

The Battle For Life

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Chapter 1 - The Quest of the Eyes of Flame

Reading: Revelation 1:1-20; 2:1.

By way of a brief introductory word let us focus your attention upon what we feel to be the Lord's concern with His people at this time.

In the second and third chapters of the Book of the Revelation we have the Lord's survey of the seven churches. As those eyes that are as a flame of fire peer into the inner spiritual state and lay bare the condition - analyse, dissect, separate, place on the two sides of debit and credit, and form and pass their final verdict - we see one thing to be at issue with regard to them all. There may be particular differences in them; the aspects may vary; the elements may be very different: yet when all has been surveyed and gathered together it is to establish but one fact, namely, the presence or absence of that which, from the Lord's standpoint, constitutes justification in the continuance of the Lord's full committal to anything which claims to represent Him. The issue for every one of these churches was whether, under the Lord's permission, they could remain as true witnesses, and whether they could continue as really representing Him. The Lord had them before Him - shall we say, had them in His hand - and was determining whether He could keep them or whether He would have to put them away; whether He would have to "remove the lampstand out of its place" (Revelation 2:5), or whether it could abide with His full approval. So that the question was clearly one of continuing in relation to the Lord's intended purpose or of losing its position. We have seen bodies cross the sky at night, coming from afar, gaining in brilliance, it seemed, as they came nearer, flashing on their way, and then disappearing altogether from view in the darkness of the night. Here are "stars" brought in by the eternal counsels of God, flashing in with the glory of His grace, some of them to cease to fulfil those counsels.

The question concerning every instrumentality raised up by God in relation to His purpose is: How far can He go on with it? It is evident that there are things which do not justify Him in wholly supporting some instrumentalities which He originally raised up and used. These letters make those things clear.

In the first place, the fact that God originally raised up an instrumentality, that it came from Him and was His work initially, does not justify Him in keeping it indefinitely. That is made quite clear. We should take serious account of the fact that, because God raised up a thing, it does not mean that He must of necessity keep that thing right through unconditionally, that is, no matter what its state or character may be eventually or in the course of time. Further, the fact that an instrument has had a wonderful history of devotion to Him and has at some time been a very real and full expression of His grace and power, does not resolve itself into a claim upon Him, and He does not regard Himself as under any obligation to preserve it indefinitely. But we have to press the point still further. Because at any given time many commendable things are to be seen in an instrumentality, which the Lord Himself may praise - and there may be not a few such things - nevertheless, this record shows that even they do not justify God in preserving it in its former place; even the presence of such comparatively good things does not mean that He may never consider putting them out of their original place, or that He is bound to refrain from doing so. There are many things which continue to exist and serve a purpose, but have lost their place in their original value to the Lord.

That is a very thorough sifting of everything. It might be thought that if God raised up a thing, if it came in the first place from His own hand; if God had used it and blessed it; if it had shown the features and characteristics of His grace and His love; if that instrumentality still had in it many commendable things which God, looking with His eyes as a flame, could approve of, surely that is enough to argue for its continuance in the fullness of His blessing? You understand that we are speaking about instrumentalities. We are not speaking about souls. We are not dealing with the question of salvation, but with that of vocation.

What, then, justifies the Lord in preserving and going on with any such instrumentality? We must look to see what motivated Him when He brought it into being, what was in His mind and in His heart. We shall find all we need to know from the very description of the instrumentality itself. In the passage to which we

have referred it is called a lampstand - "seven golden lampstands" (R.V.M.). Our knowledge of the Word gives us much light upon what that means, and the Old Testament in particular comes at once to our help, for whether it be the candlestick in the Tabernacle, or the candlestick all of gold shown to Zechariah (Zechariah 4:2), we know that in both cases there was represented the living expression of the Holy Spirit's energies. Take the candlestick all of gold. We remember the pattern of it, with its seven bowls and seven golden pipes; and the oil being emptied out from the living olive trees through the pipes into the bowls, to provide the resource for the light. It is a very complete, very comprehensive illustration, and it is something that is living. At one end there is a living fountain or spring. The prophet does not say that there were cisterns, tanks, some man-made receptacle of oil, but living trees, and oil being poured continually, ever fresh - warm from the arteries of that living organism, as it were - into the candlestick burning with its steady, undying light, a light which does not vary, which does not go out, which is maintained at full strength continually.

The Undying Flame

It is the testimony of an unending, undying, all-sufficient life; the testimony of a life which is not abstract, not something stored up, but something which is coming all the time from an inexhaustible stream, a mighty, glorious life. As the light burns, it is a constant declaration of victory, and that, a victory over death, which would seek to smother the flame. It burns in the midst of surrounding death, a continuous declaration that death has no power to quench it.

To come back to the Book of Revelation: What is it, and what is it that alone justifies God in maintaining any instrumentality in *full* relation to Himself and His purpose? It is not that the instrumentality has many good things. It is not that it had its origin with God. It is not that it has a great history, a great past, a good tradition. It is not that it has a name, a reputation, the name of its more glorious days. It is that there is *today* the same undying flame of Divine life in it, a testimony against the power of death all around. That is God's justification.

You notice that in relation to the seven golden lampstands there is reference to the seven Spirits of God, meaning spiritual fullness, and to Jesus Christ the Faithful Witness. He is identified with these lamps. He is in the midst of them, closely associated with them. They were called into being in order that they might be an abiding testimony to the Lord Himself as the Faithful Witness, the Living One, in the power of the Spirit of God.

When we come to analyze the state of these churches, we find that in five of them, at least, there is a variety of elements, each of which is an expression of something that is a contradiction to the Holy Spirit, a contradiction to the Spirit of Life. When such a thing is found amongst the Lord's people - *within* the vessel, the instrument - it constitutes an element of death and provides Satan with his foothold, and all unconsciously for the most part among those people the testimony is contradicted.

The point is this. Satan will resort to anything - his methods and his means are numerous - to get some foothold for death in a Divinely-constituted instrumentality, so that the thing becomes a contradiction right at its very center. It has a name; it has good works; it has many things which even the Lord Himself cannot judge because they are good; but the vital thing by which alone the Lord can be justified in maintaining that instrumentality in its former position has been countered. It is not a question of what there once was of good and whether it still flourishes today, but rather: Has the Lord that central, basic, essential, indispensable thing for which He has ever raised up His instrumentalities, whether individuals or companies, and brought them into relationship with Himself, that for which He apprehended them, that which was intended to be their specific vocation? It is not a matter of its bulk, size, or earthly quantity, but its intrinsic quality.

Let us look again at the particular case in point (Rev. 2:1 et seq.). The Lord is saying: "From whence thou hast fallen." "The first works." "Think again, reconsider, and change back" ("Repent"). "I will remove thy lampstand out of its place." To whom does He so address Himself? To Ephesus. Ephesus! Only thirty years before had Ephesus received that deposit of revelation above which there is nothing to excel in the New Testament, that wonderful disclosure of the eternal counsels and calling of God which came to bear

the name "Ephesians." Oh, the tragedy of Ephesus! Time was when it could be said that, through her, "all Asia" was affected. Her intrinsic value registered over that wide area.

What did the Lord mean by removing her lampstand *out of its place*? Not necessarily that by one stroke what was there would be wiped out or blotted out. Not a geographical removal or a literal extinction. Ephesus and its church went on for many years. But its essentially *spiritual* position in the "*vocation* wherewith it was called" was lost. It became something else. It may have grown numerically. It might have been accepted in Ephesus. Its "good works" may have remained and been many. But its spiritual measure, intrinsic virtue, and resources for the Church beyond its locality were lost. "Its *place*" spiritually could be removed without its temporal and material location being touched. Is this not the sad history of so many things which had a beginning and went on in spiritual power and spontaneous effectiveness for some years, but eventually lost their *spiritual* place and position in the "whole counsel of God?" In many cases, both of individual and personal and of collective ministries, we have to say: "They have lost out;" "they do not correspond to their beginning." Many places which once were centers of far-reaching influence, while still existing, only do so on an earlier tradition. Many ministries under which we felt the Divine impact have - with the extra tragic factor of insensibility to the fact - lost that Divine unction. Is it expansion without commensurate spiritual resource? Is it popularity and acceptance which has robbed of the sense of crisis and urgency? Has the vision faded because of success or adversity? Have elements of contradiction found a loophole somewhere and worked like secret leaven to corrupt? Whatever it might be, there it is, and such a thing is on record in the Word of God as a warning for all time that this is the peril which besets anything which God raised up as a lamp of true testimony. Some of us inwardly weep as, in our own lifetime, we have seen this tragedy in servants of God, in movements and instrumentalities which have lost out. Spiritual pride is a major and certain cause of such disaster. When the "Institution," "Mission," "Center," or any *thing* becomes the object of talk and gratification, and it is not the Lord in growing fullness, then the days of the Lord's full committal to it are numbered.

We have all been apprehended of Jesus Christ, and there has been a purpose behind that apprehending. We have not been apprehended just to be saved. Our salvation is but basic and introductory to something very much more. The Lord gathers His own together to form them into a corporate vessel of Divine purpose. He raises up such instrumentalities from time to time; but whether it be individuals or whether it be companies, one constant danger is that the "essential thing" in the Divine thought in raising it up, in apprehending that vessel, should somehow be lost while many other things may continue.

The Lord's Standard of Judgment

One inclusive thing arises from this survey of the churches. It is that the Lord deals with every life or vessel in the light of His specific purpose for it, and not of its general usefulness. These chapters would never have been written if the Lord were simply taking this view: "Well, this vessel is not wholly bad; there is much yet of value here; it has not altogether gone away from Me; therefore I must look after it and support it, preserve it, and commit Myself wholly to it;" but the Lord is not doing that. We may be thankful to the Lord for anything that there is in this world which is good and is of Himself, and as we ourselves go into it we are grateful that the Lord should have any witness in a world like this; but, oh, so far as His own people are concerned, so far as the Church is concerned, that never satisfies Him. Of that we may be quite sure.

Why are we saying this? Because so many people say: "Well, you know, you are trying to get something so perfect! Why not be satisfied with what is commendable about the Church today? Take it as it is! Accept it and be thankful that there are so many who belong to the Lord and bear His name in a world like this!" I find that this record does not allow of that. God knows that we are grateful that there are believers in this world, be they but poor ones. You cannot go abroad in a world like this and see its state, its Godlessness, its sinfulness, without being thankful to find even a very poor specimen of a believer who has some love in his heart for the Lord. You are thankful for the smallest thing that speaks of Him. Oh, but when you come to see God's purpose, when you see that what He has designed for His Church is the occasion of His call, His choosing in Christ, you can never be satisfied with nominalism, or with general goodness.

When you come to a word like this you find it taking you right on - if you like to call it "extreme" you may - right on to the end. It tells you quite plainly that whether there be a great past, a great history of Divine blessing and usefulness, a great reputation for good works, and many good things still obtaining, none of these things is an adequate justification for the Lord to commit Himself wholly to that vessel, for He has some reservations. He must have questions unless the purpose for which that vessel was raised up is being fulfilled. None of the New Testament Letters would have been written if the Lord was satisfied with the merely nominal. There has never been anything perfect but the serious matter is that of our attitude to "not having yet attained." Paul said: "I am not yet perfect, but..." and very much hung upon that "but." These churches in Revelation had accepted their imperfect condition.

The Nominal is Ultimately Rejected

For what was the Church raised up? I do not believe that the Lord originally thought of having a general Church, and then a special one within it; a general mass of believers, and then a company called "overcomers" in the midst. That has never been the design of God. It is what we might call an emergency state of things, and is essential because of general failure. It seems to me that the very word "overcomers" presupposes that there is failure somewhere. The Lord's purpose for *all* His Church, as a vessel - which nevertheless may only be realized in a few - is that it should maintain the testimony of a life which has conquered death, and will conquer death right to the end. It is a life question.

The Lord Jesus is constituted the great Witness upon the ground of the power of God which was exercised in Him when He was raised from the dead. Remember that the testimony of Jesus is always related to His being raised from the dead; that is, that He lives by a power which has conquered death. He is the Life on that ground, on that basis, in that sense, and those whom the New Testament approves as witnesses to Jesus are not those who talk the truth about Him, but are *witnesses of His resurrection* - that is, of course, in a spiritual way - witnesses to Christ as risen. The New Testament's testimony of Jesus is that God raised Him from the dead and that He is alive for evermore. That is the essence of the testimony. Thus the whole question resolves itself into one of testimony in life, a testimony of life. It is not a testimony of doctrine in the first place, but a testimony of life. Is the flame burning as at the beginning, witnessing that Jesus lives and is triumphant, even over the dark, deadly background of this world? That is the question for the Lord's people; the question for your life and for mine, and for every collective instrumentality.

As we proceed we shall see a great deal of what that means. For the moment we simply focus our thoughts upon the issue. I have no doubt in my heart as to what the issue of our time is. I trust that in this matter we may rightly claim to be of the tribe of Issachar, so to speak, to know what the time is saying and what Israel ought to do. I have not the slightest shadow of a doubt but that the issue of our day, of this hour in the Church's history is, more than ever, the issue of life and death in a spiritual sense. Are you not more and more experiencing that awful sapping of your very vitality, that draining of your life, that exhausting of your energy, perhaps especially in relation to prayer? Is it not true that it often requires a supreme effort to pray, and to get through when you have started to pray? You need energizing from a source other than that of your own natural energies in this matter, and that increasingly so. There is a strange, deep, terrible sapping of vitality, mental and physical vitality as well as spiritual. Spiritual people, at least, know something of that. And lying at the back of it is the *final conflict of this age*. It is the spiritual issue of life and death.

The Lord would say to us something about that at this time, and we have to direct our eyes in the way of the Lord's thought to the great issue which is at stake for His people. I trust that we shall know that He is not only making us aware of it and not only warning us about the perils of it, but that He comes mightily to our aid and shows us what is on our side in the battle.

Chapter 2 - The Controversy of Zion

Reading: Hebrews 12:22; Isaiah 34:8.

"Ye are come to Zion."

"For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, the year of recompence in the controversy of Zion."

What is the controversy of Zion? It is nothing other than the controversy for the life of Zion. Zion is often represented in the Old Testament as Jehovah's bride, as the one betrothed to Him, to whom He was married. We are familiar with such a phrase as "the virgin daughter of Jerusalem." The history of Zion was a chequered history. Zion was constantly in the realm of dispute, the object of the envy, covetousness, antagonism of the nations, and all the nations were found at one time or another in some kind of relationship with Zion. The history of Zion is a very significant and suggestive history from a spiritual standpoint. The controversy, then, was God's controversy with the nations for Zion's life. The prophecy of Isaiah makes that very clear. God was taking up the cause of Zion, of Zion's very life, and entering into a terrible controversy with the nations on this matter.

Let us bear that in mind as we take up the New Testament and consider the spiritual interpretation. In the Book of the Revelation we find the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, adorned as a bride, and the angel taking the Apostle and saying to him: "Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (Revelation 21:9). The Apostle goes on to say: "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." The closing chapter of the Revelation brings us into the city and the central thing therein is the tree of life, while down its center flows the river of the water of life; and then, as this fullness is viewed, the Spirit and the bride say: "Come." Do you see the spiritual follow-through? Here the controversy for the life of the spiritual Zion is at an end, and life - full, triumphant, effulgent - is the characteristic. Throughout the book of Revelation, God is dealing with the nations, and at its close all nations are seen as having been brought under the judgment of His Son, the controversy of Zion has been settled once for all, and Zion is found at last triumphing in fullness of life.

We have said enough to establish the fact that the controversy is in relation to life, and it is that with which we are concerned at this time. There is a spiritual sense in which we are in God's controversy for Zion today. If we take the sixth chapter of the letter to the Ephesians as representing what is going on in the spiritual realm, namely, a conflict with world rulers, then the rest of that letter makes it perfectly clear that the controversy with the world rulers is concerning the Church: concerning the very life of the Church, the life of the elect. We are, then, in the controversy and the issue is no other, and no less, than the issue of life.

In our earlier meditation, in considering the messages of the Lord to the seven churches in Asia, we were seeing that the thing which occupies the place of pre-eminent importance and value to the Lord Himself is the testimony of life - not tradition, for they had that; not so much Christian work and activity, for they were there; not so many good and commendable things praiseworthy even in the sight of God, for they were there - but that which is central and basic to the Divine election, choice and apprehension is the testimony of life. In the first chapter of the book the Lord is presented as the One who is living, who became dead, but is alive unto the ages of the ages, and has the keys of death and Hades. Alive now from the dead, He is seen standing in the midst of the lampstands, the vessels of testimony, and judging them according to what He is as the Living One, as the One who has conquered death. What He discovers and reveals in those churches is the measure in which that testimony to Him has been lost. This is more to Him than what is found amongst them of interest, concern, activity, for Him and for His things. He shows the things which have struck a blow at that testimony and names them; the things, that is to say, which have interfered with the full expression of Himself as the Living One. So it is disclosed that what to Him is more precious than anything else, than all other things put together, is the spiritual life, in fullness, in power, in expression, in impact, in testimony.

The Lord's Jealousy over Life

The priority and primacy of life is referred to in a fragment of Scripture in a much-overlooked little New Testament letter - Titus 1:2: "The hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before times eternal." (*"Before the world or the ages began"* - Amplified New Testament.)

I want to carry that thought "from before times eternal" into the Old Testament, to see how jealous the Lord is over life, and what is His relationship thereto.

1. The Tree of Life

It is necessary to go right back to the beginning of the Book, where you will find that immediately there has been that initial disobedience by which sin and death have entered and man has fallen out of his position in relationship to God, and out of his state as created by God, the question of the tree of life arises. Following the judgment upon the serpent, and upon the man and the earth, God takes His step of precaution in relation to the tree of life. He proceeds to safeguard it, lest this man should put forth his hand and take of the tree of life and live for ever. God set His cherubim to keep the way to it with the flaming sword which turned in every direction, so that the tree of life should not be approached.

The interpretation of that is to be found in the last chapter of the Bible. The tree of life in the midst of the city of God is something from which all sin and sinfulness is excluded. Without are seen to be all those who represent fallen Adam, sinful nature. No one can eventually be found in the presence of God, in a living relationship with God, and no one can know eternal life unless the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus has been made effectual in them. The point is that, right at the beginning, God took a step to protect life from the touch and the appropriation of sinful man. God was not going to have a sinful state perpetuated indefinitely. The last chapter of the Bible sets its seal to the fact and shows that the sinful state is fully and finally dealt with. The state perpetuated is a state in fullness of life by reason of what the Lamb has wrought through the shedding of His blood, even as the book of the Revelation makes clear. If at the commencement of the book we can say: "Unto him that loved us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood..." then at the end of the book we can be found within the city, drinking of the water of life freely, and living in the full power of that life. Thus we see right at the beginning God's jealous attitude and action in relation to life. It is precious to note that He suspends the possession of it until the mighty work of the Cross has dealt with all that state which, if perpetuated, would be but the perpetuation of a lost world, of a world outside of the Divine intention.

2. Cain and Abel

The next step to the unveiling of God's attitude toward life is seen in His dealings with Cain. When Cain has slain his brother Abel, God instantly appears on the scene. There is no delay; it is as though God hastens to the situation. Here is something which concerns Him preeminently. No sooner has Cain shed the blood of his brother, and that warm blood trickled into the sand, than God is on the scene. "Where is Abel thy brother? And he said I know not: am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground" (Genesis 4:9-10). Then see what God has to say to Cain. He is cursed. He is marked. Everybody who shall observe him shall see him as scarred by God and branded: and he, hardened as he may have been, and insolent to God, has to humble himself and say: "My punishment is greater than I can bear." That is God's attitude toward life - His jealousy over it.

3. Noah

We pass to Noah. The terms of the covenant with Noah are familiar to us, the equalizing of things in that covenant, and the terrible warning to man: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed..." (Genesis 9:6). God will keep things even. No man shall get an advantage in this matter. No man who touches that thing which is precious to God shall come by any gain. God will bring it to evenness. He will equalize in the realm of life. You rob man of that and you shall be robbed; you shall not be the gainer. That is a solemn warning and shows to man what is God's attitude toward life.

4. Enoch

There is a great disclosure in the Old Testament of God's mind for man in this matter. God's thought is life, not death. God is against death and for life. We glance back a step and see Enoch, who breaks the long story of death: "And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" (Genesis 5:24). That is an offset to the course of fallen man, showing what God's thought is when a man comes into real fellowship with Himself. It is life, not death, and that was ever God's thought. It remains God's thought, and He is going to have it fully and gloriously expressed in a company of His own believing children, who will be translated to His presence even as Enoch was, and will not see death or the grave.

5. Abraham and Isaac

In Abraham and Isaac it is further set forth that when God has a great purpose in mind, when He is moving out on that basis, He must have things brought on to the ground where death cannot touch His purpose. Isaac is the one in whom the purpose of God is bound up, and therefore for the sake of the purpose Isaac must be put typically beyond the power of death. He must come into death to have death destroyed, that God's purpose might be realized upon a ground where death is not future, but past. That is the great illustration of Divine purpose being upon the ground of deathless life. And in the greater Isaac the purposes of God are all going to be realized, without any fear whatever of death breaking in to interrupt, because in Christ death is past and not future.

All these are vivid, strong, and, in most cases, agonized expressions of God's attitude to the clatter of life. It is a very costly thing. It was infinitely costly to God. It cost those who were in fellowship with God much also. All this is the controversy of Zion in principle - God's jealousy in the matter of life.

6. Job

We pass on, so far as the arrangement of the record is concerned, and come to Job; and here Satan is found in the heavenlies with access to God. God challenges him: "Hast thou considered my servant Job? for there is none like him in the earth..." (Job 2:3). Satan sneers back at God: "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will renounce thee to thy face." Do you see how the question of life is bound up in that challenge, and what subtlety there is in the whole movement? God gives Satan permission to touch Job; to touch his body, to touch his family, his property, everything that he has, but says: "... Only spare his life." Here again is God's jealousy for life. Satan gets to work, and the subtlety is this: that Satan presses, and presses, and presses along every line, by every means, seeking to touch Job's life indirectly, because he cannot touch it directly. Satan's indirect method is to move Job to break with God by cursing Him, so that his life is forfeited and destroyed.*

([footnote] The suggestion of Job's wife may have been that he should break with God, and then take his own life.)*

To understand the book of Job we have to recognize that it is a controversy for life. We have said it is a controversy over faith, but that is a relative factor. The real controversy is over life. We shall see the faith element at some subsequent time, but here God's jealousy for life is seen. Job is brought to great straits, but the life link is never broken, and the end is life triumphant. We see fullness, victory, everything that speaks of life at the end.

We sometimes come very near to collapse under the strain, under the trial, under the tension. When the enemy is pressing to quench our spiritual life through body, through mind, through circumstance, we are often brought very low, as was Job. We have our questionings, we get despondent, we may well-nigh despair. Yes, every heart knows its own story of how far it goes into gloom even about God, His wisdom, His love, His faithfulness. But because God is jealous for the life, and is the Custodian of the life (we are not talking about the natural physical life), the issue is always more than we had before. We always emerge with increase. In a lesser way it is Revelation 22 after every conflict.

We must remember that in all that we are saying there is a factor extra to the natural, physical life. The real battle is in the realm of man's spiritual relationship with God.

7. The Exodus

We think of the story of Israel and the emancipation from Egypt, and once again everything is entered in the issue of life and death. God heads it right up to the main, the final, issue of life and death. God, moreover, takes His own way, makes this own provision, so that when death is to be broad in the land, smiting, smiting, smiting, devastating everywhere, His own people shall be immune from death, and shall be in life because of the blood. The life of His own is taken into His own Custody and if the life of His own necessitates the smiting of a nation, grim as that necessity may be, He will follow it out. God stands at nothing when the life of His people is at stake. His jealousy over life is made very clear in all these things.

8. Levitical Law of Life

I hardly need bring to your remembrance those passages of Scripture, in Leviticus for example, concerning God's attitude towards life, and the emphasis laid upon the necessity for the people to avoid drinking the blood, because the blood is the life and the life is in the blood - "Whosoever it be that eateth any blood, that soul shall be cut off from his people" (Leviticus 7:27). Here is God preserving the life. Life is sacred to *Him*. Life is *His*. Man must not appropriate it for himself. Man must not take it and make it his. Life is God's and must ever be regarded as sacred unto God. It means a good deal more than that, of course, but we simply state what is apposite to our present consideration.

All these things, when summed up, bring us primarily to this: that life is sacred to God, and He is intensely jealous over it. Then, that life and not death is God's will. Again, sin and death always go together just as righteousness and life go together. The Old Testament is an earthly type of heavenly truth, and all this is throwing its light forward and saying that what is represented there in those Old Testament Scriptures as to God's attitude toward life - there primarily represented by man's earthly, soul-life - is but figurative, typical, a foreshadowing of that dispensation to come, in which eternal life, Divine life, would be the life given to man.

A Life that is Eternal

Thus when we come over into the new dispensation, we find that it is not merely the soul-life of man, the bodily life, the life of man as here on the earth which is in view, but it is another life, called eternal life. "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (John 10:10). It is over this life that God is represented as being so jealous. It is this life which is pre-eminent in God's thought. The Old Testament, as we have said, is the earthly type or representation of heavenly truth. If it were only a matter of physical death, that is, if the question at issue were but that of the termination of life physically, and that were the end and all that mattered, I do not know that such a great deal of ado might be made about it. But the emphasis in the Old Testament upon even that takes its force from the fact that it is pointing to something else, is typical of something else and is illustrative of another life.

We are not in the New Testament very long before it is apparent that the controversy has been taken into another realm, and is now seen to be over man's spiritual life, over eternal life. That controversy is waged on a two-fold issue: firstly, as to whether man shall become possessed of that life or not, and secondly as to whether that life, once possessed, shall be allowed its full opportunity of final expression in man, or shall not rather be smothered and thwarted, baffled and hindered. That is the controversy. It is still over life, but now we have come into the reality as out from the shadows and the types.

The Persistent Assault Upon Life

So we pass for a few moments to see, in the realm of the reality, the assault of death upon that which is of God.

The Lord Jesus.

Let us pass right on at once to the New Testament, and come to our Lord Jesus, for He gathers all up in Himself. He is the last Adam. He is the greater Abel. All these Old Testament types are gathered up in Him. But remember that at His very birth there was launched an awful design of death. The intention of the devil was to destroy Him at His birth.

We have to pass over many years wherein we have no record of the things that touched His life, and then we find Him in the wilderness; and the explanation of those temptations in the wilderness is that they were an assault upon His life. Though from various points, by various subtleties, the issue was one: they were intended to break His union with the Father and get Him out into a realm where He could be smitten. You have only to see that *even He*, had He cast Himself from the pinnacle of the temple contrary to the will of His Father or, as the enemy would have it viewed, by way of testing God - putting God to the test instead of believing Him - would not have been safeguarded by the angels of whom the devil spoke when he quoted the Scriptures. Angels have no commission to bear in their arms any man or woman who presumptuously tries to test God when called to believe Him. The Lord Jesus in His own life has shown us this. It was a threefold assault upon His life, which was dependent upon unquestioning obedience to His Father.

From the wilderness He went to Nazareth where, in the synagogue, He opened the Scriptures. The outcome was that they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city stood, to cast Him over. A little later the Jews took up stones to stone Him, and He asked them: "Why seek ye to kill me?" (John 7:19). What is connected with such a question? "Ye are of your father the devil..." "He was a murderer from the beginning..." (John 8:44). The Lord Jesus uncovers what lies behind. He sees something more than man's opposition and antagonism. He sees the devil as the murderer, and set against His life.

We follow Him on to the lake, where the storm is beaten up, until those who were most familiar with those storms feared for their very lives. Being awakened by them, He arose, and in words identical with those which He used in casting out demons He rebuked the wind, saying unto the sea: "Peace! be muzzled!" and the storm subsided, showing that behind it there were other forces trying to swallow Him up.

Then we follow Him on into the garden and to the Cross. Who shall know of the death conflict in the darkness? It is all the assault of death upon what is of God.

The Church.

The same thing is carried on into the Church. It is not long before Stephen is stoned, and James is killed. Peter is taken with the same object, but marvelously delivered because God had yet something to do through him. Paul was in deaths oft, despairing sometimes of life. It is a battle with the power of death. There are the sweeping persecutions in which literally tens of thousands of Christians are called upon to lay down their lives for the testimony, and "count not their lives dear unto the death." It goes on still. We are in that succession, not all of us perhaps of outward persecution, but do we not know something of the pressing of that spirit of death? We do!

All this is very true. It is the controversy of Zion. It is the battle for the life of the Lord's people. May the Lord bring home to our hearts the nature of the conflict in which we are found! We have perhaps painted a dark picture, have brought the gloomy aspect into view, and have been rather strong and severe, but if you are not able at the moment through your own experience to enter into what we are saying, you may come to do so if you are going on with the Lord. In some real way you will enter into this controversy of Zion. I am anxious that we should see this more clearly, and recognize it in a more definite way. We can never adequately seek the Lord in relation to it and come into line with His intention to overcome it, be to Him the instrument against it which He requires and desires that we should be, until we are fully alive to what the issue is. I wonder if the Lord's people are at times really alive to the issue, and whether their prayers are always a true index of their apprehension of this thing! I believe that if you and I were adequately impressed, and fully alive to the tremendous issue, we could never pray mere prayers. We could never allow words to run out of our mouths, which is what we call praying. We should be down on our faces in a tremendous conflict on God's side against the evil menace that is seeking to devour the life

of God's people; but we shall never pray like that unless we are really alive to what the issue is.

While we may know it in a doctrinal way, it is necessary for us to wake up to what is happening and to what this means. The explanation of many a heaviness and of many a difficult experience is not simply that we have had a meal that does not agree with us, or that we are none too well and therefore not able to pray as we would wish. No, it is not just some physical malady from which we are suffering. This is not something which can be explained along any ordinary line of nature. Behind these things there so often lies another power. We may feel ill in body for no justifiable reason, from the natural standpoint. Our very energies and vitalities, physical and mental, may be sapped, and we say that we are tired, but there is something extra to that. The enemy delights in our accounting for these things on human grounds, when we ought to be waking up to the fact that there is a much bigger issue at stake. Let us ask: what is its tendency, and what is its effect? Is it to destroy our prayer life? Does it work in the direction of bringing us into a state of weakness and uselessness to God? If so, are we going to accept that? That is the question. There is a good deal that seems to be perfectly natural which should not be accepted by the Lord's people, and we need to test everything, try it out, and see whether, after all, the whole thing is natural, or whether there is not something hidden. Do not look for a devil with horns and a tail and a pitchfork! He hides himself. He covers his tracks. He comes in such an intangible way that you are often inclined to explain the whole trouble as quite a natural thing, when it is all covering up something else, and its effect is simply to put you out of spiritual action. We have to wake up to what is the issue for the Lord's people today, and it is no less an issue than that of life and death.

Do you recognize what is actually happening? The enemy does not mind how many so-called churches there are, how much preaching there is, or how much religious worship. I do not know that he minds very much how much orthodoxy there is, or how much of what we would call sound doctrine. What he is against is life. In multitudes of places, so far as the preaching is concerned, and so far as the things said are concerned, no fault can be found, but there is no sense of any vitalizing. There is no energizing, no impact, and no moving of the people to register the testimony of the risen Lord against the forces of evil. The enemy is getting them all quietly, nicely, snugly into spiritual death.

Oh, may the Lord move us to a new position in relation to this tremendous issue, the issue of life and death. The Lord bring it home to our hearts!

Chapter 3 - The Cross in Relation to the Issue of Life

Reading: Deuteronomy 30:11-20; Hebrews 2:14-15; Revelation 1:18; Philippians 3:10.

The matter which we now have before us is the relationship of the Cross to the manifesting of life. It is very important for us to be clear as to what that relationship is. One thing is patent, and that is that life, in this Divine sense, in this spiritual sense, this life called eternal life, is only to be had as the result of the Cross of Jesus Christ. On the ground of His death and by His resurrection this eternal life is given to them that believe. We sometimes speak of this as simple faith in the atoning work of the Lord Jesus. In the reception of that life there may be no sense of battle, nor conflict; there may be no knowledge whatever of this fuller realm where the battle for life goes on. That is because, in the matter of the gift of eternal life, the Lord Jesus Himself fought the battle in His Cross, and we receive the free gift by faith's acceptance of what He did in order that we might have the life.

That is one aspect of the Cross and the issue of life. That is to say, by the objective apprehension of the Cross we receive eternal life. All that the Lord Jesus did for us in His Cross in order that we might pass from death unto life, appropriated, apprehended by faith, results in our having life.

But there is another side. The Cross of the Lord Jesus subjectively wrought out results in our having life more abundant. His own words are: "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (John 10:10). I believe that the first half of that statement relates to the simple faith-appropriation of the objective work of the Cross - what He did *for* us - but the second part of the statement carries us further. Life more abundant requires that what He did for us shall be made good *in* us. May we put it in this way: In His Cross He dealt with our sins, and on the ground of His having so dealt with them, and of our believing in His atoning work for our sins, we receive the gift of eternal life. He also dealt with ourselves, but that is something which has to be made good *progressively*, and it is as we ourselves are dealt with in the power of the Cross that the way is made for that life to express itself in ever deepening fullness. The fact is that it is self which is in the way of the life and its full expression. It is the natural life which obstructs the course of the Divine life. Thus what has been done *for* us has to be done *in* us, and as it is done in us that life becomes more than a deposit, more than a simple, though glorious possession; it becomes a deepening, growing power, a fullness of expression.

A State of Disorder in the Creation

Let us seek to set forth the position. In the first place there is in the creation a state of disorder with which God is not united. We can all grasp that. There is nothing very profound about it except as the fact breaks upon us, and we realize that there is this state of disorder in the creation of which we are a part, and that God is not united with that state, with the creation in that condition. It is not according to His mind. It has ceased to express His thought. It is contrary to His intention and therefore He is not linked with it.

Death and Satan Positively Associated with that State

Secondly, there is a positive association of death and Satan with that state. It is not just a passive mass, in confusion, in chaos, in disorder. There are active elements in it. We might say that it is a seething mass. There are forces at work in it and those forces are not the forces of life, but of death. Death is working, and Satan is associated with that state.

A Need Arises

In the third place, we see that a need arises, and a need along various lines. Firstly, there must be a *judicial setting aside of that creation*. We mean by "a judicial setting aside" that a judgment must be passed upon it, and under that judgment it must be put away out of God's sight. It must come to the place where in its entirety it is under the Divine ban and not one part of it can come into acceptance with Him: that is, it must be judicially dealt with, and judicially set aside. That becomes necessary as a preliminary step to anything which God will do after a new order. God has dealt thus with the creation in the Cross of Christ.

Secondly, *an actual and a potential destroying of that power of death and Satan must take place.* Let us watch our words - an actual, and a potential, destroying of that power of death and Satan. Well, God did that in actuality in the Person of the Lord Jesus. He destroyed death and him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. In Christ it is actually done. Christ at God's right hand represents and declares that this has been accomplished. Death is swallowed up victoriously. Satan too has been destroyed. That word "destroyed," translated in the Revised Version "bring to naught," does not mean what some people take it to mean. There are times, when speaking of destroying, we think of going the whole length of utterly obliterating, putting out of existence. This word does not mean that. Bringing to naught means, in the intention of God, to render utterly abortive, to render incapable of ultimate success. Do not forget that, so far as the Lord Jesus is concerned at God's right hand, Satan is defeated. He cannot touch Him personally, and he knows it. The only way in which he can touch Him is through His members. Satan no longer has any power to touch Christ directly with death, or with any other weapon. "Through death he has destroyed him that had the power of death." It is actually done in Christ.

We have used another word - potential. That potential destroying of death and Satan was on behalf of the saints. That is something which is secured and, though not yet fully entered into in experience, can be entered into by faith and known in a progressive way. It cannot be said that you and I at present in the entirety of our being find that death and Satan have no power. So far as we are concerned it is not an actual fact that Satan is inoperative. But this has been secured for us potentially in Christ, that we may become those who more and more experience what Christ has wrought for us, and come progressively into the good of that work which was potentially done on our behalf. In Christ, then, we see that destruction to be accomplished in actuality; in the saints, potentially.

Thirdly, it is essential that there should be *a living representation of the Divine order, which is deathless, and victorious over Satan, as the pattern to which believers are to be conformed.* That is a necessity, and it is realized in Christ. He is the representation of the new creation, the Divine order, to which we are to be conformed, and which is deathless, and victorious over Satan. God must work to an end, to a pattern, to a model, and Christ is that for Him. He is working in the saints to bring about conformity to Christ, which means also conformity to the Divine order represented by Christ; for we must remember that Christ is the sum total of a Divine order. So often the Lord's people fail to recognize that. We must in the first place, of course, recognize that He is a Person. Before all else, He is the Divine Person, but He is in Himself the sum total of a Divine and heavenly order. If the tabernacle or the temple of old expressed a whole system of things: regulated, ordered, appointed, functioning, related: a wonderful system (do not be afraid of that word, for put in the right realm it is a very good word), and if the temple or tabernacle represented that, they were but types of Christ. Christ is the Priest; Christ is the Altar, Christ is the Sacrifice, Christ is the Fine Linen; Christ is the Gold, Christ is the perfect Humanity, Christ is all, and Christ is the order. "Let everything be done decently and in order," says the Apostle. It is a heavenly planning and appointing.

When we come into Christ, while it is true that we come into the Divine Person, we have to come into our place in a Divine order, and being in Christ requires that there shall be a right relationship to one another; an appointing, a functioning, a relativity about everything. It is a wonderful Divine system. *Death and Satan have their occasion when anything that relates to Divine order is not obeyed, recognized or observed.* It is quite easy for death to get a chance amongst the Lord's people when there is a disorder amongst them, when they are not conformed to Christ in the sense of His being an expression of an ordered, heavenly system. Surely the New Testament rather thunders upon that than speaks. If the Corinthian Church is an example of weak testimony, and indeed it is, the reason is not far to seek. It was a matter of disorder amongst believers.

So God must have this representation of His Divine order, which is deathless, and victorious over Satan, and to that believers are to be conformed. That is conformity to the image of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Fourthly, there is required *a vital union with Him as basic, and a life utterly and continuously in the Holy Spirit.* We all accept the first essential, vital union with Him as basic, but what is just as important, if there is to be the full expression of life, is that there shall be a life which is altogether in the Holy Spirit continuously. Life in the Holy Spirit is the Divine offset to that other life in death and under the power of

Satan. That other life is disordered, and God is not united with it.

That is the first state: a life in death, under the power of Satan, in disorder; tremendously active, energetic, and yet God is not in it. It may even be active in a religious way, and yet God is not in it. I sometimes wonder if religion is not God's greatest enemy in this world. It sounds a terrible thing to say, but I am quite sincere in raising that question. Religion seems to place more people in a position in which God - if we may so speak - is put to a greater measure of difficulty to reach them by the Holy Spirit than any other thing, because it puts them into a false position. Over against that God sets this new Order which is utterly under the Holy Spirit. What does it mean to be utterly under the government of the Holy Spirit? It means that everything shall be submitted to the Holy Spirit. You and I will recognize that if we move any way without our lives completely committed to the Holy Spirit, we are most likely to function outside of God's realm; and the end is death. There may be the best of intentions. Our motives may be all right. We may even do a thing for the Lord; but there are multitudes of things done for the Lord which are not done in the Holy Spirit. There is a whole mountain of activity proceeding from the purest motives for the Lord's interests, but they are not the Holy Spirit's activities. I believe the Lord is generous and gracious, and that, because it is a matter of ignorance, He is patient with us and seeks to lead us into better ways. The mistaken course may be due to want of light, and while fuller light is not available, or until it breaks in the Lord continues alongside and gives as much blessing as He can. But that does not mean that in the long run all that past activity is going to meet with acceptance and prove to have been for the accomplishment of Divine ends. At some point it will break down, and those concerned will come to a recognition of the fact that, after all, a great percentage of all that work for the Lord has not counted; and the earlier we come to that recognition the better.

The Cross: The All-Inclusive Answer

All that is gathered up in the Cross. The Cross simply says that an order, though it be religious, well-motivated, or good-intentioned, but nevertheless proceeding from man in his natural state (not necessarily in defiance of God or in conscious rebellion against Him, but just the expression of man's natural state as he is), the Cross says that this entire order is set aside. God has judicially judged it and put a ban upon it. In the Cross of the Lord Jesus God has said finally: "You in your natural state cannot serve Me, and cannot bear any fruit to My glory! It is possible to go out and work, labour, and die of the strain of trying to serve Me and yet it still remains true that you cannot, out from yourself, by any natural resources whatever, bear fruit unto Me." The only thing that can ever get through to God's end, and that can be in life - eternal, Divine, heavenly life - is that which proceeds from the Holy Spirit.

How sweeping that is! How that analyses and dissects everything! Of the things we say, for example, it continually presents the interrogation: "Was that spoken in the Holy Spirit?" It is not enough to ask ourselves: "Did I mean it well? Did I intend it for the Lord?" but: "Was it said, was it done, in the Holy Spirit, or did I do it?" It is not a question of motive or of intention, but of the source from which we did it.

We have daily to recognize that our lives must be subject to the Holy Spirit, and when we are aware that there has been something of our own will, we have to be faithful before God about it. I believe that slowly and surely we shall come to the place where we live with that certain pause in our hearts which is a check on our impulsiveness, a check on rashness, a check on acting under excitement, a check on our own way of reasoning about things. That is a thing for the Holy Spirit to set up in us. Our business is to recognize that from center to circumference our lives must be handed over to His control. The result will be that the Holy Spirit will all the time work back to the Cross. The Cross, once for all, settled that position in a comprehensive and detailed way. It stands for ever as God's judicial ban upon man by nature, in his unregenerate state. The Holy Spirit will work back to that with us.

Do recognize that the Cross is the end of the risen life, and not only the beginning. If you forget everything else, remember that. The Cross is the end of the risen life, as well as the beginning: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, *becoming conformed unto his death.*" People have been to me with Philippians 3 and have asked: "Why did Paul put death at the end? Surely it ought to be right the other way round - "That I may be conformed to His death, and know Him in the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings!" No, there is

no mistake. The order is of the Holy Spirit. The power of His resurrection presupposes that there has been a death, but the very resurrection-life leads to the Cross. The Holy Spirit in the power of the risen life is always leading you back to the Cross, to conformity to His death. It is the very property of life to rule out all that belongs to death. It is the very power of resurrection to bring us back to the place where death is constantly overcome. That place is none other than the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ where the natural life is put aside. So Paul says: "...becoming conformed unto his death...", which means: to have the ground of death continuously and progressively removed; and that, again, as we have said, is the fruit of living union with Him. It would be a poor look-out for you and for me were we to be conformed to His death in entirety apart from the power of resurrection in us, apart from our already knowing the life of the Lord. Where would be our hope? What is it that is the power of our survival when the Cross is made more real in our experience? There would be no survival were it not that His risen life is in us. So Paul prays: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection...", and that means conformity to His death without utter destruction. The end of the risen life is the Cross. The Holy Spirit is always working in relation to the Cross, in order that the power of His resurrection may be increasingly manifested in us.

This is the background of the whole question of life. I am sure, with a greater certainty today than ever, that the basis in us for life triumphant is the working of the Cross in the setting aside of all that which is natural. There is nothing more hated by the enemy than the Cross. Let us seek to free our minds from all false conceptions of the Cross! So often there has been this kind of reaction: "Oh, it is the Cross; it is death, death, death! This working of the Cross in a subjective way is all the time leading to death!" That is why we have already mentioned that it is so important for us to recognize that it is not that death destroys us, but that it makes the way for a greater fullness of life. It is the positive side that we have to keep in mind; not the fact that we are constantly being ruled out, and ruled out, but rather that of necessity that is being done in order that He may come in, and come in, and come in. It is the life side which has to be kept uppermost, even in the working of the Cross with reference to what was set aside by God at Calvary.

Is your need, then, that of life? The Lord, in effect, says: "Well, let us get this thing out of the way!" And when He gets that out of the way there is life. Do you want more life? Well, let us get this thing out of the way; and you have more life. You very rarely meet people who, having really laid themselves out before God for an increase of spiritual life, have not promptly gone into a very bad experience and had a difficult time. Have you ever come to the place where you have laid yourself out for that extra thing, that new thing, which God has been revealing to you, and not gone through some dark, trying and painful time? It is always so. It is not wrong. The Lord is only saying: "Do you want that?" There is always something to be got out of the way. It may be that you want spiritual increase because it will make you a happier man. That motive will have to be got out of the way so that you want it, not for your own sake, but for His sake. If you go through a bad time, and the dominating element is self, you will say: "Oh, well, it does not matter. I would rather not have it if it means this!" That is the selfish way of regarding it. But if you are in a dark time in relation to something, and you come to the place where you say: "Well, whatever it costs, the Lord must have this thing in my life!" you have come there by way of Christ's victory. The Holy Spirit always brings that issue. It is life that He is after, and life more abundant, and this is alone realized by His bringing back and back to the Cross. The Cross is basic to life, because it was there that the Lord Jesus conquered death, and brought life forth for the saints. Calvary is victory, not defeat!

Chapter 4 - Fellowship Between Christ and His Church in Testimony

Reading: John 17

Keeping this chapter well before us, let us turn to two other passages:

"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; he who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory" (1 Timothy 3:16).

Before we pass to the other passage, let us notice that the word translated "godliness" in this passage is unique in the New Testament. It is not the word which is commonly used for piety, but the word which means the Divine nature, and the more correct rendering would be: "Great is the mystery of the Divine nature, which was made visible in flesh." We mention that because it removes the difficulty which has surrounded this passage for so long.

"... because we are members of his body. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the twain shall become one flesh. This mystery is great: I speak in regard of Christ and of the church" (Ephesians 5:30-32).

In those two passages I think we have an interpretation of chapter 17 of the Gospel by John. You may take this passage in Timothy and note its clauses, and carrying everything back into that chapter in John's Gospel you will see that there is a twofold connection: firstly, the connection with Christ personally; secondly, the connection with those who constitute His Church.

"Manifested in the Flesh"

The Divine nature was manifested in flesh. We need hardly spend time in applying that phrase to Christ. There is no doubt that it belongs to Him, that He is the One who fits in there, that He verily was God manifest in the flesh, and that the Divine nature did become incarnated in Him. John 17 quite definitely alludes to the fact: "...they have believed that thou didst send me" (verse 8).

Then John 17 carries things forward to the Church, and while it does not give the full unveiling of the later New Testament writings when the Holy Spirit had come to open up the fullness of the truth, it clearly intimates the truth about to find fulfillment. We can even say that it introduces that truth: "I in them..." (verse 23). That clearly indicates a company constituted as an organism, as a body, of which they are the first members, the nucleus to which others should be continually added through the preaching of the Gospel. Taking their place in the Body thus formed, those who believed would in turn become the vessel of the testimony, the embodiment of Him. Later the Apostle will express it in this way: "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature..." (2 Peter 1:4). While there is, and ever will remain, a cleft, a division, a distinction between that and any supposition of our thereby becoming God and partaking of Deity, it is none the less true that the great and wonderful reality into which we are all called is the forming of a Body for the indwelling of that Christ of whom it says the Divine nature was manifested in flesh. In this, one object in view was that the manifestation should not cease in this world with the return of Christ to glory, but that there should be a continuation of the earthly manifestation of the Divine nature in Him, but now in Him in His Body here. That is a wonderful and glorious truth. It is a marvelous calling to embody Christ in the Spirit.

But such things are always tests as well as testimonies, always challenges as well as glorious truths. What the Lord is constantly seeking to do with His people, and seemingly more and more so toward the end, is to bring them face to face with the real nature of their calling, and to require that they should face up to it: as we say, toe the line. The very first thing for which the Church is called in its relationship to Christ is to be the manifestation of Him, the Divine nature manifested in flesh: "I in them..." The Church's calling is to maintain here on the earth a witness to the presence, the living presence, of the Lord. That

may sound elementary, but it is not so elementary when you consider how things are today. One would be led to think from what does exist today that the Church's purpose on the earth is to hold religious services and to do all sorts of good, charitable works, and to keep religion alive in the earth. Well-meaning and well-intentioned! But much can be brought, and is brought within a compass like that. Almost anything can be put within that range.

I was reading of a church in America where a famous dancer was invited to dance the sermons, to dance the truth of the New Testament, before the congregation. It is pathetically and tragically awful, but there by one in dancing apparel, dancing before a congregation was supposed to be acted New Testament truth: and it is argued for by Scripture - "dancing before the Lord" (2 Samuel 6:16). Brought right out of the theatrical world into what is called the Church to do that! That is an extreme case, but it can find a place within this idea of keeping religion alive and can be argued for as good. That is a terrible and solemn departure from the truth and in the light of such a thing we need to turn again and consider closely what it really is that the Church is here for. The Church is revealed in the New Testament as constituted for the maintenance in this world of a witness to the living presence of the Lord, the Christ of God - to be the embodiment of Him. Nothing less than that, nothing other than that, justifies the continuation of a thing which goes by the name of the Church. As men and women meet the Church, whether in assembly or the individual members thereof in the common walks of life, they should register the presence of the Lord; they should be obliged to recognize the presence of "something" which is not just ordinary or natural, and not just the men or the women. The presence of the Lord in the assembly of the Lord's people should mean that strangers, the ungodly, coming in should say: "God is in the midst of you!" That is the witness for which the Church is called into being.

We cannot continue on any other ground. We are not now alluding to certain prevailing conditions in a general way; we are facing this matter ourselves. The only thing which will justify our being together as the Lord's people is that the one uppermost, predominant feature among us shall be that of a witness to the Lord's presence in life in our midst, and that it must needs be confessed: "The Lord is in the midst of that people!" If we lose that we have lost our calling. Oh, that we should see to that! "I in them..."

Thus we have the mystery of the Divine nature, which was manifested in the flesh in Christ, continued now in His own. "This mystery is great: I speak in regard of Christ and of the church."

"Justified in the Spirit"

What does that mean? When was the Lord Jesus justified in the spirit? For undoubtedly it refers to Him in the first place. What is the meaning of His being justified in the spirit? I think the answer is this: His resurrection. I believe the justification of the Lord Jesus is to be found in God's raising Him from the dead. There may be a broader meaning, a wider explanation, but I believe that is the heart of the matter - that His justification was when God raised Him from the dead. Peter speaks of Him as having been crucified in the flesh, and quickened in the spirit (1 Peter 3:18). When, with regard to that death, God intervened and raised Him from the dead, God justified Him. That was His justification. He stood then in a place with God where all sin, the judgment of which He had voluntarily endured, was put away; where all and every kind of condemnation which had been made to light upon Him when made sin for us, was destroyed. All sin which was made to rest upon Him having been put away by His Cross, God raised Him; He is in the place where He is justified: He is the justified One, Jesus Christ the Righteous. That applies to something other than the righteousness, the holiness, which was inherent in Himself; it applies to the righteousness, the holiness, which is His as having been made Man, and made sin, and having borne that sin away in judgment, so that God can be just, and the justifier of all them that believe. When God raised Him from the dead it was His great act of justifying the Lord Jesus.

Now where do we find "resurrection" in John 17? "Even as thou gavest him authority over all flesh, that whatsoever thou hast given him, to them he should give eternal life" (verse 2). There is no eternal life except on the ground of Christ risen, and He here speaks as though already He is in resurrection. How often in this chapter does the Lord use this phrase: "... whom thou hast given me..." He gives three things to those whom the Father has given him:

1. He gives them eternal life (verse 2).
2. He gives the revelation of the Father's name (verse 6).
3. He gives them the words of God (verse 8).

He gives eternal life. Eternal life is the fruit of His death and resurrection. It could not be said to be eternal life had not death been destroyed and all the possibility of its being corrupted been utterly abolished. This life is ours on the ground of Christ's destruction of death, and of His having entered for us into that life which is deathless.

What is the Church's calling? It has been raised up to maintain the testimony in this world of a life which is triumphant over death. How often that has been said! That is the heart of the Lord's word to us at this time - the power of a deathless life, a life which cannot be conquered and quenched by death. That is set in John 17 against the background of a world that is hostile, inimical, hating: "... the world hated them..." (verse 14); "I pray not that thou shouldest take them from the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one" (verse 15). (The word "evil" being in the masculine it is justifiable to add the word "one".) Here is an evil one, and a hating world, and any spiritual person will tell you that, in effect, that is death - the spirit and power of death encompassing the Lord's people. Now the Lord does not ask that His Church should be taken out from the world, but that, being in it, it should maintain a testimony against, and contrary to, the spirit of it. The testimony is that of life in the midst of death. The supreme challenge to the Church's faithfulness, to the Church's ministry, to the Church's true vocation, is as to whether its condition bears true witness that it is not being overcome of spiritual death, that it really is expressing a life which is more powerful than the power of death that is all around it.

Do not allow the word "Church" to mislead you, and think of some entity apart from yourself. We must make an individual application, because if we are in living union with Christ we are His members, a part of the Church which is His Body, and what we are saying applies to us individually as well as collectively. It is not possible for all to have the advantage of a collective fellowship of the Lord's people. Some have to live in places where they are desperately alone. It may be that there is not very much spiritual life where we are, and not much help along the line of spiritual fellowship; nevertheless this word is for such. We have to do, not only with the responsibility and the challenge, but with the glorious fact that this into which we are called, and which is provided for by the Lord, and ordained, is that His people here, whether they be able to gather together with all the advantages of so doing, or whether they be scattered and isolated shall have in them the power of His life to transcend the power of death around them.

If that is revealed as the Lord's will, let us first of all readily admit the possibility of its realization and then accept the fact that, since it is the Lord's will, it must be possible. As for you and me, let us stand in our spirit for that life expression from the risen Lord which shall transcend the death that is all around us, and which presses upon us - the evil one and the hatred of men. The Lord said: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them from the world, but that thou shouldest keep them..." The power in them is the power of His risen life.

What we have been saying is so very much in accord with the fuller revelation of the Ephesian letter: "The exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all..." (Ephesians 1:19-21): "... to usward who believe..." We must stand for that strongly and definitely, because that is the testimony of the Lord Jesus.

"Justified in the spirit!" What is the Church's justification? It is that it stands on resurrection ground, manifesting resurrection life. Blessed be God, so far as our salvation is concerned, we are justified on the ground of being risen together with Christ. We take it that if we have been raised together with Him, we have been justified. God would never have brought us into resurrection union with Christ apart from justification. But so far as our calling, our vocation, is concerned, we are justified by the maintaining of the witness of His resurrection. That is the justification that applies to service, to instrumentalities.

"Seen of Angels"

After His resurrection He was seen of angels. We hardly need go back to the Gospels to indicate the record of the angelic attendants after His resurrection. There was the angel who rolled away the stone. There were two who sat on the stone. There were the angels who spoke of the risen Lord and told certain women exactly where they would find Him. Yes, angels saw Him after His resurrection. Now where in that connection does the Church come in? Oh, the Church is related in a wonderful way. Come again to the letter to the Ephesians and read: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Ephesians 3:10). I think there is little doubt that this reference to principalities and powers includes the unfallen celestial bodies, and not only the diabolical ones. I do not know that angels of Satan need instructing about the manifold wisdom of God, but God is revealing Himself in a wonderful way to His own angel ministers by what He is doing through the Church. I cannot understand that; I cannot comprehend that; it is far beyond me. But there is the statement. It is a clear declaration that God is teaching principalities and powers concerning Himself by His activities in the Church; which means that there is a realm of spiritual intelligence, very high spiritual intelligence, angelic intelligence, receiving instruction through the Church. For what, I do not know, but it represents some tremendous values. It evidently represents something of great meaning.

Very often it may seem but poor comfort to us in times of suffering, times of trial, times of adversity, times when Satan is pressing hard, to be told that, while we can see nothing of the meaning of all this, God is instructing angels, and that principalities and powers are deriving the benefit of it all. We do not draw a great deal of comfort from that, but if we understood I think we would realise that, while we may not at such times be fulfilling a very big ministry on the earth, there is a big ministry going on towards principalities and powers through our instrumentality. Do not think that running about taking meetings, and doing work for the Lord, is the only kind of ministry that members of the Church can fulfill. Ministry may be equally being fulfilled when these things have been brought to a standstill, and all earthly activities for the Lord stopped, and we are in one of these painful periods of inaction. Do not conclude that because of such inaction no ministry is being rendered, or that everything of that kind is cut off at such a time. Here is the word: "... that NOW unto the principalities and the powers in heavenly places might be made known through the Church the manifold wisdom of God" - not in the coming age, but now. They are learning from the Lord, by reason of those very difficult and trying experiences through which the Lord is taking us, what He is doing in the Church.

Supposing the principalities and powers, these angelic ministers that wait upon Him, should one day come to us and thank us very much for going through that dark time, and say: "I came to know a lot through that. I came to understand the wisdom of God in a wonderful way through that bad time which you had." You would be surprised, would you not? You would say: "Well, I never imagined that anything could come out of that! I thought everything was dried up, and that nothing was happening at all." Oh, that angel minister would say: "You were very mistaken. I was getting a great deal of benefit out of your bad time." That is not a flight of imagination. Surely that is the logical outworking of a statement like this. There is a ministry that the Church fulfils which is altogether apart from platforms and meetings and the numerous kinds of activity as here amongst men. There is a mighty ministry which reaches out and touches the fringes of the universe. God is doing something out there through His dealings with the Church here. That is a ministry in which we do well to desire to be. Remember that unfallen angels know nothing in their experience of grace. Grace - marvelous grace - is something which they can only know by observing it at work.

"Preached Among the Nations"

I think we need not tarry with that. The Church's ministry is to be in all the nations, and its ministry is Christ in all the nations. Its testimony to Him is to be in all the nations.

"Believed on in the World"

That certainly was true of the Lord Jesus. John 17 says: "... the words which thou gavest me I have given unto them; and they received them, and knew of a truth that I came forth from thee, and they believed that thou didst send me" (verse 8). He was believed on in the world.

In verse 21 we have the words: "That they may all be one... that the world may believe..." There is a believing on the part of the world as a result of His being in the Church. I am quite certain that the Church will not be believed on, or believed in, until, and unless, there is a manifestation of the spirit of Christ in mutual love. The world is put back from Christ so much by failure in that direction. While we may view the situation as hopeless in general, that does not excuse us from standing for a true testimony, and realizing that faith in the Lord Jesus will be begotten by the expression of His love amongst ourselves.

"Received Up in Glory"

That was true of Him, and, blessed be God, that is going to be true of His Church, His Body. 1 Corinthians 15 gives us a grand revelation: "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump..." We shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. That may not be so far ahead as many people think. It may be very soon: the sooner the better so far as His people are concerned. Our hearts really do say from their depths: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." There is no hypocrisy about that. There was a time when we used to be scared of the thought, but we have come to see that His coming is the way of all hope. This world will never see a better state, but an increasingly worse condition, until the events subsequent to, and consequent upon, His coming have taken place. There is coming an age when every evil thing will be blotted out from this cosmos. Wars shall be no more. Strife shall be no more. Hatred shall be no more. Sin shall be no more. Pain shall be no more. Sorrow and tears shall be no more. Death shall be no more. Oh, what a day! What an age! We can hardly imagine it, but our hearts surely leap at the thought of it.

Do you say you are afraid of that? Do you dread to think of that? The Lord must come for His Church first, and then things will rapidly hasten to that day. It may be a very terrible passage. Things may become very awful in the earth for a while after the Church has gone, but things will happen very rapidly, and very vividly, and move on toward that great day when He makes a new heaven and a new earth. But the day of the Church's being received up into glory is imminent. No one who knows His Bible and has spiritual perception, or even good common-sense with the Bible before him, can fail to see that that day hastens. The counsels of men are being blown to pieces by God. They cannot hold their decisions together for a week or two. Their most solid decisions, and intentions, and agreements, fall to pieces within a short time. God bringing the counsels of men to naught, but the counsels of God, says His Word, stand for ever. In the eternal counsels of God this is one of the things determined: "... we... shall... be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air..." (1 Thessalonians 4:17). "Received up in glory!" His end is going to be our end. The Church is going to know the counterpart of her Lord as her Head in His experience of being received up in glory.

Now, it may be that some unsaved ones have been looking in at the window and have become envious. Are you going to stand outside? Do you want to be apart from all this? Why, here is a revelation of Divine calling. Here is a presentation of the Word of God as to what it is that has been made possible for you by the Cross of the Lord Jesus, if you will believe. Are you going to let it all go? Surely you are wanting to draw near! Surely you are wanting to come in! Surely those on the fringe of things will want to be more in! Surely all of us will want to be more faithful, more devoted in the light of that day which at longest cannot now be far off. God's Word has always been fulfilled, and proved true, and this will not break down; this will be equally true.

The Lord draw us right into the purpose of our calling! There is very much more which could be said on this matter, but we have said enough to see that the mystery of Christ is carried over into the Church which is His Body in all these respects, and that a part of the mystery - such a mystery to the men of the world, to the unbeliever, to the one who does not know spiritual secrets - is the translation of His waiting Church to meet Him ere He comes again to the earth. Translation to glory is ridiculed and ruled out as a

fantastic idea by the world. But those who know the mystery of being born again; who know the mystery of being preserved and kept by Christ through the intensity of well-nigh universal opposition and antagonism, who know also that it is not in themselves at all to keep on, but that it is the Lord alone who so enables, He Himself being their very life - those of us who know these mysteries find no difficulty in accepting that extra part of the mystery related to the consummation of our lives, namely, to be caught up, received up in glory. It is a strange thing that men of the world can accept as commonplace today things which at one time they would have laughed at: radio, flight, television, moon visits, and all such things. Had you spoken of such things a century or two ago men would have mocked. Jules Verne was regarded as a sort of wonder man at one time, but all that he forecast has come true. Things he spoke of are commonplace today. Men will believe these things, yet they cannot credit the translation from this earth to the presence of God of a company whom He has redeemed. We are looking for it, and we are hastening unto it, and we shall hail it with joy. The cry is in our hearts: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Chapter 5 - The Continuation of the Conflict in Relation to the Individual Believer

We are seeking to take a further step in the apprehension of what is related to this great and pressing matter, and are going to deal with the continuation of the conflict, with reference to its nature and its sphere.

The Nature of the Conflict

The work of the Lord Jesus in His Cross has now been set forth in two respects. On the one hand, we have noted there was that which was actually complete and final in His work; the fact that the Lord did destroy him that had the power of death, and also death itself. *With regard to Himself, that is a finished work.* His presence at the right hand of God declares that death, the grave, and Satan, have been brought to naught, and no longer have any power over Him. On the other hand, there is what we have called the potential work of His Cross, that is that Christ did something which in Himself is full and final, but which has yet to become full and final in the saints; something which was *for* the saints, but which has still to become complete *in* their experience. It is potential, so far as the Church is concerned, although in Him, its Head, they have it in finality. As the result of the work of His Cross, and as the grand issue of His resurrection, eternal life is received already by those who believe. But while that life is itself victorious, incorruptible, indestructible, the believer has to come by faith to prove it, to live by it, to learn its laws, to be conformed to it. There is a deposit in the believer which in itself needs no addition, so far as its quality is concerned. So far as its victory, its power, its glory, its potentialities are concerned, nothing can be added to it. But the course of spiritual experience, of spiritual life, is to discover, to appropriate, and to live by all that the life represents and means. That is to say, the course of spiritual life and experience is the course of discovering and living by the values of that life which is within, and which is succored from above.

It is important to recognize that as a discriminating word. We are very often inclined to think that the life of the Lord in us needs in some way to be improved, to be added to, when really what is required is that we should discover what we have, and, discovering it by experience, live according to it. This life is not something apart from the Lord Jesus, and we can never think of His standing in need of some improvement, nor of the possibility of something being added to Him to make Him complete, or more complete. We would never think like that. And this life is one with Himself. As the Apostle says, it is Christ who is our life, and our need is to discover what Christ is in us, and to live accordingly. So in a very real sense it is a matter of the life getting more of us, rather than of our getting more of the life. That, at any rate, is the way of its working.

This, in the ordering of God, has to be done in a world where death still rules and works; for in this world the destruction of death has not yet been made manifest. Death, like the devil, goes on, although Calvary still remains full victory. We are left in this world, and it is in this world where death reigns and works as a great energy that we, by this sovereign ordering of God, have to come to prove the values of the life which has been deposited in us, and to discover its potentialities. This is an experimental discovery. It therefore resolves itself into battle between that which is in this world and the life which is in the believer. It is the battle for life, not as to the forfeiture of that life - not as to whether death can take eternal life away from us, for that is not the question at issue - but as to the triumphant expression and the full manifestation of the power of that life. That is the issue. We may have eternal life, and yet that life may be pressed away in our very being without expression, without manifestation, without any triumphant issue. It may be there, but cramped and smothered.

That which is true in the case of the individual believer can be equally true in the case of the Church, the collective company; it may have life, eternal life, and yet there may be no expressed testimony of its presence, or but a very limited manifestation. With this expression, this manifestation - not only with the possession of life but with the testimony to that possession - there are bound up no lesser issues than the resurrection and lordship of Jesus Christ. The testimony to the fact that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead and is at the right hand of the Majesty on High in absolute lordship is bound up with an

expression here - let us repeat - of that life which is His risen life. That is no small matter. The last Adam was made a "life-giving spirit" - life-giving, that is, life manifesting itself, life being transmitted, life expressed - and if that is not exemplified in and through the believer, and through the Church as a whole, there is something taken away from the testimony of the Lord Jesus.

How is there to be the proof, the demonstration, the evidence, the final establishment of the fact that Jesus is alive from the dead, and is Lord? It is by the triumphant expression of His life in His own. It is not by a doctrinal statement. Christ is never proved to be alive from the dead, nor to be Lord, by doctrinal statements. Your statement of faith may include the fact that you believe Jesus died and rose again, ascended to heaven, and is at the right hand of the Majesty on High, but how are you going to prove your statement? What has God given as the evidence of that? You may believe it; you may be willing to lay down your life for that faith; you may state it with tremendous emphasis, and yet you are not thereby proving it. You will never prove anything by saying: "I believe with all my might that this is the case!" You will never prove a thing by standing up and declaring it as something which you believe. You will never prove a thing by saying: "I believe in all the fundamentals of the Christian faith!" and calling yourself by some name which indicates that you believe in the inspiration of the Bible. Nothing is ever proved in that way. Reducing the whole matter to these two points - that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, and is Lord of all - you have still to prove your statement after you have made it. If you have appealed to the fact that the Word of God says so, even then you have proved nothing. Your proof can never be by argument, because what argument can build up argument can pull down, and what logic can construct logic can destroy.

How, then, are you going to prove that this is so? By the expression and manifestation of His risen life, that is all - but it is a mighty "all!" That signifies that you are the embodiment of the thing which you declare - that besides the doctrinal statement there is the living expression. Thus the resurrection and the lordship of Jesus are bound up with this expression which is called the "testimony." The testimony is not a system of truth. It is that extra factor to the statement and presentation of truth which is the power of a life which conquers death. How, then, will you prove that Jesus has conquered death? The proof of it will be a death-conquering life that expresses itself in you.

This being the case, it means that the whole issue is one of a life-power by which Christ is attested. We do not put the life in the place of Christ, but we say that the attestation of Christ is by the life. We do not mean the manner of life, but the life-power, the impact of a spiritual force which emanates from Him as in the throne, the registration upon a spiritual realm of a greater spiritual power. That is the attestation of the Lord Jesus. Therefore the major weapon of the enemy will be death. Death is also a spiritual power. Thus it becomes a battle between two spiritual powers, the power of life and the power of death. The battle goes on, and will go on, until the Church becomes so vitalised by this Divine power that, in a moment, those who went into the grave, and those who are alive and remain, are united in a mighty resurrection-ascension to the Lord in glory. The battle between these two great spiritual powers will go on till then.

That is the battle in which we find ourselves. It is an intensifying battle, and we had better recognize it once for all. It is difficult to accept that sometimes, even though we assent to it mentally. When things become difficult we are surprised and wonder, perhaps thinking it strange that it should be so. But it must be recognized and accepted that this spiritual warfare between life and death will intensify toward the end, and it will reach its highest point of tension right at the point where the Church is about to be translated. That is undoubtedly made clear by the Word of the Lord.

The Sphere of the Conflict

We speak in the first place about the individual believer. We must remember that this life of the risen Lord, as linked with the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of life, resides in the very deepest part of our being, in our spirit, or in what the New Testament calls "the inner man." Therefore the most spiritual people will find that the conflict of life rages around and upon their spirit. There is a direct assault upon their spirit in order to get their spirit weakened, shut in and pressed down, so that somewhere in the depths of their being they feel that they are unable to breathe, so to speak. They cannot actually locate it, but they are conscious that right within there is a locking up, a pressing, a hemming in, a suffocating of spirit. One of

two things will result. Either their spirit will be pressed out under this weight of spiritual death, and they will go under; or else they will have to call earnestly upon the Lord that they may be strengthened with might by His Spirit into the inward man, and then exercise faith on the ground of their prayer and seek to assert their spirit against this thing.

The trouble with a great many of the Lord's people is that they do not rise up in spirit and, in the name of the Lord, meet and resist that thing which is threatening to crush the very life out of their spirit. There is an accepting of things; there is a consenting; there is a passive attitude; or else there is a getting into an awful swirl of questionings, doubtings, arguments and discussions with the devil, going round in an eternal circle of introspection and self-analysis, when really in such circumstances believers ought in their spirits to rise up in faith in the name of the Lord to resist this thing and refuse to have it, calling, in His name, upon the energies of the Holy Ghost. We shall never get through until we learn how to do that. If the enemy finds that he can hold the situation by keeping us in that circle, that awful going round of debate, argument, discussion, of analyzing, of questioning, of doubting, he will keep us going round; he will whip us up like a circus horse to keep us running round all the time, while we never get beyond the point where we started. If you keep going back there all the time, not making one fragment or fraction of real spiritual progress toward victory, you can go on so indefinitely.

Another favourite method of the enemy is to try to get us to explain this thing along lines which are less than the real explanation, to draw in other things which he would like us to believe may account for it. The things may be numerous and various. If we settle down to accept such an explanation, it will prove our undoing. While there may be much that he can use and play upon in natural conditions, and while it may be true that he is making the most of all that is available of our own human weakness, and perhaps our physical condition, and our constitution, our make-up, and our surroundings, nevertheless ultimately it may not be a question of anything in nature at all, but a matter of being strong in spirit. You may take it as one of the settled things that there is no hope for anybody in the direction of those natural conditions. If you start working from the circumference to the center, you are working the wrong way, and you will not get through; you will be held on the circumference until you are dead. The enemy will not let you reach the center from the circumference. You must start at the center and work outward. The key to victory is our spirit-union with our risen and reigning Lord.

There are other realms, of course, in which this death battle goes on, and where this assault of death is made upon the believer. Sometimes it is upon the mind. There is a darkening, a numbing, or something like a paralyzing of the mind when you turn to consider the things of the Lord. At other times you may be quite clear and free, and your mind have little trouble in working in ordinary things, but immediately you come to spiritual things, to the things of the Lord, you discover that your mind is becoming overclouded, and is not functioning. It is being paralyzed; there is a darkness and a death creeping over it. The enemy does make assaults upon our minds; there is no doubt about that. He attacks our soul: not only the intellectual side, but every side. The enemy makes an assault upon the emotional side, to dry up and freeze our feelings, so that we are totally incapable of giving any response or of exercising any kind of heart function in relation to the Lord. The same is true in the realm of the will. There are times when it seems we cannot make a decision, and *cannot* will in the way of the Lord. The will comes under assault like that.

Death breaks upon us in each of these spheres, and the experience is more or less common to us all. It is a battle. As is the case with the spirit directly, and also with the soul, so it is with the body. There is no doubt at all that the enemy makes assaults upon the bodies of the Lord's people. I do not say that every malady, every sickness, every physical weakness, every bit of natural tiredness is the direct work of the devil. Of course, historically it is the outcome of his work, but immediately it need not be the direct work of the devil, and we are not saying that it is. We should find ourselves in great difficulties were we to teach that. But there are direct attacks of the enemy in the spirit of death upon the bodies of the Lord's people. Where there is a weakness he may fasten upon it, add to it, and seek to cripple us altogether through our weakness when, although that basic weakness might remain, we need not be crippled by it. That has been the history of the Lord's people. It becomes a question as to whether the enemy is going to use that thing to undo us altogether, or whether, in spite of it, we are to be found proving the power of a life which triumphs over it, and carries us on.

Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

The Apostle Paul always comes to our help in these matters. Paul has placed it on record that, because of the greatness of the revelation which came to him, lest he should become exalted above measure there was given unto him a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him, to smite him in the face. For this thing he besought the Lord thrice, but the Lord said: "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). We have good reason to believe that the weakness was physical weakness; I find it difficult not to believe that it was malaria. There is every reason, I think, to believe that to have been the malady. Paul's journeys were oft times in places which were infested with the malarial elements, while he was without any of the modern helps to overcome them. And when you remember that the complaint affected his eyes - anybody who knows anything about malaria knows of those sharp pangs through the eyes which in the long run do interfere with the organs of sight - it all points strongly to malaria. We are not arguing that it was so, but we find difficulty in believing that such was not the case. But, whatever it was, here is something which from time to time laid hold of Paul, and it seemed that he never knew when this thing was going to overtake him. His "thorn" was undoubtedly physical weakness, and it is called "a messenger of Satan." The whole direction of it, from the enemy's side, was a working of death. In relation to that, Paul speaks of death working in this mortal flesh. It was all in the direction of death, death, death; he was facing and fighting death all the time. But the point is, that while the devil most clearly had to do with this physical state, as the statement shows, and the Lord Himself permitted it, it did not work out in death. On the contrary, the course of that man's life is the course of a continual triumph over that death and Satan. That the power of death does assail, and that the Lord does not all the time prevent the devil from attacking these bodies, is manifest. But that does not mean that the Lord intends us to die! You might think the logic to be that if the Lord allows a messenger of Satan, whose effect is death, surely the Lord means us to die. There is no justification for such an argument. Quite the opposite is the case. The Lord had a very salutary purpose for everything in the case of the Apostle, and this working of death was expressly used to keep the man spiritually alive; for had he not had the thorn, his spiritual life would have been smitten with a blight. Hear his own words: "Lest I should be exalted above measure..." Find the man exalted above measure, and you find the man of poor spiritual life, for his spiritual life has been blighted. Find the man who is kept humble in this way, and yet triumphant in a way which is not explained on a natural ground, and you will find the man who is a giant in spirit.

Yes, the enemy does attack the body. He impinges upon what is already there and seeks to intensify it. He seeks to cripple the saints. But the whole of this word, especially in relation to the life of the Apostle Paul, is one great declaration that even in the presence of a natural handicap, a natural weakness, or something with which the devil himself has come in at a given point in the permission of God, there is a life which can carry us on to the fulfillment of a great Divine purpose which need not be curtailed because of natural conditions. Get hold of that! Do not sink under your condition and say: "Because such and such is the case with me, then the Divine purpose in its greater dimensions is impossible!" That is despair, not faith. The Apostle's declaration was this: "... that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20). It was life by faith in the Son of God. And what a living it was! What a life it was! Indeed, in his case it was a life triumphant over ever-present death. You must remember that the ministry of Paul to these Galatians was occasioned by "an infirmity in the flesh," i.e. a physical sickness, affecting his eyes (4.13-14).

It was a battle. Read the second letter to the Corinthians, and you will see the traces of the battle. Paul had just emerged from that desperate situation where he despaired of life. He had been laid so low with this thing, whatever it was, that he never expected to recover. But he came out. He bore the marks of the battle with death (Galatians 6:17), but he continued on his course long after he wrote the second letter to the Corinthians. Some of the most glorious things found expression after that. Let us believe in the possibilities of the Lord's life within us, and disclaim all the arguments in our own state, or which the enemy would impose upon us by reason of how we feel and how things appear. We must all take this to heart.

Life is Deeper than our Consciousness

We close by referring to this one point. We must seek always to believe in the fact that this Divine life, with all its tremendous potencies, is far deeper down than surrounding conditions and circumstances, than our own physical life, and than our own soul-life. Unless we grasp that, hold that firmly, we have not the ground of victory. When we feel that death is working with such tremendous force in the realm of our bodies or our souls, and everything in this sentient life of ours speaks of death, we are too often in danger of surrendering the whole position. I believe that this thing which is of God is deeper than our mortal being. I believe that it is possible even for children of God, being truly born again and possessing eternal life, to lose their reason and go into an asylum, and yet to have no change made in the deepest fact and reality of the being in relation to the Lord. We touch that point to indicate what we mean - that if our rational life is the sum total of our life, then it is a poor look-out for us. If our sanity, our natural mental balance, is the ground of our being children of God, then some from time to time would have real reason to doubt whether they were born again. And if that is true in the mental, it is true in the physical. This life of the Lord is far deeper than this mortal life of ours.

I am going to say something which may, to some, sound very terrible. It may perplex some, but it may help others. It is this: it is possible for a true child or servant of God, living in true fellowship with Him and walking in the light as far as they have it, to pass through a time of deep and terrible darkness. At such a time it may *seem* as though the Lord has left them and that Satan has taken His place of government. Prayer seems impossible or useless, and the Bible closed. Evil seems triumphant. The promises of God never to leave nor in anywise to forsake seem to have failed. Things may seem to be even worse than that, and one's salvation may be brought into question. Such has been the experience of some of the most saintly, devoted, and God-used servants of the Lord. Abraham had it (Genesis 15:12). Jeremiah knew it (Jeremiah 20:7). David knew it (Psalm 22). Job knew it. Our Lord Jesus knew it (Matthew 27:46). Dr. A. B. Simpson had this experience near the end of his wonderful life for God. And so it has been with others.

What is the explanation? With all my heart I do not believe that this seeming forsakenness is true, however real it may seem. In many cases it is because those concerned have done so much damage to the kingdom of Satan that he has rallied all his forces to quench their life and testimony. Or it may be that the enemy has discerned the potential value of a life which will be a menace to his interests. But, whether either of these explanations be true or not so, the fact remains that, where the Lord Jesus truly is, the battle for life often assumes most serious forms. Sometimes it is a devastating and desolating experience.

We need to remember that these are spiritual forces, and spiritual forces stand at no physical barriers. We have a soul, a great nervous system. Children of God for many reasons, and very often after a time of pouring out spiritually, will find their nerves are all a jangle, and they feel anything but good and holy. But are you going to say that that means that after all they are not children of God, and that it is all a myth? Do you mean to say that Elijah was no longer the prophet of the Most High when he cast himself under the juniper tree and asked the Lord to take away his life? He was still the servant of God, still as true to God as ever. We are not trying to excuse our weaknesses, but trying to get to the heart of a situation. That does not argue that the Lord *has* forsaken, that the Lord is not there, and that such are not the Lord's children or His servants. It indicates that the enemy has made them marked men or women because of something he is trying to destroy in the life. If you get into that realm, do not accept the suggestions of the enemy or seek to interpret things in the light of circumstances.

If you do not understand this that we are saying, do not strive after an explanation, and please do not put your own construction upon it. There are some who know what it is to have such an assault upon their being, their physical and nervous life as to make them feel that they are lost. I do not believe that it means that they are lost, and it is because some people accept that suggestion from the tempter that they sink into darkness. Oh, that many of these people who feel this thing upon them could know what we are trying to say, that it is for the spirit to rise up in faith and refuse the argument of the seeming! The seeming is sometimes so terribly real. People who have not suffered sometimes say to us: "It only seems to be so; it is not really so!" And we reply: "You do not know what you are talking about! It is more real than anything else to those concerned." But the Lord will teach us as we go on not to accept that as the

final thing. There is something deeper than that. The Lord is deeper than our physical feelings. The Lord is deeper than our soul.

Let me say here what I have said elsewhere. There are times and situations when ordinary lines of communication with a child of God are suspended. They are in a state of unconsciousness. It is useless to speak to them, for they can make no response. But if you pray, so often there is a response, not in words, but deeper than natural consciousness. You touch something deeper; it is the spirit, and spirit responds to spirit. We have known this to happen, even to the point of a hand-squeeze, or a facial glow. It is the mystery of Divine life.

Chapter 6 - The Continuation of the Conflict in Relation to the Church as the Corporate Company

We have said enough to make it abundantly clear that there is an age-long battle for spiritual life, and that, if that life can be arrested in its manifestation, its expression, it *will* be so arrested. There is a great power and force working by the instrument of spiritual death to quench the testimony of the risen and ascended Lord within the individual believer, and within the Church as the Body of Christ. The individual believer and the Church are together in that battle for the manifestation of that life of the Lord. The issue is not as to the forfeiture of Divine, eternal life, nor as to whether Satan can take that life away from us, but as to the keeping of it from its full expression in believers individually and in the Church as a whole. That is the battle in which we are more or less engaged and concerned, according to the measure of our spirituality and our utterness for the Lord. What is true of the individual, then, is true of the whole Body.

The Higher Realms of the Battle and the Testimony

I think we can best get to the inside of this matter by noting the contrast between the first letter to the Corinthians and the letter to the Ephesians. By this means we shall be greatly helped in understanding the nature and realm of the battle for spiritual life. There are many practical suggestions and presentations in these two letters by which we can be governed in this matter. To begin with, let us note the realms in which these letters stand; for undoubtedly there is a great difference between them in this respect. We are familiar with the governing clauses of the letter to the Ephesians. The phrase "in the heavenlies" is one of its dominating notes. We know quite well as soon as we take up the letter to the Ephesians that we are in the realm of the heavenlies. A great emancipation has taken place, a great lifting out, a great extrication, a great separation. One whole world has been left behind and another has been entered in a spiritual way, where things partake the utterness of the Lord, where the Lord is seen in a full way as Sovereign Head over all things to the Church. Here there is nothing fragmentary, nothing partial, nothing imperfect, but everything is viewed as complete, full and final, and as linked in a perfect way with the Lord in heaven. Here all the expressions are heavenly expressions. It is a realm, and the testimony is there seen in true heavenly character and vigour. We mean that the testimony is operating in a heavenly realm. It is in those ultimate relationships which are spiritual, with forces and intelligences which are supernatural, which are more than human, and more than the forces and intelligences of this earth, that the testimony is seen to be operating. The testimony is reaching the ultimate ranges of this universe, is touching principalities and powers, world rulers of this darkness, spiritual hosts of wickedness. It is there that something is being registered. It is back there that the testimony is being established fulfilled and expressed.

We cannot get further back than that. It goes behind everything seen, everything handled, everything known here, and it touches that realm which is responsible for all that is going on here.

Turn to the first letter to the Corinthians, and see into what a different realm you enter. You find very little that is heavenly there. You find that immediately you begin to move into this letter you are touching the earthlies, mundane, natural things - and what a mass of such things there is! There is none of the atmosphere of the heavenlies here. You find yourself down in somewhat sordid things, even amongst the Lord's people. Sordid is not too strong a word in some connections. You are having to deal with all the unpleasantness, all the wretched aspects of mixture and spiritual weakness and immaturity, and be occupied with things which you would fain sweep aside and have done with. You feel as you move here: "Oh, that we could get out of this realm of things; divisions, schisms and quarrellings, lawsuits and whatnot! How earthly it is!" It is another realm altogether, and because it is so earthly, because there is such an absence of the heavenly, you are not surprised that the testimony is so poor. You can find here no trace of registration upon spiritual forces. If you read this first letter to the Corinthians from an entirely spiritual standpoint, you have to say that the situation is rather one where the evil forces have gained an advantage than of their having been overthrown. You have to admit that the enemy is running roughshod here amongst the saints. He seems in some things to be having his way altogether, and carrying things into a realm which it is a shame to speak of even in the world. Yes, it is true that the enemy is no defeated foe, so far as these believers are concerned, or so far as the situation in this letter is concerned. He is

having too much of his own way, simply because they are so much on the earthly level of things.

That speaks for itself, does it not? The testimony, for its real value and effectiveness, demands that the Lord's people, the Church, be a heavenly Body. It demands that! It is clear that these believers at Corinth had come into a very small measure of the power of His resurrection, simply because they had not entered into the meaning of His death, His Cross. It is a sad and painful reflection that the Apostle should have to remind them of the opportunity that had been theirs by what he says in the opening section of this letter: "And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom... I was with you in weakness and in fear, and in much trembling. I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." That had been Paul's attitude and message and aim when he went to Corinth some considerable time before he wrote the letter. Now, his having been amongst them, stressing, emphasizing Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and nothing else, and then much later writing such a letter, exhibits the fact that they had not learned that for which he had been there!

If there is a living apprehension of Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, you will not have divisions like this, nor schisms, fornication, and all these things. They had missed the meaning of the Cross. They had failed to apprehend the message upon which the Apostle had laid such undivided and such exclusive stress in his presence amongst them. And if they do not know the meaning of the Cross, how can they know the meaning of the resurrection? How can they know the power of the resurrection? And if they do not know that, then how can they know the power of that resurrection-life registering the impact of the risen, living Lord upon spiritual forces? You can never undo divisions among the saints by bringing saints together to discuss their differences, and to ask them to make them up. The only way in which such things can be dealt with amongst the Lord's people is to get down on your knees and deal with the forces behind. The power of the enemy behind that thing has to be broken. You can never patch up a situation like that, because it is devilish.

What is true in the matter of divisions is true in every other matter in this letter. It is the enemy behind who is ultimately the occasion of all this disorder, and there is nothing but the impact of a risen, ascended, sovereign Lord against the enemy behind which will make for a better state of things. All this is made very evident in Corinth. They could not register that impact upon spiritual forces because they were not in the right realm. That is a heavenly realm of activity and they were on the earth, amongst the earthlies. The realm makes a lot of difference to the testimony.

If you are trying to operate in the power of the testimony of the ascended and reigning Lord, and are living an earthly life, you are going to be absolutely worsted and proved completely insufficient for the situation. If we are really going to have the coming through of the power of His throne, then we must be severed in a spiritual way from this world, from this earth. We must be, in a spiritual sense, a heavenly people seated together with Him in the heavenlies, blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies, and so on. The realm is important for the testimony's functioning.

It is to this testimony that we are called. This is not some ideal impossible of realization. This is not something presented as a high level of truth. This is the thing for which the Church is constituted. I do not believe, as some people seem to believe, that the Church in Corinth and the Church in Ephesus are two different Churches. There is a teaching which says that the Body in Corinth is not the same Body as that in Ephesus. I do not believe that for a moment and I do not believe that the Corinthians there called for anything less than the Ephesians. It is the same calling. The Corinthians were as much called to a heavenly life and heavenly testimony as were the Ephesians, or any others. It is a matter of whether we accept the meaning of the Cross to bring us through into the power of His resurrection, and that will determine how far we shall be the expression of that ultimate power of the enthroned Lord.

That "realm" question touches any number of contingencies. It raises the whole question of whether we are living on an earthly level; whether we are officially bound up with something which, after all, is only earthly in its constitution, even though it be of a religious kind. All such questions as these are raised, and with them the issue as to whether we are out with the Lord in an emancipated, free, and clear way as His heavenly people. We are content to leave it there for the time, and you can ask the Lord to show you what it means in a fuller explanation to your own heart.

The Range of the Battle and the Testimony

Running parallel with the realm is what we may call the range of things; not so much the dimensions as the values, the qualities. Turn again to the Ephesian letter, and note some of the great words that are found in it. There are some wonderful statements, and phrases, and terms. "The *exceeding greatness* of his power," "Strengthened with all might by his Spirit in the inward man," "Able to do *exceeding abundantly above* all that we ask or think, *according to the power that worketh in us*" - the power that worketh in us is capable of enabling us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think - "Raised him... and made him to sit at his own right hand in the heavenly places *far above all* rule, and authority, and power, and dominion... and gave him to be *head over all things to the church... the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*" Pick out all these transcendent, superlative things in the letter. Do not regard them just as words, just as oratory, but mark the tremendous range of value and caliber represented by these things. You have nothing to compare with them in the first letter to the Corinthians.

If you turn to the chapter in that letter which perhaps carries you farthest in thought and revelation, the fifteenth chapter, you will find you are, after all, only dealing with resurrection, and that, the resurrection of the body; great and glorious things, it is true, as to the nature of the resurrection body. But when you have your resurrection body you are only then entering upon the great realm of the eternities. It may be a marvelous thing for this corruptible to put on incorruption, and I am quite sure we shall think it is a marvelous thing when it happens. It will be a glorious thing when the final touch of death with regard to our bodies is swallowed up victoriously. But we are only started on the career which is presented to us in the letter to the Ephesians for the ages to come. There are very vital things in the first letter to the Corinthians but in the range, in the depth and the height, the length and the breadth, so far as spiritual value is concerned, there is no comparison. Even when you deal with the Church, the Body, in 1 Corinthians 12, you are largely dealing with it from the side of its expression here. When you deal with it in the Ephesian letter you are carrying it higher, away from conditions where it is necessary to say such a thing as this: "One member cannot say to another, I have no need of you." How that reveals what had been the spirit of things at Corinth, and what an earthly level had obtained there! The Apostle, it is true, is giving an unfolding of spiritual relationships, but it is of such a kind as is largely occasioned, if not wholly, by spiritual disorder among the saints. But when you come into Ephesians 4 and touch the truth of the Body there, you are breathing an altogether different atmosphere.

Pass on to Ephesians 5:32: "This mystery is great: I speak in regard of Christ and of the church." You are carried away into the great mystery of the Body. That is something deeper. What is the explanation of this difference? It is not that they are two different Churches, nor that they represent two different callings. It is that there are two different levels upon which they live. If all these wonderful things presented in Ephesians, these mighty, weighty things are elements of the true testimony of Jesus, then they belong to a place where the earthlies are left behind. To put that in another way: you have to leave the earthlies if you are coming into the realm where those mighty forces are operating.

Would you know the exceeding greatness of His power which is to usward who believe? You cannot if you live on a Corinthian level, if you live on a natural, earthly basis, even as a Christian. Do you want to know the fullness of Christ? Do you want to become in a related way the fullness of Him that filleth all in all? You can never be that if you live spiritually at Corinth. The testimony is a mighty thing. It is a thing fraught with these massive elements and features of the risen and ascended Lord. There will be a universal expression of that fullness in the ages to come, but even now we are to partake of it. It is to be known and set forth now in a spiritual way in the life of the Church, but the Church has to come out on to the ground which is presented in this letter to the Ephesians. I am not saying that the church at Ephesus was on this level. It may or it may not have been. But it seems perfectly clear that the Ephesian saints were in a position to have such a revelation given to them, and the Corinthians were not. The Corinthians were not ready for it. But if Paul's visit to Ephesus and the results are indicative of anything, they do speak of thoroughness there. They brought their books of magic and made a great fire of them, and their price was considerable. They sacrificed everything to the fire because they had found a new mystery, a heavenly force which was more than the force of the magicians, the occultists, the spiritists, something far above all that. They had discovered Christ, and at great cost they let all else go, and that prepared the way for a wonderful revelation to them. Paul was able to say to those Ephesian elders: "I shrank not from

declaring unto you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). You can never declare the whole counsel of God to any company of people unless they are ready for it. He had a clear way at Ephesus, and on their part it represented a spiritual position of abandonment of earthly connections, relationships, interests, and religious systems.

We focus our attention for a few minutes upon some of the more specific reasons and causes. These have been included in our general survey, but we now mention them particularly.

The Comparison of the Corinthian and Ephesian Assemblies

1. The Place of Man

Look at these two, and focus your attention upon one word, or one title, one designation namely, that of "man." What was the place of man in these two different assemblies? In Corinth man, as such, had a very large place. The Apostle says: "I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ... for whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal, and walk after the manner of men? For when one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not men?" (1 Corinthians 3:1, 3-4). Is it not man, as such, that is very much in view? Man was coming into view to the obscuring of Christ. All the way through that letter natural elements in man are being dealt with. Whatever it is, at whatever point you touch this terrible trouble that engaged the Apostle, you are touching some expression of man in himself, some dispute, for example, though over what we do not exactly know. But two believers, members of the same assembly, have perhaps been in some business transaction, and there has been something not straight, something upon which they have come to a serious difference, and one says: "All right, I will take it to court, and will fight you there!" It is man doing things as man does them. All the time it is a case of man occupying a strong place of possessiveness and forcefulness.

Turn to the letter to the Ephesians, and see where man comes in there. You cannot find him; but we find "one new man," that new man which we are exhorted to put on (Ephesians 4:24). The old man has given place to the new man. It is not the individual standing for himself that we see now but rather the individual rightly functioning in the corporate new man. It is no longer a case of so many separated individuals all thinking of their own interests, but all that individualism is lost in the one collectivity and relativity of the new man. You can almost see them growing up into Him - "Till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

That word "man" is a key to the situation in both letters. How? If he is allowed to come in, there will be a state such as you have at Corinth. If he goes out, the prospects are of an Ephesian position. That is the work of the Cross. You are not surprised, then, that in the Ephesian letter fairly early you come upon the words: "... quickened us together with Christ... and raised us up in him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus..." All that quickening and raising presupposes a death, and that is the death of the old man, the man by nature.

2. The Place of the World

The word "world" occurs a number of times in the letter to the Corinthians - "the wisdom of this world," "the princes of this world." Read down those first two chapters, and see what a large place the world takes. The world and its wisdom, the world with its spirit, the world with its way, had a large place amongst the Corinthian believers. If you follow through the letter you cannot get away from it. It is the way of the world, the way the world does things, or conditions ruling in the world - the spirit of the world - that is continually before us. The world has a large place in their reasoning. They are even handling heavenly and Divine things with worldly wisdom.

Turn to the letter to the Ephesians and see where the world is. It is left behind and believers are seen spiritually as out of the world, though not literally so. They were here on the earth as much as ever Corinthians were, and were in the world as a sphere. They were here, and yet not here. Recall those strange and seemingly contradictory phrases in John 17: "... the men whom thou gavest me out of the world...;" "They are not of the world." "I pray not that thou shouldest take them from the world..." We know

what is meant in a spiritual sense and there is no contradiction; in it and out of it at the same time. In Ephesians 5 and 6 those things which belong to ordered life here are mentioned. There are families; husbands and wives, parents and children; masters and servants. You say: "Merely earthly!" No! They are the relationships proper to life here, and yet in them is the possibility of a heavenly life. All are lifted on to a heavenly level where spiritual interests govern those relationships with a view to heavenly purposes and not just earthly interests. The world, in the sense in which it is found in 1 Corinthians, is not found in Ephesians.

That explains the testimony and shows what is necessary for this impact upon spiritual forces. That can never be unless we come to the same position, with the world left behind in this sense. "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood" - that is the world's way of doing things - "but against the principalities, against the powers..." It is a case of getting behind flesh and blood, and what a much more effective wrestling that is! What mighty issues there are in the spiritual realm! How things count when we know the secret of functioning there in the power of the risen Lord! But that requires that we shall know here, in mind and in spirit, absolute separation from this world.

3. The Difference in the Order at Corinth and Ephesus

At Corinth two things, or two sides of the one thing are presented. In what the Apostle has to say you have a heavenly order brought before you. He is indicating what that heavenly order is in the Church and is seeking to recover it, or to establish it. But over against, at least the intimation, of heavenly order - for the Apostle does not develop it in fullness - there is a terrible disorder in the assembly. Read through the letter again, and see how everything is out of order. Their procedure, their government, their relationships, are all in disorder. In dealing with the causes the Apostle has raised questions and issues which have become the battleground of the Church ever since: relationships and orders, positions and administrations in the Church. All this was out of order at Corinth.

We are not going to deal with the specific points. It would take too long, and might not be altogether profitable. At any rate, it might swing us away from our specific intention at this time. Sufficient to say that the question at Corinth is largely a question of order or disorder. We must recognize that. There is nothing arbitrary about the Apostle in that letter. A false explanation and interpretation has been put upon a great deal that Paul said in that letter - as, for instance, upon his reference to the place of the sisters in the assembly. The interpretation or construction placed upon his words has been that Paul was a woman-hater, and that he was caught up in the Rabbinical idea of women, which held they were subject and had to be kept in a place of subjection, and therefore that what he wrote in that letter was out from that mentality, that conception. Nothing is further from the truth. Nothing is a greater libel against the Apostle. The Apostle was not dealing for one moment with the question of status, of honour; he was dealing purely with a matter of order. He will not rule sisters right out of the assembly in the matter of functioning, but he will show that their functioning is relative, and that it is both right and profitable when in its place. It is a matter of order. Let that be established, and be quite clear. We fasten upon this one point to indicate what we mean.

Turn to the letter to the Ephesians, and you can discover nothing about disorder in the assembly. Chapter 4 presents the Body and its relationships established; or that part of the letter brings it mainly into view. It is a beautiful heavenly order. There is no reference to an upsetting of that order; it is simply presented as though it obtained there. There is no quarrel over it, no fighting for it; it is a statement of a heavenly order. You are in a different atmosphere altogether. The point is that the Church's testimony to the risen Lord in the power of His risen life is bound up with order in the House of God. If the Divine order is upset, the testimony is weakened, and is nullified in that measure. There is a tremendous amount bound up with order. Let no one think that the appeal for order is simply with a view to having a domination, a control, a power over others, a desire to subject people. The word "subjection" has become anathema to a good many because they have missed its significance. It is the value of Divine order, heavenly order, expressed amongst the Lord's people that is in point; for this is so vital a factor in the meeting of the enemy. A Corinthian disorder cannot destroy the power of the principle, and world rulers cannot stand before spiritual forces when a Divine order is established and adhered to and sacredly guarded. Then there is a wonderfully clear way for the Lord to come through and meet the enemies of the Church. Very often a church is divided and broken, and crying out for victory, for deliverance, for power, for

effectiveness; and if the Lord could only be heard speaking He would be heard to say: "Set your house in order! That is the way to power. Put things right in your midst, and your prayers will be answered. You are crying to Me to give you something which you call power, effectiveness. The way to it is through the clearing up of the disorders that are among you."

So the expression of His life demands a heavenly realm; separation from the world by the death of the old man in his natural strength and life, the constituting of things according to the heavenly pattern. This is all practical. There are no flights of thought to carry you away into ecstasies, but there is a coming down on to the practical basis of everyday things. I am persuaded that nothing touches the heart of the whole issue more than this. I am certain that the Church's defeat, and weakness, and failure in testimony today, in the first place, is because it has become such an earthly thing; because of the worldly elements that have gained entrance; because man, as man, has such a large place in it; because the heavenly order does not obtain, but a man-made order in what is called the Church. These things are as closely related to the effectiveness of testimony as anything can be.

Do you know heavenly union with the Lord? Have you from your heart abandoned this world? Have you accepted the meaning of His Cross for the putting aside of all that belongs to man as such? Are you quite sure that you are fitting in your place in the House of God, and that you are not out of your place? So far as your devotion to the Lord is concerned, are you really bent upon being in your place, and remaining in your place, and functioning there for the Lord? Are you a party to something which is not an expression of the heavenly pattern? Are you an officer of an official connection, supporting and upholding an order which is not the Lord's order? Well, you will be beaten in the general defeat of such a thing. It is bound to be defeat, so far as the main testimony is concerned. These are practical, direct questions. The Lord give grace, and understanding, and response to what this means. I have no doubt that as you go on from now the meaning of all this will come to you in a growing way. You may not grasp it all now, but it is something laid in store. Remember, it does matter tremendously whether you are in a Corinthian condition or an Ephesian, and these are the features and the differences.

The Lord make us, if we may say it in a spiritual sense, good Ephesians!

Chapter 7 - The Divine Purpose in the Continuation of the Conflict

Reading: Judges 1:1-26; Colossians 2:15; Ephesians 6:12; Exodus 23:29,30.

We come to a closing word on this matter, the nature of which is indicated by what is contained in the passages we have read.

The first thing we have to grasp fully is the fact which is brought before us in the Colossian passage: that in the case of the Lord Jesus the battle is a finished thing. So far as He is concerned, the victory is secured in absoluteness, in fullness and in finality. He did strip off from Himself principalities and powers, and made a show of them, exhibiting them, triumphing over them in His Cross. That brings us to the ground represented by Israel when the Lord said: "I will drive them out..." That means that the Lord is in the place of complete possession already. So far as He is concerned, the victory is secure. Now from that point there is this other side of the progressive realization of that victory by the Lord's people. We have the victory in absoluteness in Him, but we are to enter into it progressively ourselves; and it is the progressive aspect of this conflict, and the great need in relation to it, that is to concern us for a little while at this time.

The Progressive Nature of the Conflict

1. The Fact

The progressive character is clearly seen; that is, we see it to be a fact. That is perfectly clear from the Old Testament type as well as from the New Testament statement. The words in Exodus 23 are true to what we find later in the latter: "I will not drive them out from before thee in one year... by little and little I will drive them out..." (verses 29-30). We may cite Ephesians 6 as a chapter in the New Testament that indicates this progressive nature of the conflict: "... our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers..." (verse 12). In spite of the fact that the Lord Jesus has Himself stripped them off, overcome them, displayed them as defeated, we are still in conflict with them. We are not represented as having sat down with the battle over, we are still in it. Of course, that hardly needs to be said to those who have spiritual experience; but here is the fact of the progressiveness of this battle for spiritual life, spiritual ascendancy, over the forces of spiritual death. We need not dwell more upon the fact.

2. The Divine Reason

Seeing that the Lord Himself has gained an absolute victory, and that, so far as He is concerned, there is nothing more to be done - all the enemies have been met and vanquished in His Cross - why could He not just give that victory over to us in its completeness and we go happily on through life without any spiritual conflict at all? That may sound rather a foolish question! But we have to bring that question to the Lord and ask Him to explain why it must be that in His will, in His ordaining, conflict should go on and victory be progressive, instead of absolute all at once. Why must the fight go on to the end? Why must it continue? This passage in Exodus explains the matter for us: "I will not drive them out in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, *until thou be increased...*" The Divine reason, then, is that there must be development in order to possess the ground which the enemy still usurps. Our full possession of the victory tarries because of inability to occupy, because of lack of capacity, because of spiritual limitation, spiritual immaturity.

Now let us pass from the Old Testament literalism into the New Testament spirituality, and, if we can, think in terms of spiritual territory, see territory occupied by spiritual forces. No material forces can dispossess them, nor occupy that territory. Spiritual forces alone can occupy spiritual territory. If such are found in possession, and the only thing that can supplant them is what is spiritual, then there has to be that which is at least equal to such forces in order to occupy the place which they as yet occupy. Therefore it becomes a matter of spiritual measure, spiritual capacity. What the Lord says here in

principle is that He will make spiritual ascendancy contingent upon spiritual growth. So often in the battle we go to the Lord and pray, and plead, and appeal for victory, for ascendancy, for mastery over the forces of evil and death, and our thought is that in some way the Lord is going to come in with a mighty exercise of power and put us into a place of spiritual ascendancy as in an act. We must have that mentality corrected. What the Lord does is to enlarge us to possess. He puts us through some exercise, some experience, and takes us by some way which means our spiritual expansion, an increase of spirituality and spiritual capacity, and as we increase spiritually so we occupy the larger places spontaneously. The statement in Exodus makes that so clear.

The figure is interesting. Here are people who are called to victory, to conquest which is progressive and ever developing, and the Lord is doing the dispossessing, and is going before: "Behold, I send an angel before thee..." Now supposing the Lord goes in advance of His people, drives out all the enemies and leaves the territory unoccupied, but His people are so small that they can only dwell in a part of it. What is going to happen? Neither God nor the devil believes in a vacuum. Leave yourself in a state of passivity and lack of definite occupation, and you will soon find yourself in trouble. So far as the Lord's people are concerned, the devil does not believe in having a vacuum, so he fills it. The principle of this is seen in the story told by the Lord Himself about the man in whom there was a demon: the demon was cast out, the house was left without an occupant, and the demon went wandering in waterless places seeking rest. Finding none, the demon at length returned to the man out of whom he had been cast. He found the house swept and garnished, but unguarded, so he promptly took possession. But this time the evil spirit entered with seven others. It is quite clear from the Lord's illustration that the enemy does not believe in a vacuum.

The Lord likewise does not believe in a vacuum. He believes in things being filled. He believes in full possession, full occupation. That demands, in a spiritual matter, that there shall be spiritual enlargement before He can give greater space. I am afraid that Christendom has twisted things round the other way and has made large space, hoping to grow to it. So great buildings are put up, and then an immense amount of work and labour is set in motion to try to fill them. The Lord does not do things in that way. First of all He enlarges, and then He gives accordingly. Let us not, however bring the matter down on to so low a level, but keep it in the realm of spiritual conflict and warfare. The law which the Lord sets forth here in this passage is that spiritual ascendancy over the forces of darkness and death corresponds to spiritual growth, and spiritual growth is essential to spiritual ascendancy, to enlarged territory. The challenge with which the Lord meets us is this: "Can you fill it? Can you occupy it? Can you possess it? Are you able, if I give it to you?" The disaster would be all the greater if the Lord gave large territory and we could not occupy it and fill it. How important is spiritual growth, spiritual maturity, spiritual increase!

The whole question of progressive victory rests upon progressive spiritual development. It does not rest upon our having the gift of ascendancy from the Lord. Ascendancy is, in effect, developed in us by spiritual growth and enlargement; it is a matter of capacity. Hence those who know most of victory are not always those who talk most about it, but are those who have been through experiences and processes by which they have been mightily extended in Christ spiritually. Turning that round the other way, it should be a comfort to know that everything the Lord does with us which is in the nature of a painful stretching: that cutting of deeper channels, deeper furrows; that leading into depths; that breaking up and breaking open; all that which is in the direction of making for a deeper, wider, higher energy of the Lord through suffering is intended to bring into a place of spiritual power, spiritual ascendancy. Thus the power of the enemy becomes weaker, because the power of the saints is becoming greater through their growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. The power of the saints becomes greater only on that ground. We have to be built up unto power, unto ascendancy, unto conquest. It is quite evident that if there is not an adequate spiritual background to the life of those who make assaults upon the enemy, they will be knocked to pieces, for they will not be able to stand up to him. It requires that there should be spiritual competence, spiritual wealth, spiritual background and spiritual fullness in order to stand up to the enemy and force him to quit the position. It is important that we should recognize that.

We must be enlarged to occupy. The Lord will not give otherwise. He is governed by infinite wisdom in the way in which He deals with us: "I will not drive them out from before thee in one year... by little and

little I will drive them out from before thee until thou be increased..." The measure of spiritual ascendancy is the measure of spiritual increase.

3. A Deterrent if Regarded in a Wrong Way

We hurry on to note another thing. That progressive character can become a deterrent if it is regarded in a wrong way. It seems clear that many of Israel were deterred and discouraged from going on in the fight and in utterly driving out the enemy because it was a progressive, or a slow business. Somehow or other this human nature of ours likes to get things done with one bound, to have it all cleared up with one stroke, and the long-drawn-out process of spiritual growth is often a very discouraging thing to the flesh. So they did not utterly drive out those nations, simply because it required persistence. It required, as we say, a pegging away at it, a steady devotion. It demanded a continuous prosecution, ever something more yet to be done.

It is like that with us. We are so often discouraged and deterred from going on because we seem to make so little progress; because there always seems to be more before us than behind; because we seem, after all, to have gained so little; because we see so much still to be gained. Mark you, that is a part of the Divine, sovereign ordering. So long as we are here the Lord will not give us any occasion whatever for saying: "Now we can settle down! Oh, but how we are expecting that almost any day! Our thought is that it will not be long before we come to a place where we have got the upper hand, where we are in ascendancy, and the fight will then be over, at any rate in the main, and we can come to rest. I want to tell you in all faithfulness that right up to the last stroke in this battle you will feel practically nothing has been done in comparison with what there is to be done. You will have a sense that the forces before are still well-nigh overwhelming. No matter how far you progress spiritually, you will often come to the place where you feel that you are being almost overwhelmed and that the real back of this thing has not been broken. The pathway to the glory is the pathway of increasing conflict, and the most bitter part of that conflict will take place just before entering the glory. The Lord will never give us reason for settling down.

That is another phase of Israel's failure. On the one hand, while many were discouraged because of the progressive and long-drawn-out character of the conflict, it is quite clear that many others entered into a state of unholy content. They said: "We have fought, and we have got so far, and that will do." Discontent can be both holy and unholy. There is such a thing as holy discontent. While there remain spiritual forces to be driven out, to be dispossessed, and while the whole range and realm of what is spiritual still has in it that which is opposed to the Lord, you and I have no right to be content. We must not settle down and say: "Oh, that is the ideal, but it is impossible! It is all very well to see what ought to be, but it is no use setting up a counsel of perfection, and expecting and aiming at what is not possible amongst the Lord's people or in our spiritual experience!" If we begin to reason like that, we shall find ourselves in a very sorry state. During the four hundred years occupied by the Judges, an attitude of that kind produced misery, continuous defeat and weakness, and a terrible state of up-and-down experience throughout that long period. Look at the account in this book of the Judges, and mark the periods under which Israel labored in bondage and defeat! Why? The explanation is found in the first chapter. Read through the chapter again, and note how repeatedly it is said of certain tribes of Israel that they "drove not out" their enemies. The result was that they had this long time of defeat, failure, and misery. What had happened? They had entered into a state of unholy content. They had said: "Well, the ideal, of course, would be to possess the whole land, but the present measure of occupation seems to be all that is possible, and we must accept things as they are."

That comes to us as a very serious challenge in relation to the Lord's testimony. We look out on the world today, on what we call the Christian world, and we see its state, which is indeed very like that in the days of the Judges. We see divisions and failures in what is called the Church, and the question arises: Is it possible to have a whole testimony, a full testimony? Is it possible to have a complete expression of the Lord's mind? The answer that is so often returned may be stated thus: "Well, that is the ideal, but you are setting yourself an impossible task if you attempt it. You had better accept the situation, regard it as all in ruins, and make the best of it!" Are you content with that? I am not, and I have decided that even if I die in the attempt I will give myself to the obtaining of a fuller expression of the Lord's mind. In so far as my own life is concerned, it is going to be poured out to the last to get His people to the fullness of His will, and I am not going to accept this situation which is so far short of it. It is an unholy thing to enter into

contentment of that kind. It is that failure to go on, in spite of the seemingly impossible, which has produced the terrible paralysis and spiritual ineffectiveness of the Lord's people that is almost world-wide today.

The Necessity for Fellowship

We come to the final word which we feel to be the note which must stand above every other note. We see the reality of the battle, we see the many laws which govern the battle, but what is it that we need if we are to win? You might answer in different ways, but what I see as being a dominant need, if not the predominant one, is that which is at least suggested in the first part of the first chapter of the book of Judges. There the question is asked: "Who shall go up for us first against the Canaanites, to fight against them? And the Lord said, Judah shall go up... And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him. All Judah went up, and the Lord delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they smote of them in Bezek ten thousand men." Here you have real business, real effectiveness. What was behind it? It was fellowship and co-operation. Here you have the spirit of brotherhood manifesting itself in mutual helpfulness and support in the battle. The enemy has held the position and withstood the people of God because of the lack of that. One of the strategies by which he has gained his end has been to keep the Lord's people from a downright spiritual co-operation in the battle; to get them scattered, divided, disintegrated, and on individual lines instead of coming right in as a corporate and collective instrument for God and dealing with the issues in a mighty way together. We cannot lay too much stress upon that.

This is the burden of my heart: The Lord's great need is of a prayer instrument that comes together with one object, and that is the driving of the enemy off the ground. Not just offering petitions, nor just pouring out words which are intended to be prayers, for however good they might be, however right they might be, such prayers fall short of this mighty laying hold of the Lord's own victory and bringing it into operation where the enemy is. The victory is in the Lord's hands. He did strip off principalities and powers. He has said: "I will drive out." What has to follow? There has to be a coming together, and, in faith, a laying hold, as it were, of that victory; an appropriating of it, and a bringing of it to bear upon the spiritual situation. Until we get something like that we are not going to see the spiritual counterpart of this mighty sweep of triumph in Judah and Simeon. Here is real progress. Here we see the enemy having to quit.

Oh, for the coming together of God's people for real business in prayer; coming in business-like spirit, with a business-like mind, with full purpose of heart and as one man in a spirit of fellowship, because of the testimony of the Lord which is at stake, which is involved, and which is bound up with it. The Lord's need today is this coming together and squaring right down upon Satanically ridden situations to clear the ground of the enemy. I feel that to be the Lord's pre-eminent need. We do not take the thing enough to heart. We have not got the Lord's testimony sufficiently at heart. If we really were concerned for the Lord's testimony in this earth, we should only need to hear of the impact against the Lord's people and the prevailing of death in any one situation for us to get down on that situation with such purpose that we would not give the enemy any rest until he withdrew from it. But we can hear of such situations, hear of need, hear of our brethren in the fight pressed out of measure, and can be content with a mere momentary petition: "Oh, Lord, help them! Oh, Lord, bless them! Oh, Lord, come to their rescue!" when the Lord is saying quite definitely, if only we had ears to hear: "Wherefore criest thou unto me?... lift up thy rod..." (Exodus 14:15-16). We have the rod of the Lord's victory in our hands - or we ought to have. We have the rod of the mighty name of Jesus, and we come with cries to the Lord, when the Lord is saying, in effect: "Bring to bear upon that situation this victory which is in Me for you!" The need is for the coming together in fellowship, in co-operation, to bring to bear upon the situation the great victory which is in the Lord's possession for us.

Oh, may the Lord stir you in this matter unto this mighty prayer in the name of Jesus, and get an instrument, a vessel, in which and through which there will be this registration of the power of His throne upon those situations which are under the domination of the enemy! That is the Lord's great need. There are many of the Lord's people and many places in this world where the Lord's testimony is defeated, arrested, locked up, smothered and unable to break through; everything is at a standstill; the enemy is

holding the ground, and it is as much as the Lord's people can do to hold their own, to stay there. There needs to be some power coming through to clear the ground of the enemy, and that power will come through only when the Lord's people take up the matter in such a mighty fellowship of prayer that through that prayer the throne will operate.

There are many who know they are not getting through in their prayer life on their own and that they cannot deal with the situation themselves. Many are deeply and terribly conscious that what they need is a mighty reinforcing by prayer cooperation in order to get through, but the trouble is as to where such reinforcement is to come from? Those who are sufficiently concerned are not to be found. There are not those who know how to pray like this in the power of the name. Forgive me for being so emphatic, but the prevailing conditions demand strong words. The need is to recover a prayer instrument by which the power that is in the hand of the Lord Jesus shall be released upon situations which are locked up in the power of the enemy. The Lord rouse us, stir us deeply in this matter, and make us at least a part of such a prayer instrument.

Let us purpose to come together for prayer! Let us not wait until we are called! If it is possible to get together, and if there are those around us whom we can call together for prayer, let us do it. Do not wait for the appointed meeting of prayer. If you can get prayer fellowship with anybody, get down on the Lord's interests with them, and lay yourselves out in this matter for the deliverance of situations from the domination of the power of the enemy.

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