

*Volume 58*

*the*  
**Golden  
Candlestick**

**FOUNDATIONS**

**Part 1**

**T. Austin-Sparks**

## CHAPTER ONE

*Reading: Psalm 11:1-7 (Note verse 3); 1 Cor. 3:11; 2 Tim. 2:19.*

“If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” “For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” “Howbeit the firm foundation of God standeth ...”

In referring to this eleventh Psalm we cannot be sure exactly as to when it was written; that is, as to exactly what the incidents were, or the historic events which gave rise to it; but whenever it was written, it was clearly written in a time of very severe stress, when the circumstances were very difficult, and the Psalmist’s position from man’s standpoint was a very precarious one, full of peril, and as man judged, full of pending disaster. It was a time when whatever those foundations were literally, the foundations were assailed; the very foundations had become subjected to a bitter assault; and again, from the human standpoint the foundations were destroyed; as man looked at things, the foundations had been destroyed. David was in the vortex of that tumult with which we are not unfamiliar, made up of all external things seeming to prove that the situation was hopeless. Yet inwardly there was something holding which would not give consent to that, simply an unexplained, undefined reality in the heart which in effect said: It is not so. Because of the appearances and all the external evidences which would go to prove that it was so, David was counselled to flee, to abandon the whole situation to save his face, to save his very life; to flee to the mountain, to take refuge in some earthly place of security. A mountain sometimes appears to be a very secure place. It is not always so from the spiritual standpoint, and here is one of those occasions when however substantial a refuge a mountain may appear to be, it is a place of weakness if hiding in it is the result of fear. They advised him to flee to the mountain, to take refuge in the mountain, and David refused the counsel and said: “In Jehovah do I take refuge.”

We gather from the Psalm, and the one preceding it, that a wicked one, or wicked men occupied position and power. The tenth psalm contains some half-a-dozen references to the wicked, the wicked one. Whoever this was, or whoever they were, they occupied a place of great power and were menacing the heritage of God, and striking at the very foundation of God’s inheritance. Now in the midst of it all one question arose. It is the only question; and the whole situation is gathered up into this one question: “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” That does not mean that David consented to the suggestion that they were destroyed: although there is a marginal rendering which would make this verse a part of the advice and counsel of his

fearful friends. The marginal rendering would make it follow on as a statement: “For the foundations are destroyed”; if so, “what can the righteous do?”

Well, if that is the right way to read it, it all the more exempts David and shows that he is not involved in it. But if it is a question into which David enters simply as a matter of consideration — for it is perfectly clear that he does not yield to it — it gives us some very valuable basis for a very important consideration. “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” The answer, of course, is obvious; there is only one answer to that question: “Nothing.” If the foundations are destroyed the righteous can do nothing, the situation is utterly hopeless; then the advice of these men is good advice. Abandon the situation and take some ground of earthly security, give it all up, abandon your vision, your vision is a false one, it offers nothing. Now that is one line along which consideration must be pursued for a little while. The other line is by placing a very strong line underneath the note of interrogation. That is, it is still a matter of question: “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” “*If* the foundations be destroyed ...”. Are they after all, in spite of all appearances, are the foundations destroyed? No matter how things seem to be and what men say about things as to the hopelessness of the situation, and as to the great power as well as the treachery of the Evil One, are the foundations destroyed? Is there reason for abandoning the vision? Should we take what men would call a safer course, and find ourselves some line of greater security in this very precarious situation?

I am quite sure that those of you who are thinking, and looking with your inner eyes into things as they are today, have already caught the meaning of this psalm, and of this verse. There is undoubtedly a tremendous onslaught from the Evil One upon the foundations; the foundations of God’s heritage are assailed bitterly, fiercely, and treacherously — for you notice in the Psalm the elements of treachery associated with the activity of the enemy, of the Wicked. He shoots in the dark. He does not come out into the open, and his is not warfare, his is murder. He is hiding himself. He does not give a fair and square chance of battle. He keeps out of the way and shoots in treachery from dark places. And his antagonism, his treachery is directed at the very foundations of the life of the people of God.

Now there are two ways in which we have to look at this question of the destroying of the foundations. In a sense, and in the deepest sense, that is an absolute impossibility. It is impossible to destroy the foundations. The other two passages have been drawn in to support that side of things. “For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Can that be destroyed? Never! Everything has been allowed to test its power of destruction upon Him, every hammer of satanic bitterness and treachery has fallen upon that anvil and the anvil has broken the hammer and remains itself

without a scar: "Howbeit the firm foundation of God standeth." So that from one standpoint, the true standpoint, the foundations cannot be destroyed.

But there is another standpoint from which this has to be regarded which does amount to a virtual destruction of the foundation, not an actual destruction, but a virtual destruction, it amounts to it in effect. I mean this, that the enemy is so against the foundations for their destruction, that he is doing everything he can to get the people to put up a superstructure of profession, of a supposed Christian life, of an assumed relationship to God without any foundation at all. And that is a treachery in the train of which will come unspeakable disaster, because all those who do that are bound to come down, they are bound to collapse, and then they will blame God. The enemy will rush in at once into their minds and say: You put your trust in God; He has let you down. In that sense the foundations are destroyed, they are nullified by being kept out. There is a great deal of that going on today.

Now it is from those two standpoints that we for a moment have to look at this primary proposition: "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" That means that right at the outset we have to give very special attention to the matter of having God's foundation. That foundation will become impregnable and indestructible once it is established, but it is of importance beyond any other importance for you and for me that we have God's foundation, and that foundation well and truly laid. The whole situation is entirely hopeless unless that is so.

We are fast entering into the period of this world's history when the foundations of faith are to be subjected to the ultimate test. God's great emphasis today is being brought to bear upon the state of His own people. He is centering His attention upon His people. There have been great periods when His whole attention was directed through His people upon the multitudes of unsaved; they were great days of ingathering through the evangel. There may yet come in the ordering of God's purposes still further emphasis of that kind when again He will reach out in a special way to gather in lost sheep. He is not entirely ignoring that work today, and He will not have us ignore it. But anyone who knows the present situation will see that God's main work today, for which He is giving Himself, is not for the ingathering of multitudes of unsaved souls; but you do find that everywhere there is a growing movement of God in stirring the hearts of His own people, deepening the hunger, making manifest weakness and need, and putting Christians everywhere to the test. Are you facing times of spiritual trial and testing? Are you finding it easier today to live the life of the saint than it used to be? If we are honest in our hearts we will say: No, it is certainly more difficult and our spiritual lives are very rarely out of the fire. We seem constantly to be brought back to the place of testing, and every testing seems to be a deeper one than that which preceded it. The Lord is centering

upon His people and the effect of it all is to get down to foundations, and, in a day when God is focussing upon foundations, the Devil is particularly concerned to get people without foundations, and that explains great movements of today which have no foundations. We are passing swiftly into a time of the ultimate test of our foundation. The question for every one of us will be as to really whether we have God's foundation adequately, sufficiently laid as the basis of our faith. We have to see, of course, what those foundations are, or what that foundation is inclusively, but I simply now draw attention to the necessity. Superficiality of spiritual life will not last long; it will go. The winds of God are going to blow and then we shall discover how deep our roots are. Therein then is the need for considering the question of foundations.

Then on the other hand, the other point of view: the foundation being laid, whatever may be the appearances, the circumstances, the human vortex, man's opinion, there is no reason whatever to abandon the vision. It is just there that I want to place my finger for a minute or two, not intending to go into the nature of the foundation at present, but just to point out what is raised by this question.

There is a counsel of despair today over spiritual conditions, and David was not exclusive in this sense, one by himself; we all know what that counsel is. I mean that we all know what it is to have the suggestion made to us: "You are seeking to realise an impossible thing, your standard is an impossible standard; that which you have set up as your goal is impossible. Your vision is the vision of an idealist, but it is altogether impracticable, impossible of realization. Look, look at the havoc that the enemy has made. Wherever there was that which represented something extra, something fuller, something larger, deeper, greater of Christ, whenever there was that which aimed at the ultimate end of God and went beyond what obtained in its day, the enemy made an awful mess there, the enemy assailed and made havoc. History has repeated itself again and again and again in that way, and look at the mess that the enemy has made on the earth amongst the Lord's people. Look at the situation, the power, the cunning and treachery of the enemy, and how he is in the place of power, how much he has things his way, how hopeless, how weak you are in the presence of this. Look at the spiritual state of the Lord's people today. By far the greater majority of them are without real spiritual hunger, are content with their merely formal religion, and even where there are any who are spiritually hungry and honestly want to go on with God, when they are put to the test they will not pay the price. Somehow or other that hand of tradition, long standing acceptance, that hand of a historic system, reaches out just as they are beginning to move out with the Lord, and although they have indicated their desire, their wish, their longing to go on with the Lord, and have really honestly intended to do so, just at the moment when some step is to be taken which will lead them out and lead them on with the Lord, something happens, some subtlety of the enemy,

some treachery of the Adversary, some fear within them at the consequences of their step, and that hand brings them back. You had better abandon your vision, you had better take some lower ground. You had better find some place of greater assurance, some mountain of a more normal and natural course of things. You are aiming too high, the situation is hopeless, abandon it!"

I suppose most of us know something of that counsel from within and from without. The Lord Jesus knew something about it. That was the sum total of His temptation for forty days and forty nights in the wilderness. He had stepped out into a realm which was the highest that this world had ever known, and the enemy's whole object was to bring Him down — by suggestion, by treachery, by argument — to take a lower level. He would say: Your course is an impossible one. Have more sure ground under your feet than that. He would turn the Lord Jesus aside. The whole question arises in the presence of such arguments: "Are the foundations destroyed?" If they are, well then the counsel is good advice, we had better give it all up; if they are not, then there is no reason for abandoning the vision. Are the foundations destroyed? Let us press that in this practical way. Has God laid a foundation? We may lay many foundations and find that they are no good. The question is: Has God laid a foundation? The Word tells us quite clearly that He has. Does God lay a foundation without intending a superstructure? Surely that would be folly, and who would charge God with folly? Then if God has laid a foundation and His foundation is indestructible, He intends that foundation to be built upon, and intends to have a building upon it. Can God's intention eventually and ultimately be frustrated by the enemy? No more than His foundation can be destroyed! He will have His object. What is God's foundation? It is Jesus Christ. He is now beyond reach of all the forces of destruction. What is God's superstructure? It is Christ. Call it by other names if you like: the Church which is His Body, the Company conformed to the image of His Son; but whatever you may term it, it is in the intention of God, Christ developed to fulness in the saints. That can never be destroyed. That can never be overthrown. God will have it. If we are thinking of the superstructure as some movement, some organisation, some formulated system of Christian work and enterprise, well, we have a wrong conception of God's superstructure. God's superstructure is saints growing in the image of His Son, and while Christ remains, the purpose of God concerning those who are Christ's remains, and God's purpose can never be defeated. If we have abandoned ourselves to see something on the earth achieved, accomplished successfully, well then we shall come to the place where the counsel will be quite good counsel to let it go, and we shall be very unwise to hold on to it. But if we have abandoned ourselves to presenting every man perfect in Christ, we are not on a hopeless line. That is God's intention, fixed and settled before ever this world with all its changes and its Devil came into being. "... the works

were finished from the foundation of the world.” Are you trying to make work for the Lord? Are you trying to increase the Lord’s work? Give it up. Enter into the works that have already been finished and you have got a clear way right through.

If you are contemplating some call which the Lord has given you to ministry, let me tell you the secret of getting through, coming out at the other end in triumph, with fruit. Yes, certainly — you may not see it — but you will do so. Start by saying: “Lord, this was all done before the world was; I am coming into the things done and I am working with You in the realisation of the accomplished thing. I am going to enter into the thing that has been done in eternity, in the counsels of God, which relates to this specific ministry. I enter into it by faith; working out from the settled purpose of God in eternity past.” And you will come out of that ministry with fruit. God will never send you anywhere by His Holy Spirit, where there is not fruit. You may not see it now, you will later; God knows. He works upon a known accomplishment. He says to an apostle, leading him into a heathen city of wickedness and pollution:

“... be not afraid ... for I have much people in this city.” Not, “I am going to get much people”, but “I have much people in this city.” “Lord, when did You get them?” “Before ever you came into being, before this world was!” That is the principle of God. The necessity for doing the works of the Lord and for a Spirit-governed and directed life. That is to get right on to the foundation concerning which there need be no argument of despair and abandonment; it is standing upon something solid which cannot be destroyed.

Oh, to have our life founded upon that; our faith for salvation, to have all our service, our ministry founded upon that. Oh, to be delivered from things which being of man, even religiously, will not stand the test; and to be brought into the things which are of God and which will go through all the testing. “... the firm foundation of God standeth.” It cannot be destroyed. To be on that there is no need to give up. There will be times of sore trial and testing when the counselling of our own hearts will suggest a fleeing, abandoning, giving up, but that is the counsel of fear. There is one thing about the counsel of fear you may always bear in mind. Fear never sees *everything*. Fear only sees one thing. Fear only sees the present thing and is blind to all the other factors. Fear, on the part of the spies who first went out into the land, made them see just one thing, the difficulties, and blinded them to the asset, God. Faith sees all the difficulties and, while faith does not see God perhaps as imminent, it always sees Him as transcendent. Fear is short-sighted. Fear is very limited in its apprehension; and this was a counsel of fear: “Flee ... to your mountain.” Why? “Well, look at things, look how they are. Isn’t it obvious that you are on a wrong course and the enemy is just doing as he likes?” Fear could say that well enough, but David had another side. It was the side of faith, and he said: “In Jehovah do I take

refuge. How say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain.” Faith sees that God’s foundation cannot be moved, cannot be destroyed, and whatever the appearances may be, faith looks beyond the appearances, beyond the circumstances, cleaves to the Lord and makes Him the refuge, and comes through. Some people have suggested that the 11th Psalm was written by David in the day when Saul was pursuing him. I cannot see how that can be because when Saul persecuted David he fled, and here he is saying he will not flee. Others say it was in the day of Absalom’s treachery and the advice given to David was to flee. Well, he did flee then, but here he is saying that he will not flee. You have to find some other historic setting for it. He did not flee, that is the point. Why didn’t he flee and abandon that situation, and say: “Yes, you are right, he is making a mess, he has struck a blow at the very foundation of things; I had better find some line of less resistance.” Why did he not take that attitude? Simply because the eyes of his heart were fixed upon the Lord and he had no personal interests to serve; no organisation, no society, no movement to which he was so attached that if it were blown to pieces his whole life would go with it. No, it was the Lord. It is a great thing to be with the Lord and to be delivered from lesser things, to be one with the Lord in His purpose. What if all the other goes up in smoke? You were not in that at all, that is not the thing upon which your heart was set. What you were after was not a temporary thing, something on the earth; it was a spiritual and eternal thing and nothing can destroy that.

Now, beloved, you see the issue of this. You and I have got to be founded upon God’s objective. The thing which has got to be the thing which determines all our life, all our activity has to be God’s end. And what is God’s end? Let it be settled once and for all that God’s end is not to have something anchored to this earth, even with His Name upon it. Everything anchored to this earth will go with the earth. God’s object is to have a spiritual thing in the life of His people; something which relates them to His Son in a growing and increasing way — the increase of Christ. It matters nothing about all the rest. All the merely temporary aspects of the work are of very little importance at all. The thing that matters is that men and women are being perfected in Christ. We are not here to put something down and then try and get men and women to join that, attach themselves to that, — not even a “testimony”, as we might call it. Let us be careful that we start at the right end. We are not here on this earth to set up a teaching, and then try to get people to come into that teaching. If you go to your New Testament you will find people came together because they were in it already. They did not come to join it. The testimony is not something that you join. You are joined by being in the testimony. Do you get that? That is a tremendously important thing in connection with this whole matter which we are now considering. We shall be disappointed, and will have a hard time if we try to get people to adopt something, take it on, accept it. Let us, in the

power of the Holy Spirit, give our witness, let the Lord do the work in our hearts, and when He does His work in our hearts we will cleave to one another. You will have the expression of the Church here on the earth as a result of the work done inside and not in something you have brought together, even in a teaching, a testimony, or a system even called a “fellowship”. Let us be careful in thinking we can join a fellowship. Fellowship is a thing that *is*; it is the result of something inward. Now I gather up all I have said into this law. The objective is to have an inward life in God, and if we are on that line we are on something that can never be destroyed. If your objective is anything else, to have some outward form or order, you are on a line that will be destroyed, it will suffer, it will be broken up. That is why we find so many splittings up in things. Here is a pure thing which has been wrought into a few lives, and because the same thing has been done in that little company they are together in a beautiful oneness, and there they do represent something very much of God; but then others begin to join it, to attach themselves to it, or to accept the teaching. Then another generation comes along and takes up the teaching of that generation, and the thing has not been *done* in those who adhere or succeed, and so you get the carrying on of a teaching, or a tradition, without the inward thing. What happens? Before long the thing is divided, and the divisions are endless. You cannot divide a thing which is *the* one thing of Christ in each heart; that makes for fellowship, that is indestructible. But if it is anything external merely, historical, traditional, doctrinal, it can be split into as many fragments as there are people in it. The foundation is Jesus Christ; and Jesus Christ in the heart, growing, developing, being fully formed in the saints. That is an indestructible line — Christ as the foundation within us.

I think that we want to be far more concerned with the spiritual growth of one another. Everything must come within that object. The spiritual growth of one another. Everything else will come that is good and right; any kind of outward expression will be a result of it, but this is the basic thing, our mutual spiritual development, the increase of Christ, and that all hell’s activities and treacheries can never destroy. It is God’s foundation in us which stands.

## CHAPTER TWO

*Reading: Psalm 11:1-4; 1 Cor. 3:9-17.*

As we proceed with our consideration of foundations there is a third thing. In the first letter to the Corinthians we have another way in which foundations are virtually destroyed, at least in a very real measure. It is by what is put on them; the building that is placed upon them. Not utterly and altogether and finally are they destroyed by this means, but they are robbed of their supreme value, and thus they are in their main virtue destroyed. You will see what I mean by the apostle's words: "I laid a foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon." And then Paul proposes that some build with certain materials and others build with other materials. Then a testing fire from God comes to try out that superstructure; and the wood, hay and stubble material goes up in smoke, and when it has all gone the question is: Well, what was the value of that foundation if when all is said and done nothing is on it? In that way the foundation is in its supreme significance and value destroyed. The apostle tells us that those who do that sort of thing may be saved people, and, because they have Christ the foundation is there; they themselves may not lose their salvation, but then they were not saved just to be saved. Christ did not come into them just to be there. He was not the foundation just to remain the foundation. A foundation presupposes a superstructure, it points to it, implies it, necessitates it. There is no justification in having a foundation if you have no superstructure. The superstructure is the justification of the foundation. What would you think of a builder who went round everywhere putting down foundations, and then you went round the earth seeing a lot of foundations and that is all you saw; foundations put in year after year and as you passed on, you saw nothing but foundations. You would say: Well, that fellow did not justify his existence, he did not justify his labour. The only justification for putting those foundations in is that he put something on them.

The justification of our salvation is that there is a superstructure; for our salvation involves that, and we are not justified as saved ones until God's building is up. God is justified in saving us when He has His building. That is the justification of the grace of God. So the apostle goes on with the language about God's temple: "Ye are God's building." *God's* building. Now what we are putting upon our salvation, what we are building is either going to justify the foundation, or to, virtually, for all divine intents and purposes, destroy the foundation; that is, render it vain in the full purpose of God. That is plain. Do you see what I mean? There is a way of rendering even the divine foundation well nigh valueless, and robbing it of its real virtue by putting up something not

according to Christ. Now that is very simple and very elementary, but it will help us on a little.

The superstructure has to be in keeping with the foundation. It has to be spiritually and morally of a piece, it has to be alike. What the foundation is, the superstructure has to be. The building has to take character from the foundation. The foundation is said to be Jesus Christ and the whole building has to take its character and nature from its foundation. Think of de-rooted foundations after an excavation down to the bottommost depths of hell; for that is where Christ laid the foundation. He excavated down to the very bottommost depths of sin; He touched rock-bottom to lay the foundation of our salvation. Deeper He could not go. He ploughed through hell to lay the foundations of our eternal redemption. Now think of putting up a flimsy wood, hay, stubble building upon that. Does that justify those foundations? Something worthy of Christ is required, something worthy of the work that He has accomplished, something which will speak of the greatness of His grace and His glory. That is God's building.

When we have said that, and seen that, we can come to this letter to the Corinthians and let the letter itself explain that to us. You remember that we are thinking of destroying the foundations in this sense, that something not worthy of Christ is put upon them.

Now take up your letter to the Corinthians and we will cover some familiar ground. Remember this whole letter represents the problem which confronted the apostle as he contemplated visiting Corinth. There was a situation there with many sides which represented for him a problem calculated to break the heart and destroy the faith of any one whose foundations were not well laid in themselves. I am quite sure before we are through you will see that to face a situation like that, you will need to have foundations well laid in yourselves.

## **The wisdom of the world and the things of the Spirit**

The first chapter introduces you to the first phase of his problem. Before you are through that chapter you discover that in that assembly of believers at Corinth the spirit of the world outside, the Corinthian spirit had gained access and taken hold. The spirit of the world at Corinth was the spirit of worldly wisdom; it was a centre and citadel of philosophy. They had no better entertainment than to discuss the latest phase of philosophy, the new thing in thought. And Corinth was a place where human reason had full play and everything was determined in its value by the reasoning powers of the mind; argument, debate, discussion. It was a world-centre of rationalism, and that had crept into the assembly of the Lord's people. And what we find is that the Lord's people in that

spirit, in that mind, had taken hold of spiritual things, heavenly things, things of God, and brought them down to the level of mere human argument, debate, discussion, and reason; applying all the time the test of human reason to them and seeking so to handle them by the intellectual faculty as to bring them within the limited compass of man's own power of mind. Thus they were discussing what the apostle calls the things of the Spirit of God, and bringing heavenly, eternal, spiritual things down there; dragging the things of eternity into the school of worldly rationalistic discussion, debate, argument. Of course, that was not exclusively the way of the Corinthians of Paul's day. There is plenty of that today. Again and again we have come up against people whose one great obstacle to the things of the Spirit of God is their own head. They will get their head in the way; and what they cannot reduce to their own intellectual comprehension, they reject. And when you say: Look here, you will have to stop arguing, discussing, give God a chance along the line of faith, they will answer: Why have we got brains? That means our brains are the capacity of eternal things. If that is so, God help the eternal things! Well, that was the first phase of Paul's problem, no little one. Those of us who have met it even in a little way know what a big difficulty it is.

### **Human predilections, sympathies and antipathies**

Pass into chapter two and we find the same thing carried on for a bit, and then as we move on and begin the next chapter we find we come into the realm of human preferences, human likes and dislikes in the direction of teaching and teachers, preaching and preachers, the messengers of God and their messages. One school says: Now Paul is the man we like, and Paul's line of things is the line we like. You may like Apollos or Peter, but as for us, well, Paul is our man. Within the same assembly another company are saying: We prefer Apollos and his line of things. You may have Paul, and you have Peter, but we like Apollos. The third company were saying: All right, if you like Paul and if you like Apollos you may have them, we will stick to Peter. There was a fourth class who said in a superior way: Well, if you like to have Paul, you Apollos, and you Peter, you may, but we belong to Christ (something quite different from the other, of course). That is the implication, you see, making Christ a party. You know when human preferences run riot they are awfully difficult things to handle. That was there; their sympathies and antipathies; and these are deeply rooted things in human nature. It takes a lot of grace to get over them. Of course, that was their condemnation. If it does take a lot of grace to get over these things, and you have not got over them, you have not got a lot of grace. That was Paul's problem, the thing which Paul had to face and deal with and for which he had a responsibility before God.

## **The tragedy of arrested growth**

In chapter three again you find a state which is perhaps more difficult, that of unduly delayed maturity. After some considerable time of being God's people and having the things of God in their midst, Paul says that he could not speak to them as unto spiritual but as unto carnal, as unto babes. That is a tragedy. There are perhaps few more pathetic tragedies in human life than to see arrested growth in infancy while years go on. That is how things were at Corinth. Paul says it was carnality which had caused the arrest, and carnality always does cause arrest, and when they ought to have been mature they were still helpless, dependent, spiritual infants, without understanding, perception, capacity to take spiritual responsibility. A very difficult thing to deal with that. Beloved, that was not peculiar to Corinth or Paul's day. Multitudes of the Lord's people are like that today. Oh, yes, it is a pathetic situation to find people who have known the Lord for years, decades, who are still without their spiritual faculties developed to a state where they can take spiritual responsibility, where they know and have not to be told! There are multitudes like that. The reasons are not always the same. It is true that carnality is the cause of that very often, but I am afraid poor teaching is also responsible for that in many cases. They have not been fed and nourished. It is a tragic situation with which we are met today; but there it is, whatever the cause. In this case it was their own responsibility, their own fault, their carnality.

## **The shame of spiritual pride**

You pass to chapter four and find the apostle speaking with language which indicates spiritual pride. It takes this form. The Lord had blessed them with spiritual gifts and done very gracious things for them, put them in possession of His spiritual riches, and they were boasting of those possessions, boasting of these things as though they had acquired them by their own ability, had achieved them by their own efforts; and the apostle says: "... if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?" In other words: Why are you trying to make people think that your possessions spiritually are the result of your own spiritual ability, that you have by your own effort attained unto this? Why don't you recognise that it is all the grace of God, and that you are the humble dependants upon the Lord? They were boasting of their spiritual gifts as though they were their spiritual attainments and not *gifts*. Spiritual pride is a terrible thing. Ordinary pride is bad enough, always the hallmark of ignorance, but spiritual pride is a far worse thing.

Then there is the next phase of the problem confronting Paul. That alone

would dishearten a good many, but put them all together! Chapter five. Here we dare not tarry. “It is actually reported that there is fornication among you ...” Amongst believers? In an assembly of the Lord’s people? Yes, a tragic story which has been repeated again and again through the ages. But oh, the heart-break to any man who had any real sense of spiritual responsibility for souls, to come up against that.

Chapter six. Believers, members of the Body of Christ dragging one another into the courts of earthly judgment, having writs issued against one another, summoning one another before the magistrate, charging one another, lawsuits before the ungodly. Fellow members of the Body of Christ! Oh, what a misapprehension of the Body of Christ. That is, they were standing up and fighting for their own rights.

He goes on. You come soon upon some terrible disorders at the Lord’s Table. One was that they were turning the Lord’s Table into a revelry, a feast. People better off in this world’s goods were bringing to the feast luxuries, and people who were poorly off could only just bring their little, and there was the class distinction, and all that sort of thing. The apostle says: Have you not homes? If you want to glut yourselves at least have the decency to do it in your own home in private, do not do it as an assembly of the Lord’s people. You see they often turned their common meal into a sacrament. They met together, ate and drank together and then as spontaneously as if it were the natural thing they made of their meal a testimony, but this thing had so degenerated as to make it a commonplace, as we have mentioned, and all the glory, beauty, sacredness of the Body of Christ and Blood of Christ had been dragged down to this. No small problem that in itself to have to deal with. There were other aspects of this matter which we will not deal with.

You pass on still further and you come to disorders in the assembly in general. People usurping authority, and you know what the apostle has to say about disorder in the House of God. The place of men is under the sovereign headship of Christ in a spirit of subjection, fulfilling their ministry in the House of God. But here men were taking authority themselves and not having their authority in subjection to Christ. And then women, out of their divinely appointed place, upsetting the whole order of the assembly. The apostle tells them what this means: “You get out of your divine covering and get into touch with the evil spirits who deceived Eve. The Devil is out to disintegrate this assembly along the same line, and you are giving him the chance he wants by this disorder.” The whole matter was one of order. The Lord has an order for His House, and all may fulfil their ministry — women and men — if they keep to His order.

I think any one who had not the foundations in himself well established would give up this situation, abandon it, run away, do what the counsellors advised David to do, flee to the mountain. “If the foundations be destroyed,

what can the righteous do?" Surely with a situation like that the foundations are destroyed? Not a bit of it! I come back and see that after all Paul does not run away, he does not accept that the foundations are destroyed, but he does see that those foundations are being robbed of their value by all this. This is the thing which destroys the foundations in their real virtue.

## **The natural and the spiritual**

Now do you want an exposition of what Paul means by wood, hay, stubble? That is it! The Word interprets itself. What did he mean by putting upon the foundation a superstructure of wood, hay, stubble? He meant all that. Divisions, schisms, worldly wisdom, intellectual glorying, and all the rest. This is something which will be destroyed by the fire. What will you have left? When you are building with that material you cannot be building with the other at the same time, therefore you will have nothing left. Do you want an exposition of what Paul means in the second chapter by the spiritual and the natural? "Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged (discerned)." Natural and spiritual. We know that word natural, in the Greek, is the word soulical, or soulish man, and he is set over against the spiritual man. What is the soulish man? One Corinthians tells you all that. The man who is handling spiritual things with natural wisdom, he is the soulish man. The man who is influenced and actuated by his own natural likes and dislikes, preferences, sympathies and antipathies — Paul, Apollos, Peter — that is the soulish man. But over against him is set the spiritual man. The man who is not actuated primarily by his own worldly reason, but looks to the Lord the Spirit for his understanding in the things of the Lord. The spiritual man is never influenced or governed by his own likes or dislikes for people or teaching or anything else. He is actuated by what the Lord likes. He does not say: I prefer this man to that, this line of teaching to that. He says: Has Paul got something of Christ? Well, I will have all, it is Christ I am after. Never mind what kind of a vessel, it is Christ I am after. There are no divisions in the spiritual man, no preferences in the spiritual man. He may know secretly what naturally he would like, but he does not allow those things to come to prejudice his mind or in any way affect his relationship. The spiritual man does not go to law with a believer to fight for his own rights. The spiritual man is not guilty of fornication. The spiritual man does not bring disorder into the House of God; it is the man of soul who does that. You see you have got a clear exposition with the whole letter of the meaning of the natural or psychical and spiritual.

## How Paul won at Corinth

Do you see what I am getting at? It brings me right back to my beginning. What kind of a building is to be suitable to the divine foundation? Well, we have seen how Paul faced his problem. Oh, magnificent example of how to face a spiritual problem! I am not coveting to face a problem like that in one assembly. God forbid that it ever should be, but I do see here the most magnificent example of how a humanly impossible situation is faced, met, dealt with, and triumphed over. I am so glad Paul won through. Read the second letter and you see he has won, he is on top, and they are out with him. Everything was in a state of suspense so far as ministry was concerned in his first letter. The second letter is the letter of ministry. "Therefore seeing we have received this ministry, even as we obtained mercy, we faint not; but we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Then a wonderful chapter on godly sorrow leading to repentance, and what the fruit of that repentance is. But he has won, that is the point; solved the problem from every standpoint. How did he do it? Open at chapter one again. I see Paul away there with this whole problem spread out before him. Yes, bowed, concerned, praying, saying: Lord, this is a terrible thing, only You can meet it, but something must be done, this does not glorify You. Give me the key to the situation, put into my hand the key to the whole thing. And as he sought the Lord, it flashed into him, and perhaps he shouted: I have found it, and sat down to write. Chapter one, put your pencil under every reference to the Lord Jesus and you will have seventeen blue pencil marks in thirty-one verses, an average of more than one to every two verses. Gather that all up into the grand statement: "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." "For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." What is the solution? Giving the Lord Jesus His full and right place! Put the Lord Jesus into His place as absolute Lord in the heart, in the life, in the assembly, and all these foul birds will go out before the light. If the Lord Jesus is dominant in our hearts, divisions will go. You will not have to clear them up, they will go. What we need for all our divisions, our lack of love, our schisms, our likes and dislikes, is a fulness of Christ. Christ as Lord, Christ as Master, Christ reigning. And like evil creatures in a dark cellar scuttle away when the light comes on, so will divisions and schisms, and all that makes for them, go, when Christ comes into His place. It is the cure for everything.

If the foundation is to be justified it must be justified in a superstructure after its own kind. Christ at the root, and Christ the stem, branches, and fruit. It is all Christ. We have something to think about. "If the foundations be des-

troyed, what can the righteous do?” Destroyed in this sense, that they are made void by what is being put on them. What can the righteous do? Well, there is nothing to be done but one thing, but that one thing will do all the rest: that is, bring the Lord into His place. Oh, Paul must have had a wonderful faith in Christ; facing a situation like that, beloved. Sit down with any one phase of it and see how you would like to tackle it; and then taking the whole thing — more than I have given you — and realising you have a spiritual responsibility for that situation, you want a mighty faith to believe that whole situation will yield if only the Lord Jesus can be brought into His place. It will do it, and it will again. There is no problem, no difficulty which cannot be solved by the enthroning of Christ. All the problems in this world, and of all the nations, are going to be solved by the enthronement of Christ. There is no other solution, but this is the sure solution. God has bound up everything to that, that all things are going to be settled when His Son has His place. But judgment must begin at the House of God; it must start with us.

I have used all this by way of illustration. It may have an application to us in some way or other. Whether that be so or not is for us to determine before the Lord. Whether we are guilty of any of these things in spirit, in principle, if not in act. If it does not come home to us in any specific application, surely the grand truth should help our hearts. How are we going to face our problem, either within ourselves, or without, in others? Only in one way. Seek to have the Lord Jesus exalted in your own heart, and in the hearts of others. Bring Him first into view and then with Him in view all the other things can be dealt with.

I have only touched one aspect of this chapter. I will not go further with it. Paul said: “Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” You will see what the foundation is composed of. Jesus Christ as the foundation in this letter includes Christ crucified, the meaning of His death for us: Christ Risen, Christ exalted in the place of sovereign head. Those three things comprise the foundation. When we know what the death of Christ means so far as we are concerned, Christ crucified; we died when Christ died, how can we have the natural man then, the carnal man then? He has gone. When we know what it is to be risen with Christ, that is, alive unto God, only unto God; unto no other being or interest, and certainly not unto ourselves, only unto God; when we know what the absolute lordship of the Lord Jesus means to bring us into His government, how can it ever be: I am of Paul, I of Apollos, I of Peter? They cannot come in there if Christ is all. You find these threads running right through this letter. The Spirit tells you of the Christ crucified, risen, exalted. That is the foundation and the superstructure must be according to that.

Let the word lead us to glory in Christ, for that is where chapter one ends: “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

*(To be continued)*