

The Lord's Assembly
by T. Austin-Sparks

Chapter 1 – The Cross, the Essential Foundation of the Church

Chapter 2 – Service in the Spirit

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Having had in view God's thought concerning the church, we are going to consider as the Lord enables us, that which is the essential foundation of the church, and that is the cross, so that we begin this morning with the foundation of the church, of Christ's church, the cross. In a previous message one of the things which we emphasized was that the church is the object, as well as the subject of redemption. That redemption, in the thought and intention of God, always pointed to the church. That redemption was not just the matter of the salvation of individual souls howsoever many they might be, but redemption in the thought of God is always a collective thing, in His intention, the church being in view. "*The church of God which He has purchased with His own blood*". That includes the individuals but represents what God's main object was. That is looking on, then, from redemption to the church, not as a matter of time or distance, but as the meaning of redemption.

Now we take the other view, the view from the opposite standpoint, and see that the church looks back to the cross as the absolute necessity, the indispensable requirements for its existence. There can be no church, that is, the church of which the Lord Jesus spoke, "My church", without the cross. The cross is the foundation and no one can ever come into the church only on the ground of what the cross means. We can see this principle throughout the Scripture. It is illustrated in the Old Testament. We might go back even as far as Adam and see in the type again, the slumbering man and the bride, the wife taken from his riven side, and fellowship in the church which is Christ's Body, is identification with Him in the cross. And to bring Thomas into the fellowship from which he has been excluding himself while the Lord has been assembling with them, there must be a reaching forward of the hand and a putting it into the side, signifying identification with Christ crucified is basic to fellowship in the Body of Christ. It would take too long to cover all the Old Testament ground of illustration. We may just touch on points here and there.

Pass on to Jacob. We know that with Jacob the house of God came in, Bethel. Bethel was introduced to the thought, to the mind of Jacob as he fled from his brother Esau. Bethel, the house of God came into view then, but for twenty years Jacob must be so disciplined under the hand of God that he is made fit for the house of God, and then at length when God said: "*I am the God of Bethel ... arise get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred*", he must go by way of Jabbok, and the Jabbok experience where the strength of nature is broken, and for ever he goes leaning upon his staff, and that staff was the testimony of the cross to his dying day: "*By faith Jacob when he was a dying blessed both the sons of Joseph, and worshipped leaning upon the top of his staff*", a man whose personal, natural strength has been broken. That is the cross leading on to the house of God, to Bethel. You pass over many years and you come to Israel of course. As we saw yesterday in God's thought it was straight from Egypt by redemption to His Holy habitation. The song of Moses brought immediately the sanctuary into view, but that sanctuary was not reached until man was tested through that specified period of probation, forty years, and proved in himself utterly incapable of dwelling in the sanctuary, unfit for the house of God, and then by the Jordon — a type of Calvary — was set aside and a new generation which came through that cross triumphantly in the energy of the Spirit (that is Joshua) entered into the holy habitation. It is important to recognise that the forty years of Israel in the wilderness is God's abiding testimony to the fact that the flesh cannot come into His holy habitation.

You pass over another considerable period and you come to recovery from captivity, the remnant returning. The days of Ezra the scribe, and we are told that in the return of that

remnant to rebuild the destroyed sanctuary, the first thing that they did before ever they touched the sanctuary was to put the altar in its place, and then after that they gave themselves to build again the house of the Lord. It is the cross always before the house.

You pass to the New Testament. Is God going to tabernacle among men and have here on the earth a temple in which He dwells? He truly was in Christ from His birth, but when the Lord Jesus is taking up His official work to officially and representatively show what the tabernacle of God is, and God comes in a symbolic way to take up residence in Him, it is at Jordan, in type, dead and buried and raised, and the heavens open and God delighting to dwell in Him: *"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"*; it is the cross again leading on to the sanctuary. The sanctuary of which the Lord Jesus spoke later when He said: *"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."* Then you come to Matthew 16: *"I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it ... From that time Jesus began to show unto His disciples, that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and the third day be raised up"*. "From that time" means the time when He said: "I will build my church". He can never do it until the cross has been accomplished. You pass from the Old Testament to the New and you pass on to Calvary literally, the gathering up of all this, and you find that out from the cross literally came God's church. It comes in when Calvary is an accomplished fact. You pass on and see the principle, the law still operating. The man called of God and chosen of God from eternity as the special vessel of the revelation of the church, before he can go forth with his ministry, his special stewardship of the ministry, he must be a broken man. As we have often said, no one has ever yet been able to enter fully into what it meant to Saul of Tarsus to fall on his face and call Jesus of Nazareth: "Lord", "Master". It was a brokenness which was so deep, so utter it left its mark upon him through all his days, and he went forth to his ministry as a crucified man. There are many other instances of the application and operation of the principle in the New Testament, but we take one other. As we have been speaking much of the letter to the Hebrews, we note again that the second chapter of that letter brings Christ in His cross into view: *"For the suffering of death ..."*; *"He by the grace of God should taste death for (in the behalf of) every man"* *"The captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings"*. Then chapter three (there are no chapters in the original text) brings in the house of God; the house comes in when the cross has been recognised. Now you see how true to the whole revelation this is, that the cross is essential to the church and there can be no church according to the Lord's mind without the cross. We shall see as we go along how that is, in what ways that applies, but we want to get the full force of the statement to begin with. Beloved, if the house of God represents fellowship, represents ministry, then both of those things are only possible as the cross has been applied deeply, mightily, to the life of every one who forms a part of that fellowship and has a place in that ministry.

Let us look at it then along those two lines. What is the church? It is a fellowship. It says of those who came in at Pentecost, that they continued in fellowship. Acts 2:42: *"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship."* Paul, writing to the Galatians speaks of having been given "the right hands of fellowship", and when writing to the Corinthians, he is speaking of the nature of the Body of Christ, he calls it our "communion of the body of Christ", our "communion of the blood of Christ". The loaf is our communion, our common participation or our fellowship; the cup, our communion, our common participation, our fellowship in the blood of Christ. And you will be able to trace that more fully, and the other mention of it will bring much Scripture to your mind along the line of fellowship: *"God is faithful, through whom ye were called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord"*. It is the communion of the Holy Spirit that makes the church the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. So the church is a fellowship, but how necessary the cross is to a fellowship of this kind. You see here in this fellowship, everything of nature which divides must surely be set aside. The apostle gives us a very great deal in his writings about the cross and its effect upon national distinctions and divisions, and he says, here in this fellowship, this church, this one Body *"there cannot*

be Greek and Jew". It is not the agreement of both to drop their differences, to make no mention of them, have fellowship together on things which are of mutual concern and interest and leave the other things out.

It is not bringing Jew and Greek together still as Jew and Greek, it is the *slaying* of both Jew and Greek and the rising of one new man where there cannot be Jew and Greek. The cross has to come in on these differences if there is to be the one Body and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. And what is true of the national differences and dividing factors, has to be true also of the social. And there were one hundred and twenty as one company gathered to whom the Lord appeared on one occasion. I do not know how far we would arrive at the truth if we allowed our imagination to dwell upon that hundred and twenty. I wonder if we could make it up with names? You might find Nicodemus. Joseph of Arimathea on one social scale; blind Bartimaeus and a few other blind, or once blind, lame, deaf folk, beggars, on another social scale; probably Zaccheus, who would be in a place by himself, would be there. There would be women of different orders, it says: "with the women"; social outcasts, as we call them, and then others in an altogether different position, all there.

And when you go through Paul's letters alone and see how all these positions and links and settings are brought together in the fellowship, the bonds of the one Body, it represents the matchless triumph of the cross. And the high socially, do not look down upon the low, and the low do not criticize the high, the learned do not allow their learning to make them despise the ignorant, and so on. Well, all these social, educational distinctions go when the cross does its work. And what is more, the temperamental is triumphed over, and perhaps here the cross has its supreme triumph. Probably this explains why it is that the Lord allows so many funny people in the assembly. He has got a strange family! To us, it is a very difficult family. Why does the Lord allow certain kinds of people, troublesome, annoying, awkward, difficult people all to make up His family? And why doesn't He deliver us from some of them? And why doesn't He shut them up, some of them? It is to give an opportunity of proving what the cross can do.

It seems the Lord very often deliberately brings opposites to live with one another to show what the Lord can do, what the cross can do. I think perhaps the explanation is there. There has to be a testimony in this realm. Now this has not to be a general observation, this has got to be a challenge to our hearts. Fellowship, and that is the church, is impossible without the cross, it demands the cross, its very being testifies to the cross, it is a constant reflection upon what Calvary has done. And as intelligences look on and take account, celestial and diabolical as well as human, they have got to magnify the manifold wisdom of God in the church, and say: "Well, it is wonderful how these people of different nationalities, social positions, educational advantages, temperamental constitutions, they love one another and they go on together". That is the testimony to Calvary. That is the testimony unto principalities and powers. That is the proof that the God of peace has brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, through the blood of the everlasting covenant. Now you see if what is of nature asserts itself then the work of the cross is set aside and the church is destroyed. The Lord has made a certain provision within His rightly constituted assembly for that, for if what is of nature really asserts itself against the good of the assembly of the saints, it has been given by the Lord spiritual ones in authority to rebuke that soundly. Titus was to rebuke soundly those who asserted themselves with their doctrine which was injurious to the saints. We read that has to be done in love. I do not know whether we have risen to the Lord's requirements in that way always; if it is an asserting of what is of nature in the assembly to the injury of the saints, then those that are in spiritual authority must rebuke that, and rebuke it sharply, but in love because that can prove a ground for the devil to undo Calvary's work and be one of His methods of again getting rid of the church in its real spiritual power and effectiveness. But that is not a work that can be done very easily.

Now worldly principles introduced among the Lord's people will always work toward

disintegration because the whole law and principle of this world is self. It is self; it is self-will. The principle of this world is self, and mainly self-will, and it was along that line, of course, that the Lord Jesus met His temptation. His temptations from the evil one were, in general temptations to adopt worldly principles. The temptation to turn the stones into bread was in essence the temptation to take Himself out of the Father's hand and act for Himself without reference to the Father. That is all, that is the worldly principle of self-direction, self-interest and self-will, and the evil one knew enough to know that Christ's triumph absolutely depended upon His obedience to the Father's will. Self-will is a worldly principle. The temptation to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, with Scripture to support His action, was a temptation to gather a following on a worldly principle with a semblance of truth without the right foundation.

Now I want you to get this. Follow this closely. The same principle of course, was in the third temptation to worship Satan and receive the kingdoms of the world and all this power by again acting out of correspondence with the Father's will, in self-will; world dominion along the line of self-will. The principle involved is the principle of the cross all the time. Here was the Enemy saying: "You can have a following if you like. To use the other word, you can have a fellowship which has the Scripture apparently behind it — the semblance of truth with God's Word supporting it but without the foundation of the cross". That is a very searching thing. There is no fellowship which is the fellowship of the Body of Christ, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the church which is His Body, that is not founded upon Calvary, the cross as having set man in self-will by nature, entirely aside. You may have a good deal of Scripture supporting things, and the enemy supported his proposition by Scripture, but if the cross is not there, as having dealt with man by nature and put him away, the result is not that which God is seeking. True fellowship is upon the foundation of the death of Christ. The death of Christ is the foundation of the fellowship, the foundation of the church, which means that when Christ died we died, and all those things which belong to man by nature, and to the world, and to religion as a formal thing, were died to by Christ in His cross. He died to sin. He died to the flesh. He died to nature, representatively, He died to the world, and He died to formal religion, and that is the foundation of the church, and we should test everything by that.

Although we may not come into the full meaning of that experimentally at once, although we may have very little light about that at the beginning when we first became joined to the Lord in new birth, that does not say for one moment, that because the Lord has accepted us and brought us into fellowship with Himself, that the light is unnecessary. A good many people argue like that. Oh, this is extra teaching and it does not make any difference to the foundation fact that we are saved, we belong to the Lord, we have a knowledge of the Lord and therefore all that is quite unnecessary, as long as we have got the end all the teaching is quite superfluous. We must recognise this law, that the Holy Spirit knows everything when He regenerates us, and He regenerates us only on the ground of our being willing to go on with Him in the full knowledge of what He meant by our regeneration. And you will notice that any fragment of new light which the Lord gives, which is not obeyed immediately, interrupts the life of the Spirit, and the Holy Spirit says: "I can go no further with you", and you not only stop there but you decline, you lose your life, you lose your power. The Holy Spirit gives us life initially, only with the thought that we will go on with all that that involves, and the full truth is necessary so far as it is possible for us to have it. It is important to know that, and to tell the Lord's people that. The Holy Spirit in every one of His acts, acts prospectively. He has something in mind, in view, and in every one of His acts there is bound up all the other acts that should follow, and if there is not a following on with the Spirit, we have simply strangled the first activity of the Holy Spirit and robbed it of its intention. That is only explaining spiritual experience. And that is all bound up with this, that to go right on means that self-will goes, for everything to which Christ died has also gone for us; we have died to that. The church is founded upon the death of Christ in its meaning for us, and fellowship in this sense is only possible on that ground. So that every fresh crisis, perhaps in a disorder, a breach of fellowship, an upset, a disturbance will only be got

over as there is tracked down the bit of flesh, the bit of self, the bit of "I", the bit of nature which rose up and occasioned that, and being tracked down is taken back to the cross. You cannot put a plaster over things and make out it is alright, nothing has happened. There has been something of the poison of the old nature there and it has to be taken and ruled out; you cannot just smooth over things because it is a violation of the cross.

Now I want to follow on, not with dealing with the phase of service and ministry but with the fact of it in relation to the cross. It is just as important for us to be crucified ministers and workers as it is to be crucified sinners. I expect all of us here would accept the position taken so far, that as in Adam, as members of the Adam race, as parts of that old creation, we accept our death in the death of Christ; as sinners we readily have taken our place there. But that thing in a practical, experimental, mighty way has got to come into our ministry. It has got to come into our lives as Christian workers. It has got to touch us in nature in this realm. There are no lords in God's heritage, there is only one Lord; there are no masters in God's house, there is only One Master: "*One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.*" I believe this is behind the truth of the New Testament, that there is no assembly with just one Elder. You cannot find an instance in the New Testament where there was one Elder in the assembly; it is always plural — elders. The Lord has never had over His church any few dominating individuals, and the ordering of His assembly is so clearly laid out that the prophet must give place himself to another if another has a word from the Lord to speak, and that they are all in ministry themselves to be subject one to another. It is the governing of a great principle. The ruin, the wreckage of what is called the church has come about by that law having been set aside by dominating individuals, dominating personalities, aggressive people taking hold.

Now for us, we recognise that, I think, in principle. But the question comes back, have you and I been defeated not only as sinners but as ministers and workers? It is not enough to accept the truth of identification with Christ. That thing has got to be applied truth in the reality in which it was applied to Jacob, so that Jacob knew, not as theory, not as something he had learned, but knew in his own being that he could not walk as he had walked before, he could not do as he had done before, now there was a part of his being which represented his strength, the thigh, which was crippled. Now he was a dependent man, and take away that staff and he goes down, cannot stand up, there is something outside of himself which is not himself, upon which he is dependent for all his goings. He is a crippled man. Is that you? Is that me? That is essential to ministry in the Holy Spirit. You lose nothing by it, but gain. We gain one hundredfold, one thousandfold by it. There is one thing that this nature of ours dislikes more than anything else and that is weakness. To be weak, and to feel weak, and to know that we are weak, and for other people to know that we are weak is terrible for us. Oh! But that is where the Lord Jesus accomplished His triumph. "*He was crucified through weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God ...*". It is the way of power. But we are dealing with fellowship for a moment, fellowship in the ministry. What I am getting at is this, that we have got to be crucified men in ministry, in our relationships to our brethren, we have got to be crucified men in the work of the Lord, otherwise we will have to stand by ourselves. I do not mean to stand alone, to stand by ourselves. But when we come there the Lord stands by us. Oh you can afford to let go, to take all the risks of men taking account of your weakness and your acknowledged dependence, and what they see of your helplessness, taking a mean advantage of it, and God will stand by you if you are a man with a mandate, there is no man that will be able to stand against you. They may take account of you as being weak but they will meet God. They will have to reckon with God; you are weak in the Lord, it is the Lord they have got to reckon with, and isn't it a thousand times better for them to reckon with God than with us? What is going to be the result of them reckoning with us? We may 'defeat' them and what is there in that but desolation. There is not much gratification when you have beaten your last opponent; you are on top, but what does it

mean. Think of Saul of Tarsus talking of himself as the off-scouring of all things; Something has happened, but God stands by that man. Let them do what they will but they have to reckon with the Lord. We do not lose anything of position, of influence, of prestige and so on by being crucified men. The flesh hates it. It is the way.

"Behold my servant whom I uphold"; who is that? Behold Him; *"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not"*. "Whom I uphold", says the Lord, Well, it will be good to be crucified men and women as workers, as servants of the Lord. It must be. The ministry in the church, which is the Lord's ministry, is crucified ministry. It must be. And we must know it. You will ask your own heart how true this is. You must answer to the Lord this question: *"Have I been smitten, broken in the whole strength of nature as a servant of the Lord as well as a sinner?"* "Have I?" "Am I a broken man in nature?" A vessel of fragile clay has to be broken for His light to shine out. That is the ministry of the church. It is a crucified ministry through a crucified minister. That is the fellowship in this ministry. The fellowship in this ministry is the fellowship in the sufferings of Christ. And the sufferings of Christ are not the physical sufferings of Christ merely, they are those soul sufferings which for the most part came along the line of being subjected to trial and temptation where the will of nature is tested in the light of the will of God. The sufferings of Christ commenced in the wilderness, and they went right on and were all gathered up in the cross. It was a constant setting aside of the human will for the will of God, and what that involved for man.

I close with this word, bringing it up into its real place. The word of the apostle is: *"Ye were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord."* Fellowship which is ours with and in God's Son presupposes and involves His absolute Lordship; *"Jesus Christ our Lord"*. It is Christ as Lord, and absolute Lord that makes for fellowship. You have a great illustration, which is familiar to most of us, of David when all Israel came to make him king at Hebron, and then they all brought their food supplies and for three days they were eating and drinking, a scene of wonderful fellowship, great joy and rejoicing because the object was David as king. It was that that gave character to the feast, David as king. The one whom God had chosen was their king and when they made him so they had a most wonderful season of fellowship, and it is just that again. It is Jesus Christ our *Lord* who is in view collectively, mutually and corporately. That is, when the assembly comes together under the absolute leadership of Jesus Christ, then you know what fellowship is. That has to apply to the assembly as such and it has to apply to the ministry of which we have been speaking. He is Lord. Absolute Lord.

Now may the Lord give us grace to receive His word. If He is going to have what His heart is set upon even in the local representations of His church, it must be upon the basis of the cross as applied to us as the Lord's servants. May we have grace to accept it.

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Chapter 2 – Service in the Spirit

Reading: Romans 1:9; John 4:21-24; 1 Cor. 15:44; Heb. 12:9.

We have been very much occupied in these days with the matter of ministry in the house of God, We have been considering the house of God along the lines of the divine order, and now in this gathering I have this word on my heart to speak about service in connection with the clause in Romans 1:9: "*Whom I serve in my spirit*".

It is of very great importance that we who are servants of the Lord, should know the nature of service from the Lord's standpoint, and I think this statement of the apostle represents something which is quite revolutionary in the matter of service. It says quite clearly that the true service of the Lord is not in things outward; it does not begin there. It is not a matter of taking up Christian work, going into the Lord's service and becoming workers or servants or ministers in a systematized sense. It represents a change in dispensations. In the old dispensation the service of the Lord consisted in the things that were done outwardly: the sacrifices, the sprinkling of blood and all the many sided ministry of the tabernacle or the temple in outward things. That was the old order. I am rather afraid a good deal of that conception of things has come over into the New Testament age and the service of the Lord is looked upon as an office into which you are either put, or which you take up, a name by which you are called, perhaps the form of apparel which you wear, and having certain outward facilities of arranged, prepared, organized Christian work, and then a programme of activities, the giving of addresses and the preaching of sermons. Now service will always have, of course, an outward expression, but this word of the apostle implies, if it does not definitely state, that true service does not begin there. It is not just seeing something that needs to be done and going and doing it.

The words of the Lord Jesus to the woman, as we have again read them, represent this tremendous change which has come about by His presence. She is pointing to the outward representations of the old system of worship, service; this mountain and Jerusalem, this temple and that, and our fathers worshipped here and You say that it ought to be there. Well, that was the old order. It was Jerusalem or some other place, the temple there or some other centre of worship, and He said to her: "*Woman, believe Me, the hour comes, when you shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father ... but the hour comes, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeks such to worship Him*" (KJV).

What is the force of the "now is"? Well, it covers a tremendous range; it has the most momentous implication. It means that by the presence of the Lord Jesus, every outward system as it has existed is finished with. It was a representation. It pointed on to something, to Someone. In Him all its meaning was gathered up and fulfilled and the mere illustration is now finished with. The reality of all this is found in the Lord Jesus and that was not the real thing, not the true thing. He places His emphasis upon the *true* worshippers. Than that is by way of comparison and discrimination. In a sense, neither Jerusalem nor Samaria represented true worship. No doubt the worshippers were sincere, they meant what they did, He is not questioning their sincerity but He is saying it was not an outward system of things, and not the heavenly things themselves; it was that pattern of things in the heavenlies. He is the Heavenly One, He is the embodiment of the heavenly system, and when He arrives all that merely represents Him passes away, ceases, so that with His coming both the temples went, the outward systems went in the mind of God. The tragedy was that men kept on with a thing which had served its purpose, had its fulfilment, and was now set aside. "*The hour comes, when ye shall*

neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father ... the true worshippers shall worship the father in spirit and in truth". "Whom I serve in my spirit".

Now everything for the believer has its root and its rise in their spirit. In the deepest reality of the new birth it is the spirit that has become the seat of the new life, the spirit which has become the centre of the regenerating activity of the Holy Spirit, and the spirit which has become the vessel of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and it is out from there that everything for the believer proceeds. This simple phrase is used by the apostle to the Hebrews: "*The Father of (our) spirits*". Our spirits then have been begotten of God, born anew from above, and everything therefore is inward in its origin. Worship now belongs to our born-anew spirit and service proceeds from our born-anew spirit. I am not drawing a broad distinction between worship and service; I am using the words that may be interchangeable. They may, for our purpose, represent two aspects of the same thing.

The point is that everything new takes its rise in the spirit because the spirit is really the mind renewed, and it is the spirit of the mind which brings the mind into fellowship with God who is a Spirit. God puts Himself into communication with man by man's spirit. It is the spirit of man which, renewed, born again from above, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, is endowed with those spiritual faculties which are necessary for spiritual life and spiritual service. The faculty of sight in things spiritual belongs to the spirit. It is what the apostle means by "*having the eyes of your heart enlightened*". Eyes, deeper down than the eyes of reason, of mental apprehension. The apprehension of things spiritual demands the spiritual organ of sight to be quickened, energised by the Holy Spirit.

Now I think it unnecessary at the moment to go over the whole ground of spiritual faculties. We make the statement in general, that this is the situation. It is the outworking of this that is important. In the case of the apostle who said this, it represented such a tremendous change for him. He knew the Old Testament Scriptures before ever he was born again, he knew them thoroughly and he knew them soundly, and yet he did not know them at all! And the thing which happened to him in his new birth was that he saw with eyes which he had never possessed before. He saw behind those familiar Scriptures, the spiritual realities of God's mind, God's thought and hence he did not just give out the Scriptures, though he believed they were divine Scriptures, that they were inspired of God. And you find that he is getting the divine thought behind them, and that divine thought coming to him, seeing that behind the Scriptures, made him appear to everyone else who knew the Scriptures in the old way, as though he was reading things into the Scriptures, and taking things out of the Scriptures, which were not there, and giving all sorts of fantastic interpretations to the Scriptures. They could not see, but he had seen. Now what I say is not justification for giving fantastic interpretations of Scriptures or trying to get something out of them that is not there.

Some people think they can be mysterious in getting something out of the Scriptures which is not there. The point is, ministry in the Spirit is not just ministry in the letter. Ministry in the Spirit is what the Holy Spirit reveals within as God's thought, as God's mind about things. It is the deeper thing that can only come to us when the spirit has been quickened and made alive to God's thought about it. It is the great difference between taking up the Bible as a book of texts and preparing wonderful discourses on passages of Scriptures and using them as pegs to hang all sorts of stuff. It is a serving in the spirit, that is, in the recognition by the quickened and renewed spirit, in the power of the Holy Spirit, of God's mind about things, and you will discover of course, that that is a perfectly revolutionary thing and that represents spiritual growth, spiritual maturity.

Taking this letter to the Hebrews from which we have taken the phrase: "*The Father of (our) spirits*". The difficulty with which the apostle was dealing there was a spiritual immaturity to which he refers in chapter five when he said: "*For when by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that someone teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God.*" That was his difficulty and that state of

things was working out in this way, that they were not seeing, that they had not the spiritual perception to recognise that the old Jewish order of things in the tabernacle, in the temple, priesthood, sacrifices, and in those external ordinances as such, that the whole thing had now passed as a representation. The spiritual realities which they represented were God's established order for the new dispensation, and their danger was to live in an old dispensation which had passed, and therefore, to lose the spiritual power and virtue of what had come in, and that was immaturity. And the apostle was trying to show that that new service and worship is an inward thing first of all. It is by reason of Christ who fulfils all those things and gathers them all up in His own Person as fulfilled, taking up residence by His Spirit within the renewed spirit, of which God is Father. And out from there worship flowing and service proceeding and everything coming from the Spirit of God who has with Him the complete fulfilment of everything foreshadowed, dwelling within the born-again spirit and expressing that. That is what Paul meant by: "*Whom I serve in my spirit*". Paul had not, as we saw, gone into the ministry; the ministry had gone into him. Paul had not taken up Christian work; the Lord had taken up Paul. There is all the difference, and we have got to come back to this last.

By reason of our being regarded as workers, or ministers, or the Lord's servants, we find that there is a great system imposed upon us and we are under an obligation to meet it, and so we must prepare so many addresses to meet the organized demands of our position, and the thing becomes external upon us, a great imposition, something imposed upon us, and we have got to live up to it. When we get there it will not be long before we are dry and lifeless and the whole thing will be onerous and burdensome. No, everything depends upon our inward life in the Lord, that the Lord Himself by His Spirit dwelling within us has an opened heaven, a heaven that was opened to Him and has never been closed, and as within us so to speak, now in imagery, the angels of God ascending and descending upon him. That is, with an opened heaven God's communications in Christ continually going on in our hearts: the communications of heaven. That is exactly what happened in His own case in the days of His flesh. He repudiated any suggestion that anything He said or did originated in Himself. He constantly affirmed that the works that He did, He did not out from Himself. "*The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what he sees the Father doing! For what things so ever he does, these the Son also does in like manner.*"

How did He see? The eyes of His heart were enlightened. His spirit was discerning, perceiving by its own spiritual faculty under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, what the Father is doing. He was standing in this sense as man, the Son of man in ministry according to God's heart. We are not forgetting that there is the other side where He is God Himself, but now He is standing officially as man in the service of God under the anointing of the Spirit, and the law is that nothing originates in Himself, it all originates with the Father and is communicated to His spirit, and His spirit in Holy Spirit fellowship with the Father is discerning, recognising, and so it comes out from the Father through His spirit. He serves His Father in His spirit, and as with the works, so with the words. "*I do nothing of myself; but as my Father has taught me I speak these things.*" "*The Father that dwells in me, He does the works.*" "*The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.*" We must not apply this to general and all situations. It was not concerning giving the Lord's message, but concerning emergencies. He said to His disciples: "*When they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaks in you.*" So many of us have come across have taken that to apply to all kinds of ministry and have thought: 'The Lord will tell me what to say when I get on my feet' — be careful! Come back to this that the Lord Jesus Himself was in this position, that nothing had its rise in Himself. It had its rise in God by the Spirit and that was born in His own spirit. Exactly what the apostle means: "*Whom I serve in my spirit*". Nothing out from Himself but out from God. That is the principle of spiritual ministry and spiritual service. When it is like that there will be nothing that is dead. It will be a constant renewing. You may say the same things a thousand times, you may follow

the same line of truth many times, but if it is in your spirit, not just your natural mind, it will not matter how many times it is said. If it is said by the leading of the Lord it will still have vitality and energy and effectiveness. This has got to be in our spirit and not to be in our system of things outwardly, not to be in ourselves naturally, and of course, here comes in the tremendous necessity for our spiritual life, our spirit to be kept in that continuous fellowship with the Lord.

The Lord Jesus speaks of Himself as fulfilling Jacob's dream. The angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man and you will remember that in the case of Jacob it was Bethel that was in view, the house of God. The house of God, an altar set up upon the earth, the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. That is all you want as a description of the house of God. The Lord Jesus was the sanctuary of God on the earth. He was the divine Bethel, the house of God. The features of His life were just those; the Father above, in the place of exaltation, in the place of government, the place where everything was subject to Him of soul, heart and mind, and between Him and His temple constant communications. The bearing of God's mind, carrying to and fro all His thoughts and desires. Coming down revealing His mind, returning with that will as known, fulfilled. That is the church. That is the house of God. That is Bethel.

But mark you, each one of the Lord's servants is the house of God, is a temple of the Holy Spirit; every member of Christ is a sanctuary, a habitation of God, and ministry in that house of God is upon that principle, that Christ indwells by His Spirit and that all the ministry and all the service is upon the basis of a continual communication with heaven. Not producing the thing ourselves, what we should say, what we should do, where we should go but receiving it by the Spirit and only as it is so, beloved, will the thing be living, will the thing be effective. This is very elementary, but oh it is fundamental, it is basic, it is important.

The conflict for the child of God is for the most part in the realm of the spirit being now alive, being kept, maintained in life. The soul and the body must be governed by the renewed and Holy Spirit energised spirit, and if the spirit loses some of its vitality, then we shall register that in all the rest of our being. We shall know it in our bodies, we shall know it in our minds, in our souls, in that which we call our souls, our soul life. Yes, but it works the other way. The secret of true life in body, in mind, is found in the spirit being constantly maintained in life by the Holy Spirit. Oh we have proved this again so often; that sometimes we felt perfectly incapable of doing anything with our bodies, and in our soul life we have had no energy, no will, no heart, no mind.

We have tried to raise ourselves, but No. But then we have got one or two to pray with us, or the Lord has graciously sent someone along to pray with us, and in touch with Him, in renewed touch with Him the spirit has been renewed, re-energised, and through the vehicle of the spirit the life of the Lord has come into the mind, into the soul, into the body and the service that has followed almost instantly, or almost immediately afterward, the thing which was in view, the thing for which we were entirely unfit has not been service in our body, or in our soul, we serve the Lord in our spirit because if it had not been for that renewed, re-energised indwelt spirit, the service would not have been produced. And if you had asked Paul how it was that he was able, with such a body of infirmity, having suffered so much, to do all that he did do, he would have explained that it was all the outcome of his spirit being constantly energised and renewed. Now we are so often in danger of thinking the other way round, that the Lord must first of all come and start with our bodies before ever we can do anything. That sometimes has been His kindergarten method with people who have not spiritual intelligence and understanding, with the little ones, and He sometimes adapts Himself to the ignorance of the Lord's people, but that is not the less normal. That is not the principle of the child of God who has any intelligent fellowship with the Lord, and it is an important thing in service to recognise this, because you know real service does represent some measure of maturity, which means spiritual intelligence.

In the book of Numbers we read about the order of the house of God. Well, if you look into the book of Numbers, you will find that there was an age limit fixed in relation to those who were to come into fellowship with the Lord in His conquests. You see what was in view was the house of God ordered according to the mind of God with this issue: *"Rise up, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered"*. You see the scattering of the enemy and the casting down the adversaries was the issue of a house in order but unto that there was an age fixed, twenty years, and twenty years means typically youthful maturity. Maturity is not just a matter of time. Paul tried to bring that home to Timothy. It is not just a matter of years, maturity can belong to what is naturally a youthful state, and immaturity can belong to people who are naturally as old as Methuselah. The three and a half years of our Lord's life counted for infinitely more than the almost thousand years of Methuselah. That spiritual value is not reckoned by God in the measure of time. The Lord would have His warriors mature as soon as possible but there must be maturity even though in the point of years those years may be few. And maturity is marked of course by intelligence. And in the Lord's service especially upon this matter, that we will not be able to do spiritual service by natural means. That even if we have the best natural equipment, that is not the Lord's means for accomplishing spiritual ends in itself. We may not have that equipment physically, mentally, naturally.

We may be at a discount, but the principle is that service is in the energy of the Spirit and when we are most at a discount physically and mentally, when we have no natural resources left, when it seems that the work of the Lord is no longer possible and that there is a growing limitation, we should remember that the principle of serving the Lord is not natural at all, it is the spirit. That the spirit being energised by God and quickened at any moment can make mind and body equal to the fullest labour so that we do not accept our natural state as our criterion – *"Whom I serve in my spirit"*, and it is the explanation of the phenomenal accomplishments there in the apostle's life. You cannot explain things at all upon the natural ground, you have to look elsewhere and he gives you the secret: *"Whom I serve in my spirit"*, not with my natural force, not with my physical strength, not with my intellectual equipment, but *"Whom I serve in my spirit"*. His equipment, therefore, for service came through his spirit whether that equipment was of revelation, light, truth, or whether the equipment was physical energy and strength. Whatever equipment was necessary along the line of knowledge or strength, it came to him through his spirit. He will tell us quite plainly that he did not receive his knowledge of the Lord by any natural means, it did not come to him by the exercise of his natural reason, and he did not receive it from men, he received it by revelation in his spirit; and what was true in the realm of revelation and knowledge was true in every other realm which made him the minister of Christ that he was.

The secret was here, "in my spirit". He had found, not only initially in his new birth, but continuously in his life, in his very continuance and persistence, and in all his ministry, that the Last Adam was made a life-giving Spirit, That was a continual abiding reality for him in everything. The Last Adam to him was made a quickening Spirit, it is the explanation of the believer's life, it is the explanation of the sustainings, of the service, and of the consummation of the believer's life. 1 Cor. 15:35: *"How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?"* The explanation is that believer, so far as believers are concerned, have got a renewed spirit, and they are essentially spiritual people, and God is going to clothe them with a spiritual body. The consummation of the believer's life is on the basis of that principle, that they already have been raised and therefore they will be raised. They already have a spiritual man, and that spiritual man must, for his completeness have a spiritual body.

Everything begins with the spirit, proceeds from the spirit, is the basis of all the divine activities, service. We have got to know how to walk in the spirit and live in the spirit. Hence we have ever to remember that natural conditions are never to be the last word for in a moment, when the whole natural situation may be, speaking naturally, utterly

hopeless, by a quickening of the spirit the most wonderful results may follow. Dead one minute and the next minute, or the next hour, in a full stream of active life in the service of the Lord. Not that the Lord did something from the outside, but the spirit felt His quickened touch, and that spirit took hold of mind and body and said: "*Come on, there is more work for the Lord yet to be done in the energy which the Lord gives.*" There are intelligences which are able to recognise that. Men do not see it. Men see the outside. In the main, men do not know, but there are intelligences who know, who are able to recognise and it is in that sense that it is unto principalities and powers that the manifold wisdom of God is made known through the church. We are equally to be individually and corporately a vessel of the testimony of that deathless life of our risen Lord, and that is to come through our ministry, to be the truth of our ministry: "*Whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of his Son*".

The Lord teach us more and more of what that means, of the value of that, the possibilities of that, how to apply that. May we always bear in mind that in order that that might be maintained for us in its fullest measure there must not be any tampering with the flesh. We must daily put to death the deeds of the flesh so that the life of Jesus may be manifested even in these mortal bodies.

The Lord help us.