

The Holy Spirit's Object in Coming

Reading: Matt. 3:16; Gal. 3:13-14.

In our previous meditation, we noted in the first place how the Scriptures in every connection make it clear that whenever God has moved to realize any phase of His comprehensive purpose. He has done so by the agency of His Spirit. Then we went on to point out that the pattern of this great divine purpose to which the Holy Spirit is committed is God's own Son, our Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit comprehends Christ, and the purpose of His coming is to reveal Christ and to constitute things according to Christ.

Now we go on a little further, for thus we are brought immediately to the Holy Spirit's object in coming and then the Holy Spirit's method of attaining His object. We see that He alone knows Christ. "*What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him?*" (1 Cor. 2:11). You can only understand a man by having a man's nature. "*Even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God.*" To know the things of God you must have God's nature and that is a spiritual nature. He alone knows, but He has come to make known what He knows as the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him. But He is an inward revealing and teaching Spirit; that is, His revealing of Christ has got to be of an inward nature, it has got to be a heart thing. It is not just an objective presentation of truth or truths. It is not just to see in an objective way things as to Christ, but rather to constitute the nature of the child of God according to Christ, that what is true as to the Holy Spirit is made true as to the child of God.

I have just cited that passage — "*What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God.*" Here, you see, like is necessary and essential, to knowledge. That is the law that governs here. Like is necessary. A dog can understand a dog, a man can understand a man. A man does not understand a dog and a dog does not understand a man. They require their own constitution and their own nature. People can go a long way in guessing and arriving at conclusions, but there is still a long way to go to understand how the lower sentient creation communicates its knowledge mutually, exactly how these creatures make known to one another what they are thinking, feeling, wanting and intending, but it happens, there is no doubt about it. They do know from one another in their own way what is intended, what is wanted and what is felt, because they have a nature which is capable of intercommunication in its own realm.

You and I have our basis of relatedness, communication, knowledge and understanding because we share human nature.

But it is not so in the higher realm. Naturally, we do not know the mind of God, the thoughts of God, the intents of God, the desires of God. *Naturally* the ways of God are far removed from our ways. "*As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts*" (Isa. 55:9). There is a difference and the difference is the difference of constitution. We are flesh and He is Spirit. We are soulical in our nature and He is spiritual in His, and these are two orders. They cannot commune in full understanding fellowship. Only that which is spiritual can apprehend the spiritual; the spiritual is never apprehended by that which is not spiritual. "*He that is spiritual judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of no man*" (1 Cor. 2:15); he is inscrutable. No one can understand the spiritual man but a spiritual man. No one can understand the Spirit of God save he in whom the Spirit of God is and who has been constituted by the Spirit of God a spiritual man. It is a different nature.

This is the way of divine knowledge, of knowing Christ. We may have all the information that it is possible to accumulate throughout the ages about Christ and not know Christ. We may be very fully informed on all the truths as to Christ doctrinally — His person, His

work, and all that has to do with Him — and still we may be in the dark as to Christ Himself. This is not a matter of an informed mind. This is a matter of a constituted nature and in the last analysis we only know Christ in the measure in which we have been constituted according to Christ, made after Christ, like Christ, partaking of His very nature. That is the only true knowledge of Christ, and that is what the Holy Spirit has come to do, not just to present truths but to do some great thing which makes over again according to Christ so that the knowledge and understanding of Christ is in our very being. We feel it. It is a power, a force, an energy. We know. You say, How do you know? We may not be able to tell you how, may not be able to define it, explain it, but we know. The thing is settled in our very being and it is not a matter of being able to give up this, to give it up as something we have taken on, teaching that we may abandon which we once adopted and accepted. No, this knowledge of Christ is something which has become our being and it lives with us and dies with us in that sense that it is part of us. Oh, there are far too many people who feel themselves to be in a position of being able to take up this teaching and give up this teaching at will. They can take it or refuse it. That is not the knowledge of Christ. The knowledge of Christ is not something from which you can resign, which you can give up, abandon. You may grow, you may advance, in many mental conceptions, but the true knowledge of Christ is a part of your being.

The Holy Spirit is constituting on the basis of what Christ is and when at last that corporate Body of Christ, the Church which is His Body, is perfected, it will be a perfect universal expression of what Christ Himself is, and that is its calling and its function, and that is the object of its eternal election — to be in this universe that comprehensive expression in *nature* not in words, ideas or teaching, but in nature, in ways, what Christ is. That is the only satisfactory and adequate meaning of the very term — His Body.

And what is going to be true of the whole of that Body is to be true now progressively of every part. Thus the work of the Holy Spirit in each part of the Body, in you and in me, is to conform us to the image of God's Son, to constitute us after Christ. How different is this organic process, this spiritually biological basis, from a system of doctrine, a system of truth, a system of teaching, and all that outward form which has now come to mean Christianity. You can have it all and yet not meet the tremendous spiritual impact of Christ; all the orthodoxy that it is possible to have, all the right form and order, perfect in its outward shape, method and observance, devout, and yet with no registration of the spiritual power of Christ. That is the terrible tragedy. The Holy Spirit has not come just to make models. He is not here just to set up churches, to have a perfect replica of something. He is here to bring Christ in living, mighty, spiritual reality as a force at the centre of this universe, to register. We can have the doctrine in perfection and the church order and polity complete, absolute. We may have the New Testament model of a church with all the right forms and orders and I am not saying that these are not necessary, but we can have them all and yet there be lacking this tremendous influence and power as of a living dynamic Person. While the order may be necessary to the Holy Spirit, the order can be there without the Holy Spirit. Well, this is the Spirit's vocation in this dispensation, to bring Christ in all that He is according to divine constitution, and thought; to bring Christ, as it were, into increasing presence in God's universe. I know that in Himself He is full and complete, in Himself He is present in God's universe in a finality to which nothing can be added, but what He is in Himself is the Spirit's ground of operation to expand, to extend, to impart into a Body in the first place, the Church which is His Body.

So that the first thing that the Holy Spirit is here to do in this dispensation in relation to the comprehensiveness of Christ, is to make inward the outward work of Christ and what Christ did for us, on our behalf, all that He accomplished in His incarnation, by life, by death, by resurrection, ascension and exaltation. All that is the ground of the Spirit's operation to make it inward in believers and in the Body, to put Christ in the sum of His work at the centre of things, and then work to make that centre the nature of the circumference. The objective is to be made subjective by the Holy Spirit. He has been

manifested. He was manifested to "*destroy the works of the devil*" (1 John 3:8). The Son of God was manifested; He has been brought into this world literally, objectively, and has accomplished a perfect work.

But now an apostle will speak about "*it pleased God ... to reveal his Son in me*" (Gal. 1:16). He has been revealed objectively, but this has got to be made subjective in me. The historic Christ will not do to accomplish the end of God. If God were only working sovereignly and mechanically, it would be enough, but seeing God is working constitutionally, it is not enough. The thing has got to be put into the very nature of things, and the revealed Son of God has got to be revealed in us. The new creation has got to follow in principle the law of the old creation. "*It is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*" (2 Cor. 4:6). It is inward revelation of the knowledge of the glory of God, inward revelation in our hearts. The new creation is constituted by an inward revelation of the light of God in the heart. When the light of God has shined into the heart, what a new world, a new order, at once springs into being; what a change! Until that light has shined into the heart, it is no use arguing, reasoning, discussing, trying to thrash things out. It is no use sitting down even with a well-instructed ruler of Israel — Nicodemus — to go into the matters of the Kingdom of God. The light has got to shine in inside and then all the argument becomes unnecessary. At once the subject says, I see! I have struggled, strained, groaned, longed, agonized, for years and years, but I have not been seeing, I have been in the dark, but now I see! God has shined; God Who brought the old creation into being by shining in the dark has shined into the darkness of this heart and I see the light of God, the light of the glory of God, and the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ! For the new creation is in Christ Jesus. Thus the apostle will say — This mystery, this secret, this hidden secret of God which is now out, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). That is the Spirit's work, to make inward all that Christ is and Christ has done.

That is very simple and elementary, but it is the basis of everything. There is no hope until that is done, and that is not only the initial breaking in. It is the basis of all spiritual progress, growth and increase, that the Spirit is continually increasing in the believer this illumined knowledge of Christ in this inward way.

Here you have the apostle Paul, a man of a vast spiritual apprehension, a great spiritual knowledge, gigantic in comparison with the rest of men is his apprehension of Christ. What he has been shown! He has seen all that tremendous significance of the glorified Christ revealed to him on the Damascus road. He has, at a later date, been caught up into heaven and shown unspeakable things which it is not lawful for a man to utter (2 Cor. 12:4). He has got all that teaching of the Holy Spirit apart from these specific advents of God in his life, these particular, peculiar epochs. He has all that and yet well on towards the end of such a life, so rich, so full, this man is stretched out, he is found to be reaching forward. He is like a runner in the race, he is bounding forward to grasp, to apprehend. He is in a sense a long way ahead of himself in his attitude. He is going because he is drawn on by something. And what is it that makes that man go on, what is it that is drawing him on, what is it that is making his life to be characterised by this one thing — I press, I am a man who is on full stretch! It is just that the Holy Spirit has shown him that Christ is far greater than ever yet he has seen or imagined, that he has this living sense of a knowledge of Christ which is after this mark — not just information — this order of knowledge which is transforming knowledge, constituting knowledge, which is going to result in his attainment unto the very glory of Christ itself. It is the intimation, the revelation, of the Spirit within him of the greatness of Christ, what there is to be known. "*That I may know Him*" (Phil. 3:10). "*... the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord*" (Phil. 3:8).

My point is that the very power of spiritual progress, advance, growth, development, is this work of the Spirit making us realize that we do not know anything yet in comparison

with what God wants us to know and to know in this transforming, this transfiguring, way. I ask you, have you any sense of that? Do you feel that you are just paddling in the very shallows of a vast ocean, which ocean is Christ, and you know out there, there are depths and fulnesses which are going to mean everything to you if only you can get there. How different from a satisfied Christian life, satisfied in any measure. I do not mean that we should be restless, discontented people. Let us be careful how we interpret this. There is a wonderful satisfaction about every little bit of fresh knowledge of Christ. Satisfaction deepens and there is no realm in which satisfaction is deeper than in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. How wonderful it is, when we have been in the dark, perplexed, distressed, rowing hard against contrary currents and winds, and He appears in the darkness and we see Him in some new way that just answers to that particular need. What rest of heart there is. You are not surprised that it says in that story in the Gospel that then they were at the land. They had been rowing out in the deep all night and land seemed far away. As soon as he appeared they were at the land (John 6:21). You feel you have arrived immediately you see Christ as He answers to that particular need, how He applies there. It is heart rest and satisfaction.

But at the same time we know that there is very much land to be possessed and we can never be content in a wrong way with less than all that God wants, for after all it is not a feature of the Holy Spirit's presence and activity in us that we are those who are stretched out, reaching forward and pressing on, going on, to full growth. That is a fruit of the Spirit in us. Anybody who settles down with their measure of spiritual life and knowledge of Christ has left the place of the energies of the Holy Spirit. Thus the Holy Spirit has come to make inward in our very hearts, in our very beings, all that Christ is and has done. That is the first thing in this particular dispensation.

Then to constitute us as believers spiritually according to Christ; initially by new birth, for that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:6); that is a new constitution. Then progressively to conform us to the image of His Son; and then consummately, the body of this humiliation shall be made like unto the body of His glory (Phil. 3:21) which is the consummation of the Spirit's work in us.

With one further word, I close this meditation. This, as we have said, begins with the individuals. It is a personal and individual matter. The very meaning of our having received the Spirit as an earnest of our inheritance, the very reason why the Holy Spirit enters into believers is to make this all true in them personally. Are you grasping this — all that this means that the Holy Spirit is in us? What a vast world you have right at the centre of your being if you have the Holy Spirit! What possibilities and potentialities there are if we have the Holy Spirit, Who knows everything about this matter, resident within. Oh, for our lives to be really more under the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. We shall know what we ought to do and ought not to do without being belaboured, without it being laid down for us as a rule. We will know. Brother Nee's word always comes back — the 'Resident Boss' will make us know. The 'Resident Boss', said a newly-converted Chinaman, "would not let me." That is how he put it. It is like that; we know. It is so gloriously possible to trust people when the Holy Spirit really has His place inside. You go back after years and find they have gone on. Oh, for more of those men who are so truly born of the Spirit, so truly constituted by this birth of the Spirit, that they can go out into the world, go out into our Forces abroad, and not meet another Christian, not have any Christian fellowship, any meetings to attend, but have to encounter all the opposite, and yet be found to be going on with the Lord, growing. There are those like that. But why, how, when so many who have been brought up and nurtured in our meetings, in our churches, and have all the evangelical doctrine, when they get out they lose it? Why these others? Because they have been inwardly reconstituted; the Spirit is there, they know the Lord in an inward way. This is reality. Oh, have we grasped this? It is the basis of our growing knowledge, intelligence, understanding.

We are supposed to have the Holy Spirit resident within us and that is no small thing. That is God, infinite God, infinite in knowledge. "*He that is perfect in knowledge is with thee*" (Job 36:4). That can be said now in a New Testament sense in which it could not be said when it was said in the Old Testament. With thee — yes; but now, *in* thee. Perfect in knowledge, perfect in power. That is an inward reality for the born-again child of God. Lay hold of it, believe it, trust the Holy Spirit, have real living dealings with the Holy Spirit to bring you into all the will of God.

I have said this begins with us individually. It is a truth, a fact, concerning us individually as members of Christ. But the Holy Spirit is here also to reproduce Christ in this other, this greater organism, the Church which is His Body, to reproduce Christ in this corporate wide way of a whole collective Body who are sharing His one life.

How will Christ be reproduced? Not by the acceptance of creeds and doctrines and teachings and orders, but by the receiving of His organic life, His divine life, His life from above, His life of the ages. And that life is not an abstract thing. It is the Holy Spirit Who is the Spirit of life, and the value of that is that we are not just under the urge of an abstract force called 'life', 'spiritual life', 'divine life', or 'eternal life'. We are under the instruction of an intelligent Holy Spirit Whose means of making us know both right and wrong and all the things of God is life. You can come into a meeting and if you are spiritually alive, how do you know that the thing is true? Not because it answers to the set standard of your orthodox truth or tradition. You have a witness in the thing, the thing is alive in a sense that means quickening to you. It answers to you in an inward way, and very often you have to go away and say, 'The way in which it was put was beyond me, but that was not the end of it; it was something that met me inwardly. I realised that there was life and power. There was meaning beyond my apprehension, but it was meaning and value, and it has meant something to me although I could never write it down.' It is like that, the Spirit of life teaching us in that way.

May the Lord make good in the case of every one of us and in all of us as a part of that great Body, the wonderful work of His Spirit.