. "*The mystery of His will*", meaning, as you know, the undisclosed secret of God's will, something that God had as a purpose which He willed to realize, but which He kept in secret throughout a whole period of time.

But now made known, now revealed, "*having made known unto us*" what He did not make known unto others before. The mystery of His will, or the purpose of His will, relates, it says, to Christ. "*Which He purposed in Christ*". The purpose, then, is in Christ. You notice the several occasions on which that phrase is used in that first chapter.

Thirdly, "*unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times*". There is an age in which this purpose will be fully realized.

And then, fourthly, we were foreordained according to that: "*having been foreordained according to the purpose*". That is the analysis of the statement concerning the purpose.

Later we shall have to look at the purpose itself.

#### Unseasoned Wood

Thirdly, we come to the material and the work. I do not know how far we are going to get. The material upon which God is working, and the work that He is doing. As our illustrations are coming from this little workshop where we are working on the wood, we might be reminded of the little phrase in Haggai 1:8 — "*Go up to the mountain, and bring wood.*" So the material we are thinking of at the moment is that which corresponds to the wood which is to be shaped for the house of God, and first of all there has to be a preparation of the wood. The work cannot really be begun, the purpose cannot be worked out, until something has been done by way of preparing the wood, and that is no small matter. There are many problems connected with unseasoned wood.

Last week I went down to the farm and I saw a nice branch of an oak tree lying on the ground, and I thought there were possibilities in that oak, so I asked my son to just cut me off two pieces. Of course, I knew they were unseasoned wood, and I knew what to

expect, but I thought I would have a try and see exactly what would happen and how far we would get.

I put a piece on the machine and got to work. It responded immediately. Chips flew in all directions, and I gradually worked it down to a beautiful-looking block. It was to be the foot of a table-lamp. It looked all right. When I took it off the machine it was perfectly smooth and polished and it did not look too bad. I took it off the machine and put it on the bench and left it for about three days. I went back, and found what I expected, what always happens with unseasoned wood. My beautiful block had split all the way round. It had dried, and in drying had opened up and was perfectly useless. You see the problems of unseasoned wood, all the disappointments if you go too quickly, all the disaster and tragedy of trying to hurry something before its time. It is all very well to bring the wood from the mountains. We are not told how long they kept it for seasoning, but we have to allow for that. There must have been such a time. It has got to be set apart. Paul said that he was set apart from his birth (Gal. 1:15), but that was from God's side, God's act. That setting apart had become a very practical and real thing in Paul's own life, and that period of being set apart or separated, is one of the most trying and difficult periods in any life, or aspects of the Lord's dealings in life.

### **Time Needed for Seasoning**

Just think of Paul himself. Well, there was that great vision between Jerusalem and Damascus, and that great sense of vocation, and what the Lord said to Ananias – "*He is a chosen vessel unto me*" (Acts 9:15). Then he started right away in his eagerness, in his enthusiasm, he started right away to try and be the vessel but he experienced an arrest and two years in the desert. Now, that is not easy for a man of Paul's temperament. It might be easy for some very quiet, sober, restful temperaments, but look at this man, and to be apparently set back, held up, for two years ...! But that is not all. He went to Jerusalem, quite expecting, of course, that on the one hand the Jerusalem church and the apostles and leaders would open their arms to welcome him and he would have a great reception, and seeing that he was so well-known in Jerusalem, what he had been, surely all Jerusalem would listen to him because they knew him. What happened? A terrible set-back. A situation arose which became so acute that the apostles and elders in Jerusalem did what many in China have done in recent years: begged the missionary to withdraw for the sake of the future of Christianity. And they just asked Paul, I expect very kindly and politely, 'Look here, your presence here constitutes a threat to the whole future of the church; you had better withdraw, get out.' So he went to Tarsus, and you perhaps do not realize that he was there three or four more years doing nothing. Reading the narrative, it looks as though it is one thing following another, but if you read carefully Paul's writings you will find that there is every reason to believe that he was from A.D. 37 to 42 doing nothing, waiting for that day when Barnabas came from Antioch, and said, 'Brother, your waiting time is completed, there is a job for you, the Lord needs you'. But what a gruelling time for a man like Paul with his boiling zeal, his tremendous energy. The wood had to be seasoned, it therefore had to be set apart, separated. Someone has said: 'God often permits those whom He has chosen for some work to wait a long time.' For a will as untamed as his, and a heart eaten up with consuming fire, this period of waiting nearly four years in Tarsus waiting was no easy matter for Paul. The Scripture is full of this waiting in the Lord, and waiting for the Lord requires strength. The fidgety, nervous, active kind of person cannot wait. He is always either too early or too late, not able to move with God. It is good for us to remember that such times of testing did come to the saints, that there were the times of apparent inactivity when they seemed to be doing nothing but just searching and groping for the will of God, and not finding it.

That may help some of you. I hope it does not depress you, but it is very true. But I want to say more than that. Will it ever be altogether otherwise? Will there not always be this element of waiting, even when we are active? When we are engaged in the Lord's work and on the purpose, will there not always remain this sense of the more, the unattained,

something for which we are still waiting? The place of patience is as much in the work of the Lord as in waiting for the work of the Lord. Was that not true of Paul? Did it not go right through his life even after Arabia and Tarsus and the twelve months at Antioch? When he got right out on his main life business, was it always without this testing? What about two years' imprisonment in Caesarea much later in his life? Was not that an opportunity for wondering why there should be so much lost time? He was just left. It says "*Felix left Paul in bonds*" (Acts 24:27). It seems as if it is lost time — what he might have been doing! It will go right on. In the work or out of the work, there will always be a place for this kind of testing, waiting for the Lord.

Now why do I say that. For this reason, that whether you are in the waiting for the Lord, or whether you are in the work of the Lord, do remember that it is today that matters, and not tomorrow. There is this infinite peril of always thinking in future terms: 'Some day I will be in the work, some day I will be in the Lord's interests, some day I shall find myself there.' Beware of that snare; shun it as you would shun a plague. I cannot think that Paul in Arabia or Tarsus or Caesarea or anywhere else was ever doing nothing. There may have been the trial and the testing about the public side, but this man was making good whatever there was of possibility, even while he seemed to be waiting.

Now you see this brings us back to a point which I made last time, that the work of the Lord in us, unlike this mechanical workshop, the work of the Lord in us goes on simultaneously with His using of us. While we may be in the work, He is still doing deep things in us. Our New Testament came to us along that line. The New Testament is not the fruit and product of the cloister, the monastery, the withdrawal from active life. The New Testament was hammered out in everyday experience. It was produced because of everyday demands and situations which arose from time to time drew out everything. The men who wrote were up against real life, and they wrote by the demands of real life. We must not get into that nebulous position where we are always waiting for something, waiting till we get into the work. We are in the work today, and the work is going on in us, and if we are not today under the hand of the Lord in a fruitful way, a way which is showing itself now, even if it is in our patience, our longsuffering, our endurance, our steadfastness, while we may be waiting for the thing that we think is our life work, today is the day when our life work is going on. You will never be more in your life work than you are today.

What is our lifework? Is it to be preaching, giving addresses, running about conducting meetings? No. What is the purpose here? — that we shall be to the praise of His glory. That is our life work. All God's activities in us and upon us and through us are to head up to that, to the place of His glory. That is our work today.

Well, this wood has to be seasoned by being set aside. But when the wood is taken and it is separated, set apart for seasoning, what is happening? All the elements are at work upon it. You have probably seen wood undergoing the seasoning process. When I was young, I used to see so much of it. My grandfather was the biggest timber merchant in this country, and I used to spend a lot of time at his wharves as a little boy. I saw the barges arriving on the canal with wood from the Baltic. It was brought ashore and cut up into planks, and then to my amazement it was carefully stacked somewhere right out of the way so that the air could get in between and all the elements could play upon this wood, and it stayed there, it seemed to me for years. What was happening? Well, the elements were playing upon it. The Lord exposes us to the elements to season us.

### **Natural Heat Eliminated**

What takes place in that seasoning? First of all, that great factor in decay has to be eliminated, and moisture is the big factor in decay. I leave you to interpret what moisture may mean. It may be our own heat, our own enthusiasms, our own excitability, our own anxiety, our own restlessness. I think that is true to the Bible. You remember in the Old

Testament the priests were never allowed to wear wool; they were only allowed to wear cotton, and it was forbidden to mix wool and cotton, because wool creates heat and perspiration, and no priest is allowed to perspire. There is a lot in the Bible about 'perspiration', this human heat, this natural heat, this going for it ourselves, this moisture. It is true that a well-trained athlete, one who has really trained thoroughly, does not perspire as easily, at any rate, as the other. Perspiration has come under control. It is unfit people who do all the perspiring. We know how unfit we are. We climb a little hill, and there we are, we are betrayed. All that has to be got rid of before the Lord can get on with His work through us, and the Lord allows the elements to play upon us in order that we may beat the elements eventually. This wood has to be able to withstand rain and moisture in the future, and therefore it has to go through this discipline where that sort of thing is not in its constitution any longer, it can resist.

That is a parable. It is very true to life. The Lord does so deal with us like this. The natural perspiration, the natural heat, which is the basis of decay, is eliminated. The Lord is always working with the long view. What He is after is that things shall not decay. They will stand and go right through. So an experienced worker in wood never hurries the seasoning period. That is what I did. I just hurried that piece of wood. It made a wonderful response, but it did not last. The Lord is after the lasting effect, and therefore He must do the seasoning and not cut it short. How we want the Lord to cut this short. Let us see what He is doing with us and face it because it is true. That which is the basis of the various weaknesses has got to be dried up.

Two or three things will happen with unseasoned wood. First, it will shrink. You have seen doors of unseasoned wood shrink and great gaps appearing when it is dry, and then when it gets wet it swells. Unseasoned wood shrinks at times and swells at others, it gets too big for its framework, it will not fit into anything or anywhere or with anybody. It has got too swollen. We know all about it. And then, there will be splitting, showing holes and gaps and finally early decay. So it must be seasoned, and if there is a period when it is only seasoning — and there will be a seasoning going on with all who are going to serve the Lord — it will have to be. We often speak about the work of the cross. This is just what it is. The effect of the cross in us is to season us, make us suitable for the purpose.

### **The Choice of Wood**

Then there is the choice of wood. Of course, when it comes to man, he is very selective and very careful in his choice of wood, and rightly so. He chooses for his end that which is suited to it. Some wood will not serve certain purposes, and will not become certain kinds of vessels. Man has to choose what is suitable to the object in view. That is his wisdom. But God's wisdom is altogether above man, altogether above ourselves. God's judgment is so different, and very often just the opposite to man's. What He chooses for His vessels and for His purpose very often cannot be understood by man at all. We have to leave this whole matter of suitability with the Lord and raise no questions. Why has He chosen me? Why has He put me into this work? We have got to leave that with the Lord. We may spoil everything in this workshop of God, we may spoil everything for the Lord by deciding upon our own case. Moses got very near to that. The Lord appeared to him and told him to go to Pharaoh. He said, 'I cannot speak, I am altogether unsuited to and unfitted for this. You have got hold of the wrong material, you have made a mistake where I am concerned.' That was the argument. 'I cannot speak.' The Lord said a very illuminating thing. "*Who made man's mouth?*" (Ex. 3:11), 'Who made you as you are?' This so clearly says in other words, 'I made you like that, and why did I make you as you are, a man who cannot speak, and then call you to go and do this great speaking? So that I would get all the glory, and you would get none.' "*Unto the praise of His glory*".

Jeremiah nearly crashed on the same point. When the Lord commissioned him, he said, "*I know not how to speak; for I am a child*" (Jer. 1:6). The Lord said, "*Say not, I am a child; for to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall*

*command thee thou shalt speak.*" But here is a man saying, 'I am not the wood for this job, you have the wrong material.' I expect many of you have felt you were called to something for which you are utterly unprepared and unsuitable, called into the purpose of God which finds in you nothing that is of value in that purpose at all. Some of us have often argued with the Lord like Jeremiah and Moses, 'Lord, you have made a tremendous mistake here. I am not the person for this job, I am not made this way at all', and yet the Lord holds us to it and will not let us go. I cannot tell you how many times I have asked the Lord to let me go on that ground, but He holds you. You are the bond-slave of Jesus Christ. We have to leave this matter with the Lord. We shall only spoil everything if we decide upon our own case, and we shall also spoil everything if we want or try to be what God does not mean us to be. Oh, we can see many whom we knew quite well were called and gifted by God gifted, for a certain aspect of His work, but they saw other aspects, and went for them. The evangelist with the gift of an evangelist seeing the teacher and trying to become a teacher and spoiling both the evangelism and the teaching, becoming a misfit. We shall only spoil everything if we try to be what the Lord does not mean us to be. Let us yield to the Lord, put ourselves in the Lord's hands, go on with the Lord and trust the Lord that, as we do so, it will quietly become clear, perhaps to others before it is to us, but become clear to us sooner or later that such-and-such is the thing for which the Lord has called us and therewith to be content. So much for the wood.

Do remember that this workshop of God is a very real thing. We are the called according to His purpose, we are His workmanship, He is working in us to will and to do His good pleasure. The work of God upon us, as we shall see as we go on, is often, and perhaps more often than not, hard to us naturally, difficult to bear, the deep grooving, cutting and shaping. It is hard to nature, but grace will see the work done, and this letter to the Ephesians, in which first the great purpose is revealed and then the workmanship is mentioned, is a letter in which grace is everywhere. Perhaps you have underlined the word 'grace' in the letter to the Ephesians. If you have not, do so, and you will get a surprise. It touches every phase of the letter. It is the governing thing in all that is there, from eternity to eternity. When all the wood has come down from the mountains, been seasoned, and shaped, and fitted into the house, they will bring forth the top stone with shoutings of Grace, grace!

## Chapter 4 – The Pattern Shown

*“A copy and shadow of the heavenly things, even as Moses is warned when he is about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith He, that thou make all things according to the pattern that was showed thee in the mount” (Heb. 8:5).*

Now we will go on to “the pattern shown”, and of course carrying with it the whole matter of conformity to God’s pattern.

It is important for us to remember that God has the full pattern before Him and in mind before ever He starts. The whole thing, to the last detail, is perfectly defined in the mind and the purpose of God. There is nothing casual, nothing that is mere chance with God. We come to the Word of God and these great illustrations and pictures of God’s workmanship as in the tabernacle, and Ezekiel’s temple, as in Solomon’s temple, and we find God having the whole thing to a detail before Him. I am coming to that again presently, but we must start there.

Now, I have got here illustrations. This, of course, is not God’s pattern, but it shows a design, a complete picture. You will see the purpose of my putting that before you in a minute. Those two pictures represent a complete design. One is a lampstand, the other is a fruit stand. It is the complete thing, and the workman who is going to fashion either or both of those things has that thing completely in His mind before He starts. He does not just put a piece of wood on the machine and start it revolving, and then apply his tool or tools to see what happens, to see what comes out, to see if he can do anything, if it works. I repeat, with God there is no chance, there is no trying it on with us to see if He can do something, if something will be produced. God knows what He is after, and He knows it to a fragment, He has the whole thing in view.

### Christ God’s Pattern

Of course, we know that God’s pattern is Christ, the perfected Man, with literally countless details. You are going to be surprised in a minute on that point, the countless details of a perfected man. Christ, the perfected man, is inclusive and comprehensive. He includes all the divine thoughts that God has ever had, as to what His glorified, perfected man should be to a detail. Christ is inclusive of all God’s thoughts, that is, spiritual thoughts and moral thoughts, as to His creation. Christ is a universe of divine ideas.

And of course Christ is exclusive as well as inclusive. He stands alone, one by Himself. There is not another like Him. He is not a pattern, a model. He is *the* pattern, the model. He is the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega, and you can have no language outside of that. There is no speech outside of what lies between Alpha and Omega, and so He is the full and the final, the conclusive and the exclusive speech of God.

### The Comprehensiveness of Christ’s Diversity

He is comprehensive also in the sense of being diverse. There are many different aspects of Christ all in one. He has many different aspects, at least as many as there are different kinds of people. No two people are exactly alike. Somewhere you will find some point of difference, as in the whole creation. God’s creation is a very diverse creation, and Christ is capable of revealing Himself in some different aspect through a countless host of people. He is not just making us all exactly alike. He is spreading Himself over a vast number and is capable of doing so, and revealing Himself in this way through that one, and in that way through this one, and so on almost ad infinitum. The diversity of Christ is God’s pattern also.

Remember that. Perhaps you are trying to imitate some other Christian. Imitation does not come within the scope of God's work at all. Imitation is ruled out. Conception is God's law. It comes out of life, and life is the most diverse thing in this universe. Think for a moment of the diversity of life in God's creation. You cannot comprehend it, and God needs this wide range to express His so great fulness, and yet, at the same time, there is a basic oneness, and it is oneness with the substance of Christ, or is represented by the substance of Christ. I am not talking about deity and Godhead now. I am talking about the perfected humanity, the Man in the glory, and there is a basic substance in that humanity which is the norm of every man in Christ.

### **A Basic Oneness in Christ**

The oneness is upon this, that there is a nature, which is Christ's nature, which is imparted to us when we are born from above, or, in other words, when we become joined to the Lord one Spirit we become partakers of His nature. In elementary forms it is true, but there is the basis, and it is in that oneness with His very substance as the Son of man glorified that we have a oneness, and can therefore be conformed to His image. It is the kind of being that He is. Do remember that all service for the Lord, whether it be as a light bearer or a fruit bearer, all service for the Lord springs out of that basic nature. That basic nature lies behind all our acts and our activities. It is not, in the first place, what you or I say, or what you or I do, but it is the kind of person that is saying it and doing it that is the real value of everything and gives it its meaning. God is more after the person than the works and the words. To Him, the works and the words, all the activities, are worthless, if they are not coming from this basic nature of Christ. That is very searching. It is the spirit and the nature behind everything that matters, that gives it its value. The nature has to come first, and that is why God takes such infinite pains with us. He allows a lot of people to do a lot of talking, and He allows a lot of people to do a lot of work, but the people who are going to count most for God in eternal values are those upon whom God has wrought most deeply, in whom He has worked His work to produce this nature of Christ. They may not do so much talking and working as others, but there is the intrinsic value of Christ, and it is that that matters to God. It is the nature, and God knows when the nature is there. There is nothing feigned or pretended with God. A business man, if he is clever and astute enough, can gain his point; he can steal very politely. He has not got to hold the pistol at the customer's head — 'Your money or your life' principle. He can be very polite, very gentlemanly, very nice apparently, but behind that, he is going to get an advantage to gain his point, and he is going to get more than he ought to get, and someone is going to be cheated, very nicely cheated, but God sees through it. It is not our niceness on the surface that passes with God. It is not our feigned Christ-likeness. God is looking right through. "*Thou desirest truth in the inward parts*" (Psa. 51:6), and God does not let us off in any deception at all, any pretence. We sometimes think we are getting on very nicely, but God is looking deeper and after something deeper.

Therefore the pattern is the point to begin with. The complete pattern is in God's view. But the workman, when he gets to work, does not have that complete pattern there; it is inside. He has something else that he applies, so we take the next step.

### **The Measurement of Details**

How does the workman begin his work on what he has in view? Of course, the piece of wood goes on the machine long ways. You remember we brought our piece of wood and found our dead centre, the dead centre the will of God governing all from centre to circumference. When we found our centre, we drew our circle, the circle of God's will, Christ, and then, having drawn our circle, we find we have some corners, and we studied God getting rid of the corners. The first practical operation with tools was to get rid of those corners, but having got rid of the corners so that this becomes a round thing, it goes onto the machine, and it is not with that full picture in view that the workman gets

to work. It is what is called a profile, and this is what happens. The wood is put on the machine, and then something like that is put on the wood, and then lines are drawn. You would not, of course, know what that was if I showed it to you apart from everything else. You would see a piece of cardboard, a lot of angles and cuts and so on. But when you begin to put it on there, you begin to see what you are doing. You have the outline, and from that outline you begin to work.

What is the next thing to do? There is your outline, your profile. You have drawn all those lines. All those lines are the measurements of every section, small and large, and the workman has first of all to put his measurement on that little bit there, and then how far down it comes and all the way along until you have a smother of lines with dimensions, length and breadth and height and depth all the way along. You cannot take any chance on this matter of detail. If you are working to a pattern, you cannot take any chances. You have to be meticulous to a fraction all the way along. Every curve has to be exact. It is simply a smother of figures, that this is this fraction of an inch, and so on, in breadth and depth and height. It is all worked out like that.

Now, perhaps you think that is an exaggeration as to God's workmanship, but make no mistake about that. That is the only thing that comes near to the machine, and you are working all the time according to marked out measurements. Our point at the moment is this, that God is very particular, God is very careful. God is never casual, haphazard or taking chances. He is not just doing something to see what may happen, what may come, how it may turn out. If God has got us in hand, He is very careful and particular, and there is no getting away with it. We cannot get off God's machine unless we absolutely refuse and resist God, unless we say, 'I am not going to have this', then the Lord, because He has made us with that power of choice, says, 'All right, you are laid aside until you come into line', but if He has us it is like that. He is not careless about His work at all. It does not matter how long, what pains, God is going to have an exact expression of His Son. All things according to the pattern shown. You remember, from your knowledge of the tabernacle, how detailed God was in all measurements. You remember Ezekiel's temple; he measured and measured, and gave the measurements all the way along, in and out, up and down, and round about. Why? Because this is a figure of Christ, and Christ and His church, His Body, and they are one in this, that it has to be conformed to His image, not to be a caricature of Christ, a false representation or distortion, no, exact. The length, breadth, height and depth, the measure of Christ, and the measure of Christ does not just mean the final fulness and wholeness. It means that measure complete to every detail and every point.

That means this, that God, being exact, and perhaps you are learning this, I trust you are, that if you get into the hands of God, He is very exact, very particular, and He keeps everything to His own known design in its details. The word 'perfect' is applied to so much. "*Let patience have her perfect work*" (James 1:4). God has His way with us over patience. There will be eventually no room for anything but patience. It is patience or it is nothing. It has to be all patience. Patience perfected through faith and patience, the perfecting of faith. It is very real, because God is working to this pattern of His Son, and it raises questions like this — Have you learned *that* lesson? God is seeking to teach you that lesson. His dealings with you are all to teach you a particular lesson about a particular way, particular behaviour, particular kind of life you are living, a particular habit, and the question is always arising. He is bringing His profile to that point. He will leave all the rest for the time being while He gets on with that point, and that point represents some lesson that we are being taught by the Lord on His machine. He is cutting away, dealing with us apparently in a hard way. He brings His profile, and places it there to see if you have learned that lesson. You are not going to get any further until you have. It would be a terrible thing for us to go on and God having left things imperfect, and then in the end what we would have thought to have been His kindness and love in letting us off, to find there is something that cannot stand, that cannot pass with God in the final issue, something not right after all. God is very particular. As He is

with the foundation, so He is with every part of the work. Have you learned that lesson? Have you yielded on that point? The Lord does not swallow up that point in ninety-nine others. He is very careful. His principle is that of the shepherd. He has one hundred and loses one. Why not be content with ninety-nine? What does one matter? Ah, that one matters as much as the ninety-nine to Him, because completeness cannot be reached while one point is lacking, and He is after completeness. Have you yielded on that point? Have you made that adjustment? You want to get on, you want to get out into the Lord's work. The Lord says, 'We cannot go on.' We are held up maybe a lifetime, years, because that lesson, that point, that adjustment, still lacks something, and thus He is constantly applying His profile.

### **The Instrument of the Word and the Spirit**

He has an instrument with which He does it. The instrument is fixed according to the measurement that particular part of the vessel requires, and screwed up tight. No weakness about this, no uncertainty, no indefiniteness. If it is half an inch, it is going to be half an inch. It has two points. Those two things are the Word and the Spirit, the Spirit working in relation to the Word, fixing the measure. The Word made alive by the Spirit, the Word made experience by the Spirit; the Spirit bringing the Word into practical value, and the Holy Spirit is not going to move one hair's breadth from the Word of God. The last chapter of Exodus has that constant, almost monotonous, repetition, "*as the Lord commanded Moses*". The word that the Lord had given governed, and it was that, and the Holy Spirit holds to that. It is fixed, and whatever God's measure for any particular point in our lives may be, that is fixed. God does not vary that. He waives no point, He does not ease it up. That is the measure. There is no varying it, it is fixed. He brings us back again and again. God is constantly coming back with His pattern, but His pattern worked out to a detail, and the details all fixed and governed by the Holy Spirit according to the Word of the Lord.

When the profile has been put against the wood, then the next thing is that on the wood all the marks are made, first as to the measurements, the distances, the depths, and then that is put on the machine, and the cutting tool is used in the first place, and the Lord begins to cut in. You do not need to be told a lot about the Lord cutting into the life. He cuts in and He cuts out. He makes His grooves, He makes His mark. It is very real work in the hands of God. Well, we know something about that.

But when He has made His first cuts and He has begun to mark us, then He begins to shape, and the rounding processes begin, and something of a shape begins to take place.

### **The Sandpaper of Corporate Life**

And when the cuts are made and the shaping is done, that is not all. Then He applies the sandpaper to smooth it all, make it smooth to the touch. Do you know anything about divine sandpaper? Well, you know, divine sandpaper very often comes through the person next to you. Perhaps you would not mind if it were directly an angel from heaven coming to say, 'I am going to smooth you out a bit; it will be a bit uncomfortable'. But when the Lord takes up another person, and makes that person His sandpaper ... But it is like that. That is one of the great values of corporate life, there is no doubt about it, and if we have not learned how to yield to the sandpaper of corporate life, we have missed one of God's great methods in perfecting a corporate vessel. This is a corporate vessel, and the perfecting of it is very largely along this sandpaper line of things. You put your hand with the sandpaper on that thing and you are amazed at how uneven it is. It looks fairly good, but your hand is almost torn by the roughness, and you gradually feel that wearing down and smoothing out until there is no longer any bumping or unevenness. There is a lot of roughness about us that the Lord has to get rid of, and it is only done by sandpaper, and that is very often only done by relationships. We very often think that we would get on very much better and become a very much more beautiful vessel if we

could get right away with the Lord somewhere, away from things and people, we would be beautiful. We would not. It does not work like that at all. We do not become spiritually beautiful in that way. The beauty is false, if there is any. It is here in this related life that the sandpaper of contacts is applied, the smoothing. We could dwell a long time upon the smoothing processes.

### **The Time Factor**

But let us go on to other things to be briefly touched upon. The time factor. All this with God is so largely a time factor. I tell you, in that little workshop, I have to put many things aside, spoiled, because I have not had time to do them properly. I have tried to do them in half an hour, and it required hours, perhaps days. God does not do that. He does not try to do in five minutes what requires such thoroughness as to necessitate it being spread over a lot of time. It is one of our troubles with the Lord, this time factor. But God is doing things thoroughly. He does not want to have to put things aside, spoiled by hurrying the process. Do you know something about that? It is like that. God is working thoroughly. He is taking time, He has all eternity before Him. We are in such a hurry. Some of us have tried to put such a pace on life, crowd so much in, thinking that time is going, we must get it all crowded in, and some of the deepest lessons the Lord has tried to teach us are in that connection. It does not matter to Him if we are laid aside for months on end, provided the work is going on in us, something is happening in us and to us. It is a mystery of God to lay aside His servants, whom the world says are so needed, and time seems to demand, and they themselves feel that it is lost life. The Lord does not look at it like that at all. He is going to spoil nothing by hurrying. We do; He will not.

### **The Realm of the Heavens**

Finally, we must consider the realm in which all this is taking place. Although we are talking by natural illustration, from time to time we have put our finger on extra factors to the natural. It is in the spiritual realm, it is in the heavenly realm. This workshop is a heavenly workshop. Ephesians is in the heavens, and God is working in that realm. In that realm nature cannot stand up to it, and it is useless to try to meet this thing and go through with this thing with natural elements.

How can I best illustrate that? Here are two friends, or two related, husband and wife, or other relationships. There may be a very real, genuine and true natural basis to that relationship, there may be genuine natural affection, there may be everything there in the natural which makes it a right and proper and good and valuable relationship. Bring that into the workshop of God, and you will find you need something more than that natural basis of your relationship to go through this. Your natural affection will not stand up to this, even for this one nearest to you. You have to have something more. You are meeting extra factors. It is no use resorting to sentimentalism here. It does not do. You have to rise to a higher level even in best natural relationships to get through this. This is too much for nature, this work of God on us. 'Paul, are you not a man of tremendous intellect? Everyone who has had anything to do with you for hundreds of years regards you as a man of tremendous intellectual power, and here you are saying that in this realm you are a fool, you have not got what is necessary for understanding, for explaining, you have to have something more than all your natural ability, you are praying for a spirit of wisdom and revelation.' Yes, the natural at its best cannot stand up to this realm. There is no explanation that we can find intellectually or rationally in the realm of God's activity. You just cannot explain God naturally and why He does this, why He does it in this way, what He is doing, what He is after. You can search, but no man by searching can find God out. Nature in the realm of intellect will not get us through here. We are in a realm where only divine, heavenly, spiritual resources will get us through.

What is true of the intellectual is true in the matter of the will. Apply it to Paul again. 'Paul, you are a man of terrific will-power; as a young man, you allowed no one and

nothing to stand in your way. If you made up your mind naturally, you have an indomitable will', and this man, of all men, is making it perfectly clear that to get through at all, he needs strengthening with might by His Spirit in the inward man. Nature will not get us through.

And the same in the emotional realm. If we are going to live on our natural feelings, we are not going to get through, and it is no use trying to find good feelings to get us through. It just will not work. In this realm you have to have another source of supply for mind and heart and will, for spirit, soul and body. Do you understand that? The most difficult place for anyone to live in naturally is a spiritual realm, where the things of heaven are going on. Some people think that 'Honor Oak' is the most difficult place in all the world to live in. Here is the explanation. You can go away and it can all let up while you are on holiday. A fortnight of that, and you say, 'I am losing out spiritually, I am going to get back into the fight, into the realm where things matter.' Our spiritual and heavenly life is bound up with this grim operation of heaven. A lot of people have tried drawing out, going away, and they have lost out. Oh, the tragedies, those who have lost out because they drew out. And yet to be in on the basis of nature is impossible. You try to live on the basis of nature, and find your resources in a heavenly realm. You will find it is not possible to survive. To live in heaven, you need the oxygen of heaven. When God gets us on His machine and starts that wheel whirling, we lose all resource in the flesh and in ourselves, and we discover something more is needed here, and that is, as we once said about the wood, the difference between spiritual people and a piece of wood. A piece of wood has no chance. A piece of wood is what it is in itself, but a spiritual person has extra resources and extra factors to draw upon, extra to what it is in itself. Yes, I am a poor bit of wood, that is how I am made. What can you expect of me? What does God expect of you? Lay hold on life, exercise your spiritual volition to draw upon resources that are not in yourself, and if you do not do that you will die. We have those resources in God, and we have to draw upon them continually. 'This morning I feel out of it, down, battered, helpless; this is terrible', and we go about with a miserable face. No, I lay hold on the Lord, His life, His grace, and that will make me different from what I am in myself, and it is only as we do that that we can go through in this realm of conflict, pressure and strain, for it is dreadful to the flesh if we have not got up somewhere in spirit, and we have to constantly get up somewhere in spirit, on top of these atmospherics.

## Chapter 5 – Vessels of Service

Reading: 1 Chron. 28:11-19; 1 Cor. 1:29-31; 2 Cor. 10:17-18.

The fragment from the passage in Chronicles which we will underline is the end of verse 13 — *“all the vessels of service in the house of the Lord”*.

I may say again that we are using simple objects from a very ordinary workshop with which we may be familiar as illustrating these lessons. I am not suggesting that the objects used are anything at all in keeping with the chapters that we read, but they will help us to learn some of these lessons. Some of you will remember that right at the beginning we had something like that piece of wood before us, which no one will think is very elegant or beautiful, precious, valuable, or promising. I expect if you had it, you would probably think the best thing to do with it would be to throw it on the fire. It would at least serve a purpose there for a few minutes, and that would be its value altogether. It is nothing worthy in itself. And then I showed you what was attempted with a piece of wood like that which was only another section from the same piece sawn off from there. I showed you what was attempted with it, seeking to draw the lesson that God Who knows us, if left to ourselves, without His grace, His mercy, His care and patience and interest, without any divine purpose, would never take us up at all. He would just ignore us, perhaps thrust us aside, and say, ‘Well, that is worth nothing, I can do nothing with that.’ But God Who knows us and of what little value we are in that heavenly realm, in that house of God, apart from His infinite mercy and grace, never does throw any person aside. He never does refuse the poorest piece of human stuff. He does not do what we do with people — say they are not worth much, and just thrust them on one side.

And so with that first lesson in my own heart, I said, ‘Let us see if something cannot be made of this’, and I showed you the result of the first attempt upon that piece of very common, poor wood. I told you of the trouble it gave, how at one time it was too soft and went to pieces, another time found something hard in it which upset everything. It is strange that so often the people who are the most morally weak are the most stubborn. They think that their stubbornness is strength of character, but it is nothing of the kind. Stubbornness and strength are two different things. That wood showed that kind of character. But we proceeded, and found we got considerable difficulty, and so for a time it was put on one side. The Lord does not do that, but I did, to think it out, and to see if something else could really not be done, and that piece of wood worried me. I had started on something and laid it down. There it was, and I could not forget it, it was a challenge. ‘You started something, you ought to go through with it until you find the thing absolutely impossible.’ And so I had to come back again. There is no need for me to interpret as I go along. All I am saying is a lesson. I had to come back and take it up again. You remember I went further than that with it.

### The Vessel Owes Everything to Another

I am going to show you the result of that unpromising thing, that which had no virtues of its own whatever. Here it is. No one is to laugh and no one is to frown or criticize! That was the piece of wood. We have our lesson. That naturally unlovely, unprofitable block of humanity had the tools applied, some shaping was done, some dressing was put on it, and some adornment was added to it, and it serves a purpose. It stands on a little table. In the dark it serves a great purpose. It shines away. It is not unpleasant to look at. It is doing some useful service. Why? Well, you see, it owes everything to another. That is the lesson. It has nothing in itself. Its own nature will not bear looking into. It is a very good thing that all that is covered, up, but because it is covered up, it is given a covering. What it is in itself is hidden, and something that is given to it is seen, and it is adorned with such adornments as it has, which are not its own at all. They have not come from the inside; they have come from another. Shall we say that it owes everything to its

master. If I am allowed, for the sake of pressing the lesson, to put it this way. The thing was pitied, the thing became an object of compassion and grace, and then of patience and perseverance, hope, faith, much worth and some disappointments. But at last, through that vision for it, which was not a vision of its own, for it could never have had such a vision of its own, the vision of another for it, and the master doing everything for it, it was at last brought into contact with the great source of life and light. And all that is needed, of course, is just for the current to be on and the light is there. It is linked up with something not its own, not in itself. It owes everything to another. It has nothing whatever of its own. *"That no flesh should glory in His presence"* (1 Cor. 1:29). *"He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord"* (1 Cor. 1:31).

And is not that the Gospel in its simple, elementary aspects? We do know that the more we know ourselves, the more prepared we are to take the place of that very ordinary, worthless piece of stuff, and we know more and more that if He does not cover us and hide us, there is not much hope for us. But we do know that there is a wonderful covering. *"Bring forth quickly the best robe, and put it on him"* (Luke 25:22). The Lord is always seeking to cover the nakedness of our worthless lives with His own merits, His own values, so that He may show forth His excellencies, His light and His life through us.

### **The Vessel to Proclaim the Life of Another**

But there is another thing about this. You could bring in the most valuable lampstand that this world possesses, whether it were made of ivory or gold, or set with all the precious stones worth countless pounds, bring it in here and put it alongside of this one, and it will give no better light than that. Though it may reflect the light a little better, the light itself is of no better quality. It all comes from the same source. This ought to encourage us. We so often think of better vessels. I may talk about the other side in a minute. 'If only I were better stuff, if I were made on a better principle, if only I were worth something, how much better service I could do, what a much better light I could give. You could not. It is the same light, whatever the vessel is. The cheapest, poorest vessel has to draw upon the Electricity Board just the same. There is no special Electricity Board for a better kind of lamp. It is just the same. And we, however imperfect we may be in ourselves, however deficient of personal merit, can bear the light which is the supreme quality light, the light of the Lord, the light other than which there is no better. It is the same light. So many of us have received the life and the light by means of very ordinary vessels who could make no claims for any merit in themselves, but had to say, 'It is all the grace of God; as for me, it would have gone ill with me but for the grace of God', and that is the testimony after all. And so that poor old thing, that old painted thing, has a very soft place in my heart. Better things have been made, but that is there. It has spoken, and it has spoken in its poor little way, this imperfect way, nevertheless very definitely and very loudly it has spoken of what the grace of God will do with a very poor piece of material, and I do not know about you, but I need the Lord to talk to me like that continually.

The point after all is this, that the function of that lamp is not to proclaim itself, is not to proclaim its own merits, its own virtues. It is to proclaim the life and the light, the patience, the forbearance, the continuance, the constancy of another. Well, that is where we are to begin with. We should count for nothing if the Lord did not cover us up and hide us, and that in Himself, the so much better One.

### **The Same Treatment for Both Good and Bad Wood**

But I am going to pass to another side of this matter with another object. Here is this (visual aids are missing). Some of you have seen that before. How many of you here have been to Kilcreggan, and you saw that as a piece of the cedar tree in front of the house. Well, like that it does not look very much. I brought it home, and took its companion length and put it on the machine, and eventually I will polish it. I did not have

time to complete the lamp-stand, but there is the beginning of it. This is a piece of wood that has a lot of qualities as you can see. It really has a lot of qualities in it, not like the other one with none. The other one, looking at the cedar, might say, 'If only I were like you'. As we say, 'If only I was like so-and-so. They have a different nature, a different disposition, different temperament, different make-up, from what I have. They have chances that I never had; their home and their upbringing and their education and everything ministered to their being something worthwhile.' You have argued like that, perhaps, sometimes. It is perfectly true that as one wood differs from another, so we differ one from another in those natural qualities, shall we call them, virtues, (I do not know that we can call them virtues, but there they are). But are we, after all, right in drawing a conclusion and saying, 'Well, you have a right to expect something of so-and-so, of such people; you have no right to expect that of me, I am not made as they are.' That is natural argument.

You see, although you may think that there are wonderful qualities hidden in this, first of all, you would not like that on your table like that; you would not think that that is a beautiful object. Just as much as the other, the work had to be done on it. First of all, it had to be stripped, and there is no vessel ever used or formed by the Lord that is not first of all stripped. Oh no, this does not get in any more easily than the other, without some very real work, first of all stripping, and then the first shaping; the corners have got to go. It does not look as though it has any corners, but it has to have corners before we can do anything with it. You have first of all to work it down to a square and then take the corners off, and you find you have more corners, and all the corners have to be shaved off to make it a complete round. And that is true of every piece of material, good or bad. And good people have corners, you know. The fact is that when we come into the realm of heavenly things, our best natural life will not stand up to it. Corners are discovered which were unsuspected. You find very often very good people, nice people in the business world, but bring them into the house of God under spiritual tests, and they can be as difficult as anyone else. Something comes up then that is just not going to yield. Indeed, very often those people have bigger battles than those who have no self-sufficiency. So the cedar has to go the same way as the piece of common, plain wood; it has to be stripped, shaped, worked down. You can see the difference in the diameter of these two. How much working down to get it to that, reducing. Do you know anything about being reduced? And you know what the workshop of God is in your reducing. It is not always that romantic workshop of the earth. Sometimes it is a kitchen, the sandpaper of an awkward person at your side, a difficult home, a difficult business, or even difficulties in the assembly, bringing us down, reducing us, and the cedar has to be reduced and brought down just as much as anything else.

But you know, when I put that on the wheel, and started going on some fifteen hundred revolutions to the minute, it did not like it. It flew off the wheel. Someone outside heard and said, 'Everybody alive in there?' It was not going to put up with this. A lot of people do that. Perhaps we have all done it when the Lord has started on us, and the cedar does it just as much as anything else. The wood with the good qualities does that sort of thing, just as the worthless thing. It flew off the wheel, and had to be looked for in its hiding-place and brought out again and put back. Have you run away from, the Lord, ever taken yourself out of the Lord's hands? Is your name John Mark? We are all like that, good, bad and indifferent. I am trying to make this point, that whatever may be the quality of the thing itself, it has to go the same way as anything else, and it will never be anything in the house of God until it has gone the way of all the others. The same kind of work has got to be done. It was reduced and treated and polished, and it would have been nothing for its purpose unless that had been so.

Now again, I am holding this (visual aids are missing) at a distance, perhaps you can see a black line running down there. What was that? Cleft asunder. I came down two mornings after I had gone that far, and found a gap in it. You see what happens to unseasoned wood. The Lord never does use unseasoned wood. He always sees to it that

when He brings vessels really into their purpose, they have been really seasoned, and this beautiful thing needed seasoning just as much as anything else. I am not going back to repeat all I said about the work of seasoning, the time that it takes to season a piece of wood, and all the elements that have to be brought to play upon it. The point is that the cedar, as much as anything else, has to be seasoned. There is a real tragedy in what is called Christian work. Sometime ago I told you of a leader, the head of a great missionary society, who told me that fifty per cent of the missionaries who went out with their society never returned to the field after their first furlough. One of every two did not go back; they were broken, finished. A little book in India has just been published in which we are told that sixty-five per cent of all missionaries never returned to the field after their first period on the field. They cannot go on with it; they are broken, finished. They have not got it in them. Now, what do you think about that? That is a terrible tragedy. I am not only speaking about missionaries. What do you think they feel about it?

Here is this wood, and I do not know what I am going to do with it. I may be able to do something with it, but I will never eliminate that scar. It will always be there, and if it were sensible, it will always know the scar of a breakdown, because it was brought into position before its time. It was called upon, or as things are now, gave itself to something for which it was not really prepared of God.

Now, what is the point? Do you not think that the Lord is really justified in seeing to it that we are thoroughly seasoned, that really a deep work is done? Do you think it is to the glory of God, any pleasure to the Lord, or even right, that servants of His should break down in the very first period of service, and be unable to go on after that, and have in themselves the sense for evermore of, 'I broke down on the field'? That is terrible. Therefore ought not the Lord to take infinite pains to get His wood seasoned to do the deep work that will make that instrument, that vessel, able to stand up to things? The tragedy and the trouble with so many of us is our lack of stamina. We are moved too easily; we are carried away too easily. We are so easily put off. People begin to talk to us and we listen and the Lord is wanting men and women who are immovable, steadfast, always abounding in the work of the Lord, not for a first period, but always, men and women of real stamina, endurance. And does not the New Testament again and again bring its emphasis down upon that? "*Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast*" (1 Cor. 15:58). Steadfastness is a great New Testament virtue. You just will not crack up and crack open too soon. If the Lord has things in His hands, He does not do what we do. I tried it out, and discovered that even in the best the seasoning is necessary. Whatever it is, however good may be its natural qualities, it just cannot get through without that work of patience that is represented by the seasoning, and if the Lord gets His hand upon us, He is going to season us, and do you not think that that may be the reason why it goes on so long? Some of us are near the end of our course. We have not much longer to go here on this earth in our service, but we are still being seasoned. We are not seasoned yet; we are still capable of cracking, still capable of breaking down.

What does it mean? Oh, the Lord is preparing vessels for eternity for a heavenly house, and so our whole lifetime, from one standpoint, while there may be usefulness and service, is a preparation for eternal service in that heavenly house. The Lord is going to do a very thorough work, and it seems to me that the process of seasoning intensifies as time goes on. That is the deepening work in us to make us able to stand up to things to the end, go right through. That is what the Lord would have, and oh, what a lot of ways He employs to do that! He just does expose us to all the elements. He does test us. May it not be that every test that comes our way in the thought of God is meant to produce stamina. It challenges us, first of all, to stand and withstand, and, having done all, to stand (Eph. 6:13). The grace of God drawn upon in the intensifying trial puts stamina in to go through to the last mighty victory. "*And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and they loved not their life even*

*unto death*" (Rev. 12:11). *"Be thou faithful unto death"* (Rev. 2:10). It is this faithfulness in us that the Lord is trying to produce, and not allow for breakdowns.

### **The Wood Has To Be Brought into the House**

Well, where does that bring us? Even with such a piece as this, all that is necessary, and, after all, it is not so much different from the other. Of course, I could take another line of argument were I disposed to, but we leave that other line about materials and their different kinds, their different make-up and qualities naturally, but let us come to this, that even this has got to be brought from the wild, and for its real justification in life, that is a vocation, a real vocation, it has to be brought into the house. It may be very nice to be a piece of tree growing out there. It goes on through the years. Perhaps it is better to come into the house to give light and life in the house. Well, at any rate, whatever you may argue about a tree, that is what the Lord intends in the building of this house. The word was, *"Go up to the mountain and bring wood"*, redeem, bring into purpose, bring it into the house. You know the meaning of that message. Our real value is not in growing wild or being out there somewhere. Our real value is in the house of God. That is where God has appointed that we shall fulfil our vocation.

### **An Appointed Place**

Then, perhaps, there is just this extra factor of finding its own place in the house, a place appointed for it. We bring in a thing like that, we usually put it in a place where it more or less always stays; that is its place in the house. You expect to find it there. And the Lord wants to bring us in and put us into our place in the house, and He would say that every vessel in the house has its own place. Read again that list of vessels. Everyone had not only its own function, but also its own place. It was related to something else, it was connected, it was placed, and that is where it was expected to be found. If there were snuffers for the light, you did not expect to find them in the court, you expected to find them near the light. We may not always be able to say for ourselves what it is, but in His ordering the Lord has a place, and if we really move in the Spirit, we shall find ourselves being moved into a place in the house. There has to be adjustment in the house. This becomes our place, our function, our connection, our relationship. It has to come into the house, and it has to be appointed in the house.

### **The Supply of the Spirit**

And then, just like the other, it has to be supplied with all the means of service. They are not in itself. The supply has to come from somewhere else, the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, Paul called it. Now, we all know that whatever may be the natural calibre or qualities, abilities or disabilities, the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ is equally necessary for all, but equally available for all. Thank God, there are no favourites in the house of God, there are no favourites in His treatment, in His methods. Because this is better wood naturally than that, it is not going to have better treatment than that. There is no favouritism, it is all the same.

You remember we started by saying that one thing that covered it all was fellowship with God in His dissatisfaction with anything less than His full mind. That must govern us. It is negative, I know, but it must govern us, that we can never be satisfied with anything less than God's full thought.

Now I close at this point with this. The positive aspect of that same thing is that we must be in perfect fellowship with God in His object and His way of reaching it. We must agree. You think that you are being taken by a wrong, unfair, cruel way, a way that raises questions about His love. Believe me, as one who has had to fight out that battle many times through the years, this is true of God. He is taking a way with you and with me which is the only way, seeing we are what we are, He is taking the right way. He would

not reach His end by any other way with us. It is not exactly standardized for all people, but it is particular. He is dealing with us particularly, and He is dealing with us according to His own knowledge, and that is the only way in which His end can be reached where you and I personally are concerned. We are going to admit that one day when we are fully in the light. We shall say, 'I thought it a strange, hard, unfair way, I thought God was not dealing with me as kindly as He might have done, but now I see that was the only way in which He could reach His end in my case.' We must be one with Him in faith as to His object and as to His way of reaching it.