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Golden
Candlestick

CHRIST OUR ALL

Part 2

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FULNESS IN CHRIST

I think our meditations in which we have been led in these times might very well be gathered up or set forth by this clause — “... the knowledge of His will” (Col. 1:9) or perhaps better — “... that ye may fully attain unto the knowledge of His will”.

At once we observe that the will of God referred to is not something in a fragmentary way, that is, the will of God in relation to the fragments of our lives, but it is the whole comprehensive will of God by which all the details of our lives are governed, the will of God as the full thought for His people. That will of God, the full knowledge of which was the burden of the apostle’s prayer, is written everywhere in His Word, and is shown to be nothing less and nothing other than divine fulness for His people. God’s mind for His people written everywhere in His word is divine fulness. This fulness is gathered up and presented to us in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Old Testament in the main is the revelation and history of that purpose of God in the life of a chosen nation, Israel; the New Testament is the carrying over of that purpose of God, but in a still greater fulness, to the church.

The history of the earthly and of the spiritual Israel

We are familiar with the story of Israel’s life from Egypt to the promised land, have read it often and much, but it is possible to read it in a very detached way, just as we would read the history of any other nation, reading it as history. What we have to realise is that we are in exactly the same position as was Israel when it was between Egypt and, shall we say, Malachi or the book of the Acts. The book of the Acts in the New Testament sees the end of that history for the time being — Israel’s rejection established and the church’s entrance accomplished to take up that very same purpose of God in a fuller, more heavenly and less earthly way; to be spiritual in all its principles and nature and with one all-governing purpose. You and I are there today and we are writing the second history of the Israel of God. We are His spiritual Israel, and we are writing the history from an exodus to an entering in and possessing, and I wonder, if this history should be finished now and the book closed, and we had it on record just as we have the history of Israel in the Bible, how much our history spiritually would accord with Israel’s history. What I want to have brought home to us just now is this, that we are making history, and it is the history of God’s spiritual Israel, and we are under exactly the same will of God as Israel. The purpose of God for us is the same but in larger dimensions. The purpose is divine fulness.

Now then, we have stepped right into the very midst of Israel's history and all of us will find ourselves at one or another of the points in which Israel was during their history. Some will be just outside of Egypt; some will be at this or that stage of the wilderness journey; some will be on the borders of the land. Is it possible that any might have been turned back through unbelief? Some will be over Jordan in the fight for possession of the land. The positions, the phases and the aspects are numerous, and we are all in one or another of them, hence history for us spiritually is now in the making.

Deliverance from Egypt

There are some very pertinent questions which arise in this connection. The first is this, Was the Lord content with getting Israel out of Egypt? Great as that was, tremendous as was the cost and the conflict, terrible as were the factors associated, deep and wonderful as was the meaning of the lamb slain, the blood shed and sprinkled, death overpowered and set aside, the mighty forces of the enemy paralysed, the sea parted and a way made — all wonderful truths in their spiritual significance; yet was the Lord content when that was accomplished and He had them out of Egypt? Did the Lord for a single moment take the attitude, "Now, they are out, now I have got them free, we can be satisfied, we can settle down"?! No one would dare to say that the Lord was content. It would be utter blindness, a misreading of that history, to even suggest that the Lord was content with that stage of things, however great it was. There are many people who have fallen into that error and who seem deliberately, of set mind, to settle down at that position and say, We are saved, we are out, the blood has redeemed us; Christ has delivered us from Satan, from judgment, from sin's guilt and penalty; that is enough! All that is necessary now is for us to try and get others out! There are multitudes of that mind (if they do not say as much, and some say it). They imply that they have no concern for anything else. To be saved and to know that you are saved is all that you want. Well, I ask again, was the Lord content? And the Scriptures come with an overwhelming answer — No, the Lord was not content for a moment!

In the wilderness

The next question is this: Was the Lord satisfied with having them as His own people unto Himself in the wilderness, even if they had behaved themselves there? Again, the answer comes back from everywhere in the Scriptures. No, the Lord was not, and never could be, satisfied with just having them to Himself as His own people, even though they might be very good! And yet again, there are so many who stay here at this position, this place of coming short of that full will of God, thinking, "Now I belong to the

Lord; all that I have to do is to really try to behave myself, that is, to live a good Christian life, not to do many things which I once did and to do other things which I used not to do, and so to conduct myself as a Christian here on this earth and just live a simple honest Christian life. That is all that the Lord expects of me and that is all that I want!” Would such have satisfied the Lord in the case of Israel? And the answer is most certainly, No! The only difference that their behaviour made was in the matter of time. They were there longer than they need have been because they did not behave themselves. Even if they had been the most exemplary people, if they had behaved themselves in a most satisfactory way, the Lord would not have left them in the wilderness or have been satisfied to have them there. It would only have meant that His full thought about going on would have been realised more swiftly, but going on was always His thought; not just to be satisfied with having them as His own and having very good children as His own. Are you satisfied as a parent to have children who are very good but evermore remaining children? Well, we like to keep our children children, but we should feel very bad about it if they never did grow up. The Lord could never be satisfied with having very good children in the wilderness. His will was something more than that.

In the land

A third question, still at a more advanced point. Was God’s end reached when He had them positionally over Jordan in the land? Did He say, “Now at last they are out of Egypt, out of the wilderness; they are over Jordan, they are in the land; let us settle down in contentment and be at ease — we have reached the end”? The answer still comes back with great emphasis, No, no! God’s end was not reached even when He had them positionally in the land beyond Jordan. It is one thing to be in a place where there are vast and inexhaustible resources, and it is another thing to be in possession of the resources which are in the place where you are. And the Lord could never be satisfied and never feel that His will in its fulness was apprehended and realised by His people until they had come into possession of all that was in the place to which He had brought them. The New Testament, beloved, is a comprehensive and emphatic answer to all these questions which we have just asked.

“Let us go on”

Each position mentioned is represented in different parts of our New Testament. One part of the New Testament deals with us at the point where we are brought out of Egypt, delivered from the kingdom of darkness, death and judgment. Another part of the New Testament deals with us at the point

where we are just outside; born again, children of God; where we are now in Christ; where we are the Lord's. Other parts of the New Testament deal with us in the various phases and experiences of the wilderness life; it is a spiritual counterpart now. Yet again we shall be met by the New Testament at the point of the great crisis of the cross, the Jordan, in the life of believers, not in the life of the unsaved; the divide between the earthlies and the heavenlies. And then we shall find in the New Testament that which bears upon our life as in the land, as in the heavenlies in Christ with spiritual warfare and spiritual treasures. The New Testament covers the whole and answers all these questions comprehensively by saying that the Lord never stops at one point. The Lord is always going on, and the Lord is always saying to His own, "Let us go on! Let us go on to full growth, let us go on unto perfection, let us go on unto the end!" The prayer of the apostle is "that you may attain unto the full knowledge of His will".

What is it that we are after? For what do we exist? What is the purpose of our ministry? Well, it is not to set up something here, it is not a new movement or teaching. It is one thing and one thing only, and unto that everything else has to be brought into line — it is God's full will for His people, which is divine fulness in Christ. So often we have expressed in the words of the apostle here: "I would have you know what great conflict I have"; "that we may present every man perfect in Christ" (Col. 2:1, 1:28). That word 'perfect' is a word which is greatly and grievously misunderstood. Let me repeat what I have often said. It just means this, coming to the consummation of God's will, God's thought. It is the consummation of the purpose of our existence in the will of God. Perfect, perfection, is so often made to apply to flawlessness, aimlessness, to a most immaculate life, a state. Well, of course, that will be included in the end, but to be perfect as in "Let us go on to perfection" means this, that the end for which we exist in the will of God is consummated and realised; we go on to the realisation, the consummation, of God's thought for us. That is becoming perfect in the New Testament sense, to present every man consummate, full-grown, finished, completed in Christ, God's fulness.

Is it necessary for us to ask ourselves any questions in the light of what we have been saying? The one all-governing question might be asked. Have we accepted and settled down at anything short of God's full will? Have we settled down at the position where we are saved and it is good and glorious to be saved? The sin question has been dealt with, the precious blood has settled that; we are delivered from the power of Satan and the condemnation of sin; that is all we want. Have we settled down accepting a life of just living as truly, faithfully, as we can day by day, not doing things we judge to be wrong or right, just living a simple Christian life, knowing we belong to the Lord and that is all that matters? Have you settled down there? Have you settled at any point? Have you stopped short? Well, let it come to our hearts

anew, the great warning and exhortation that God has not stopped and He has not abandoned His thought of fulness for us, and it is still His desire that we should attain unto the full knowledge of His will. So then, we have seen that with the cross foundational to all as an abiding energy and instrument of effectiveness, each New Testament letter is intended to lead to the fulness of Christ, showing us the way and showing us the requirements necessary to reach that fulness.

The whole range of God's will

I am going to close with a very brief review up to the point at which we have now arrived. The letter to the Romans brings before us the whole range of God's will, showing that God is for us in relation to that will. The letter works up to its great climax in chapter 12 — "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." This refers to that whole comprehensive will of God. God is for us in order that we come to that fulness of His will in His Son, and this letter shows us that the ground on which that is possible is the righteousness of God which is by faith in Jesus Christ; a theme upon which we can never dwell without profoundest gratitude. How can I ever come to divine fulness in Christ, being such as I am? The answer is, it is not being such as you are, it is being such as My Son is! He is made unto us righteousness! Thank God! If you have got a ground of absolute righteousness which satisfies God, a righteousness which satisfies *God*, being such as *He* is, about which He has no question or quarrel, concerning which He can say, I am utterly satisfied with that righteousness, then the way is open, the prospect is clear. By imparting His own righteousness through faith, God has shown that He is for us in the matter of coming to divine fulness. That is the grand message, the comprehensive message, of the Roman letter. It is the foundation of things.

Life in the Spirit

The first letter to the Corinthians shows that, with this divine fulness ever in view, even those who are the Lord's have got to be transferred from the life of nature, life in the flesh, to life in the Spirit. The natural man must be put aside by the cross of the Lord Jesus, and life in the Spirit must be brought in. That is the message of that letter — life in the Spirit, and not in nature, in the flesh, even in the case of Christians. That is an essential application of the Roman letter to begin the practical course to that divine end — fulness in Christ. We cannot take our first step until that is settled. That was the challenge to Israel. They were out of Egypt but they were still in the flesh, still carnal. A pillar of cloud and of fire was given which was the Holy

Spirit, and in this first letter to the Corinthians the apostle says, “I would not have you ignorant that our fathers ... were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor. 10:1-2).

In type they were brought under the Holy Spirit’s government, but the trouble with Israel was that they were not really under the government of the Spirit in their own hearts. Being positionally there, they were not conditionally there, and so their natural life was constantly rising up against the government of the Spirit, and there was a state of revolt, and that meant delay of growth and progress. They had to learn how to be subject to the Spirit before they could emerge in the life of fulness in the land.

Christ an inward revelation

The second letter to the Corinthians shows the necessity for Christ to be an inward revelation working out into experience. “God ... shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

You remember the words, but then that letter is so largely taken up with how, through deep suffering, Christ has been wrought into His servant, the apostle, and out of the inward revelation and the inwroughtness of Christ, the apostle speaks about ministry. “We have this ministry” (and ‘it’ is the ministry of something within, a treasure in vessels of fragile clay) “that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves.” It is an outworking through discipline, chastening and suffering, in order that there might be a manifestation of the Lord. The way to fulness is that way of the inwardness of Christ being made a reality through the discipline of daily life, through the sufferings and afflictions of Christian experience. What is God doing by way of our sufferings, our trials? He is simply transferring our outward doctrine to our inward experience. The things that we know as truths are becoming living realities in us. No, let us put it this way — the Christ of Whom we have heard and of Whom we have been taught, is becoming in us a reality through our sorrows and our sufferings, so that when we speak of Christ now, it is not as from a book but from our hearts, and that is exactly the sum and substance of the second letter to the Corinthians. The apostle might say there, “From our hearts”, because God has shined within and God has wrought within through our sufferings. See what he says in that letter about his sufferings which have made him conscious that the vessel is fragile clay indeed. But ... the exceeding greatness of the power of God! That is living testimony; that is the way to fulness. There is no royal road to fulness; it is the path of suffering, the path of knowing and proving the Lord by trial and adversity. Let no one think we are ever going to get to God’s full thought by escaping suffering — never; it cannot be!

Life and liberty in the Spirit

In the letter to the Galatians the word is concerning life and liberty by reason of the Lordship of the Holy Spirit as opposed to bondage and death by the lordship of the law. The Galatians had come out into liberty, into life, by faith in the Lord Jesus. The Judaisers had come along and sought to impose upon them again the legal restrictions of the law. You must and you must not, and this had fastened upon them and quenched the life and brought them again into bondage. The apostle wrote his letter simply to say this: If you are going on, if you want to go right on (for you have come under arrest, you did run well — who hath bewitched you, who hath hindered you?) and keep going on unto God's fulness, it can only be as the Spirit is Lord, delivering you from external impositions, systems or legal obligation! That is, as you walk in the Spirit, the Spirit will never tell you to do anything that violates the Word of God. Indeed, you need the Spirit to make you understand what the Word of God means and to make it effectual in you. Oh, let us beware of that pernicious, dangerous, evil position into which some people have come where they take the position that if you come under the Holy Spirit, that makes you a law to yourself where the Word of God does not matter and is of secondary importance; the Holy Spirit is your guide, and you set the Word aside. Oh, never will a Spirit-governed life be on that basis. Never! A truly Spirit-governed life will be kept true to the Word of God in every part. Remember that. The Holy Spirit will never deliver us from the government of God's Word. He will bring us very much more intimately under that government, but there is altogether a difference between a system, even a biblical, scriptural system of things and saying, "Look here, you have got to do this and that! If you do this and don't do that, there will be unfortunate consequences!" This attitude brings a life into bondage and death. There is all the difference between that and the Holy Spirit checking up as to the Word of God. The Spirit will lead us into fulness through the Word and the Word of God will become full of meaning, far deeper and greater than we ever realised, under the Holy Spirit's sovereignty, but the Holy Spirit will never bring us to death and bondage. The way of life, the way of fulness, is by the sovereignty of the Spirit, and so the great word in Galatians is, "Where the Spirit is Lord there is liberty", not liberty from the Word of God — that is licence; but liberty from bondage in the sense of legality (and Mr. Bunyan will help you with Mr. Legality in 'Pilgrim's Progress').

Divine fulness a Church matter

We pass from Galatians to Ephesians, and there breaks upon our eyes the wonderful revelation that fulness, this great will and mind of God as to divine fulness in Christ, is a church matter, a body matter. It is not some-

thing just for individuals as individuals, but that the individuals will have it, can have it, and can only have it in relation to all other members of the one body. The fulness is something for the body and can never be had by the individual. It is “Now unto Him be the glory in the church ... unto all ages for ever and ever.” “In the church” — it is a body matter, and that raises new questions, new demands, new spiritual responsibilities, brings in all the matters of our spiritual growth being corporate, being connected, being related. We only cut short our spiritual course, limit our spiritual growth, if we fail to recognise that fulness is a matter of related life with other children of God. That can be put to the test and it will be proved to be true wherever you see it. If you see anything at all of unrelatedness that is not, in principle and spirit, body life, you see limitation. Fulness is destined by God to be the lot of His church, the body of Christ, and so we have to move in the way of fellowship if we are going to move in the direction of fulness. Isolation, detachment, independence, or anything that makes us merely individualists in the Christian life means the narrowing down of our spiritual measure. That is what comes in with Ephesians, but there is this added fact that, while fulness is a church or body matter, it demands a heavenly position, as we have been seeing in previous meditations.

Christ our all

Now we reach Philippians, and all that I have to say in that connection is that it brings in again further indications of the way to fulness. Philippians says to us that fulness lies in the direction of Christ Himself being our all. That is what we have been seeing. Oh, the fact, of course, remains that fulness is in the direction of Christ and Christ being all, but that is not my point. My point is this — fulness lies in the direction of Christ being *our* all, not Christ being all, but *our* all. You read this little letter and what you find is a man captivated by Christ; not only captured by Christ as His prisoner, but captivated by Christ Himself. “For me to live is Christ!” “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus!” “That I may gain Christ!” “I have suffered the loss of all things, I count all things but refuse, that I may be found in Christ, gain Christ, the goal, the prize!” Then again, “I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me!” Then finally, “My God shall supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus!” His riches in glory in Christ Jesus made available to you! Here is a man enamoured of Christ and captivated by Christ. That is the way to fulness.

None of us would say that we are there, but we will look in the way and we will pray. Oh, that Christ may more captivate our hearts, and we shall be at His feet, that it may be true of us. “For me to live is Christ”, and, “This one thing I do, I press toward the mark, the prize of the on-high calling in Christ.” It is Christ, only Christ who is the way to fulness.

CHRIST OUR INHERITANCE

We have looked at Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians and Philippians, with their specific message in connection with the fulness in Christ and our progress thereto. The New Testament therefore becomes a comprehensive setting forth of the growing way into fulness with the specific requirements from point to point by which fulness will be reached.

It is here that we turn to the letter to the Colossians. The thing that really matters to you and to the Lord is that your heart is adjusted to this matter. We are not handling the Bible as such, for it is not our intention or desire to be giving addresses, Bible readings and studies, but to face God's will for us. The Bible can only be the channel through which that will is made known to us. We must not stop short at the word, the letter, the statement of truth. We must come into touch with the challenge of the will of God, so that here and now we get our hearts adjusted to this thing and ask ourselves: Do I really want to know the will of God? Is my heart set upon the will of God? Then what is the will of God? And the answer now is: The will of God for us all is the fulness of Christ.

A second question arises: What is necessary that we should come into that will of God or that fulness of Christ? This letter to the Colossians brings us very near to the end of the road on the way to fulness. Here, to use the language of the type in the Old Testament, the land is set before us. When we come to this letter, we stand with the land and all that it contains at our feet. There are some quite distinct features and aspects.

All the fulness in Christ

In the first place, however, let us see the comprehensive and positive statements that the fulness is presented to us in the Lord Jesus: "He is before all things, and in Him all things consist" (1:17). "In Him ye are made full" (2:10). "... the Head, from whom all the body ... increaseth with the increase of God" (2:19). "... where there cannot be Greek and Jew ... but Christ is all, and in all" (3:11).

These are the fragments, but what about that comprehensive statement in chapter 1: "Who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love; in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins: who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in Him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through

him, and unto Him; and He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things He might have the pre-eminence” (Col. 1:13-18). There is no doubt that, with such words, the land lies before us: a land of divine fulnesses in the Lord Jesus.

We just note again how fitting and apt was the Holy Spirit’s sovereign government of the arrangement of these letters when He overruled and set aside the chronological order and had them put as they are with us now. In every case it is a remarkable thing, and here you see it. Every step that we have taken with every letter is in its rightful place; it is a sequence. Now you are coming to the end of this comprehensive revelation of God’s fulness through His servant Paul, and it is as though all of God’s purpose were gathered together in a very concrete and concise way and presented to you at once. This is the thing for which I brought you out! (Romans). This is the thing for which I required the setting aside of your natural mind! (1 Corinthians). This is the thing for which I shined into your hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, that you, beholding as in a mirror might be changed from one degree of glory to another! (2 Corinthians). This is the thing for which I delivered you from the bondage of the law and brought you under the sovereign government of the Holy Spirit (Galatians). This is the thing for which the church, the body, was fore-known, forechosen, foreordained before the foundation of the world! (Ephesians). This is the thing for which Christ has become your captivating life, goal, prize, strength and all-sufficiency! (Philippians). It is all leading up to this — all the fulness in Him and you are made full in Him. How appropriate it is to have Colossians where it is. The Holy Spirit is a wonderful organiser and He puts things in their right place even though men would say, No, this is not the right order! When men compile the New Testament, they put things in their chronological position. But when the Holy Spirit has one divine comprehensive thought towards which He is working, He upsets the merely human, earthly order, and puts things in a spiritual order and leads us spiritually from step to step in a sequence ever unto fulness. That is what He does with us in our experience, for the spiritual experience of the Lord’s people corresponds to the spiritual order of the New Testament arrangement.

All the fulness not yet possessed

The next thing that we note is that the church is here regarded as being over Jordan, although not yet in possession of the land. You notice Colossians 1:12: “... giving thanks unto the Father, who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” Do not interpret that as meaning saints who have gone to glory. The spiritual meaning of the word here is that we ought to be the saints in light, and the saints in light have an

inheritance, and we are made to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints who are in light.

“Who delivered us out of the power of darkness” — out of Egypt — “and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love; in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins” — we are out in Christ, we have come out, we have come on the way, we are in Christ, “... in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden” (2:3).

We are not only out of Egypt, redeemed, translated into the kingdom of the Son of His love, but now it is, “in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden”. I transfer that verse to the Old Testament and the description of the land, a land flowing with milk and honey and so on — in other words, “in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden”. We are in the land; we have not exploited all that is in the land, we are not in possession of all the treasures, but we are in the land. “... for in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and in Him ye are made full” (2:9-10).

The church is then regarded as being over Jordan although not in possession of the land in experience. If all that we have seen from Romans to Philippians is true in our case, this is where we are regarded as being. Of course, that requires another survey of all those letters. If it is true that you and I are standing, in the first place, in the joyous appreciation of a righteousness of God which utterly, perfectly, satisfies Him, a righteousness of God which is of faith, not our own righteousness which has no place with Him, then we have come to the first stage. If you and I have seen the cross and accepted it in its relationship to our own natural life and have accepted a life no longer of nature and the flesh in its carnality but in the Spirit, we have come to the next stage. That is 1 Corinthians. And so, if we have by faith appropriated the fruit of the cross as set forth in all these letters, and have come to the place where Christ is our vision, our life, our goal and prize, where we are wholly captivated by Christ and can say, “For me to live is Christ”, not myself, not this world, not anything but Christ, then we are regarded as being in the land. That is what it means to be positionally in the land.

Most of us know quite well in our experience that we cannot really live in the terms and enjoyment of the land over Jordan (which is in the heavenly blessing of a relationship with Christ) and at the same time walk according to the flesh, even as a Christian. We know that is impossible. We have only got to read the first Corinthian letter, and we see very clearly there is very little of being in the land in that letter and very much that is other than heavenly there. Instead of the Philippian position, for instance, where Christ is the one all-engrossing purpose, in 1 Corinthians it is I, I, I; — when everyone of you saith, I, are ye not men, are ye not carnal, are ye not babes? In spiritual experience, ‘I’ and ‘Christ’ cannot go together because ‘I’ is down here earthly, and Christ is up there, heavenly; there is a world between. So in

order to come into the land that 'I' life has got to go out by the cross. But if we have accepted the meaning of the cross in all these matters and the cross has brought us to this place where now there are no conflicting interests, where there is no divided heart but steadily, by His deepening work of grace in us, Christ is becoming to us the one and sole object of our aspiration, aim and devotion, the one purpose of life, then we are in the land. All that remains for us is to discover in ever-growing fulness what we have in Christ. Here, you see, the church is regarded as being in the land to discover all that God has summed up in His Son for us.

The Holy Spirit leads into all fulness

Then what is it that is required in order that we may make that discovery, that we might exploit those resources? Well, that brings us to the next thing in this letter. The apostle is praying "... that ye may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to the might of His glory" (Col. 1:9-11). You remember, to go back to the type, when Israel was over the Jordan and in the land positionally, Joshua saw a man standing with his sword drawn. Joshua asked him, "Art thou for us or for our enemies?" And in a beautiful evasiveness the answer came, "No, but as captain of the host of the Lord am I come." And Joshua bowed himself to the ground.

The Spirit of the Lord has come to take charge of the Lord's purpose, not to be for you or for me, not to be for anybody but to be for the Lord's purpose in His people. The Holy Spirit is not given to us to be used for ourselves. There will come a time before very long in the history of Israel when they will discover that the Holy Spirit, Captain of the Lord's host, is not with them. They will go up and fight and be defeated and be scattered and be ashamed. He is not committed to them as such. He is committed to the purpose of God in the people of God. It may be that the Spirit of God will take up their enemies sometimes and seem to be associated with their enemies against them in a sovereign way. But the Holy Spirit is not committed to people, to men; He is committed to a purpose. Joshua bowed, he had no dispute with this answer. He did not say, But that is not answering my question precisely! He bowed, and from that moment it was as though that unseen Captain of the host of the Lord was linked in a spiritual way with Joshua, and the two became identical, so that Joshua became the instrument and vessel of the energies of the Holy Spirit in order to realise the purpose, and that is just what is meant by chapter 1, verse 2. The land lies before, all the fulness is at our feet. We have to possess, to know, to enter in, to turn to account, to walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every

good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God. How can it be done? — strengthened with all power, according to the might of His glory; by the energies of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is committed to this very purpose. This is a note of great strength and strengthening to us. Simply to recognise the fact is of immense value. We pray for, crave for, the Holy Spirit. We are always reaching out for the Spirit. What we should recognise is that if we have walked the pathway of fulness to this point, it is not for us to pray for or seek the Holy Spirit. It is for us to yield to the Spirit, for He has come committed to the purpose of God, and the very difficulties, chastenings and disciplines of our spiritual life are things which are in the sovereign hand of the Holy Spirit unto this very end.

We come into a patch of deep spiritual trial and suffering, when everything seems to be dark and it even seems that the Lord Himself has left us, but what is the experience of mature souls? What is the verdict and the history of those who have walked with God for long? Is it not this, that they come to a time when, with the descent of a fresh cloud, a fresh darkness, upon them, the encompassing of a fresh situation of adversity and trial, they say, I wonder what it is the Lord is going to bring out of this? I wonder what this is going to mean of spiritual gain? That is a new language. Once when trial came, there was a mixture of perplexity and rebellion with the Lord's dealings so that it was not easy to face the thing. I do not know that it ever is, but it was much less easy. There rose up something of revolt and a real questioning of the Lord, but the longer we go on with the Lord, the nearer we get to the point where we look at trials from this point of view — What has the Lord got in this? There is something coming out of this! The devil rages and the experienced ones say, Satan does not use his powder and shot for nothing, he knows there are some values and he is after spoiling those values! Doesn't that just mean that the Holy Spirit in a sovereign way is in possession of all our experiences with one end in view — spiritual fulness? The richest souls are those who, under the Spirit's sovereign government, have passed through deep places, dark places, and have come to know that it is in the deep and dark places that the treasures are found. "I will give you the treasures of darkness" (Isa. 45:3). Then darkness is not necessarily desolation if the Holy Spirit is in charge. "Strengthened with all might according to His glorious power". Israel, you have bitter foes to face, you have yet a long way to go before all these treasures are exhausted, but the Spirit has come to be your energy to see you through to that end!

Let us draw from this all that there is for us. Oh, it is a great and blessed truth and reality that the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was intended above and beyond all other things to bring the church to its final fulness. You may think of the Holy Spirit doing this and that and another thing and distributing His work over the fragments of spiritual life, experience and service, but the Holy Spirit is comprehensive in His vision; He is not

fragmentary. He has in every detail one thing in view — the fulness of Christ. His work is, above everything else, to bring you and me to spiritual fulness. He will do it if we capitulate to Him, if, unlike Israel in the wilderness, we will allow Him, and not rebel against His Spirit, as they did. They rebelled against His Spirit and therefore He could not bring that generation through, but if we do not rebel but capitulate to the Spirit, trust Him to do His own work, He will bring out of the darkest and deepest experience some treasure, some new value, some new measure of fulness.

You say, it is easy to talk, it is easy to say these things! Yes, it is, compared with the going through, I know. There is always a catch about saying these things, lest there might be a glibness. But some of us and some of you know a little of what we are talking about. It is true, even if we are passing through a dark time now in which we see nothing but desolation and no fruit at all. We can look back upon some very dark places in our experience when we felt just like that — Oh, this is the end! No more after this; this is the end of everything! And we look back upon those experiences now and we can say that through them we have come to know the Lord, our knowledge of the Lord has increased, perhaps something more of the Lord has come to have a place in us. We are less what we were in ourselves before. We are more dependent upon Him, and being more dependent, we are in a better position to prove His sufficiency. All that is growing in the fulness of Christ. If you are having a bad time just now and it is dark and it is all Dead Sea fruit, the Holy Spirit is going to bring treasures out of this darkness if you trust Him, and He is going to be your energy to see you through to God's end.

Let us gather it up in this way. The Holy Spirit has committed Himself for ever to secure God's end in the church, which is the fulness of Christ. The Holy Spirit has committed Himself; He has come for that purpose; that is His business. The Lord Jesus indicated that when He said, "When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He shall guide you into all the truth: for He shall not speak from Himself; but what things so ever He shall hear, these shall He speak: and He shall declare unto you the things that are to come. He shall glorify me: for He shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you" (John 16:13-14). That is simple language embodying these profound spiritual realities, that all that God has vested in His Son, Jesus Christ, is going to be divulged by the Holy Spirit to those who will walk in the Spirit. The Spirit has come for that.

Is the Spirit in us? Have we received the Spirit? Have you received the Spirit? If you can say, yes, you know that the Holy Spirit is in you, then, He is in you and in me for no less a purpose than the main object of His having come at all — to bring us through to God's end; to be the energy by which we reach that end. "I ... pray you may be strengthened with all power, according to the might of His glory, unto all patience and longsuffering with joy" (Col. 1:11).

The energy of the Spirit is seen again in Col. 2:1: “For I would have you know how greatly I strive for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh.” “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, saluteth you, always striving for you in his prayers, that ye may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God” (Col. 4:12).

Here are the Holy Spirit’s energies in the apostle, in Epaphras; the energies of the Spirit along the line of prayer, of intercession, unto this end. It is perhaps a flash of fresh light upon the whole matter of prayer. That is, what is prayer in the Holy Spirit? What is the motive and object of Holy Spirit-energised prayer? It is this — God’s full end; every man complete, consummate, perfect, final in Christ. “... that we may present every man perfect in Christ; whereunto I labour also, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily. For I would have you know how greatly I strive for you” (Col. 1:28-2:1). That is the Holy Spirit’s burden of prayer. Paul says, His energies which energised in me mightily! That is said just to remind you of a truth about which you must inquire of the Lord. Oh, for more of these Holy Spirit energies in prayer, that the saints may be brought both to know and to reach God’s end, the fulness of Christ.

To sum up, in this meditation we have been seeing the purpose of God and the stages to that purpose; what is required; seeing the Holy Spirit committing Himself to that purpose. Then we ourselves taking off our shoes, bowing ourselves upon our faces and capitulating wholly to the Spirit in His great divine purpose saying, ‘We trust the Holy Spirit to be the enlightener and the energiser unto all God’s will in our lives; we will not allow any Corinthian natural element to arise to hinder; we will not allow any of these earthly things set forth in these letters to come and impede; we will seek to remain on heavenly ground to be governed wholly by the on-high calling of God in Christ Jesus.’

CHRIST OUR INHERITANCE

(cont.)

We continue with this matter of God's will concerning His people, that they should come to His own fulness in His Son, the Lord Jesus. We are now near the end of the way towards that great goal which God has fixed as His irreducible measure for His people. So far as God's will is concerned, He does not curtail, or in any way reduce His purpose; it remains fulness. However His people may react to His will or fail to react to His will, at long last He will let it be known that He never accepted our measure, but always stood for His own — fulness.

Things which govern in the matter of fulness

Now we want to see one or two things which are governmental in the matter of fulness. In our previous meditation we saw that in the letter to the Colossians the Lord's people, the church, are regarded as being over Jordan and positionally in the land (that is using the Old Testament type of the spiritual truth in the case of Israel being over Jordan and in the land positionally), with all its fulness in Christ before us. There are, I think, three things in the main which immediately arise.

1) "One New Man"

The first is that the people of God in this position are regarded as being on corporate ground, as being a corporate body. When we come to Colossians, the Colossian position, we really have left behind everything that is individualistic and we are regarded as being one body, the corporate man. A little later in the letter the apostle will make this the ground of his exhortation and appeal. He will put it like this: "... seeing that ye have put off the old man ... and have put on the new man" (3:9-10).

We must not confuse this Colossian statement with those terms, with just the putting off of the old man in the Roman letter sense. It does not allow that same interpretation, for a particular word is used. In the letter to the Romans when the old man is put off, that is simply the body of the flesh, that is our old Adam nature. That is included, but here in the reference in the letter to the Colossians it is our corporate man, the corporate old man, the whole Adam to which we all belong in a related way. We have put off that man with his nature in the Roman sense and have put on the new man; and this new man is not only a new nature, but the word here is that particular word which means something which never was before — and that in a

corporate sense. The word ‘new’ in this case is not just fresh; is not something renewed or made fresh, made new again, something which was and is now made anew. It is something which is new in the sense that there never has been such a thing before, and it is this “one new man” (to quote from the letter to the Ephesians, for Ephesians and Colossians are twin letters; they are two sides of one thing), it is the one new man, a man that never was before. It is a corporate man.

That is the first thing that arises here in the position over Jordan. Everything that is separate, detached, unrelated, apart, merely personal, individualistic, has gone, and we are on the ground of a corporate body. Everything from this point onward is a body matter, a related matter, a corporate matter, and you see that followed out very strictly in the history of Israel. The Lord held them to that and when they violated that principle, trouble came. Let Achan act out of relation to the rest of the people of God in an independent and personal way, with personal interests in view, and what happens? Does Achan get away with it? No! Moreover, does Achan meet the thing alone as an individual? No! The Lord comes back upon that and involves all Israel. One man involves the whole nation. And again, they said after Jericho’s great triumph, “Well, Ai is nothing compared with Jericho; it is not necessary that everyone goes up against Ai; let a few of us go up!” And, while it was a spirit of self-sufficiency, it was also a spirit of independence. It was again a breaking up of the solidarity of the body. It was action on the part of some out of relationship to the others and it was disastrous. The Lord pressed the principle all the way through. All Israel had to be gathered when Joshua enquired of the Lord, cried to the Lord, as to the meaning of this defeat at Ai. The Lord did not say, “Achan has sinned!” He said, “Israel has sinned!” It is strictly corporate ground here, body ground. For what reason? This is because when we really do come into the land where all the fulness is immediately in view, that fulness is a body matter. No individuals and no little companies can inherit alone. This fulness of God in Christ is reserved as the inheritance of the body of Christ. That is God’s thought, so that our inheritance has got to be co-inheritance, related inheritance, and we have to move together in a spirit of oneness.

In our previous meditation, we saw that the captain of the host of the Lord appearing to Joshua represented the Holy Spirit coming to take charge of this divine purpose. The typology is simply this, that through that Jordan — that death, burial and resurrection identification with Christ, we are all baptised into one Spirit in one body. The force is this, that the Holy Spirit coming upon the church on the other side of the cross, where identification with Christ is known, makes the church a solid whole, makes the church one, and how true that was at Pentecost. What oneness there was when the Spirit came and what effectiveness there was as the result. You notice the outworking again in the type. Here they are over Jordan; the captain

of the host of the Lord takes charge in relation to the divine purpose, and then they go up against Jericho; and encompassing Jericho, they are as one people, very truly one, and at a given signal and point of time they all shouted with one shout and the walls came down. It was the perfect synchronizing of utterance, expression, declaration, and that is something Pentecostal. When at Pentecost the apostles stood up together and spoke with one voice, made one declaration, oh, what a breaking down there was, an overpowering. There is something in that oneness of the Holy Spirit which is a terrific force and impact upon the powers of evil. It is a Holy Spirit thing to make the people of God so one that powers of evil simply have to give way. You can understand now why it is that Satan lays himself out with all his strength and all his resource to interfere with the oneness of the people of God, because that oneness is the most effectual thing against his kingdom and it brings right at once into view the loss of his kingdom through the church. I do believe that you and I need, however much we know the truth of the corporate nature of the body of Christ, the Holy Spirit to come and re-emphasize this in our hearts at this time.

Everything today seems to be saying that a corporate expression is impossible. Well, that entirely depends upon what we mean by a corporate expression. If we mean the uniting of the 'church' in all its branches here on the earth in a great union of the churches, then we are on the wrong road and there is not much hope. But if we come to that place of which we have been speaking so much in our previous meditations, where in a spiritual and heavenly way we will really stand into and strive together for the relatedness, the fellowship, the oneness, of all who share the one life of our Lord, then something is going to happen against the powers of evil and our inheritance is nigh at hand.

Thessalonians brings in the consummation; it is the end of the road indeed. Again you wonder that the letters that were first written by the apostle are put at the end of his letters, with the exception of the pastoral letters, Timothy and Titus. At the end of those letters which were particularly written to lead saints on to spiritual fulness we have, by the Lord's ordering, Thessalonians. And both letters to the Thessalonians bring particularly into view the coming of the Lord and the conditions at the time. One of the conditions at the time of the Lord's coming is the manifestation of the Antichrist, the man of sin. He has now come out into view; the fulness of that other man, that other corporate man with his head, the Antichrist, has come out — consummation along the evil line. And what shall happen? The Lord shall descend with a trump of the archangel and the shout, and the power of evil is fully and finally destroyed with that shout. Maybe there is a spiritual link between Joshua 6 and Thessalonians, that when there is a shout of God which represents the concentrated utterance of the Lord, the church is triumphant, the power of evil is rent. The shout, that trump around Jericho, is

the voice of one people. There were not a number of trumpets; only one trumpet was heard, however many instruments there may have been. One voice, one shout in absolute unison — that is a work of the Holy Spirit, and only the Holy Spirit can do that.

We shall see another law by which the Holy Spirit does it, but how important it is in the light of the fulness of Christ; the overthrow of the power of Satan; the onward march of the church to its great consummation, that the Spirit of the Lord should be allowed in us to destroy all the divisive work. He must be allowed to destroy the schismatic work, the sectarian work, in spirit and principle; all that which down here keeps the people of God apart, behind fences. He lifts us on to heavenly ground where we spiritually remain and cleave unto the people of God with one heart; and contend, strive, give diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit. May I urge this upon you as an end-time necessity in two major directions — one, the fulness of Christ; the other, the overthrow of Satan. That is Joshua and that is Colossians.

Well, the corporate thing comes up when you get over Jordan onto heavenly ground, and if the corporate is not our real concern, we are not on that ground. If you and I can easily accept divisions, if we can go on as though they did not matter; if we can allow them to come in without sorrow of heart, without that in our spirits which corresponds to the ache in our bodies when a member has been injured or amputated, we are on very low spiritual ground. We are not really on Colossian ground. That is the first thing, and much could be said about that, but may the Lord lay it on our hearts and show us that this is a law, a governing law, of the inheritance. We are going to come short of the inheritance if we fail in this matter of the real spiritual oneness of God's people.

But this added word. For some people that is very easy, but where it is an *easy* thing, the *real* thing may not exist. Perhaps that needs to be explained. It is quite easy for some people to be very sociable with everybody and to take the attitude that they are not going to recognise any of these earthly divisions; they are going to take advantage of every opportunity that is open to them. But that may be very superficial. It seems to me that where there has come a true Holy Spirit revelation of the nature of the church as the body of Christ, then the matter of fellowship becomes a matter of conflict and suffering. So it was with Paul. He spoke of himself as being in bonds for the body's sake. "I ... fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake" (Col. 1:24). To get really onto this ground in a Holy Spirit sense is going to mean a great deal of warfare, conflict, and will call out all our devotion, our watchfulness; and it is so up to the hilt. It is not such an easy matter. Where the thing is genuine, you may take it that Satan always has an interest in it; it does not matter what it is. You can have any of the things of God in a certain realm and Satan never bothers, but when that thing comes into a spiritual realm where it means

something of spiritual increase, then Satan is always very interested, if possible, in destroying it. That is the first thing.

2) *The Cross*

The next thing which comes up alongside of this is that when you are over in the land, you have to face the cross and its implications in a new way. I am referring now to Colossians chapter two and what lies behind it of implication in the book of Joshua. "... in whom ye were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead" (Col. 2:11-12).

You remember when the people were over Jordan they came to Gilgal and the Lord ordered that the whole race representatively should be circumcised; and Gilgal, the place of circumcision, became their base of operations. They returned there again and again after the various phases of their campaign, and here the apostle explains the meaning of Gilgal or of circumcision, "Ye were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with Him." Baptism and circumcision are therefore brought together and identified in principle, and then circumcision and baptism are both explained as being our identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection, through which the whole body of the flesh was put off. Christ in His death and burial took the whole body of our flesh, our fleshly nature, our carnal nature, and representatively, in death and burial, put it away forever, put it off. It was as though He left it in His grave. A body was left which was never brought back again, and that body was the body of our sinful nature which He had taken voluntarily and deliberately in a representative way; and then in His resurrection it was another body, not the body of the flesh but the body of the Spirit. Our baptism is our testimony to the fact that we have accepted the meaning of that, that in His death, burial and resurrection we, in the thought and mind of God, were included, and on that ground we come into the land, for Jordan is only the other half of the Red Sea. The Red Sea is what Christ did for us apart from us; Jordan is what Christ did as us and our identification with Him in it — two sides of one.

When we come through Jordan (our identification with Christ) to the other side, we are represented as having put off the whole body of the flesh, and the cross comes into view to govern that position. Gilgal becomes a governing position of every movement; every campaign, every further step is governed by this fact: you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit; you are not in the old man, you are in the new; you are not on carnal ground, you are on divine ground! Everything is governed by the cross in that sense, and that

is the only way to possess the fulness, to come into the inheritance.

How necessary that is in relation to this corporate matter. You see, Achan violated the very implications and significance of Jordan and brought in something personal for himself, thus violating the very principle of the nation, that it was a baptised, risen nation. He brought himself right back under the judgment which Jordan represented. The result was that they could not go on as a people. The Lord did not take the attitude, Well, Achan has sinned; let us deal with Achan and let all the other people go on! It seems hardly fair, but nevertheless the Lord's law holds good. You are one people! "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it" (1 Cor. 12:26). If one member is doing wrong in some secret, hidden way, the whole body is suffering. Those who are holding back from God's full thought are not just living unto themselves — they are affecting the rest. That is God's truth. Therefore the force of the exhortation that all of us should really embrace this meaning of the cross, that all that is of ourselves personally, our own preferences, our own ambitions, our own aspirations, our own desires as personal things, should come to the cross and be yielded up in the light of the good of all the Lord's people. We must not hold anything out of relation to the good of all the Lord's people. The cross must deal with all that. Oh, how much there is in these letters of Paul which bears upon that — personal positions which are calculated to injure other people of God. You can hold your position to yourself, but do not hold it to anyone's detriment, that is to injure their faith. There is so much about that in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Many things which, so far as conviction was concerned, caused these believers to differ — about eating things sacrificed to idols, for instance. One man would eat them, another man, never! Well, I suppose it was quite a serious matter. Certainly it was a serious matter to those who did eat and those who did not eat. Perhaps in principle it may have been a serious matter, but what Paul saw was this, that these people who were divided on a matter like that were taking up a position against one another and cutting one another off by their own conviction. Paul says, If you have a conviction about that, have it between yourself and the Lord; don't you judge your brother! Judge nothing before the time, before the Lord comes; everything shall be manifested then! You can hold a personal position, such a conviction, so strongly, that you can do untold harm by trying to pulverise your brother into your position. He must stand before the Lord as you do, and if you cannot understand his position, love him. If he belongs to the Lord, ask the Lord to open his eyes, but do not cut him off. There are so many things that have been made the ground of division and excommunication which are not at all justified in the Word of God. So far as I can see, the only things in the New Testament which are the ground of excommunication, suspending, are false doctrines as to the one central point of the Person of the Lord Jesus. Another is fornication; for the time being the fornicator

must be put out. Another is a violation of the authority of the Holy Spirit in the order of the church, which brings us to the sovereign Headship of the Lord Jesus over His church. These things result, according to divine order, in suspending, for the time being, a walking together. They need not be final if the person doing the wrong repents, but all these other things are not the ground of dividing up at all. So much division comes about by our own natural strength, our own carnal strength, and our carnal mind. We think that we are so zealously affected and spiritually downright, yet it is our own strength and not the strength of the Lord at all. The cross has got to be recognised as that which deals continually with all natural strength in believers; putting off of that whole body, so that we can go on as a corporate whole to fulness. Otherwise we are broken up and there is limitation.

3) The Headship of Christ

Now I must close with just a few words on this third matter as to laws of fulness, and that is the Headship of Christ: "... not holding fast the Head, from whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, increaseth with the increase of God" (Col. 2:19). "Holding fast the Head, from whom all the body increaseth with the increase of God". You could not have a more definite, concise, explicit statement than that. The body increases with the increase of God by holding fast the Head. Here again is your Captain of the host of the Lord in His position of absolute authority over the church, and the church coming deliberately, consciously, willingly, under that Headship of Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Headship means three things. It means firstly authority, that all the authority is vested in the Head. The history of divisions among the Lord's people and consequent limiting of their spiritual measure is just the history of the setting aside of the Headship of the Lord Jesus in some way or other. It may be along the lines of what we call 'rationalism'. What is rationalism? It is a very academic word, but it just means this — the authority of man's reason. Man's reason, man's mind, man's interpretation, judgment, construction has been allowed to take the place of the Holy Spirit's authority in every matter. Well, divisions always come along that line and how many they are. It would be too painful to speak about that; but oh, the conflicting minds, the conflicting interpretations, resulting in the conflicting schools. All these conflicting schools have come into being by the authority of some human mind, and we know how that limits spiritual measure and divides the Lord's people. The Headship of Christ has been set aside.

Or it may be along the line of another rather technical word — ecclesiasticism, and by that we simply mean that men have come into the place of authority religiously, men have become heads in a religious way. We see it in certain great systems where a man is the final word of authority in the 'church'. We see it brought down even to local assemblies with a single

head. This is the strength which lies behind any position which will not give full and final authority to any one overseer in a local assembly. This is the strength of the New Testament argument against a single ministry in any church as being the supreme thing. In the New Testament, they appointed elders in every church. The church was governed corporately by a plurality of overseers, not by any one man, and everything became a matter of fellowship, and prayer fellowship at that, to submit everything to the Holy Spirit. In Antioch especially, there were certain who ministered to the Lord and fasted and *the Holy Spirit* said... The Holy Spirit, you see. The principle is the important thing to recognise, that God is against anything that centres headship in individuals here in His church, because there is only One in whom full authority is vested, and that is His Son as Head of the church and there must be no violation of that.

In numerous other ways through the ages, this great spiritual law of the absolute sovereign Headship of the Lord Jesus over the church has been violated, ignored, set aside, with what result? The result that we see today — division and limitation. “Not holding fast the head”. And what does it lead to? It leads to all sorts of things, including deception, being misled. I am very interested to notice here the context of this word about holding fast the Head. “Let no man rob you of your prize by a voluntary humility and worshipping of the angels, dwelling in the things which he hath seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast the Head ...” (Col. 2:18-19).

All that precedes “not holding fast the Head” is satanic deception, delusion, and the apostle says that it works out like this — to ‘persuade you to a voluntary or self-humiliation’. Conybeare has rather an interesting note on that. He says that it was an exaggerated self-humiliation, that is becoming ascetic in his practice, like a devotee, wearing rags, exposing himself to insult, ascetism, deception. You must appear before everybody as mean and humble. You must wear clothes that make you appear to everybody to be nothing! That has happened again and again in history, that certain people have become ascetic in that way and tried to appear before the whole world as very humble, wearing humility on the outside. That is voluntary humiliation, says the apostle. You can go to the other extreme, of course, but if we hold fast the Head, we shall not go to extremes — that is the point. If we hold fast the Head, we shall be sensible people; we shall be balanced people. There will be a real sanity about you. We shall not be singular and peculiar and so prejudice the very interests of the gospel. Oh no, no extremes. Not holding fast the Head, he says, results in this sort of thing, being different from other people in some peculiar and strange way to impress people with how humble you are; in other words, how Christ-like you are, how other-worldly you are, but this is not the thing to be worn on the outside. This is an adornment of a meek and quiet spirit.

My point is just this, that not holding fast the Head leads to all kinds of false things, extremes, deceptions. It results in the whole body not drawing together from the Head and making increase with the increase of God.

The Headship of Christ means Christ's authority; the Headship of Christ means life, for from the Head we draw life, the one life. All the members have their life by reason of their being focussed and articulated in the Head, and the Headship of Christ therefore, through His one sole authority and His one sovereign life, means unity. Really, if the Holy Spirit gets charge of us, we shall begin to move together, we shall gravitate towards one position, we shall steadily come to the place where we do see eye to eye, where we do say the same thing, where the one testimony is borne, where the one voice is heard and the one impact upon the forces of evil is registered. Therefore may the Lord bring us into the meaning of this sovereign Headship of His Son and bring us there swiftly, because it is in this that all the members make increase with the increase of God. Blessed be God, what remains to be done, if we have been moving in that direction and have not reached it fully and finally at the time of His appearing, will be finished in a moment. The oneness will be consummated in the twinkling of an eye, but let it be found in us that we have not stopped short. The Lord is not going to make good to us that which we have refused.

All this is too much to be remembered, but may the Lord just make it a message in our hearts with an influence, a power, an impression, and let it be ours to set our hearts upon God's end, His fulness in His Son — that we shall be found there.