

THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST

(handwritten version)

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"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach to the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8).

Chapter One

Introduction

NEAR THE JOURNEY'S END

The last phase of his pilgrimage has arrived. The end of the journey is in sight. The course has almost been run and what a course it has been! The faithful servant, the war-scarred warrior, the greatest of Christ's missionaries, church builders, and stewards of the heavenly riches, will soon receive "the crown of eternal life" laid up for him. His "journeys oft" are soon to give place to "the rest that remaineth". His "labouring more abundantly" is practically over. He gives expression to a hope that he may yet visit some of his most beloved converts (Phil. 2:24). (Some believe that this hope was realised, and that, for a short period of release, he travelled still further afield. But we have no definite record of this in the New Testament.) He is now in prison in Rome and later concludes his record with the period there "in his own hired house". This man, who saw the sovereignty of God in every vicissitude (change of circumstances) of his life, did not fail to do so in this arrival and sojourn in Rome there which was so different from what he had hoped for and expected (Rom. 1:15).

Disappointment and God's appointment

Taking stock of his situation, he was not long in arriving at the conclusion that, in that divine sovereignty, this would make possible the realisation of another strong desire that had been in his heart, but which could not be fulfilled while on his many travels. He had written letters, some long and some short, each of which had been written in relation to some particular need and situation. Not one of them went — other than by a passing reference — outside of that special demand. He made long journeys and worked steadily at his trade to support himself and make it impossible for critics to say that he lived off his converts. He also had special and extraordinary experiences, such as being "caught up into the third heaven (in a vision or dream) hearing unspeakable things" (2 Cor. 12:1-4), not omitting the two years in the Arabian Desert, several years alone in Tarsus soon after his conversion, and a long imprisonment in Caesarea. All this gave much time for meditation and for the

Lord to speak to him. In this way an immense accumulation of spiritual knowledge became stored up in his heart. Being so sure, as he often said, that this "revelation" was a "stewardship" for "the body of Christ", he would doubtless be hoping for a time when he would have leisure and detachment enough to unburden his spirit in writing. We now know that such a time and opportunity just *had* to come, for the fruit of that has been an unspeakable blessing to the church during these many centuries.

Well, as we have said, strange as the Providence may have seemed when first he looked round his apartment, and saw, not least, his Roman guard and chain, he soon realised that this could be the great opportunity for which he had been waiting. It would very strongly appear that as this realisation came to him, and perhaps in the long nights when vision had gone, he became almost overwhelmed by the uprush of that store of revelation. We so conclude from the method and style, as well as the substance of what he then committed to writing. He had those churches in Asia immediately in mind (though the Lord had much greater intentions) and what he wrote was intended to be circulated among them, probably a blank space being left for filling in with the particular name, such as — "to the saints which are at ..." (The name 'Ephesus' does not occur in earlier manuscripts). There is little doubt, however, that this overflow of heart had a special direction for that so great and spiritually influenced church at Ephesus. This may be of secondary importance in view of the so-much-greater divine intention by this inspiration.

The overflowing heart

It is his manner that means so much as a first impression. Our title is an example of that manner. The Letter (to the Ephesians, so-called) is written in terms of the superlative. Look at some of these superlatives: "The exceeding greatness of his power" (1:19); "The fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (1:23); "The exceeding riches of His grace" (2:7); "The unsearchable riches of Christ" (3:8); "The breadth and length and height and depth"; "The knowledge-surpassing love of Christ"; "All the fulness of God" (3:18,19); "Exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (3:20); "Far above all heavens, that He might fill all things" (4:10); "The fulness of Christ" (4:13); "... a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (5:27).

Are we not right in saying that the man was first unable to contain his fulness? Not only his phrases, but the grammatical form he uses also prove this. He will start on a course, and then, when an extra thought comes into his mind, he will diverge and go off at a tangent, not picking up the earlier thread again until some way after. The longest sentence, without a full stop in the New Testament is found in this Letter. He is too full and too eager to stop for literary technicalities. The floodgates are open like a torrent and he is pouring out this fulness so long pent up. When we come to consider the nature of his revelation we shall understand better why he was so expressive in superlatives. At the moment we are just registering the force of his anxiety to get it out at last.

The greatest document ever penned

Some may not agree with us, and some may think that we are exaggerating when we say that this Letter is *the greatest document ever penned*.

We shall have to substantiate that opinion, but we shall not have altogether failed when we have finished. When we say 'greatest', of course we don't mean in length, but in intrinsic value and content. This is the crown and consummate essence of Paul's ministry. It is the climax of his mission. Here are a few comments of outstanding Christian scholars on the Letter to the Ephesians.

For one such it is: "the consummate and most comprehensive statement which even the New Testament contains of the meaning of the Christian religion, blending as nowhere else its evangelical, spiritual, moral and universal elements."

Or from another: 'The sublimest communication ever made to man was made from a Roman prison by one who in his own words was 'the very least of all the saints.' "

"The Epistle is one of the noblest in the New Testament."

"A divine Epistle glowing with the flame of Christian love, and the splendour of holy light, and flowing with fountains of living water."

"The most heavenly work of one whose very imagination is peopled with things in the heavens."

"In this the divinest composition of man, in every doctrine of Christianity; first, those directives peculiar to Christianity, etc."

"It is emphatically the Epistle of the Ascension. We rise in it, on wings of inspiration, to the divinest heights. Word after word — and thought after thought — now 'the heavenlies', now 'spiritual', now 'riches', now 'glory', now 'mystery', now 'plenitude', now 'light', now 'love', seem, as it were, to leave behind them 'a luminous trail' in this deep and shining sky."

"It is the most advanced, the most sublime, the most profound, the most final utterance of Paul's Gospel."

Let us hasten to say that our own appraisal is not the result of reading such estimates of the work, for these are of much later discovery. We have reached our own conclusion after many years of reading and meditating on this Letter, and on Paul's ministry in general. But we are so glad to have our judgement confirmed or checked by men of so much greater knowledge than our own.

Therefore, we have only introduced the Letter. Its content, teaching, and message will occupy the main place, while still remaining so vastly beyond our comprehension. Before we take our plunge into those deeps, and never get much further than the surface, we must give some attention to the man himself, and to how the man and his ministry are one thing. Before so

proceeding, let us remind our readers of one or two obvious but impressive facts.

When the apostle Paul set himself to write this Letter, he had no idea that he was writing Holy Scripture — the Bible (in part). His sole thought and desire was to confirm and supplement that “whole counsel of God” which he “had not shunned” to declare to — and through — Ephesus and Asia Minor during the two years that he was there (Acts 19). It was a Letter that — in his own mind — he was writing, and that, to a location and a need. It could never have occurred to him that what he was writing would be read by an ever-growing number of people through nearly twenty centuries; that it would go into a world the size of which he knew nothing; that people of every race under heaven would have it translated into their own language or dialect; that it would divide Christendom worldwide into the largest opposing schools of theology and interpretation, that people of God in every time and realm would eagerly feed upon it; that bookstores in every country would have their shelves growingly filled with ‘Expositions’, ‘Commentaries’, ‘Sermons’, etcetera on this Letter; and that, finally, such appraisals as we have given above would be attached to that piece of personal correspondence! He would never have imagined this as possible, but would also have had a shock of astonishment if he had foreseen it. What a vindication of this testimony! What a justification of his sufferings! What an unveiling of God’s sovereignty and grace! What an inspiration and strength this should be to any who may be suffering in fellowship with Christ, and what a proof of the truth of his own words, “Your labours are not in vain in the Lord.”

THE MAN IN THE MESSAGE

This is not intended to be a 'Life of the apostle Paul', but rather to do with the particular *significance* of this servant of Jesus Christ. While there are those vital and essential factors in his case which must be true of every servant of Christ, and true to every fruitful ministry, (as we shall later indicate) everything about Paul indicates that he was indeed "a chosen (elect) vessel", foreknown, foreordained, and selected. This was true particularly in the nature of the ministry for which he was "apprehended". The same nature of ministry may — in measure — be the 'calling' of others, but it was pioneered in Paul. All the apostles stood on common ground where the fundamentals of the faith were concerned. As to the Person of Christ, the work of Christ, redemption, justification, sanctification, the world commission to preach salvation in Christ to the whole world, the coming again of the Saviour, etcetera, the apostles had the same foundation. Each one may have had "grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." That is, according to their personal gift — whether "Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor and Teacher", and had "grace" — anointing, enablement, corresponding to the responsibility, but on 'fundamentals', that is, foundation matters, they were agreed and one.

Whatever we may say in distinguishing Paul we would not for a moment take one small fragment from the great ministry of John, or Peter, or James, or others. Never could our New Testament suffer the loss of those ministries, and elsewhere we have gloried in them. When all has been said as to their value — and it would be an immense 'all', we still have to affirm that there was — and is — that which is unique and particular in what came through Paul.

Let us hasten to say a very significant and helpful thing before we proceed. It would never have been possible for Paul to understand his pre-conversion life until he came under the hand of Jesus Christ. That vocation with which he was called when Jesus became his Lord throws so much illumination upon the sovereignty of God in his past history. This is a principle which will help so many people and servants of God, and it shows how immensely important it is that Jesus should be — not only Saviour — but Lord. We shall see this more fully later. Paul's Jewish birth, upbringing, training, education, and deep embedment in something from which he would be extricated by the power of God, and something which was going to be shown to no longer be what God needed, is in itself of tremendous educative value. Why God, in His foreknowledge should put a man deeply into something which does not ultimately represent His mind contains a point to be noted. Many there are who argue that, because they have ample reason to know that God put them into a certain way, work, form or association there they are to abide for ever, willy-nilly. Paul's history says 'No' to that argument. God's ways in his case came to show that He may do a thing like that, and all His Sovereignty may truly be in it, but only for a purpose, and a temporary purpose; namely to give a deep and thorough first-hand knowledge of that which is really at best a limitation upon the full purpose of God. It is necessary for an effective servant of God to have personal knowledge of that from which people are to be delivered. Abraham must know Chaldea. Moses must know Egypt. David must

know the falsehood of Saul's reign. So Paul must know the proscribed (rejected) Judaism, so that he can speak with *authority*, the authority of personal experience. Were we the Psalmist we should put "Selah" there, "Think of that!"

But we must underline two aspects of this principle. We are referring to what was definitely within the divine "working of all things after the counsel of His own will", and "according to His purpose". Paul was not changing his God at conversion. Jehovah was his God for ever. The change was in the *method* of God. It was still God working. We say this because no one can say that because they were born and brought up in this and that, therefore 'Providence' (meaning God) intended *that* to be their way for always. We *must* be as we are and where we are by the sovereignty of God, and we *must* know that any major change is definitely of God, and the only alternative to making it is clear disobedience to the presented will of God. It has to be a *must*, or a missing of the way. It certainly will make demands upon faith's walk with God, because the element of *apparent* contradiction may be present. We do not know what mental struggles and soul battles Paul had. It is not recorded that in facing the immense revolution he turned to the Lord and said — 'Well, Lord, by Your sovereignty I was born a Jew, and that with more than general terms. — A Hebrew of Hebrews, of the stock of Israel; of the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee. And now, Lord, You are requiring me to take a course which repudiates all that and contradicts it. It is not like You, Lord, to contradict Yourself; it seems so inconsistent. It is not as though I have not been God-fearing and without faith in You.' The change was so revolutionary as to be two contrary ways in the same God. Here was a very big occasion to "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and *lean not unto thine own understanding.*" We could cite the cries of many servants of God who have been brought to such a crisis between reason and faith when God was demanding a decision which *seemed* to contradict all His former leading. Some of them have come to be very greatly vindicated by obedience. Some have lived to be examples of having missed the way, or God's best.

All this has to do with God's sovereign preparation and equipment of a servant so that that servant should truly know by deep experience what he is talking about and what the differences are. This is a summary of his Jewish background. But this man was elected and destined to be God's special messenger to the *nations*, not just to a nation. The nations were mainly under Roman government and Greek culture and language. Through his father Paul inherited Roman citizenship and freemanship, and by his birth and upbringing in Tarsus he had both the Greek language and a first-class familiarity with Greek life and culture. There those things — Jewry, Roman citizenship, and Greek language took him with facility and ease into practically the whole world. But, added to all this natural qualification was that without which Paul would never have been the real factor that history testifies to; he was anointed with the Holy Spirit. Sometimes the anointing has made up for much natural deficiency in education and birth, and men have made spiritual history who would never have been recognised on mere natural grounds. The Lord took very real care that Paul could never make his natural advantages the ground of his *true* success. This was implied or indicated in the first recorded words of

the Lord about him — to Ananias — after his conversion, “I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name’s sake” (Acts 9:16).

The sovereignty of God is many-sided and has many ways. It is only when the full story is told that a true explanation is seen. At the beginning and in the course there can be room for many a ‘Why?’ A Moses and a Jeremiah may start off with what they are convinced is a definite handicap and contradiction, but history justifies God and in the end His wisdom is vindicated. When God says, “He is a chosen vessel”, He knows all about the clay of which the vessel is made. As we go on the two implicit things just referred to will become increasingly apparent. One, that the messenger and his message are one thing; the message is in the man’s constitution and very history under the hand of God, and two, the man is not just recognised for his natural qualifications alone, but pre-eminently because God has anointed him for his position and work. No man can be in any but a completely false position if he speaks without what he says being born out of real experience. Only, for instance, may a man speak of brokenness if he himself has been broken. Paul’s ministry throughout came from a continuous history with God in deep, and usually painful experiences of conflict. It was ‘the spoil of battle’. It is absolutely imperative that it should be obvious and manifest that any position, function, and ministry on the part of anyone in relation to Christ should be by anointing, and that the impression made, and conclusion drawn by others is that, ‘That man is clearly anointed for that job!’ Anointing simply means that God is most evidently with the person concerned in what they are doing and in the position that they hold. To be out of position is to be out of anointing in that instance. We cannot select, choose, or decide our place and function. That is an organic thing, and just as it is awkward for a leg to try to do the work of an arm in the human body, so there will always be something wrong when we assume a work or position for which the sovereignty of the Spirit has not chosen us. With all the adversities and oppositions, it is the most helpful thing to know that we are where we are by divine appointment and not by our own will. It is a good thing when we know what *our* function is, and what it is not, and act accordingly! There are sufficient functions in the body corporate for every member to have a quite definite one under the one anointing, and the function will as naturally express itself as an eye sees, an ear hears, a hand grips, and so on, *if* the head — the Head — is in full and right control. Paul, then, has much to teach us on this matter, first by his life, and then by his writings. At this point we are brought back to where we diverged, from the message to the man, and we must now consider that differentiation of function for which Paul was particularly chosen and apprehended.

Paul’s distinctive vocation

That there was a difference and peculiar importance in Paul’s ministry has a number of strong evidences and attestations. He knew it himself and often referred to it, both as to its substance and the way in which he received it. This is expressed in such words as the following:

“How that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery, whereby ... ye can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ” (Eph. 3:2-4).

“The stewardship of that grace of God which was given me to you-ward” (Eph. 3:2).

“Unto me ... was this grace given ... to make all men see (bring to light what is, margin) what is the stewardship (dispensation, ASV) of the mystery ...” (Eph. 3:8,9).

While Paul does not say that he alone had had the “mystery” made known to him, he does claim that, as a stewardship, a ministry, it was revealed to him in a distinctly personal and direct-from-heaven manner. He claimed that he was divinely apprehended for this particular ministry; what that revelation was has to spread itself over all that we shall write. At the moment we are concerned with the *fact* of Paul’s specific vocation.

Not least among the evidences of this was the fury, invective, hatred, malice and murderous cruelty of the devil and his forces focussed upon this man relentlessly. It was simply because of what was coming through him, and not just because of his personality. It began and broke loose on the same issue before Paul was the apprehended vessel of it. To see and understand this we have to go back to the one man who had previously seen what Paul was shown. We refer to Stephen as the first Christian martyr and we are deeply moved when we read the account of his death. But how little Stephen has been understood, and how blind we have been to the real meaning of his death — his destruction by Satan-controlled men.

Stephen — the precursor or forerunner of Paul

A thoughtful consideration of Stephen’s discourse before the Jewish Sanhedrin will show that Stephen was like a ‘preface’, an introduction, to Paul’s ministry. If Stephen had lived there is little doubt that he and Paul would have been in a mighty partnership in the stewardship of the mystery. This, of course, supposes that the Lord did not foresee that Stephen *would* die, and that, in that foreknowledge He did not mark down Paul for the sole stewardship of this ministry in its fulness. The divine sovereignty has rarely been evidenced more than in Saul’s presence with Stephen at the time of the latter’s death, although an accomplice in it. As we move with Stephen through that long discourse, following his mind from Abraham through Isaac, Jacob, the Patriarchs, Joseph, Israel, Moses, Egypt, the Exodus, Sinai, the Tabernacle, the Wilderness, Joshua, David, Solomon, the Temple, the prophets, up to Christ, the “Righteous One”, there is one thing that is in Stephen’s mind throughout. That one thing is the key to everything, and the one thing that — more than anything else — explains, defines, and characterises Paul and his ministry. That one thing is that God is ever, from eternity to eternity, pursuing an all-compassing goal, through human failure, human and satanic destruction and attempted frustration, by a variety and multitude of ways, means, and persons, in all generations and ages. God is ever going on. His desired and selected instrument or instruments may become a hindrance rather than a help. Nations, empires, and systems may oppose and obstruct; circumstances may seem to limit Him, but — given time — He is found not to have given up but

still to be going on. He has set Himself a purpose and a goal, and that goal will be reached. Let Jewry “always resist the Holy Spirit” as Stephen says; so much the worse for Jewry. That is the tremendous upshot of Stephen’s discourse.

Within that inclusiveness there are other features. God’s purpose is a heavenly one, a vast one, a spiritual one, an eternal one. Neither Tabernacle with all its inner beauty and symbolic embodiment of divine thoughts, nor the Temple of Solomon with all its magnificence and glory, nor Solomon himself with his stunning wisdom and overwhelming wealth — says Stephen — can remotely approximate to that toward which God is moving in relation to His Son. That is not “made with hands”. That is not of the earth. That is not God’s throne (Acts 7:48,49). The Holy Spirit — says Stephen, in effect — is moving on, ever on to this so-much-greater in every way. Stephen, in one glorious hour, met the devastating force of that with which Paul contended all his life; namely, the incorrigible disposition of *God’s people* to bring what is essentially heavenly down to earth and fix it there; to crystallise spiritual things into man-made systems; to lay hands upon what is of God and make it something of man, something exclusive and legal under men’s control. Stephen’s stand for, and testimony to, this ‘heavenly vision’ (*that* became Paul’s phrase) brought him into the worst violent and vicious hatred of vested religious interests, so far as systems were concerned, and Satan’s fiercest jealousy behind all. Touch religious traditions and established orders and you will find the same thing that Stephen met, a jealousy which moves from blindness to the vastly greater purpose of God. In *some way* you will be stoned! By ostracism, exclusion, closed doors, suspicion, and misrepresentation, all of which are traceable in the case of Paul.

Have we said enough about Stephen to justify and establish our statement that he was — so to speak — Paul in advance? Stephen himself is an example of God going on in spite of hell and men, and Paul *was* the going on of God in fulness when men put Stephen away. We look back to our beginning statement that a major evidence of the particular ministry for which Paul was chosen is the vehemence of satanic antagonism.

All that we have said, and much more, will, of course come out in our consideration of the ministry of Paul himself, but I am sure that we are beginning to see something of his significance.

Still ahead of our contemplation of the crowning and consummate ministry of Paul the Apostle, there are several matters of considerable value which may make a brief chapter of helpfulness by themselves.

SPYING OUT THE LAND

On two occasions, when Israel was contemplating entering the Land of the Covenant and Promise, spies were sent over beforehand. The first occasion was disastrous because it was the decision of the people governed by self-instinct, and although Moses complied, and the Lord permitted, the secret motive was eventually betrayal. After long and deep discipline the principle of "the delight of the Lord" was present and faith triumphed. The spies can go with approval and blessing when the motive is that of the Lord's glory, not man's. We would believe that the move from 1 Corinthians 1:10 to Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians corresponds to that change from the first to the second spying out of the Land. May we answer to the second as we contemplate the glorious Land! Of the preliminary considerations here are some:

- 1) Paul himself was — when writing — aware that what he had been shown by the Lord was beyond his power of utterance. The very phrase "unsearchable riches" implies this. It could be correctly translated 'untraceable' or 'inexplicable'. Beyond tracing, beyond explaining, beyond reach. Paul knew himself to be attempting an impossible task. He requested these believers in Asia to pray for him "that utterance may be given unto me in opening my mouth, to make known the mystery..." (Eph. 6:19). He was labouring to speak the unspeakable, to fathom the unfathomable, to comprehend the incomprehensible. The paradox of preaching the unpreachable characterises these final letters. If that was true of *that* man, what can *we* do more than behold at a distance!
- 2) What Paul did and did not set himself to do.
Paul — in these final writings — did *not* set himself to write a treatise on this and that theme, subject or doctrine. There is all the difference *in this respect* between 'Ephesians' and 'Galatians' or 'Romans'. In 'Ephesians' Paul is not reasoning, arguing or debating. He is not setting down his 'Philosophy of Christianity'. He had a wide and rich knowledge of the philosophies and religious ideas of the world in which he had moved. But he is not minded to deal with these or compare the other religions with Christianity. What Paul *did do* in this Letter to Asia, and through Asia to all whom Asia touched, (and unconsciously to us), was to make a mighty proclamation. Here we have a man making a proclamation. He is just giving out with a heart too full for articulation — an "utterance". It is like an imperative broadcast for which the microphone is too small and inadequate.

This was not something that he had thought out and was the product of his great brain. He attributed it to a "revelation" given him by the initiative of God. This that he is penning is a vital, and in a sense, a consummate presentation of the long process of God's self-disclosure. And it embodies God's full and final revelation of His eternal purpose. It is because it is of this nature that Paul falls on his knees and prays a

special prayer for his readers (Eph. 1: 15-17). It is because of a fixed and unutterable law and principle, which he has enunciated so clearly and emphatically elsewhere (1 Cor. 2: 14-16) that spiritual things, (things of the Spirit), can only be understood by spiritual people, (people of the Spirit). We have to come on to this later, but all that is before us in this letter will be little or no more than written mysteries if we do not pray this same prayer for this same necessity before we go any further.

- 3) The last letters, being so inclusive in substance, naturally gather up in allusion, if not in restatement, many of the matters touched on incidentally in former letters. So, in allusion, we have vital points in Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, etcetera. It would require much time and space to trace and tabulate the instances. Some great words will be an indication, such as "redemption", "spiritual", "sons", "grace", "adoption", "foreordained", etcetera.
- 4) Our method will be different from that usually employed in studying these (and other) letters. In order that Bible students may obtain a quick, easy, and simple grasp of the books of the Bible, Bible teachers usually suggest outlines according to the content and subjects mainly mentioned. This is a very suitable and helpful method. Thus we have such helpful outlines and analyses (of Ephesians) as Dr. Campbell Morgan's 'The Church':
 - a) The Heavenly Calling.
 - b) The Earthly Conduct.

Each of these two sections is divided into three more.

Or we have sister Ruth Paxson's 'The Wealth, Walk, and Warfare of the Christian'; or that little book by Watchman Nee, 'Sit, Walk, Stand'. We are not trying to improve on these valuable works, and that is not the method which we are employing, and we hasten to say so. From the following you will not be given a 'bird's-eye view', as we usually describe a general look at things; unless it is an eagle's eye which sees vast ranges from great altitudes. In this sense 'Ephesians' does take up the eagle aspect of the cherubim — mystery and heavenliness. Our method will be — as it were — to hover over some of the eminences rising from this landscape, or, to keep to our title, stand and gaze with wonder at some of the "unsearchable riches of Christ" which are presented in these final writings, especially 'Ephesians'.

THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES

We shall not get very far into the practical meaning and import of this great unveiling until we have the key in our hand. Once we have that key everything will be explained as to its purpose and value. Strange enough that key is in the form of a small prefix which — unfortunately — does not appear in our translations. It occurs twice in Ephesians, (in major connections), four times in Colossians, once in Philippians; in both letters to Timothy, and in Hebrews. (Whether Paul actually wrote 'Hebrews' is not discussed, but we have no hesitation in saying that his influence and way of thinking are definitely in it). In our translation we have the word "knowledge" in Ephesians 1:17 and 4:13, Colossians 1:9,10, 3:10 and Philippians 1:9. But there and in the other letters mentioned the word (in the Greek) has the little prefix 'epi'. Epi means full, and while 'to know' occurs alone in many places in the New Testament, it means — usually — the beginning of knowledge, such as, "This is life eternal, that they should know Thee, the only true God, and him whom Thou didst send, Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). But when we have moved on from the beginning and are come to the more mature state as in Paul's later letters, that which is set before us is "full knowledge" (epignosis). What Paul prays for therefore in Ephesians 1:17 is that believers who have already advanced in knowledge may still come to *full* knowledge. That is the word of maturity. This then is the key to all that is presented here, and what is presented is that which constitutes full knowledge. All that we will add until later is that this knowledge, or full knowledge, is not mental, intellectual, academic, obtained by reading, study, or hearing (although it *might* come *through* such) but, as Paul emphasises, it is by revelation of the Holy Spirit. For us now, since the Scriptures were completed, revelation is not something *extra to* Scriptures, but revelation or illumination as to what is in the Scriptures; and that is inexhaustible. We will come back to that later.

Let us note some of the major features of the ultimate disclosure.

As to how the apostle came by the full knowledge which he had, we can only say two things, which are made known. One was the more general, "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him, the eyes of your heart being enlightened ..." etcetera. That is the birthright of every believer, but it belongs to obedience to all truth or light already given. It is what John refers to — "The anointing which you have received ... teacheth you all things" (1 Joh. 2:27). But, in Paul's case, because of his special 'stewardship' he was given special revelations, as when he was "caught up (in vision, dream, or trance) into the third heaven and heard unspeakable things" (2 Cor. 12). If we follow this illumined and inspired mind of the apostle we shall be led into and through "ages" from eternity past to eternity yet to be. We shall be given a glimpse of what took place in each of these eras, and what the character of each was, is, and will be.

There are four of these eras referred to:

- 1) "Before times eternal."

- 2) From creation to Christ — the Old Testament era.
- 3) From the incarnation to the consummation of the age.
- 4) "The ages of the ages."

Between (1) and (2), there is an event which has affected the whole course and character of things from (1) to (3), as we shall see.

Before times eternal

It is to be noted that the apostle had barely begun this letter and opened the floodgate of this pent-up revelation than he carried his readers away back past all time and landed them in what he called "before the foundation of the world". It is language which he used more than once: "Before times eternal" (2 Tim. 1:9, Tit. 1:2).

Having taken that long flight back over centuries and millennia, he intimated what in that dateless past took place. Two things are indicated and stated. In the counsels of the Godhead the Son of God was designated and appointed the eternal Sphere of all that would be of God. "In Him" is the definition (Eph. 1-4). Two hundred times the apostle uses that term in varying forms in his writings. The writing of the letter to the Hebrews states the same thing in precise words — "Whom He appointed heir of all things" (Heb. 1:2). This is not knowledge exclusive to Paul. Both John and Peter speak of the same thing as to the eternal position of the Son of God. But Paul unfolds so much more of that designation. There, then, first in the "before times eternal", the Son of God — now given the name which became His so long, long after, "Our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:3) was determined the inclusive realm of all that which would belong to God. As a race would be "In Adam" (1 Cor. 15:22), as a nation would be into the single seed of Abraham, (Rom. 4:13 etcetera) and as the harvest in the single grain of wheat, so the Son of God would be the content of all that which would eventually be of God. So the apostle writes with the Person the persons — "He chose *us* in Him." This was in the divine deliberations. We are not unfamiliar with this concept. Jesus Himself made reference to it. "For the elect's sake"; "... so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24:22,24); "Shall not God avenge His elect?" (Luke 18:7) etcetera.

Peter also uses this term (1Pet. 1:1). In those eternal counsels there was determined and secured a "people", "a body", "a nation", which just had to be to justify the appointment of the Son. We are not now going to launch into a discussion of 'predestination' or 'foreordination'. All that we will say at this point is that two things govern this matter of the divine election. One is that it is corporate. It is a 'Body', and just as a physical body was prepared for God's Son in incarnation — "A body hast Thou prepared for Me" (Heb. 10:5), so a corporate "Body" was prepared for Him. It was as essential as it is for a spirit to have a body for all practical purposes (more on this later). The other governing thing is that this election is not to salvation — willy-nilly — but to

purpose. This is fundamental to this whole letter to Ephesians. See how large and powerful a place the "eternal purpose" has in Paul's mind and writings. It is that "purpose" that determines so much in God's ways. The exhortations, the admonitions, the encouragements, the warnings, the entreaties, are all related to "this purpose" *in salvation*. How vastly much there is bound up with that drawing aside of the veil upon those eternal counsels! Out of them come the deliberations and activities of God, "Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will"; "According to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph. 1:5,11, etcetera.) See also Romans 8:28,29,30.

We must however remember that there is one absolutely pre-eminent and predominant matter which determines everything, and from which and to which *all things* are related. This is the one thing which explains everything that is in this letter, and all Scripture. It is the place of God's Son that does indeed explain the Calling, the Conduct, and the Conflict. This, then, in and from eternity past stands over all time and eternity to be; affecting, determining, governing "all things".

It has often been said that the criterion by which truth or error is in any system of religious teaching is determined in the place that it gives to the Son of God, Jesus Christ. That is a very sound criterion.

To substantiate this it is only necessary to pass your eye through this letter and note how often the Lord Jesus is actually mentioned. You will find that His personal name is mentioned some forty-four times, in addition to which, note the many pronouns: "Him", "His", "He", and "Whom".

THE TRAGIC INTERLUDE

We have mentioned that between the “before times eternal” and the first era of time there took place something which has affected in a tragic way the whole course of events. The Bible has much to say in relation to that, first Paul, in his final three letters (excluding Timothy, Titus and Philemon) gives a very strong place and meaning to that event. We refer to the invasion into the universe.

The great schism

As to the particular letter with which we are occupied (Ephesians), there are three allusions to this cosmic disruption. One — and this is a supreme factor in the significance of Christ — is in a very brief phrase; the fuller context is this (chapter 1:9,10): “Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him (Christ) unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth; in Him, I say.” The clause we want is, “to sum up all things in Christ”. The word (one long Greek compound), “to sum up” means ‘to bring back and to gather around the main point that is “in Christ”’. It is to regather the “all things”. In the companion letter, Colossians, Paul says, “For in Him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth” (Col. 1:16). This means that originally all things were in God’s Son. That it should be necessary to say that in the fulness of the times all things would be *regathered* or brought back to Him clearly means that something happened to take things out of Him, or away from Him. Oh, what a lot there is that points to that! Jesus said that He came “to seek and to save that which was *lost*”. He gave a parable of wicked husbandmen who slew the heir in order to appropriate the inheritance. He said that “All that came before Me were thieves and robbers.” It is an aspect of truth which has an immense amount of teaching in the Scriptures. Something was done to rob God’s Son of His place and rights in the eternal purposing of God, making it necessary to *re-gather, re-cover, re-unite*. We will come back to that later.

The *second* thing pointing to that great event and breaking in of disruption in the state, the condition against which the purpose revealed in this letter stands. It is a horrible picture: “Dead through your trespasses and sins”; “Ye ... walked according to the ... prince of the powers of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience ... in the lusts of our flesh ... by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:1-3); “at that time separated from Christ (note that) ... having no hope and without God in the world” (2:12-13); “... as the Gentiles ... walk, in the vanity of their minds, ... darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God ... being past feeling ... lasciviousness ... uncleanness” (Eph. 4:17-19). How did all this come about when all things were in God’s Son originally? All this is outside of and apart from Christ! Surely we can say of this: “An enemy has done this.”

Very well, let us pass to the *third* thing in this letter indicative of the great schism. How well-known the words are, but how little known is their vast sinister context. See Eph. 6:10-13: "... Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the hosts of wicked spirits in the heavenlies"; "Stand, withstand, having done all, stand."

Relations between the Son of God and some evil Power and his hosts have been so ruptured and disrupted that there could be no appeasement, no compromise, no fellowship until that evil system had been destroyed beyond remedy. That great schism began somewhere outside of this earth; it then invaded the earth, and has been the source and cause of all the schisms and disruptions in history. The Bible labels that responsible one — Satan, the devil.

For some time rationalism, liberal theology, psychology and certain philosophies ridiculed the existence of a devil in person and what the Bible attributes to him was explained as just neuroses and complexes; that is, evil is not anything to do with evil spirits or a 'Satan'; it is a kind of nervous disorder. Demonology is only a form of mythology. So, Satan played a master trick by persuading man to believe that he does not exist. But the world has had some shocks in recent history and there has been a positively terrible unmasking of the most awful malignity in this world and in human behaviour. Not only in those realms which are called 'savage', 'uncivilised', and 'backward', but for sheer devilry, wickedness, and calculated cruelty nothing has ever been worse than that among what have been thought to be 'cultured' and 'advanced' peoples. Their very scientific 'advancement' has been employed for the most unspeakable horrors. We could write many pages on this line but we refrain. The Bible is terribly vindicated as the course of this world proceeds, and not least in its unveiling of an evil personal power which is ill-disposed towards mankind, and particularly to those who have allied themselves with God's Son. The battle for unity is a painful and heart-rending conflict. The disruption of nations proceeds apace, and among God's people there is nothing too sacred to escape this cosmic determination to disrupt the smallest approximation to divine fellowship. Of course there are many 'societies' and 'fraternities' which are left alone, but it is no compliment if Satan is not disturbed. Let us make no mistake about this matter. The Bible leaves us in no doubt that at the end of the age every element in the universe will assume unmistakable features of intensification. This, of course, is only logical if the end is fulness in every connection. Whatever your interpretation of Revelation 12 may be, we have to note that Satan's shortening tenure of power is marked by his coming down to the earth with great wrath (verse 12).

But let us return to Ephesians, the great summary of spiritual history. We must note particularly that the apostle brings out in a full and definite statement that the church — the body of Christ — is involved in this war of the ages, and all that has been written he heads up in this. It is as though he would say, 'All that I have been saying regarding the eternal counsels of God, the place and purpose of the Elect — the Body of Christ, the redemption of that Body and its uniting with its Head; its life, character, walk, and work in this dispensation and the great goal and established purpose of God to ultimately reunite all things in Christ, is *the* object and occasion of an immense, untiring, and ever-

intensifying cosmic conflict, in which unseen and countless evil forces are bitterly antagonising the purpose, and all related thereto.' Paul says that it is because of the ministry committed to him to make all this known that he is in bonds and imprisonment. He shows that this antagonism of spiritual intelligences will be levelled at all that relates to that stewardship, and implies that if ministries are not just 'departments' or aspects of Christianity, but all of a *corporate whole*, solidly built upon a single object (Eph. 4:13), this *corporate* character will constitute the most serious menace to that evil kingdom as to draw out its venomous and every-sided effort to break it up and neutralise it. The apostle defines this opposition as "wiles of the devil". He then sets over against each other the armour of God and the wiles of the devil. It is God's provision for meeting satanic "wiles". By symbolic means he shows the nature of the "wiles". On the positive divine side the points of attack are shown to be "truth", "righteousness", "peace", "faith", "salvation" and "the Word of God".

Against every form of subtle lying God provides the girding of the Spirit of truth. Against accusations and condemnations of the heart, He provides "the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ". Against fear which makes the going, the feet, unsteady and unsure, He provides "the peace of God which passeth all understanding". Against the suggestions, ideas, thoughts, imaginations, and reasonings which assail the mind — the head, He provides salvation by grace. Against the attacks on the trustworthiness of the purposes of God, He supplies the Holy Spirit to answer back and retaliate with the sure Word. "Over all", and related to all, He says — "In all your taking, take the shield of faith." But *note*, God does not put all this provision on His people; He provides it and then says to them, "Take unto you." There *must* be an act on their part, for the element of passivity is not consistent with such warfare. Would to God that, when these "fiery darts" begin to fly, we instinctively reached for the appropriate weapon of defence. Perhaps we ought to *consciously* have them always on!

As we have said that in his last letters Paul gave a strong place to this conflict of the ages, we cannot close this chapter without a reference to Philippians. In Colossians it is obvious, (see chapters 1:13,20 and chapter 2:15), but in Philippians it is more by inference and allusion. We believe that when Paul, writing of the self-emptying of the Son of God said that, "Although He was not equal with God, He thought it not something to be grasped (held on to) to be equal with God, but emptied Himself" (Phil. 2:6,7). The apostle was alluding to the ambitious pride of Lucifer "to be like the Most High" (Isa. 14:14, Luke 10:18). If this is a right interpretation (compare 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6) then the scene in Philippians 2, in keeping with so much other teaching in the New Testament, is that of the Son of God becoming the Son of Man, and taking man-form to fight out this battle with the usurper.

'A final Adam to the fight, and
To the rescue came.'

And Paul, a good soldier of Jesus Christ, in the same battle, goes on (Phil. 3) to show that the way of victory is the way of "counting all things loss".

Let us sum up.

"Before the foundation of the world", divine counsels took place which one called "the good pleasure of His will", "the mystery of His will", "the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His will", "the eternal purpose" (Eph. 1:4,5,9,11; 3:11). In these deliberations certain very definite decisions were made. These decisions were twofold.

- 1) The Son of God was "appointed heir of all things", the Sphere and Realm of all things (Heb. 1:2; Eph. 1:10,11).
- 2) An elect people was "chosen" in the Son to be the complement of Him, to be the corporate vessel of His expression and administration, termed His Body, His Bride, His church, etcetera; vocation being the idea of that election and predestination (Eph. 1:4,23; 5:25-32; 4:1).
- 3) Subsequent to that twofold appointment and election a revolt took place among heavenly beings in great number, led by one in a very high position, probably very near the top. Pride and jealousy over the Son's appointment were the causes of this revolt, the place of equality with God being aspired to by that high one. That one and the hosts in complicity with him were cast out of heaven and "kept not their first estate".

The division in heaven with the wrath of God upon them inspired an eternal and deathless enmity in that leader against God's Son, and mankind, the intended and potential vessel of His glory. So mankind was struck at early after creation, and the special enmity focussed upon the line of those who maintained faith in God and bore any characteristic features of God's Son. As primarily, so through all the ages the one object and activity of that evil adversary has been to disrupt, divide and disintegrate humanity, and most particularly "the elect", the people of God. His object is to neutralise God's purpose and its appointed and chosen vessels. In this intensifying battle the true church is shown to be deeply involved. God has made a full provision for the church to meet and stand against that great enemy. That is a general summary of the actual teaching and implications of one aspect of this letter to the Ephesians.

THE ERA OF THE HIDDEN SECRET

"In other generations was not made known unto the sons of men" (Eph. 3:5).

"From all ages hath been hid in God" (Eph. 3:9).

"Which hath been hid from all ages and generations" (Col. 1:26).

It will be noticed that we have chosen the alternative word to the one in the relevant Scriptures. That is "secret" instead of "mystery". Our reason for so doing is to avoid the necessity of spending a lot of time in explaining that Paul was not thinking in terms of the Pagan mystery religions and making Christianity another such religion with differences. Neither was he thinking of something mysterious. We have heard people speak of 'mystical Christianity' and of 'the mystical Body of Christ'. Such terms, we feel, are dangerous, because they open the mental door to mysticism, which is false spirituality. Mysticism leads multitudes of people into a wholly false and deceived position as regards Christianity. We want to say here with great emphasis that, contrary to many false definitions of the letter to the Ephesians, that letter is in another world altogether from mysticism! It is intensely real and practical, and there are no illusions about it. To use the word 'secret' is to be easily understood, whereas 'mystery' suggests to the ordinary mind something remote from comprehension. By 'secret' the simple meaning is that something was not made known, but hidden, or kept in reserve. This will be more fully defined as we go on. In this chapter we are mainly concerned with *the fact* of the secret, not with the nature of it, which will be *the* subject of the following chapter. As to the fact, by that we mean that it did definitely exist and was ever and in all things *the* great reality in the mind of God. Indeed, it was implicit, if not explicit, in all the ways and means of God. It was no myth, but a positive reality. It was the hidden *meaning* of God's ways, and of the means that He employed. We, to whom the 'secret' or 'mystery' has been disclosed, find it very difficult indeed to use the Old Testament without giving the meaning. But to the people of that dispensation, (with a few exceptions of partial enlightenment), only the events, the instruments and the objects were known. They did certain things and employed certain things because they were commanded to do so. Their entire system — given by God — was objective, outward. Even where and when there was sincerity, devotion, reverence, and zeal, it was to an outward form and with outward means. The heart could be in it, and there could be strong conviction that it was right, and yet, withal, true spiritual understanding could — and often did — mean *misunderstanding*, and that misunderstanding led to hard, and even cruel, behaviour.

This fact comes out in a glaring way in the days when God's Son was here in the flesh. It would almost seem that the Spirit of Truth had — among other things — the deliberate intention in inspiring the Gospels to expose this terrible fact that men could be fiercely and utterly committed to the outward and objective things of tradition, ritual, dogmas, etcetera, and at the same time be utterly remote from their spiritual meaning and value. The apostle of whom we are speaking just now was formerly one of these people. He said that he

“verily thought that he *ought* to do many things contrary to Christ” and he did vehemently what he believed his understanding of his Bible demanded. It is just at this point that the apostle focussed his revelation on the change in the divine economy from one era to another. This is the significance of his words regarding the mystery being hidden from ages and generations. He knew, and no one knew better than he, the nature and features of that Old Testament economy. It was an economy of externals: ritual, vestments, liturgies, formalities, particular places, buildings and localities; men dressed differently from other men; names and titles, religious classes, and the thousand-and-one other things which went to make up the religious system. It was orders, adornments, and procedure. It was the system of the visible, tangible, temporal and palpable. It was very elaborate, attractive and impressive: the processions of high priests, priests, and attendants, with robes, mitres, and censers, etcetera. It was so familiar to Paul in his former life, and it was just *the* things, beside which there was nothing comparable. Now, something had happened which made it all a system of shadows without the substance. It had — for him — receded from reality, and it belonged to a past and disposed of childhood as he described in his letter to the Galatians. For him, any carry-over of that kind of thing was failure in apprehension of God’s mind; failure in ‘growing up’; failure in spiritual understanding; a clinging to childish things: in a word — contradiction to the very meaning of Christ and the advent of the Holy Spirit. With Paul the revolution was radical, and while he loved the people of the prescribed system, he felt keenly the falsehood of their position. It will be in our next chapter that we shall seek to show what it really was that was hidden from the people of that era, and from those who carried the features of that era beyond God’s appointed time into a new and completely different era, even to our own time. We are at present dealing only with the inclusive *fact* of the hiddenness. There are one or two matters to which we must refer in particular. One has to do with what was *not* hidden in that era. This is necessary in order to arrive at the essential ‘secret’.

The coming and expectation of the ‘Messiah’, the ‘Christ’ (the same word in different languages) was certainly no mystery. That “Seed” had been foretold immediately sin entered (Gen. 3:15) and Moses had prophesied the rising of The Prophet (Deut. 18:15). References to the Coming One are many: His birth, His life, His anointing, His sufferings, and His glory.

Then, there was no secret as to salvation being preached to the Gentiles. That is not an exclusively New Testament truth, nor a part of the mystery now revealed. The same is true as to the kingdom of God. That is not made known as a fact for the first time in the New Testament. There are other things also in the New Testament which are *quite apparent* in the Old.

One other thing needs to be emphasised as not changing with the two eras. It is the basic law of all that relates to God. Some confusion has come into the minds of many in relation to the change from law to grace. When everything has been rightly said as to our being no longer under the Law, but now under grace, the idea has slipped in that the fundamental principle has changed with the dispensations. This is not so. The principle, or law, which is the same in *every* era, is faith. Faith was no less *the* governing law in the Old Testament than it is in the New and no more in the New than in the Old. In that age it

was not the works by themselves that justified. Neither in Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, nor any of the rest of the army mentioned in Hebrews 11 was it what they did that found the way through to God, (although there was a significance in what they actually did) it was faith in God that was virtuous. Works without faith are as ineffective as faith without works. There is no conflict between Paul and James. They are only the two sides to one thing. (Perhaps James was more of a legalist than Paul). The key to every approval in the Old Testament is "he believed in God". It is so very clear that God placed this law beneath and behind everything. It is true that very big changes exist in the two dispensations. In the old dispensation God blessed in temporal and material ways. Obey God, be faithful to God's commands, and blessing will be upon "your basket and your store"; your family, and your field. Prosperity will be on your labours, and facilitation of your success. But underneath all that there was the law of faith. It is unchanging with times and economies. Paul has not been shown a new principle. This has nothing to do with his "revelation" in particular. The 'secret' lies beyond that, although his doctrine of justification was admittedly revolutionary and upsetting. What Paul made dominant was faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ and how it closed the old order of things. Of course, much time and space is required to elucidate Paul's doctrine of justification, but that he has done for us. We are saying that "the mystery" as revealed to Paul particularly is not a new idea as to the law of faith, although the basis of faith may be literally changed from men's works to Christ's finished work. Works themselves do not justify, but the justified person works the works of faith.

It is important and helpful to know that, in the old era, God was not working with a different *mind* from that which belongs to this present era. His mind is unchanging in its nature and purpose. If His methods and means change, His thoughts and object remain the same, from eternity to eternity. Because in one era He hides these essential concepts, it does not mean that they are not implicitly in all that He chooses and uses.

What comes to light in the subsequent dispensation is not new in the sense of never having been before in the goings of God. It is only what God has been consistently working toward all along. So, when the secret is out, we are able to see it in the ways of God with persons, and peoples, and things from the beginning. There are no after-thoughts with God.

THE SECRET REVEALED

"... *It hath now been revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit*" (Eph. 3:5).

"*According to the purpose of the ages which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Eph. 3:11).

As we now arrive at the very heart of the whole matter it is necessary to repeat firstly that the apostle Paul does not claim exclusiveness in the revelation of the long hidden mystery. While he certainly and positively does claim that it was revealed to him in a specific and particular way, and that this revelation constituted him a particular 'steward', and that he was chosen and dealt with by the Lord in a way which specially related to this purpose, yet he includes "His holy apostles and prophets" in the knowledge of the long-hidden, but now unveiled secret. It is evident that Paul did have a fuller 'understanding', and perhaps a unique apprehension of it, but it is not difficult to find — at least — partial traces of this knowledge in Peter and John, as it was also true in Stephen.

We must also emphasise that Paul's was not a *different* Gospel from that preached by the others, and certainly Paul did not have two Gospels; one concerning 'salvation', and the other concerning "the mystery". How often have we heard Christians say that they are only interested in 'the simple Gospel', "the Gospel of salvation", and that they are *not* interested in 'deeper teaching or truth'. Paul would have been both surprised and grieved to hear such language, for his 'Gospel' was one, and he would say that the fullest and deepest revelation is the Gospel. The position so much to be deplored in great numbers of Christians is so largely due to a fallacy — the fallacy that it is unwise, if not futile to give the greatness and immensity of God's revelation in Christ to either the unsaved or to young Christians. Rather, let them be made aware of the vastness of that to which they are called! A little Christ, and a little Christianity will produce little Christians! Some of the best and strongest Christians that we have known come to the Lord in gathering where the questions of Christ was being unfolded to *Christians*, and Christians in responsibility. 'Back to the simple Gospel' can be a snare to those who really do not mean business with God!

At the time of writing this we are in the midst of having work done on our present home. Hammers and chisels are making such a noise as to almost deafen us. The workmen are explaining: "My, this house is well-built. The bricks are not put together with ordinary sand cement, but with concrete, and it is very hard work to make a hole." God's building is like that, whereas men build, not for eternity, but for the present. But, mark you, it is not just deep *teaching* that we advocate, but Holy Spirit unveiling of Christ. That brings us to *the* message and substance of this letter in particular. Standing before it we find ourselves facing some of the greatest questions and problems with which men have been, and still are, wrestling in the realm of Christianity. This letter

answers them, but how few there are who see the answer, and fewer still who — if they catch a glimpse of it — are prepared to follow it. In a time of almost worldwide war there have been those countries which have taken no share in the conflict and have missed the honours because 'they were not free to participate'. Internal complications, divisions, and commitments bound their hands and made them neutral. Fear, self-interest, and failure to recognise the great moral interests kept them as isolationists. Let us at once affirm that the letter to the Ephesians represents the greatest religious crisis in the history of the world. It tells us that, out from the past eternity has come the revelation of a secret which God had kept hidden from all previous ages. The revelation has introduced and inaugurated a dispensation of greater importance and significance than any age before it. It tells us that for the ministering of this revelation God chose, prepared, and appointed an instrument of a particular kind; one formed by God in a particular way. This instrument — Paul — was never ordained or appointed to this work by men, although he was recognised and "sent forth" by the church. Nor was he ever taught or prepared for his work by men. He received everything directly and at firsthand from heaven. The Lord dealt with him in a way that wholly corresponded with the purpose for which he was chosen. The letter which is before us goes to the heart of a matter which has been growingly occupying the most serious consideration of all Christendom, and in the matter which is perhaps, more to the fore today than any other. It is the matter of very real consequence to all Christians, but, unfortunately it has been lifted above the ordinary person by a highbrow term which is so widely employed. The word or term which has been so much used since about the year 1900 is 'ecumenical', a word from another language. Of course, something impressive is lost if its simple meaning is employed, which is 'worldwide'; and its present instrument is what is known as 'the World Council'. This 'Council' is laboriously applying itself to discover a solution to the chaos and complications of divisions in Christendom.

For centuries the various sections — called 'denominations' or 'churches' of Christendom have tenaciously held to the position that they were each originated and justified on a basis of Scriptural authority. Every division has made that claim, and finds its strength in that conviction. Now the slogan of the 'World Council', or Ecumenical Movement is 'these man-made divisions', which must be got rid of. For one of its great convocations the subject chosen was 'The order of God, and the disorder of man'. This was subsequently changed to 'Man's disorder and God's design'. But every attempt to resolve this problem, whether it be in general or even among evangelicals meets with unsolvable difficulties, and the only recourse is to tolerate or compromise on matters of serious account. So a *number* of compromises have to be introduced into the programme for unity. The great problem of divisions in Christianity cannot be solved *by human resources* any better than many interracial problems. This, then, is the tremendous situation which this letter deals with and answers. We have already seen that this great spirit of schism had its beginning far back at some dateless point in heaven, dividing angelic hosts into two inconsolable camps; later it involved the earth and has had a long, long history, gaining momentum in ever-multiplying and intensifying wars. Then it invaded Christianity, and the result is grievous indeed. So, it is no small thing that this letter deals with and to which it gives the answer. We have also seen that the heart of this whole matter is reached and touched by one phrase which sums

up the purpose of God at the end. That phrase is — “unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up (reunite) all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth; in Him, I say” (Eph. 1:10). But, while we may embrace that as the end, beyond this age, our concern is for *this* age. Is there no way or hope for — at least — an approximation to that now? The letter would surely leave us in a dilemma if it only pointed to a future age, and had no answer to the present tragedy. But it has the answer. This answer is given by several means and ways. Perhaps the simplest, most direct, and most helpful way will be to let Paul himself be the answer. Seeing that the apostle makes such strong and categorical claims as to his own personal revelation, it will be best to examine that revelation, and what it did in this man’s life. We noted at the end of chapter four that the personal name of Jesus Christ is mentioned some forty times in this short letter, plus all the pronouns: “Him”, “His”, “He”, and “Whom”.

This, in itself, is the strong clue. In his letter to the Galatians Paul made the statement in these words:

“An apostle, (not from men, neither through man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father)”.

“Neither did I receive it from man, ... but ... through revelation of Jesus Christ”.

“It pleased God ... to reveal His Son in me” (Gal. 1:1,12,15,16).

In the letter to the Ephesians, which is our present consideration, the apostle makes much of revelation; indeed, he bases all the “full knowledge” upon a “Spirit of wisdom and revelation”. Very well, then; the answer to this great question which is before us, and which is the occasion of all this feverish discussion and deliberation in Christendom, is found in the *revelation* and apprehension of God’s Son. It is wholly a question as to whether or not God’s Son has been really seen by an operation of the Holy Spirit.

The kind of seeing to which we refer is an epoch, an encounter, a revelation, a crisis. There is no power on this earth which could have changed that rabid, fanatical, bigoted, Saul of Tarsus, a “Pharisee of the Pharisees” into “the Apostle of the Gentiles”; the fierce and intolerant persecutor and destroyer of everything and everybody related to Jesus of Nazareth into His greatest friend, advocate and devotee! Argument would not have done it. Neither persuasion nor persecution nor martyrdom would have affected it. But it was done! That ‘conversion’ stood the test of all the persecutions, sufferings, and adversities possible to man, for the rest of his life. Moreover, it provided the substance of the greatest of all apostolic ministries; so intrinsic as to have extended and exhausted all efforts, through many centuries, to fathom, explain and comprehend.

What did it? Paul would answer, “It pleased God to reveal his Son in me” or in other words, ‘I have seen Jesus Christ.’

Right at the foundation and root of this man’s life was a ‘seeing’ which split his life in two and emancipated him from the tightly bound fetters of a mighty tradition. He said, “The God of the great creative fiat, who said, ‘Let light be, and there was light’, shined into my heart, and in that act and light, I saw the

glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). In that face Paul saw God's eternal purpose as to man. He saw God's method of realising His purpose. He saw the vast *significance* of God's Son in creation and the universe: and, he saw — in that One — the church as His Body.

We cannot make too much of this matter of revelation, illumination, and seeing. It is basic to salvation. (Acts 26:18). It is essential to effective ministry (2 Cor. 4:6) and it is indispensable to full knowledge unto full growth (Eph. 1:17).

Jesus emphasised the importance of spiritual seeing, as a reading of John's Gospel will show. 'Eyes' were — in His teaching — a criterion of life or death. Indeed, a fundamental and pre-eminent work of the Holy Spirit has to do with spiritual enlightenment, and that, supremely as to the significance of God's Son, Jesus Christ. It is all in the Scriptures, but still our eyes may behold Him. Let us be quite categorical in stating that we can never see the church until we have seen the Son of God, and we cannot *truly* see the Son of God without seeing the church. This is *the* point in the incident at Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:16-18). Leave all your debate of whether Peter is the Rock on which the church is built and focus on the real key to what Jesus said: "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." My Father in heaven *revealed* it; revealed what? — that "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." What then? "Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." Can anything be built upon Peter, even converted Peter, which will withstand the power of hell or death? No, it is who Jesus Christ is, revealed from heaven that is foundational to the church, and "other foundation can no man lay" (1 Cor. 3:11).

Ephesians is tremendously contemporary, that is, up-to-date. In our time it is customary, practically instinctive, for Christians meeting each other for the first time to ask, or be asked: 'What denomination, or mission, or society, do you belong to?' Some such question is almost inevitable. Their 'church' is designated by a national, doctrinal or personal name, such as Wesley, Luther, Calvin, Mennonite, etcetera — a title. If the apostle Paul stepped into Christendom today and were asked such a question as to "association", membership, he would open his eyes wide and look with pained astonishment and say, 'Oh, brother, I have seen Jesus, the Son of God, and in seeing Him I have seen the church, and in that only true church there is not this mix-up of nationalities, colours, names, social or cultural differences and distinctions.' "In Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye are all one man in Christ" (Gal. 3:26-28). "... Where there *cannot* be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is all and in all" (Col. 3:11). He would add, 'There cannot be Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or any other name.' The very least that such a seeing of Christ would do would be to revolutionise our phraseology, our manner of speaking.

A little incident might be to the point here. The writer heard it told by a well-known servant of God. In one of the southern states of America the buses were divided for 'coloured' and 'white' passengers, and the rule of separation was strict. A bus was about to start from the stopping point and the 'coloured'

section was quite full. The white section was also full but for one place. That place was next to a well-dressed and apparently well-to-do lady. A feeble, old and very poor coloured man hobbled to the bus and begged the conductors to let him on because his son was seriously ill and he must get to him quickly. The conductors pushed the old man away saying there was no room. The old man begged again to be allowed on, and was harshly treated by the conductor. The lady turned to the conductor and said, 'Let him come and have this seat by me.' The conductors objected, saying that it was against the law. But the lady insisted and enforced her wish. When the old man got off another woman said indignantly to the lady, 'Why did you allow that person to come into our section?' The lady answered, 'I am a servant of Jesus Christ, and my master is colour-blind.' This is a simple and touching story, but a profound exposition of the New Testament doctrine of the Body of Christ. Paul's revelation of Christ is, "There cannot be Greek and Jew ...". Not, all there are in the Body as what they are on this earth. Given that all are truly born again and "baptised in one Spirit and one body" there is the foundation for getting *above* the very real problems of the natural. Of course, there really is no other true church. We remind you again of the *very* great place that Christ holds in Paul's very being and in his letters, and, of course, this will determine everything.

How many things to which we give such importance would lose that importance and just recede from a first, or even secondary, place if we truly saw the Lord! What change in manner of speech and conduct would just happen without effort if we truly saw Him *in the Spirit!* It is costly. All true light costs. So the man in John 9 found, but ask him whether he would exchange his new sight for the old teaching. Read again Paul's evaluation of his revelation of Christ in Philippians 3.

But let us insist and stress very strongly that, although Christ in all his fulness has been preached and presented in the New Testament, that same New Testament makes it very clear that, *through the Word* and by the Holy Spirit that objective presentation has to have a subjective counterpart in the heart — the spirit — of the believer. It will tell us that it was for this purpose that the Holy Spirit came; for this very purpose we have the indwelling Spirit. Paul earnestly prayed for already well-taught believers that they might be given a Spirit of revelation in the full knowledge of Christ. This spiritual faculty of an open-heaven endowment and given spiritual faculty is meant for all believers. But remember, the demand is for an absolutely pure and honest spirit, and a preparedness to accept and go through with all that is involved. Here, the cross that is Christ crucified, in its deepest application to self-interest in every form is the Rock of Offence, or the Chief Cornerstone; stumbling and falling, *or* building and rising. Any pride, prejudice, or reserve will find us out sooner or later in that we shall have been sidetracked from the fullest intention of God in calling us. It will be a tragedy if, in the end, we are found to be in a 'backwater', a cul-de-sac; perhaps snug and free from all the stresses of the battle, but — from heaven's standpoint — out!

Such a possibility was an ever-present dread of Paul. "Lest, having heralded others, I myself should be rejected", and there is much more like that. "If by any means," he says. We must return to the great matter of the "Mystery", for

there are things related to that in our letter which need clarifying. In all his letters Paul uses this word some twenty times.

- 1) The mystery (secret) of the blindness (KJV) which has happened to Israel. Rom. 11:25
 - 2) The mystery of the wisdom of God. 1 Cor. 2:7
 - 3) The mysteries of God. 1 Cor. 4:1
 - 4) The mysteries in speaking in tongues. 1 Cor. 14:2
 - 5) The mystery of the Rapture and change of body. 1 Cor. 15:51
 - 6) "The mystery of his will." Eph. 1:9
 - 7) The mystery made known to Paul. Eph. 3:3,4
 - 8) The fellowship (KJV) of the mystery. Eph. 3:9
 - 9) The mystery of the union between Christ and the church. Eph. 5:32
 - 10) The mystery of the Gospel. Eph. 6:19
 - 11) The mystery which hath been hid. Col. 1:26
 - 12) The mystery of Christ within, or in the midst. Col. 1:27
 - 13) The mystery of God — Christ. Col. 2:2, 4:3
 - 14) The mystery of iniquity (KJV). 2 Thess. 2:7
 - 15) The mystery of the faith. 1 Tim. 3:9
 - 16) The mystery of Godliness. 1 Tim. 3:16
- (Some of the above are repeated.)

It looks as though there are many mysteries, but if we look again we shall find that, at least, in the majority of cases the mystery relates — *in some way* — to Christ and the church. There are very few exceptions to this, and when it comes to Paul's particular conception, it is not in the plural but it is "The mystery", and it is connected with Christ personal, and Christ corporate.

The next thing that we must take account of in this connection is Paul's particular viewpoint. It is from above. Four times in Ephesians he uses the phrase, "In the heavenlies" (1:3,20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12) and in that form it is found nowhere else. This is one of the most difficult phrases referring to heaven, and as "Every knee shall bow, of things in the heavens, etcetera", (Phil. 2:10). The translation, "in the heavenly places" is not too fortunate. But let us look at the various references.

- 1) The present realm and nature of the believer's blessings is in the heavenlies (Eph. 1:3)
- 2) Christ is now seated "in the heavenlies, above every principality and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name ..." (Eph. 1:20,21).
- 3) The position of Christ is said to be that also of the church (Eph. 2:6).
- 4) There are principalities and powers in the heavenlies which are having made known unto them, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10).
- 5) The warfare of the church is not now in the realm of flesh and blood, but in the heavenlies with principalities and powers, etcetera (Eph. 6:12).

Therefore what we have is that there is a realm or a space above and around the material, the sense and tangible realm, where spiritual interests are supreme, where rival spiritual activities go on. Great forces are at work in that realm, and they have a constitution, system, or organisation suitable

to this purpose. It is a divided realm between celestial and demonic principalities. On the one side there is both interest in and cooperation with Christ's interests in the church. On the other side there is not only bitter and relentless hostility to those interests, but an impact upon this world, "this darkness", which is intended to destroy both the people and the earth as the inheritance of God's Son. We know that natural elements above the earth have a powerful influence upon the *physical* life here. In the same way there are spiritual intelligences and forces which exert a tremendous influence upon the moral and spiritual life in this world. It is in this realm that Paul sees several things belonging to "The Mystery". One, that, amidst the strife, confusion, and all that seems to the contrary, God is working out a "Purpose" which, because He is absolute Lord, will not just have to contend with adverse forces but will show both superiority and make the adverse forces secure the furtherance of the Purpose. This is the long view and the above view of the heavenlies. There, because Christ risen and exalted is 'seated at God's right hand', He is in that position representatively and inclusively of the church. The church, therefore, is "seated together with Him in the heavenlies"; that is, in the present and ultimate good of His sovereignty.

Further, the blessings of believers are now, not as under the old economy, temporal, material and sentient, but "spiritual": "The riches of His grace", "The riches of His inheritance", "The riches of His glory", "The unsearchable riches of Christ", etcetera. (These are all phrases in Ephesians.) These blessings are for a church and its members who have — through union with Christ in His death and resurrection — been spiritually delivered and emancipated from "this present world" as the sphere of their natural life, ambition, and resource, and where hearts are "set on things above" (Col. 3:1-3). If you have really come into the good of such "riches", then you have proportionately come into the heavenlies. While we are right in mentally conceiving of "the heavenlies" as being a realm, we must not confine the idea to geography. Like "the kingdom of heaven", it is a sphere or realm in which spiritual factors, principles or laws, and conditions obtain and take pre-eminence. That is why we used the word 'proportionately'. Geographically we are one, as we are not in a realm, a country, but spiritually we can be more or less in the *nature, character, and good* of that realm. It is not a matter of definition of terms, but of spiritual accord, harmony, adjustment and agreement. In a time of great blessing we can just say, 'It was as though we were in heaven.' It is a spiritual position in oneness with spiritual realities. While it *seems* so difficult to explain, it is really only the fact and development of that which every *truly born again* believer turns without explanation; namely, that something has happened by that new birth which has showed their consciousness of belonging and gravitation, so that a break has taken place *in them* with one realm and what belongs to it, and a union has come about with an entirely new realm and its content. They sense that they belong somewhere else, and that there is a spirit in them which gravitates there and to those things. The New Testament has all the language and words for this, but it is the inward awareness that is the ground of learning the *meaning*. The development of that "law of the spirit in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:2) by discipline — trial and error or triumph — is the way of the "transforming, by the renewing

(making anew) of the mind” (Rom. 12:2). It is the church’s and the believers’ normal course.

THE CHURCH LOCAL

It is of considerable importance to note that, although the Letter to the Ephesians is a majestic presentation of the church in its activity, ranging every dimension of the eternities, realms, and ages; and setting forth the profound councils of God, the letter was sent to local churches. This fact has some very challenging and searching implications. We must remind our readers that there is such a thing as a positive and definite revelation of what the church is, and therefore of the basis of its unity. It may be something to take note of that there is such a worldwide concern for and activity in relation to the unity of Christians, and such concern should find us in full heart sympathy with it. The big difference is between a massive effort to solve the problem from the outside, by trying to stick all the broken pieces together and in some way make them fit, and, on the other hand to recover the spiritual power which will make for a spontaneous coming and fitting together. The one is the organised, composite collection and assemblage, as of a machine: the other is the organic, spontaneous relationship of a corporate life. The former will come unstuck repeatedly. The latter will eventually emerge "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing". But what about the church as locally represented? We must remember that when Paul wrote this letter and sent it to the churches in localities, he was very well aware of the trends, or even the actual movements toward departure and breakdown in the churches. He had foretold it as to Ephesus when he left the elders of that church near the ship on the way to Jerusalem. "I know that after my departure grievous wolves shall enter in among you ... and from among your own selves shall men arise ... to draw away after themselves" (Acts 20:29-30). That was incipient division. But here from his prison in Rome he will write: "All they which be in Asia (in *Asia*) be turned from me."

Two letters will soon be written to Timothy (probably in Ephesus) which will deal with the beginnings of the change from primal Christianity to all that it has become now. They were intended to warn against the ecclesiasticism, clericalism, ritualism, sacramentalism, etcetera, which has invaded the church and changed its primitive character. So, Paul's head was not in the clouds and his feet off the earth when he deliberately wrote this letter as to what the church is. No doubt his reference to the spiritual warfare was because he knew so well that the battle was on in particular relationship with this very matter, showing of how great a consequence it is to the satanic forces. It is impressive how any stand for a true expression of the Body of Christ is fraught with more conflict than anything else. If it is a congregation, that is, a number of individual Christians resorting to a given place for public worship, without any corporate church life and order, or if it is a mission hall mainly for preaching the Gospel to the unsaved, or, again, if it is a preaching centre where people go to hear a well-known preacher, all these will carry on the quiet way with little opposition, from within or without. But let there be a movement in the direction of a real corporate expression of a Holy Spirit constituted testimony to Christ corporate, then the battle is on and nothing will be untried to break that up, discredit it, or

in some way nullify that testimony. The book of Nehemiah is a very good illustration of this many-sided hostility. Again we point to Ephesians as relating vicious spiritual antagonism to the essential purpose of the letter. In this first particular, the universal is transferred to the local, and the local takes character from the universal. A true representation of the elect Body of Christ is a standing menace and ominous sign to the satanic kingdom because it is the church which at last is going to dispossess and supplant the "world rulers of this darkness" and govern with Christ. If only God's people would view all their divisions and internal troubles in this light instead of always attributing them to 'second causes'! This is the first implication in Paul's passing to local churches the *whole* immense revelation of 'the Mystery'. There are several other features and factors which carry such tremendous significance. There is that factor which the apostle mentions with one of his superlatives: "The exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead ..." (Eph. 1:19).

"And you did He quicken when you were dead ..." (Eph. 2:1).

The church locally represented should be and embody the testimony to "the power of His resurrection". It should, *in its history and constant experience* — rather than just doctrine — declare that Christ is risen.

The impression primarily given should be one of livingness. The testimony should be that, although you may be jaded, weary, too tired even to make the journey; disheartened and despondent; physically, mentally, and spiritually drained, you come away renewed, refreshed, reinvigorated, and lifted up. The activity of divine life has just resulted in a spiritual uplift. Note the way in which that has been said: 'the activity of divine life'. We have *not* said: 'the life of human activity'. There is an illusion or delusion in much Christianity and in many churches that activity is essentially spiritual life. Hence programmes, attractions, and an endless circle of 'specials efforts'. All this is too often with a view to giving the impression of life, or even creating or stimulating 'life'. Life will work, but works are not always life. That was the indictment of the church at Ephesus — Rev. 2:2-4: "I know thy works ... But ...". Divine life is spontaneous and not forced. The dead (spiritually) *are* raised, and not by artificial means. The Lord of the church is the risen Lord, and His attestation is resurrection life. So "the power of His resurrection" should be the hallmark of a truly New Testament church. So often we quote our Lord's words, almost as a formula: "Whosoever two or three are gathered in my name, there am I." At the same time the atmosphere may be heavy, uninspiring and devoid of a ministration of divine life. Is this really consistent with the presence of the risen Lord?

We proceed with the implications of this letter. If the church local is a true microcosm of the church universal, then this letter will show us that in the local representation there could — and can — be abundance of wholesome and healthy food. Our Letter has fed and stimulated believers through many centuries, and still the food-values are unexhausted. The ministry in a true local expression of the Body of Christ should be an anointed ministry, and

because it is such, no hungry soul should ever go away unfed. Not just studied and 'got-up' addresses or discourses, but a message from heaven making it possible for people to say, "We have been truly fed today." This means that the Lord's people, being nourished, are growing in *spiritual* stature, capacity, and responsibility; not just increasing in mental knowledge or doctrine, but in really knowing the Lord. The criterion of a church's value is the measure of Christ Himself in His members.

This is not mere idealism; it is the normal state of a truly Holy Spirit constituted church in any place. Paul's use of the word "riches" in this letter indicates how spiritually wealthy any company of the Lord's people should be.

We have shown earlier that the man behind the letter is, in his spiritual history, identical with his message. We shall now seek to show that, in several respects, the history of the church, universal and local should follow that spiritual history of the apostle.

1) The church in any locality should be born out of heaven. It is the aggregate or corporate fellowship of born-from-above believers. What, then, is to be true of every individual believer must be true of the corporate company. That goes right to the very root of the church conception, and it will be as well if we settle it here and now that, in the Scriptures, no other such thing is known or recognised as having a right to that name — Christian church. That will sift our consideration down from an immense amount that takes the name but is not *the* true thing. Christendom or Christianity has become a colossus of a thing which is the home of every kind of bird in creation. To try to make a unity of such is a trick of him whose "lords of the air" they are; *naturally*, some better, some worse, but far from all born again or from above (John 3:5-13). This just means that every local company of believers, right at its beginning as such, should be something done by the sovereign Holy Spirit. Inasmuch as the church takes its character from its Head, its "Firstborn", its "Chief-cornerstone", the "Foundation", it must in every representation have its origin in heaven and embody the life of heaven. That means that formation by man's action is ruled out. It is not an institution; it springs out of life. It should be possible to say of any local church — or church in any locality — "That was an act of God." Mark you, we are seeking to get right to the root of this matter of what the church is, and what it is not. The former is our real concern. Study — in the Gospels — what Jesus said about Himself and about men, and you have the key to what the church really is.

2) That leads to the next thing as to the 'local church'. If the church was *born* of the Holy Spirit, it was born out of the travail of God's Son; then the law of travail must lie right at the origin of any true representation of both. In the New Testament the church universal and the churches local came out of real travail. The travail, agony, and pain of Christ gave birth to the church at Pentecost. Those who were its nucleus were baptised into His passion. They suffered the breaking of their souls when Jesus died. Hence their ecstatic joy when He rose again.

John 16:21-22 was literally fulfilled in their case. That needs no enlarging upon. But what of the churches? Can we put our finger upon a New Testament church which was not born out of and into suffering? Immediately such a church was in view the battle for its very life, its very existence, began. Stonings, imprisonments, lashes, intrigues, slanders and persecutions of every kind lay at the emerging of every such potential representation of Christ corporately. Someone had to pay a price and the churches were the price of blood and tears. *When power is lost, perhaps through neglect, foolishness, strife, division, formalism, or the loss of the sense of the value of the truth, or for any other reason, the only way of recovery will be that of a fresh baptism into sorrow, remorse, tears and travail.* This is surely the right interpretation of the Second Letter to the Corinthians after the First. This also surely is the key to the situation in most of the churches in Revelation chapters 2 to 3. It is definitely implied in the case of Laodicea. A church which does not suffer for its life is, by all the laws of nature and grace, a weak and ineffective church.

- 3) Still pursuing the line of Paul's history and the church we have to say that a local expression of the church — and all its members — must be the result of an encounter with God in Christ. Any corporate or personal ministry which is to be as fruitful as was Paul's, even in a more limited degree, must have such an 'encounter' at its beginning. The cross and the resurrection of Christ was such for the nucleus, the representative company. The cross was devastating and desolating to all the self-sufficiency, self-assurance, self-confidence, pride, ambition, and presumption of man. The resurrection was the invasion and taking over of the life of Another. This is so clearly seen in the case of the man who more than any other represented that nucleus, namely Simon Peter. He was a man broken and shattered by the cross, but reconstituted on another basis by the resurrection. As to the great unveiling of the "Mystery" of Christ and His Body —the church, Paul's devastation and very survival was by this encounter on the road to Damascus. Such an encounter, sooner or later, personal and collective, must lay at the foundation of a true corporate life. It may be at the beginning, or it may be later. It may be a recovery necessary after failure. Many a church, and many a servant of God has had history cut in two by such an encounter. Before it, an ordinary, limited, and comparatively powerless ministry. After it, a release and enlargement, with much spiritual fruitfulness. A little book published by the Moody Press, Chicago, called 'Crisis Experiences in the Lives of Noted Christians' relates examples of this in a number of instances.

- 4) *If the church universal is above all earthly differences, then the local church ought to be super-national, super-denominational, super-interdenominational, in spirit, fellowship, and outreach.* We have often said that Christ *cannot* be confined or fitted exclusively to any category that is of this world. His temperament overlaps all the categories. His nationality, time, teaching, and Person suit and meet the need of all, but He cannot be the sole property of any. We have seen works of man's artistic imagination purporting to depict the great scene in Revelation

chapter 5: "And the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" (verse 11). In the artist's portrayal, with all the good meaning in the world, the artist painted in people of every nation, colour, physique, dress, complexion, age, and stature. Well, as we have said, the motive and intention was good, but who can describe resurrection bodies? "Made like unto His glorious body"; "It is raised a spiritual body". We can be quite sure that everything that has come in as the result of man's failure, causing estrangement and what is 'foreign' will be gone forever.

The point is that if Christ, and what is of Him by the Holy Spirit is the constitution of the church, then our meeting, our fellowship, our communion *must* be on the ground of that which is of Christ in all believers. We are referring to the basic life of all true Christians. When it comes to the work of the Lord, there may be *things* we *cannot* accept, while we still hold to the ground of one life. This is surely the meaning of the Lord's Table. In Ephesians Paul sees only one church, while he knows all about the many churches. There may be a million loaves and cups and tables in true evangelical Christianity, in every nation under heaven. But the Lord only sees one loaf and one cup. Even when the local loaf is broken and "divided among yourselves", the Lord still only sees one loaf. Christ can be shared but not divided; He remains one Christ in "ten thousand times ten thousand" believers who share His life.

When the Lord does something in us and thereby changes our mind about former beliefs, the temptation and battle can so easily be to become separate *in spirit* from those who — as yet — have not been so changed, and then the almost incorrigible inclination sets in to make a 'sect' of that particular complexion or experience. While there may be real values, and *vital* values in God's dealings with us, which we strongly desire all others to know and experience, we must never make our experience a wall between us and all true children of God. The only way of hope and prospect is to shut our eyes to much that may offend our spiritual sensibilities (providing it is not sinfulness in the life) and to get on with the positive course of as much fellowship in Christ as is possible by the grace of God, always avoiding like the plague any attitude or talk which can be justifiably interpreted as spiritual superiority. Misunderstandings because of ignorance, prejudice or insufficient investigation are inevitable, but even such things must not be allowed to close our hearts and turn us in on ourselves. While the wall of the new Jerusalem *does* mean a definite limit and demarcation of what is 'within' and what is 'without' as to Christ, we must remember that it is "twelve thousand furlongs" in every direction which symbolism is intended to signify how great Christ is, and therefore, how great His church is.

When Paul set himself to write the First Letter to the Corinthians, he knew that he was going to deal with the partisan and sectarian spirit. He therefore opened the letter with the true ground and range of Christian fellowship: "Sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, with all that call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in every place, their Lord and ours." In this same dimension he closed the letter to the Ephesians: "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption."

5) If it is true, as we have been trying to show, that Paul's history embodied the principles of the revelation that became his "stewardship", one further feature of that history must be noted, and taken up in the local church. That is, an overmastering apprehension by Christ: "I was apprehended by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12). The word "apprehended" is a strong word. It means, to be arrested, overpowered, appropriated, and brought under control. It is the word used in John 1:5 regarding light and darkness — "the darkness overcame (apprehended) it (the light) not." It is also used in relation to the power of demons in possession. As the outcome of this apprehending, Paul always spoke of himself as "the prisoner of Jesus Christ" and "the bond-slave of Jesus Christ", and as, "bearing branded in his body the marks of Jesus." This experience, born of an event, meant for Paul the loss of all independence, self-direction, self-government, and the rule of the world. It meant the absolute Lordship of Christ. Here was a man who had one overmastering concern for Jesus Christ. Not for a this or that, but for a Person. His first ejaculation on the encounter was, "Who art Thou Lord?" and in capitulation he followed up with, "What wilt Thou have me to do, Lord?" That Lordship was no mere doctrine with him; it was a complete mastery. This was very personal, for of the many double calls in encounters with God, such as, "Abraham, Abraham!", "Jacob, Jacob!", "Moses, Moses!", "Samuel, Samuel!", "Martha, Martha!" and "Simon, Simon!", the last was by no means the least. "Saul, Saul!" Such a real sense of being called with a purpose *must* be a constituent of and in any true local church. To lose the sense of vital vocation, purpose, and destiny is to lose dynamic, and to become an existence rather than an impact.

THE ALL-INCLUSIVE GOAL

"Till we all attain unto ... the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

Everything before this and after it in this letter has its focus upon this clause. Do you ask, 'What is the whole letter about?' The answer is in four words: "The fulness of Christ". The two usages of this word "fulness" by the apostle in this letter, not only sum up the whole letter, but present the most wonderful and remarkable thing in this wonderful document, and the most wonderful thing in the Bible. In chapter 1:23, the astounding statement is that the church, which is the body of Christ, is "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all". That seems clearly to mean that Christ can no more be full as Head without His body to make Him complete: that He needs and depends upon His body for His self-realisation and self-expression. Closer still: He fills all in all and yet requires His body in order to fulfil His filling. The body is the fulness, the completion or complement of Him. In chapter 4 verse 13 the finality of that truth is pushed along a line to a future climax. "Till we all attain" is linked with a vari-sided provision of functions. We are informed that, on His return to heaven — "When He ascended on high" — the Lord Jesus forthwith "gave gifts unto men". These were personal gifts, or gifts as persons, and they were men taken captive by Him. But these men were the expression of various functions: "Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers". Different functions, each one given grace "according to the measure of this gift", but *all together* bound and energised by *one* object. The Apostle — inclusive; the other three (pastors and teachers being one function) making up one interrelated and inter-dependent ministry. There are *not* different "schools" or categories working apart, but only different aspects or functions of one body. There has to be mutual recognition, mutual evaluation, and mutual cooperation. The separating of these functions can only result in an unbalanced condition, and lack of balance always results in weakness and loss. To give an unbalanced emphasis to evangelism is only to have immature Christians. To give out-of-proportion weight to teaching may result in the introversion which is divorced from objective concerns for men's salvation.

In a *local* assembly, constituted by the Holy Spirit, for its full growth, all of these *functions* should be present. Those who minister should know what their particular gift, grace, and anointing is; and the assembly also ought to know it. Things are thrown into confusion when there is a trying to be and do what the anointing is not meant for. What pathetic, and even tragic, situations come about when men try to be that for which they are not anointed. A leader must be *obviously* anointed for that function, and the anointing must be accepted and acknowledged. The same must be true of all other parts of the one ministry. But each personal gift *must* — and this is absolutely imperative — *must* — keep the one inclusive goal in view, and definitely contribute to it — "the fulness of Christ", because it is a "measure of the gift of Christ". The question may arise as to knowing what one particular function is. The answer in general will, of course, be that as we seek to be a responsible member of the body in the local church, we find that the Holy Spirit burdens us and

exercises us in a particular way. Note, this is not official. That is, it is not by our being appointed by men, or by our assumption, but by our spontaneous and voluntary exercise in concern for Christ's interests in His body. The Lord save His body, and its ministering members from the pathetic scene of ministries which are not the definite projecting of "He gave"; *He* gave; not, man chose, appointed, or 'opened the platform' to *anyone* who would take it. The giving of the ascended Lord is selective, specific, and deliberate.

We must here indicate something very precious and helpful in this connection in New Testament procedure. It is indicated in 1 Timothy 4:14, and implicit in various other instances: "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." The "Presbytery" here does not necessarily mean special apostles, but surely 1 Tim. 5:17: "Let the elders that rule well ...". True, Paul did speak of "the gift of God that is in thee through the laying on of my hands" (2 Tim. 1:6). It would seem clear that, at some time there was a praying over the members of Christ's body, and in the praying, the Holy Spirit constrained to ask for some particular qualification by which the persons concerned would make a specific contribution to the ministry in the body.

Elsewhere, Paul exhorted Timothy to: "do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry", and to Archippus he sent a specific message that he should: "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it" (Col. 4:17). It might be a very good thing if *all* ministries were the result of such specific action in prayer! There would be a much greater "attaining unto the fulness of Christ", and much less of the ineffective and unprofitable "wisdom (or otherwise) of men".

Our passage in Ephesians 4:13 indicates that the body, whether universal or locally represented should, by the ministries, be making progress toward the ultimate fulness. The words are "the building up of the body of Christ". "Edifying" in the Authorised Version is misleading because it conveys the idea of 'headifying'. While it is corporate growth, it, of course, must be true of each member. While Paul mixes his metaphors, at one moment speaking of a temple and the next of the body, he eventually comes down fully on the body as "the full-grown man", and what he means by building up is seen in chapter 4 verse 14, "no longer children". He is talking about the transition from childhood, (in which the persons concerned are always having to be nursed, and — like children — draw attention to themselves all the time), to mature Christians who can take spiritual responsibility and care for others, with the outward-looking concern for the other members of the body. It is a matter of coming into an increasing measure of Christ.

"Till", signifies process and progress. "We all attain," signifies corporate object. "The fulness of Christ", means the goal reached.

From Ephesians chapter 4 verses 10 to 15 we are thrown backwards to the election, the calling, and vocation, to the relevant conduct and walk, and onwards to the conflict and the demand for "standing". Everything relates to, and focusses upon "attaining unto the fulness of Christ".

Concluded

