



*the
Golden
Candlestick*

**GOD'S INSTRUMENT
OF DELIVERANCE
IN A TIME OF DEATH**

Part 2

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Volume 142

LOVE — THE GOVERNING FEATURE OF THE OVERCOMER

A. THE LOVE OF GOD

“Who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14).

“So will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and If I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:16).

“But I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love. Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works” (Rev. 2:4-5).

“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth” (Rev. 3:15-16).

Love for the Lord

These two passages from the Revelation are the first and last messages to the seven churches, and they both show the loss of a positive element. “Thou hast left thy first love.” “Thou art neither cold nor hot.” But all that comes between them as the first and last can be put down to the same cause. We probe into these messages with the object of seeing exactly what it is that the Lord is after, the occasion of His dissatisfaction and of His appeal, and what it is that He means when He says, “He that overcometh ...” — and He says it to every church. There is this one thing which may be the main and fundamental thing which will arise in every case. The result will be at the end we are left with just one focal point which explains the difficulty and which is the occasion of the Lord’s admonition, entreaty, warning and encouragement. It is all focused in this matter of a positive element. In the case of Ephesus, He calls it first love with corresponding first works. He has something to say about their works and He knows them, but they are not the first works. Though they may

be the first works in kind, they are not the first works in value. It is just possible to go on doing the same things without the same value.

Is that not just the history of a good many things in relation to the Lord? The same words are being used, the same terms are common, the same forms obtain; the same laws and regulations govern, but there is a difference. There is something lacking, something that was there that is no longer there. That is the history of very much in the church.

Ephesus had works, labour and patience and dislike for hypocrisy and falsehood and all such very admirable and commendable things, but there was something which had disappeared. It was a vital positive something which the Lord no longer found among them. That was the cause of the trouble. As I have said, that same thing can be traced in every case.

In Smyrna Satan is about to cast some of them into prison. They are going to have tribulation ten days; they are going through a time of intense suffering and they have to overcome. What is it that they have to overcome, the sufferings, the trial, the persecution, the imprisonment? Not exactly, but they have to overcome that which Satan will try to bring about by the suffering. That is, suffering, trial, adversity, become a great battlefield upon which the interpretations, constructions and representations or misrepresentations of Satan become the real power of the trial. You know that when you are passing through a time of adversity how the enemy is always near to put his construction upon your suffering and trial, to tell you that the Lord is against you, that this all means that the Lord is not with you and for you, that the love of the Lord has been withdrawn and all that kind of thing. "Satan is about to cast you into prison." What for? Just to tie you up? Not altogether, but that in the presence of trial, suffering and adversity, he might find a vantage point in your weakness to insinuate that which will be your undoing, that your overcoming is not just overcoming the difficulty but overcoming that which Satan introduces in the difficulty. Your overcoming will depend entirely upon whether you have this positive factor of love for the Lord.

Then the overcomer will be an overcomer upon one thing only, will overcome or be overcome by the presence or absence of this one thing — a positive love for the Lord. Satan cannot do very much when that exists. If at the time of suffering and adversity we turn over to ourselves in self-pity and self-occupation, we provide the enemy with the ground that he wants for turning our hearts against the Lord. Then it will be clear whether there is an adequate love for the Lord or whether it is love for ourselves. The overcomer will be such purely and simply upon the basis of one thing, the positive factor of this love. It was so in Smyrna.

Then Pergamum and Thyatira are rather linked together. To Pergamum the Lord has to speak strongly about Balaam being there; and to Thyatira, Jezebel. Well, how did Balaam get into Israel of old? How did Jezebel get her place in Israel of old? Surely and only because of a declension of a love for the Lord in Israel. If you have a pure single love, there is nothing mightier against a divided heart than just that singleness of love. All the siren voices have no charm if you have one object of love. All that Balaam can offer and all that Jezebel can do lose their power and influence if your heart has one object which engages it entirely. Pergamum and Thyatira have let Balaam and Jezebel in because of one thing; it could not be otherwise; it must be because that positive element of a first love is no longer there. You only take on others if you have lost your first love, and Balaam and Jezebel stand no chance at all if the heart is wholly fixed on the Lord.

It is said of Sardis, “I have not found thy works perfect” or complete. It is the same thing — starting and not going through; receiving but not carrying out, not rounding off, no consummation, stopping on the way. Why? Something has happened to the heart, that is all. It must be. It would never happen if the heart was still as it was when you started. If our hearts are wholly in a thing we do not stop after we have gone a little way, we do not leave it in a state of incompleteness, we go on with it.

And then we come even to Philadelphia. There is not much to be said against Philadelphia, but there is this, that even Philadelphia has got to overcome. With nothing said by way of condemnation to Philadelphia, the Lord still adds this word, “He that overcometh”, so evidently Philadelphia is up against something. There is just a little suggestion, “the synagogue of Satan”. What is that? Well, if Philadelphia is love of the brethren, Satan’s strategy, Satan’s tactic against that will be a counterfeit love of the brethren, a synagogue of Satan, a misrepresentation in fellowship. There is a peril even there; and Philadelphia, while there may be nothing positively wrong with you, you have got to beware. There is an enemy on your track too, and if you are going to be saved and overcome — and you will have to, you will not escape the trial — it will only be on this one basis, that that love is kept undivided, clear, pure and white-hot.

And so we come to Laodicea; neither hot nor cold; lukewarm. It is all summed up in that final state. I think you see what I mean. I am not dealing with the messages to the churches. I am just getting at one thing. What *is* the central, fundamental factor in the overcomer? If we are really to be overcomers — and God forbid that we should fail in this matter — one thing is the key and the secret of it all. There may be a lot of teaching about

overcomers, overcomers may be said to be this, that and something else, maybe that they have got to know a lot, understand a lot or be mighty warriors. But you can bring it all back to just one thing out of which everything else will come, and that one thing is a superlative love for the Lord, a love for the Lord which is stronger than anything else. And what I need and what you need and what the Lord's people everywhere need is more of this passionate love for the Lord Himself.

It is a great defensive factor against the enemy. Perhaps there are few things which are of a greater defensive and protective value than a real love. Oh, how we are protected, safeguarded, defended, when love is in the ascendant. We are not open to very much when there is a single object of our hearts, when all the heart is centred upon One. That is a great protective factor, and I repeat that we all need, in a time like this, a reviving, strengthening, deepening of our personal love for the Lord Himself.

Self-effacement by love for the Lord

We have got to have a new apprehension of *His* love in order that there might be an outgoing of a new love from our hearts to Him. So my word to you, though simple, is just this, that victory and the great vantage ground is a mighty self-effacement by a mighty love for the Lord. A self-effacement — that is why I read again from Esther, “If I perish, I perish!” It seems to me that that really does touch this matter of the overcomer right at its root. “They loved not their life even unto death” (Rev. 12:11). They loved not their life. If I perish, I perish! Esther is an Old Testament type of the overcomer and the principle is there, correspondence between Esther and Revelation 12. “They *loved not their life*” — complete self-effacement.

Self-effacement is not something that we can achieve. We cannot achieve it any more than we can achieve any other phase or particular of dealing with self. We are what we are and there is a good deal of self about every one of us. Self in some form or other is there in strength, and in many of us in more than one form. If it is not self-pity, it is self-preservation. If it is not that, it is something else. Self is there, and it is no use our turning in upon ourselves now and saying that we are going to deal with ourselves and root this out. Not at all; it will never happen. We shall only become more conscious of that self-factor; it may worry us day and night and become a burden, this strength of self. We may concentrate all our attention upon this self-element and it goes from bad to worse. We are only driven to distraction and despair. I am not suggesting to you that we have to deal with this self-element

and root it out. Not at all, and I would not bring you under any burden on that matter.

What I want to say is this — there is a positive way in which that is dealt with; the other would only be negative, after all. There is a positive way. The positive way of self-effacement is that Christ should supplant self, that there should be in our hearts shed abroad by the Holy Spirit the love of God. The quest must be a positive one, not a negative one. Not, “Lord crucify this self, deal with this self, break this self!” — not concentrating upon that in that way. But — “Lord, bring about a new mighty love for You which will supplant this self, which will efface self altogether!” That is the positive way and that is the only way, but oh, what a tremendous thing that is when Christ really does fill our hearts! What a power that is, what a victory that is!

You can see it working in any one of the cases presented to us in the Word of God. Take John the Baptist. Perhaps you do not think of John the Baptist as one of the overcomers. He is a young man and it is not so easy for a young man but he is being tremendously used of God. However, he is not putting up posters and placards giving the titles of the series of wonderful addresses he is going to give in Jerusalem, taking the largest hall and arranging things for a great attraction. Not at all. He can go right outside in the wilderness, leave the city, and they are coming out to him. Jerusalem and all the region round about are coming out to him, thousands of them, and he is speaking and the power of God is coming upon them and they are going down under conviction and saying, “What shall we do?” There are even Roman soldiers among them, all classes of people, coming out in their thousands, and that is going on perhaps for some considerable time. He is the centre of a tremendous spontaneous movement, without any effort at all; God is using him.

One day another young Man appears who comes into the circle of John’s ministry and influence and that other young Man begins to draw away from John, to draw away his following, to draw away his crowd. His influence is becoming so strong that it has got right into the circle of John’s nearest relationships, his own most intimate disciples. John the disciple leaves him and goes off after that other young Man. John the Baptist sees them going. He is left and in his heart of hearts he knows they are not coming back to him. They have gone and gone for good.

What does he do? Is there stirring within him jealousy, self-pity, hurt pride? Does he feel bad about that other young man? See if you can put yourself into his position. What does John feel, what does John do, what does John say? Oh, here is the overcomer if only you can register it: “He must

increase, I must decrease” (John 3:30). That is sublime; that is triumph; that is not human nature; that is magnificent; that is an overcomer!

He recognizes in that other young Man, in Jesus, all that which he himself knows he has not got. He knows he cannot meet the situation as that other can; he knows that in that other one is the answer to a need which he cannot meet. He has seen the greatness of Jesus, and that is all. His heart has gone out to Jesus and he survives the storm. There is no self-pity, no jealousy, no defeat. He is an overcomer and it is because his heart is bound up with the heart of the Lord Jesus and he has great love for Him. “He *must* increase, I must decrease.”

You can see it in Paul. Oh, what a lot Paul had to encounter, what a lot of opposition, even among those who owed everything to him spiritually in the Lord, and how they worked against him; how they descended to the meanest tricks to try and undermine his influence. What did he do, what was his reaction? Was there bitterness, resentment, hurt pride, a giving up? No! His attitude was this — Well, whether they preach Christ of truth or of contention, thinking to add affliction to my bonds, what does it matter if only Christ is preached? That is all that matters! What do I matter if Christ is preached?

If you look into Paul’s life, you find that is the key. “The more I love, the less I be loved” (2 Cor. 12:15); nevertheless he went on loving. Why? Because the love of Christ constrained him. He was entirely delivered from all that which was petty and personal and selfish by this great love which he had for the Lord.

I suppose there are few spheres of work more disappointing than work among Moslems, and you probably remember that Raymond Lull gave his life for the Moslems, and oh, how little in return and how much suffering! But do you know there was one thing characteristic of Raymond Lull? He was given to frequent exclamations, and it was always one phrase. It was this — “I have one passion: it is He, it is He!” It has been handed down as the characteristic phrase of Raymond Lull; “It is He!” It was that passion, surely, that kept him going in all the discouragement and unfruitfulness of his work in that barren field. “It is He!”

Alexander Whyte and Marcus Dodds used to go for long walks every Saturday afternoon, and Alexander Whyte put this on record concerning those walks. He said that whatever they started off with in their conversation, they soon made across country somehow to Jesus of Nazareth! They had much to talk about. There was a wide field of interests and occupation, but they soon made across country somehow to Jesus of Nazareth! That is the point and if only you and I could be so filled with that love for the Lord! “It is He!”

Spurgeon himself said, “I looked at Him, He looked at me, and we were one forever.”

If there was something like that more deeply about us there would be salvation, deliverance. I mean the suffering of Smyrna would not have the effect that the devil wants it to have! I read a little fragment of Scott’s Antarctic Expedition, and a little fragment from Dr. Edward Wilson who died with Scott in the Antarctic Expedition, and I must say as I read, it came to me with a challenge. This is what he says. “This I know as God’s own truth that pain, trials, sorrows and disappointments are either one thing or another. To all who love God, they are love tokens from Him; to all who do not love God and do not want to love Him, they are merely a nuisance. Every single pain that we feel is known to God because it is the most loving touch of His hand.” Do you believe that? How many of us believe that? Can you sit down here and honestly say with conviction that the pain, the troubles, the trials, sorrows, disappointments, every one of them are the love tokens of God? Could you say that without any hesitation? I say, this challenged me, that a man could say that. And you know these men knew something about disappointments and pains and troubles on that expedition. But to say — These are the love-tokens of God! There is a very deep knitting of the heart with God to be able to say that and really mean it, without any cant, without any hypocrisy. This pain, suffering, sorrow, disappointment, keen, acute, and bitter; this trial, these trials, these persistent trials, are nothing other than the love tokens of God! To really say it and believe it, well, what chance has Satan got when you are there?

If Smyrna is in that position, then Smyrna need not worry about the ten days, the set period of trial and persecution. Satan will achieve nothing if Smyrna will turn round to him and say, “This is all the love of God for me!” I do not suppose any of us have really got there. I hope there are some. I have not arrived there at any rate, but I am saying this to you because I feel that this is what we need as the power to overcome — a great love, a new love for the Lord. I believe that “to him that overcometh” in every case circles round the presence or absence of this positive factor where Christ utterly holds the centre of our love, our affection, our devotion. And this is no weak thing, this is a mighty thing; it is the key to everything.

I have only said one thing in many words and different ways, but this matter of overcoming can become very complicated. It can become a teaching, an interpretation of truth, a system of doctrine — the overcomers, what they believe and what they teach and what they practise. Oh, let us get behind all that. Who are the overcomers, what are the overcomers? You can

sum it all up in this one thing, they are the people who have one passion — a great and undivided love for the Lord. That is what it amounts to. Everything else will follow, will spring out of that, and so we pray for this renewing of love which will put us out of the picture, which will have this effect — “If I perish, I perish!” That is not the thing that matters at all. The issue is far bigger than whether I perish or not, whether my interests remain intact, whether I get anything out of it, whether my name survives. That is not the question; it is nothing to do with where I come in at all. This other One has come in so much and so mightily that I have just been put out! That is what we need.

And is not Satan’s triumph so often because he finds some ground in us of self-interest, self-pity, self-occupation? Yes! Oh, let us ask the Lord for this one thing: that we will be altogether effaced, and *that* because He utterly supplants us, takes our place. It is a mighty thing if that happens. You see how John the Baptist was saved by it; what a triumph! You can see how Paul and many others were saved. It is the only way. The Lord save us from ourselves by becoming all.

LOVE — THE GOVERNING FEATURE OF THE OVERCOMER

B. LOVE OF THE BRETHERN

Reading: 2 Cor. 6:11-13; 1 Cor. 4:14-15; 2:15; 3:1; 12:1; 2 Cor. 5:13-18.

It is very well known and fully recognized that the theme of the Corinthian letters is spirituality. The passages just read bring that up clearly before us and you have only to think for a moment of these two letters to realize that that is so.

The apostle opens his first letter with a reference to the Corinthians having been blessed superabundantly with spirituals, spiritual blessings, spiritual gifts, coming behind in no spiritual gift. Because the Corinthians were so richly endowed with spiritual gifts, because they were a church in which spiritual gifts had such a large place, they had the idea that they were very spiritual people. It is something of an anticlimax when the apostle so soon says, “I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes”, though they came behind in no spiritual gift; making it perfectly clear that possession of spiritual gifts does not necessarily imply a large measure of spirituality in life.

What spirituality is not

Paul mentions a variety of kinds and orders of spiritual gifts. Among them there is the gift of knowledge, but in relation to that he says with startling, almost frightening emphasis, that spiritual knowledge is not necessarily a sign of spirituality of life. That rather pulls us up, does it not? Surely to have spiritual knowledge is a mark of being a spiritual person! Not at all, not necessarily. You can be a spiritual person and have spiritual knowledge, but you can have spiritual knowledge and not be a very spiritual person in any very real marked sense. Of course, basically it is true, but not in

any fuller sense than being babes. That is how the apostle deals with this whole situation of spirituality, on the one hand showing what spirituality is not, and so cutting away all false ideas and letting the false structure down with a bang. It is a very necessary thing sometimes to have your building pulled to pieces and made to tumble over your head if it is false.

You have an idea that because of this and that and some other thing which is of the Lord, which is a mark of the Spirit's power and of the Spirit's presence, because you have light and because you have truth, because you have this or that gift, you are necessarily either a spiritual individual or a spiritual church. It may be necessary to just let that whole structure down with a crash. That is what the apostle does here. He shows in a devastating way what spirituality is not.

Then, on the other hand, he gets to work to show what spirituality is, and it is that positive side that we will consider now. Some very heavy, severe blows might be struck on the negative side, but we should all suffer, for we are all living in glasshouses and not one of us dare throw any stones. A good deal of revision is needed in the position of every one of us. We all have some mistaken ideas; perhaps we have a false position in some things, maybe where we have a large amount of light and truth and can talk about the profounder things of the eternal purpose and so on. We assume that that represents some large measure of spiritual attainment on our part, that we occupy a position of some spiritual significance, that we are somewhere where other people are not — and that might just be a false structure, an altogether wrong idea, it may be utterly untrue. The Lord may be hammering at the base of our supports and causing the whole thing to tumble round our ears so that we do not know where we are, after having all the teaching we have and all the knowledge we have. Well, in faithfulness the Lord would save us from every false position.

What spirituality is

But the Lord is not merely destructive or negative in His dealings with us and if the apostle addresses that side of things in these letters, he also in a very full and rich way deals with the constructive and positive. He makes it perfectly clear for anybody who has eyes to see and a heart really in quest, what spirituality really is after all. If it is not this or that or the other thing, what is it? The apostle sums up this whole matter of spirituality in one word — love. “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels ... though I have the gift of prophecy ... and have not love ...”. Though I have

all knowledge and all the gifts, the spiritual gifts which are regarded as making me spiritual, it may be, after all, nothing. I may be nothing and nothing may be profitable.

The love of Christ shown through Paul

Paul is certainly not saying that you make a choice between gifts and love, that you can have love, and gifts do not matter. But what he is saying is this, that you can have gifts and not be in any real measure spiritual. There is something more, whether you have gifts or not. This other thing is the thing that matters. Spirituality, then, according to the conclusion of these two letters, is love. The whole subject of spirituality is headed up in love, and in reading these letters in the light of that, I am tremendously impressed with the exemplification of this truth in the apostle himself. You are certainly dealing with a spiritual man in Paul if love is spirituality and spirituality is love. Nowhere else does he shine forth in terms of love as in these letters. You are tremendously impressed with the wonder of Paul's love for these Corinthians. You notice how repeatedly he speaks of them as his children, "my children", "I speak to you as my children"; "You may have ten thousand tutors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I begat you through the gospel" (1 Cor. 4:15).

Then you go through the two letters and see the large place that love has. You know the classic of 1 Corinthians 13. Then you know these first six chapters of the second letter and this great word — "Our mouth is open unto you, O Corinthians, our heart is enlarged ... I speak as unto my children." "For a recompense in like kind, be ye also enlarged" (2 Cor. 6:11,13).

And this love of his was over against very much in them which was set against him. There were several factions which had little or no place for Paul. They said, We are of Peter, we are of Apollos! Some were of Paul but more were not. They had no place for him although he begat them through the Gospel, although they owed their spiritual life to him in Christ. You know very well the allusions in these letters to things which they said about him: criticisms — of his personal, physical appearance, of his methods, his ways; judgments on him, misinterpretation. He was a yea and nay man. Because he said that he would come and he did not come, did not arrive at the time, they said, "Well, you cannot count on Paul, he is a yea and nay man, you cannot be sure of him!" Now all that is not calculated to provoke love naturally, but — the less I be loved, the more I love. The letters are full of this wonderful love of the apostle, and when you come to think about it, it is the only thing for the

situation. Seeing what people are, seeing how things are, there is only one thing called for. You are either going to close it all down, and give it all up and wash your hands of them and go and try somewhere else, or you have to have a love that will get on top of all this, go beyond it, transcend it, a love that is greater than all this unloveliness, and not least in the unloveliness is this assumption of spirituality with all its carnality. That is a difficult thing to put up with. If people were really faulty, weak, defective people and they knew it and humbly acknowledged it and had a meekness of spirit about it, you could get on. But when, with all their gross, horrible carnality, they assume that they are very spiritual people, then that is rather difficult. That calls for some grace that more than flesh and blood can produce, and that is the grace of this love.

There is only one thing for it, and that is a love like this. Either the edifice is going to be brought down, levelled to the ground, or else you are going to build with this unpromising material, with all this stuff. You have got to build, and if their very assumption of spiritual knowledge is one of the difficulties, you cannot build with spiritual knowledge or more spiritual knowledge. If those very spiritual things taken up in the flesh have constituted the impasse it is no use laying your emphasis upon those things, gifts, whatever they may be, as the things which are going to count. No, you will only be building more and more of this false position.

“Love buildeth”

The only thing that really does build is love. “Knowledge puffeth up, love buildeth” (1 Cor. 8:1). So it is either going to be no building, a false building which must come down (you know what he has said earlier in this letter that every man’s work, every man’s building, will be tested by fire — “I laid a foundation ... let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon ... each man’s work shall be made manifest ... because it is revealed in fire” (1 Cor. 3:10-15); a false building which will sooner or later crash, or it is going to be a true building. And if it is going to be a true building there is only one thing that will really build and that is love. The only real building-up factor is love. There may be, there are, gifts, and they may be important, but they, in themselves, will not build up.

The apostle sought to point out that the gifts were given with the object of building up, “edifying” is the word in our old translation. They were given for edifying or building up, but they have become things in themselves, ends in themselves, they are not accomplishing that for which they were given —

building up. Why? Because they have been taken up in this natural carnal way to bring men into evidence as gifted men.

You will forgive me if I am rather exploring and interrogating. You see as we get on and we know more and more of the testing fires, we steadily lose interest in everything that is not of immediate practical value. I suppose that is a phase of getting old! You realize that you have not much longer to live, and that you had better begin to see that everything is counting; there is no room and no time for decorations. Things have got to be of the utility order, have to be of practical and direct value, and you have no patience with mere words, no longer any interest in great ideas as such. You are being sifted right down, and the thing that really does concern you is, what is happening? What is being done? How far are we getting on? What is the measure of downright reality and spiritual and practical value? Not, how great are the addresses and how wonderful the ideas, but what is happening, what is the real value of things? And that is where we are. At a time like this, what matters is real solid building that is going to stand through the fiery testing, that which really is spirituality in essence; not a great idea or a set of great ideas, but the solid thing that will not disappear and go up in smoke when the day of the ordeal arrives.

And are we not perhaps in such a day, when the work is being tested by fire and the real value of all that has gone on before, all that has been said, all that has been stood for, the real value of it is going to be brought to light? Then such an enquiry as this has a real point — what builds? And Paul says that love builds, and love is the only thing that really does build, and there is no hope for building unless there is love. You may as well give it up, you are only getting something false, mistaken, artificial, which will not stand, will not work, if there is no love.

With a situation such as this is, with people being what they are, the Corinthians being what they are, then and now, you have to have something that is bigger that transcends, that will not be put off, something that will not be disheartened unto despair by all this. You have to have something that will deliver you from taking the attitude of, “Well, just look at these people, what an awful mixture and mess and contradiction they are! I am going to wash my hands of them all, it does not amount to anything!” You have got to have something that will save you from that, seeing what they are, and they are just the same today as they were in Paul’s day. I am sorry if I sound insulting! But we are just like that, we are not accusing Corinthians — we are like that. Every one of us is capable of the same things as they were. There is a good deal of carnality about us.

Every one of us here likes to feel spiritually good. What is the one desire, the one clamour and craving of your being? Is it not to feel that you are getting on somewhere, becoming something, that you now have spiritually attained, that you are really now something spiritually? And if anybody should remark that you are a good man, you are a saint, how very nice and comfortable it all feels. Yes, there is that about us, but that is simply the root, the seed, of this thing. It is original sin. What was the original sin? Adam, under Satan's suggestion, reached out his hand to have things in himself instead of in the Lord. You do this and you will be as God yourself, you will be independent of God, you will have it in yourself, you will not have to be dependent upon God! And so he reached forth to have it in himself, to feel he had it in himself, the power of knowledge, judgment, decision, achievement, of realising his own destiny in himself. It is original sin. It is in all of us; we want to have it in ourselves.

So the Corinthians had simply, by original sin, taken hold of divine gifts to make something of themselves. That is just the opposite of love — making something of yourself, being something yourself. "Love", says Paul, "vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly" — giveth itself no airs, says Moffatt; "no self-important bearing", says a hymn. But that is human nature. Love is not that. That is original sin. It does not build up.

Love — the fruit of the cross

So, you see, the apostle brings us right to the cross over this whole matter. In 2 Corinthians 5 we are brought right to the cross. "The love of Christ constraineth us." A marvellous word, that word "constraineth". It is a big, strong word translated in various ways in the New Testament. When the Lord was touched by the woman and said, "Who touched Me?" the disciples said, "Master, the multitude press, or throng Thee, and sayest Thou, Who touched Me?!" That word, throng or press, is the same word in the Greek as this word, constrained. You know what it is to get in a crowd, in a throng. How helpless you are in a throng. Get in a crowd that is surging in a certain direction and it is no use putting your back up against that crowd. The only thing to do is to go with it. The love of Christ throngs, carries, constrains, "because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and he died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves" (henceforth not unto themselves because they died), "but unto him who for their sakes died and rose again. Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh."

That is love which is the fruit of the cross. The work of the cross in us bears fruit in that it gives us another outlook upon people which is not after the flesh. That is the only thing that is going to build up. If we have a fleshly outlook upon people, there is going to be no building up. Can you or I really build up anybody spiritually when we are looking at them all the time naturally and in the flesh? We cannot, it cannot be done. And it does not necessarily mean that they are very bad people in the flesh and we are taking account all the time of their badness in the flesh. You cannot build people up even if they are very good in the flesh. There are a lot of these sentimental friendships between Christians, wrong kind of friendships, infatuations. The person is a very attractive and infatuating person, and someone becomes infatuated with them, attracted, lured, obsessed. Now tell me what the real building up value of that is after a time? It does not get anywhere spiritually. Very often it becomes a real menace and hindrance to spiritual life. No, whether it is like that where there is no vice or defects particularly to take account of, or whether it is like these Corinthians in their carnality, with another fault and weakness, failure or sin, if we are going all the time to be dominated in our consciousness by people naturally, we are not going to do any building.

We can only build upon Christ, with Christ. Does that sound complicated? Oh, the building is Christ; all that that building is, is Christ, and if we are going to take account of Adam, man, that is not Christ, and if we are all the time influenced and affected by that, we shall not get very far with the building. What it amounts to is this, that if I am going to help you and you are going to help me, somehow we have got to get on top of what we are naturally, otherwise we simply wash our hands of one another or else be always in conflict with one another. There certainly will not be the positive building up spiritually.

And so you and I have got to be very careful about our preferences about people, our selections, our discriminations, our liking this one and not liking that one, and allowing such things to affect us. Too often among Christians that sort of thing prevails. I have no room for that one, I do not like so-and-so! All right, if that is the case, there is going to be no building; all building is set aside. I am not saying that we are not going to be aware of people's defects. Paul knew all about them and could say exactly what they were, but he did not allow that to be the level, the end, the measure. He had a love which went beyond that and took the attitude, "Now, that one is a very imperfect, faulty, weak one; there are horrible things about that one, things I naturally detest and dislike immensely, but this is a child of God, Christ is there, and I have to

build upon what is Christ there and seek to increase that and all the time refuse to be put off by what else I find there! It would be the easiest thing for me simply to turn them down, have nothing to do with them, but that will not get us anywhere. We must bring in the love of Christ to transcend all that and we will get somewhere!” And it has so often proved to be that the most difficult and unpromising ones, calling for much love, after a time have responded and come into a place of spiritual growth. And we thank God for patience and that we did not allow the temptations to give up on them to prevail.

It is a simple, elementary word, but it is important. Are we building something that is going to stand, or some great, big, inflated thing of words and truths and interpretations, and the whole thing will count for nothing when it is put to the test? God forbid! As we were in our previous meditation occupied with the need for a great new love for the Lord, so now the emphasis is upon the need of a new love for His own. For love is the building element and the only thing for building, and unless we have it, there really will be no building, we had better give it up. The Lord fill our hearts, then, with a great love for His own, whatever they are.

THE GOSPEL OF RECONCILIATION

Reading: 2 Cor. 5:17-21.

“God ... reconciled us to Himself through Christ.”

“God ... gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation.”

“God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.”

“God ... placed in us the word of reconciliation.”

“We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God.”

The wonder of reconciliation! It is a big word, it may sound a little technical, but say it slowly to yourself, break it up and listen. Re-con-ciliation. Doing something over again, bringing back somewhere. It is a re-something; it is a re-with-something, and when you break it up like that and listen, it is not so big and technical after all. Its message immediately becomes plain, its meaning clear. The implication is just that there was something both actual and intended and that something broke down and God has restored it. God has done it over again, God has brought it back.

Well, that is the Gospel, the Gospel of reconciliation. It just means that we, mankind, were made for a very living close intimate fellowship with God, for it is in the first place reconciliation to God. We are reconciled to God, brought back into union and fellowship with God. We were made for that and we lost it and God has recovered it.

Man's glory

But oh, what a lot that carries with it! It carries two of the most tremendous things that we can think of. It carries man's glory and it carries man's doom. It carries the most wonderful thing, the most glorious thing. And it carries the most terrible and awful thing, because it means this, that the distinctive thing about man, the thing which marks him out as a peculiar creation of

God, a particular creation as different from all other creations, is that he has been created with a capacity for fellowship with God. I do not know what the relationship of angels is to God, but I have a doubt, a question, as to whether it is the same as this. I am not sure that angels were created for fellowship with God in this sense. They are His messengers, His servants, who understand Him intuitively, but there is a difference. Man is unique in God's creation, he stands alone, and the thing which makes him unique and alone is this capacity for fellowship with God. I could use another word and be quite scriptural — friendship, for it seems to me that there is something in the tone of God which is very deep and very sacred, when God speaks of one as "My friend"; "Abraham, the friend of God". It is a tremendous thing. What a glory, what a wonder, that we have been created in this way so that we are different in the whole creation from the rest, and this is the thing which makes us different — we have the capacity for fellowship, may I use the word? — friendship, with God. That is man's glory, and all that it means on the side of divine purpose and thought and desire. Who shall ever be able to tell what the possibilities are that are bound up with such a capacity?

Man's doom

But there is the other side, the very doom of man. I mean this, look at the world today, look at mankind today, mankind through the ages, struggling, groaning, longing, seeking, pursuing, ever and always in quest of something, consciously or unconsciously. It is always after something, wanting something, reaching for something; unsatisfied, groping in the dark, and as a prisoner, bound, not free. Man has gone on like that through the ages, generation after generation coming, living its life with a feverish, eager, passionate quest and longing. And many have passed and never have reached that for which they were seeking, and it goes on. And that is the thing which lies behind all that we see and know in humanity, in the world, in the race. All these wars, strivings, activities and energies of men — they proceed from something in man which makes him crave to reach, to achieve, to arrive, to have, to possess something. And he is cheated, cheated all along, robbed all the time, mocked. This is the story, as a hymn puts it:

*"I tried the broken cisterns, Lord,
But ah, the waters failed;
E'en as I stooped to drink, they'd fled
And mocked me as I wailed."*

What lies behind it all? This capacity for God, for fellowship with God. If

that thing could be plucked out of man's nature, that capacity for fellowship with God, if it could be rooted out, then all this would collapse. Man would just resolve into a passive, inert, uninterested being without any motive in life. The thing which was intended to be man's glory and which is in itself man's supreme glory, his capacity for fellowship with God, has become his doom. He craves for something, he knows not what. Some would put it into language and say it is God; the majority never say that, but they are as deeply and terribly gripped and in the power of this thing as any. They are straining after something and their very strain leads them to the excesses of sin and lust and passion. It is this capacity, but they do not know the meaning of it. That is where the preaching of the Gospel is called for.

It has always been like that. That which God intended to be for man's glory, by being diverted from its right goal and being taken over by wrong motives, has become the very thing which has undone man and been his doom.

But it is just there that this big word and this wonderful word comes in. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself", bringing back in Christ that which was lost, recovering in Christ, overcoming the difficulty and realizing the great purpose — fellowship with Himself, *in Christ*. God was in Christ.

Man's inability to be his own saviour

How is it done? Well, it is perfectly clear if only men would face facts honestly, that this situation is not going to be met and can never be met out of man himself, in spite of the tremendous propaganda that is going on now. It is not only that men hold these views and give expression to them, but there is an organised propaganda of the doctrine that salvation is in man himself, that he has the secret of his own salvation in himself and can be his own saviour. Now, I am not going to tell you what I know about that, but it comes into my hands every day in printed form. It is a definite effort and a subtle movement on an organised basis to get that into men's hands, that the secret of salvation is in man himself, that he can be his own saviour.

If men would face facts they would see that is a lie. It is not true, and God is allowing an outworking of the truth to demonstrate on a most colossal scale the falsehood of that. In our day, if there is one thing that is really being demonstrated before earth and heaven, it is that salvation is not in man, in his power, in his ability, resource or ingenuity; not at all, and certainly not in his nature.

No, you see man himself is out of reconciliation and in his own person there is the declaration and we all know it, that there is something not reconciled in us; there is a division and a conflict, a warfare in our own being. We want, we crave, but we cannot.

Reconciliation to God through Christ

How will God meet that need, or how has He met it? Oh, if there should come into this world and into this race One in Whom that conflict did not exist, One in Whom there was no basis for such a conflict, One in Whom already reconciliation existed perfectly, where there was no controversy with God but where God and Man met in one personality, in one life, in one being, on terms of absolute fellowship and friendship, that One would be unique among the sons of men, different from all the rest, and so different that He would not be as one of those men at all. He would be a different order of man; we do not know this man, we have never met this man among men. That would be a coming in from the outside, for He is not here; there would have to be a breaking in, an intervention, for He is not among us, it is not the common nature. God would have to do that, God would have to create that, God would have to make that Man, provide that Man; that would have to come from heaven, from God. That is exactly what has happened. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.

How is it done? “If any man be in Christ, there is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). And “all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.” Well, here is one Man in Whom God and man are perfectly at one, in harmony, in friendship. There is no contrast, conflict, division, suggestion, shadow or suspicion of any strain whatever, but perfect, full harmony. “If any man be in Christ ...”; reconciliation, you see, is something that God has done in the perfect harmony of man with Himself and Himself with a Man — His Son, Jesus Christ.

You cannot find it anywhere else. Look for it in yourself; look for it in the world, look for it anywhere; you cannot find it, except in Christ.

*“E’en as I stooped to drink they’d fled,
And mocked me as I wailed.
Now none but Christ can satisfy.”*

Well, that is the simple but glorious Gospel. It is reconciliation.

You see how it is done. It is not a doctrine, it is not just something taught, it is not even only a Gospel to be preached; it is a Person, a nature. It is One, God’s Son, in whom, by whose cross, the sin which destroyed the conciliation

has been removed, that sin which interfered with the original basis of life with God and with the great end which God had in view in creating man with capacity for Himself, fellowship with Himself. In the cross of the Lord Jesus, all that has come out against that has been met. "He who knew no sin was made sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21), in our place made sin "that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Given the righteousness of God, you have conciliation. All the strain, the warfare, the conflict has gone, the discord is removed, you are at one. "Come unto me ... I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28); the rest of re-conciliation in Christ.

That is the Gospel for the unsaved and the Gospel for the saved. For there still remains in us even after we have come to Christ that basic conflict, and that is why the Lord not only says, "Come unto Me", but He says, "Abide in Me" (John 15:4). What He means is this, that the place of conciliation, rest, harmony, fellowship with God is in Him. If you get into yourself, the old striving will come up, the old warfare. It is just as you, by faith, abide in Him that you continue to enjoy the meaning of reconciliation, fellowship, friendship with God, the rest and the peace. That is the lesson of the Christian life — abiding in Christ. The fruit, says the Lord in His great picture of the vine, is the result of abiding in Christ and barrenness is the result of not abiding in Christ. And what is the fruit? Well, the fruit of abiding in Christ is the fruit of peace, the fruit of rest. Is not a restful life a very fruitful life? Is not a life which has the peace of God at its centre a fruitful life? That life does not have to do a lot, to be very busy; it is fruitful. I venture to suggest that in times like these, if the peace of God were really triumphant in our hearts, it would be one of the greatest and most fruitful blessings that we could give to this world. This world wants to find people who have the secret of inward peace today. That is fruitful in itself.

Put it the other way — unrest, uncertainty, strain, fret and anxiety are desolating, blighting, barren things, and the fruit of reconciliation is rest and peace. All is well in the realm where it matters most between God and myself and that is bound to affect everything else. If men in this world could really say, "I know it is well between myself and God!", what a change there would be! The trouble is that all is not well between themselves and God.

Abiding in Christ, oh, to learn this lesson and learn it more thoroughly, that we might come into the good and value of abiding in Christ; that is, keeping out of ourselves and what we are in ourselves and by faith abiding in what is true in Him.

In Christ reconciliation obtains; it is established. You cannot find any point at which there is a strain between Christ and His Father, where there is

one moment's anxiety about their relationship; you cannot find that in Him. And that is not just something which they privately have between themselves. The declaration is that God did that in Christ for us. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" and "hath reconciled us to himself through Christ", and has planted in us the word of reconciliation. What is true in Christ is by God's own doing, for us. In Christ we are reconciled. There is no shadow, there is no question. What Christ is to the Father is true for us through faith. Do we not believe that? Does our faith not grasp that, that the relationship of Christ with God is for us in its completeness if we believe? We cannot improve on that with all our strugglings; we will never get to that by all our striving; but God has completed it. Reconciliation is accomplished in Christ and it is for us by an act of faith. Lay hold of it. It is not what we are at all, it is what Christ is. So simple are the words and so familiar that they lose their edge. You and I need this rest and confidence and assurance, a settled joy that there is nothing now between God and ourselves since we believed into Jesus Christ. It is all accomplished in Him. He has given unto us the joy of reconciliation and the peace of reconciliation.

The *word* of reconciliation will come following the message of reconciliation. It becomes the passion of our lives that men should know. "We beseech you ... be ye reconciled to God." That is, accept the reconciliation that is in Christ.

I do want you to recognize that it is Christ that settles this whole matter and if you look at Christ, look at Christ again when He was here. And if you look at Him now as He is still here, you can see the outworking of this matter of reconciliation. You see the double effect of Christ's presence. When He was here on the earth, He had a double effect upon people. On the one hand, His very presence made them aware of their remoteness from God, that they were not reconciled to God. However they felt about it before; when He came on the scene they discovered how far from God they were. Yes, the man who had been able to go on in a certain measure of complacency, when He came on the scene, fell down on his face and said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8).

And yet, on the other hand, He had just the opposite effect, that is, His presence made men feel that there was not remoteness from God, but nearness, reconciliation. Take the example of Zacchaeus, for instance. That day the little man discovered God was very near when Christ came. When Christ came into his life and into his house, God was very near, and although he in himself immediately cried out about his sin, hope sprang up in his heart, a new prospect and possibility came to light. And while on the one hand he

would gladly have fled from the presence of this One, on the other hand, he could not. He had to stay because he felt this is where his hope lay. Peter said, “Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord”; that is how he felt about it. But if he had said everything, I think he would have said, “But don’t do it, Lord!” Christ’s presence had the double effect that here is my condemnation and here is my salvation, in this Man. That is just it, the fact of a need for reconciliation, and the fact of the presence of reconciliation provided. It is in Christ.

And it is like that today. Men know when Christ is brought into their midst that all is not well. In various ways they may try to cover it, violently or with ridicule or in some other way, but underneath is the consciousness that there is no conciliation. If you can get past that, get down under that, if you can get them alone, if you can get them to open up, they admit it. They begin to tell you how bad they are, how wicked and God-forsaken they are, but they do not want God to give them up, to depart from them. They know that it is in that direction that their only hope lies and it is Christ brought into their presence that has the double effect, and that is the proof of the Gospel that it is in Christ.

I need not say any more. We rejoice in this reconciliation. May the word have the effect of showing us what a great Gospel we have, what a great message we have, how it touches the very heart and core of everything in man’s need and condition. May it bear fruit in us in that we are not seen to be those who live under a strain, fret, worry, a burden of uncertainty, but in the peace and the rest of faith’s assurance of being reconciled to God in Christ. There may be much to be done in us by way of sanctification, but the foundation is laid and settled. We are one with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and God has done it. The glory of this whole thing is that God took the initiative and did it.

Concluded