

THE ALTAR

The Eternal
Sacrifice
of God

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First published June 1978

Revised June 1983

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The text

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The Eternal Sacrifice of God

The Altar theme is one of the most important truths of scriptural revelation. Either by direct or indirect mention, or in parallel or closely associated ideas, the truth of the altar is presented to us from beginning to end of the Book. Part of the purpose of this issue is to trace and develop the truth related to the altar as it unfolds from Genesis onwards throughout the two testaments. To do this exhaustively is altogether too great a task; in some connections, however, we shall pause to inquire into the text more fully than in others. This will be necessary for the sake of the truth which God wishes us to understand, that understanding, we may give Him greatest pleasure by entering into His life.

One of the wonderful things about truth is that it is greater than our understanding of it. God has sent forth the Spirit of truth to guide us into it though, that entering in the enlightened heart should see the truth to be as vast as God Himself. It is therefore not surprising that what is often at first thought to be the truth about a thing is soon discovered to be only a part or partial view of the whole truth. Because this is so, every new discovery ought to be regarded only as a truth, or a facet of truth about the truth. Certainly this is so about the truth of the altar, as we shall see.

As is so often the case, the New Testament supplies the key to this subject. At first this may seem more than a little strange, for in it there are so few references to the altar. This is because under the New Covenant there is no place for a literal, earthly altar. With the passing of the Old Covenant and the earthly priesthood there remains no need for any of the means or instruments or place of service necessary to its function. Upon the rare occasions when the altar is referred to in the New Testament, it has mostly to do with the former earthly legal system given by Moses. From the time of the death and resurrection of Christ this became obsolescent and has long since passed away. Other than in this connection, it is mentioned either with regard to the order of priesthood now functioning under Melchizedek in heaven or with reference to heathen religion, or else with the intention that it be understood only in a figurative and spiritual sense. Nevertheless, in whichever connection it may be mentioned in the New Testament, what is said about it furnishes us with a key to its meaning in the Old Testament.

Perhaps even stranger still, the New Testament passages which provide us with the best lead to the understanding of the whole range of truth associated with the altar do not in fact mention the word. For instance Peter speaks of 'the Lamb (of God) without blemish or spot, who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you', and John says that Jesus was 'the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world', but neither of them mentions the altar. How long before the foundation of the world Jesus was foreordained to be its redeeming Lamb we are not told, nor do we know the precise occasion when He was slain, but the knowledge that sacrifice and death took place long before men ever made an altar on earth introduces a new element into our thinking about it all. Evidently sacrificial offering as known and practised by man is not an idea that originated with him, neither is it an emergency measure devised by God as of political expediency; it is an absolute necessity, apart from which eternal life could not be. This is brought out to us by the revelation that the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world.

Except God had told us this we should never have known, but being in possession of the fact, we see that sacrifice is so fundamental to being that without it the world itself could never have been created.

The Invisible Sacrifice

It is a most sobering and significant thought that when God laid the foundations of the world, He laid them in sacrifice. Almost involuntarily there spring to mind all the things it normally associates with that thought — animals, blood, altar and fire; but not in those things did God make His sacrifice. The sacrifice to which Peter and John refer is not flesh and blood but spiritual sacrifice. There were no flesh and blood creatures in existence when this great sacrifice was made, so all 'normal' sacrifice was completely impossible. This being so, it must also be true that sacrifice did not originally exist nor could then have been made for specific ends such as redemption or atonement or forgiveness, but was practised for some other purpose altogether. This may be quite new, perhaps revolutionary to our thinking, because we have been reared in the evangelical tradition of sacrifice for sin, but this sacrifice had nothing to do with sin, nor was it made for that purpose; it is eternal. The sacrifice of God was not, is not, nor ever shall be made in connection with anything except life itself; it has to do with being, not expiation.

For this reason it is without precedent or repetition, and is impossible of imitation; sacrifice is constant in the divine order of being and life.

Sacrifice and offering lie at the heart of God, eternal as He. God is love, and love cannot be apart from sacrifice. That is why God laid it at the heart of Israel's national life. He did not command sacrifice of His people just because of sin but of necessity to proclaim to them Himself; they must know His manner of being and His love. Sacrifice as Israel knew it was the adaptation and application to men's spiritual needs of the divine science of being. It was the physical phenomenon of a life-principle of deity. At that time sacrifice became sacrifices, repetitious and various. When bodies and blood were sacrificed for various reasons defined by God, they were intended by Him to be outward manifestations of spiritual realities; apart from that they had no value. How many in Israel understood this is a matter of speculation; David almost certainly did.

In process of time physical sacrifice had to be of course, for God had decreed that without shedding of blood remission of sins should never be available to anyone. However, vital though the need for forgiveness is, and necessary as the sacrifice was, whenever it was made the visible sacrifice was not the most important of the transactions then taking place; that for which it stood, and so poorly represented, was always the greater.

The Lamb of God

Sacrifices of animals made on God's altar pointed on through time to the actual bodily sacrifice of Christ Jesus; that was their limitation. They could not point backwards to eternity and the spiritual sacrifice that God made then, for flesh does not typify, nor can it understand spirit. Nevertheless the Levitical sacrifices were instituted to be reflective as well as predictive. By them hearts taught of God to know that the spiritual sacrifice is the real one are afforded a backward look through all time to that occasion when the Lamb was slain by God before the foundation of the world. Looking forward from the time of institution, they dimly and dumbly foreshadowed the least part of Jesus' sacrifice — that is the physical, outward sacrifice and death of the Lamb. Looking back with understanding from that time to the beginning of the world, they are seen to be projections from and adaptations of the eternal spiritual sacrifice which neither human eye saw nor human hand ever handled. Meditation upon the miracle convinces the heart also that they were but pale reflections of it.

Whether any eye but God's ever saw this miracle we do not know, but certainly if any did it was not a man's. But then it was not a miracle to God, only a natural demonstration of love — substitution — any sacrifice is only an application of the necessary principle of eternal being to present need. In whatever realm of natural life we move, the invisible, inaudible, intangible things are always vastly superior to those which we can apprehend by human sense. Real as the outward is, it is only of spiritual value to us as an indication, a parable or type of that which is inward; God intended and created it to be so.

Such Bible phrases as 'which was a figure for the time then present' for instance, specially inform us of the typical nature of the whole tabernacle complex and associated worship. Those things were solid and real enough, but they are none the less pictorial and teach us more by the reality of their existence than by what was accomplished by their practice. All were foreshadowings of the person and works of Christ; like the law itself under which they were ordained they found their fulfilment and end in Him. Spiritually, naturally and humanly He is their terminal point, for He fulfilled all. However, having said that, we have again arrived at the heart of the matter under consideration, for the physical person and sacrifice of Jesus of Nazareth only fulfilled that which was material and outward. When humanly manifest on the earth, especially at Calvary, He not only fulfilled inward truth, but the more pointedly and visibly expressed it.

Care must be taken lest in thinking along these lines the outward be divorced from the inward. In actual fact it is quite impossible to do this; nevertheless in our minds we must strive to keep them together as they truly are in Christ. In Him they are one, but while wholeheartedly confessing this, we must clearly understand and firmly assert also that the outward sacrifice at Golgotha was the least part of that which was transacted there. The endurance of the cross was vital to Him as a man and to God as the Eternal Being; it was also necessary to us men for our salvation and eternal being. Indeed the cross and all He suffered there was completely unavoidable to Him if He was to fulfil what the scriptures predicted and He Himself had said. However, save for the inward, unseen

things, which the visible, audible things indicated, the events of Calvary would have had little value. Since the unnamed thieves crucified one on either side of the Lord lingered on in their death-throes longer than Jesus did it is to be presumed that they also shed blood more copiously and suffered bodily tortures for a longer period than He did; it is almost as certain too that, with the possible exception of a few next of kin, their blood and death meant nothing at all to men, and have no spiritual value whatsoever. In common with all men of normal mentality, they fought death: Jesus did not.

Perhaps a fuller grasp of what was happening may be gained if we understand at least part of the reason why God blacked out the awful scene for three hours. He did it partly because He was seeking to emphasise that the outward, physical suffering of His Son was not the chief thing to which He was directing our attention. By drawing the veil of darkness over the whole scene He was attempting to redirect our gaze to what was happening in invisible realms. Paul says plainly 'we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal'.

The Indestructible Christ

The Christ is eternal. The Christ did not die. Jesus died. The physical body of the human/divine Jesus died, but the eternal Christhood of the Man of Calvary did not die, nor could it. Because the body of the man of the cross housed that Spirit who is the Christ, it was raised from the dead. The departing of the Spirit of the Christ from the body of Jesus brought about its death, so we say with Paul that 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures'; but to say that does not mean that the Christ died: He is completely indestructible. At His birth the angels said, 'Unto you is born a Saviour which is Christ the Lord', and He is recorded as saying to His Father, 'a body hast thou prepared me'. He said so at the time He joined the body formed in Mary's womb in preparation for the birth of the child Jesus, resultantly He was born Christ the Lord. He was the Christ — God manifest in the flesh.

The Jews said, 'we have heard out of the Law that Christ abideth for ever', and they were right. It was precisely this mystery that stumbled them, for calling Himself the Son of Man He was saying that He must be lifted up to die. They knew that the Christ is eternal and therefore cannot die. They were mystified because they stumbled at the stumbling-stone laid for them in Zion. Jesus died according to the scriptures; He suffered death, that is He allowed it and told others to do so too. 'Suffer it to be so now', He said, as He moved on to Calvary. According to scripture 'He should be the first that should rise from the dead'. He 'endured the cross', suffered death as well as suffering when dying, and rose again: Luke called it 'His passion'. Christ did not die; He conquered and destroyed death. He was found in fashion as a man and became obedient (unto God) unto death (as any man would have to) that His manhood might be highly exalted — His Christhood remained intact and eternal as ever.

John says of Him, 'the Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us, and we beheld His glory the Word was with God and the Word was God'. God the Word joined the tiny body of flesh for the purpose of dwelling on the earth in human form. It was a miracle and He did this in order that He should be the true tabernacle which God pitched and not man. God was moving along the line of scriptural fulfilment. Whilst living on earth among men in that tabernacle of flesh, He first displayed in it God's glory before all and then at last, by means of it, gave to His Father the one human sacrifice He required. Unto this end all the sacrifices made of old under the Mosaic Covenant pointed. At the time they were offered in connection with the tabernacle and temple erected with men's hands, but to God they spoke of Him. He once said of His body 'destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it again'. The voice of Him who indwelt the temple was speaking from within the temple; they could and did 'destroy' that (not permanently though as we know) but not Him.

Israel's Altar

From the day the Children of Israel were constituted a nation with a law and land of their own the Lord dwelt in their midst. From that time onward He commanded that sacrifice should become daily routine; each day was to begin and end with sacrifice. At set times throughout the year supplementary sacrifices were also to be made to Him; apart from this He would not, could not dwell with them. There were also great commemorative and prophetic feasts of Jehovah in which the people were invited under command to join with their God. This was the background in which they lived; in Israel sacrifice was as permanent as God's being and presence in their midst.

Israel may not have known that sacrifice was as necessary to Him as to them, but it was, so He secured their continued union by ensuring that His superior knowledge and will should be acknowledged and done. He did this by the simple means of enforcing the sacrificial system upon them as their only means of gaining entrance and approach to Himself. Their acceptance by Him and their continuance with Him as His people and His presence with them as their God depended primarily upon what took place at the altar. This has provided the ground for the concept of Calvary as being the means of atonement, forgiveness, redemption and cleansing. In short, the altar with its sacrifices are almost exclusively associated in our minds with the means of procuring salvation for men; few seem to realise that the sacrifices of ancient Israel were intended by God to signify far more than that.

The Cross — God's Altar

It is difficult for men of evangelical persuasion who love the cross of Christ to dissociate that cross from the human sacrifice and blood-offering He made there. They rightly see them as one. That is to say they see Him as God made man to accomplish human sacrifice for human sin. This is spoken of in numerous scriptures and specifically stated in words like those in Hebrews 13.11 — 'the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin are burned without the camp'. Because the Lord fulfilled this scripture and died without the city, they see Him crucified and sacrificed upon the cross as the sin-offering. Such realisation causes them to hymn their thanks to His name with undying gratitude, and rightly so, for the knowledge of their own sin and utter inability to change themselves fills them with self-loathing. Thus Calvary is their constant theme, and because they do not normally go beyond the simple and vitally necessary understanding of the Lord's human, sacrificial death, the greater truth of eternal sacrifice from which it came is lost to them. Despite the fact that God so specifically ordained and carefully fixed this truth as a constant factor of life in Israel, it is all too frequently unseen. Yet the series of invisible miracles accomplished by Christ on the cross was unspeakably marvellous and not the least of these was the way He changed His cross into an altar.

How gracious is the Lord who suffered for us without the gate in the place of a skull. Calvary was the mound of execution where criminals were hanged on trees and left to die; it was outlaws' territory where outcasts, lepers, thieves and wild beasts lived and fought and suffered and died. What compassions He felt, what love He showed, how wonderful He is that He should go there and suffer so for us! It is certain that the worshipping heart shall enter into no height except that height be equalled in experience, if not excelled in understanding, by the depth it has first plumbed. Yet how slowly we understand the mystery of God. It must be a real sorrow to Him that, although He has sought to reveal these things to us in so many ways, so few have grasped His secrets. All the Lord Jesus accomplished on the cross by paying the penalty for sin and bearing away its mass from us would have been to no avail if He had not at last turned the tree of curse and punishment and shame into an altar unto the Lord.

Only to the understanding heart does the cross become the altar of God. No other eyes but the eyes of our understanding can or may see the transformation. The high priest of Israel dealt in many parts and divers manner with strictly limited means and repetitious ceremonies. His ministry was only with woefully inadequate substitutes and signs, but our glorious Melchizedek did all at once. Moving in the eternal realities of His own life, He accomplished at the same time and place, in one act, everything that was required by God of Him, for God and man. Crucified, made sin, shamed, outcast, He contrived by His virtues to use the cross for His purposes, converting it to an altar whereon, by the eternal Spirit, He offered Himself without spot to God.

The word 'altar' first appears in scripture in connection with NOAH following the flood. When he came out of the Ark and entered upon the purged earth as a new man, the first thing he did was to build an altar unto the Lord, and offer sacrifices to God. If he had ever done such things before we are not told of them; he may have done and perhaps it is right to assume that by building an altar and sacrificing to God he was following the habit of a lifetime, but we do not know. What we do know is that, on leaving the Ark, the first significant work this new man wrought upon the renewed earth was to build an altar, take of the life within the Ark and sacrifice it to God. God then smelled a sweet smell.

All was at rest in heaven and on the new earth; though in a way different from how it was in the beginning, man was at one with God. It was as paradise regained, or the commencement of a new age; except for the presence of sin, because of the sacrifice all was as it was in the beginning. But even so, despite sin, perhaps because of it, through this man Noah God had established on earth an everlasting principle.

Almost certainly Noah was ignorant of the significance and function of the three persons in the being of God, and the principal manifestation of the love which is the most basic factor of eternal Being, namely self-sacrifice. God had not been able to reveal this in quite the same way before, so Noah was not following a precedent. Nevertheless the idea of self-sacrifice is easily discoverable in His method of creation. It is obviously incorporated into His plan of life for mankind, for the way He built woman from man reveals it for all to see. First of all He caused ADAM to pass into a deep sleep and then extracted from him a rib; closing up the man's flesh again the Lord then made the woman and presented her to the man. The parallel between this operation and the principle underlying the altar and sacrifice lies here: the deep sleep represents death and the woman the life which could come into being only because of it. In this manner the eternal principle which was later developed and demonstrated as altar and sacrifice was woven into the creation of the woman; it really could have been done no other way.

It is highly unlikely that Adam was taken into the counsels of God about this, or that he consented to and volunteered for the operation. No man has been God's counsellor and there is no record that the first man was consulted as to its alleged benefit to him, or whether he even wanted a companion. It is probable that the Lord told him about it afterwards, for he said, 'this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh'. But whatever may have been God's procedure in the matter, we now know what happened. The truth implicit in God's creation of Eve is that Adam had to lay down his life and sacrifice a part of himself in order that she might live unto him. That is how truth eternal in God was adapted by Him to the art and science of creation. Long before it was manifest to man as a principle of life in God, it existed in him as a basis of life union and duplication and was eventually demonstrated to him by the compulsory altar.

The altar is as much a symbol to mankind as it was a necessity to Israel. Its chiefest function and greatest glory is humble, voluntary self-giving for the promotion of another's life; this is perhaps the most vital of the many characteristics of true love. Certainly without it eternal life cannot possibly be. That it involves and implies death is inevitable, indeed altars demand it and only exist for it.

In man's thinking the altar is generally associated with the ideas of placation, propitiation, substitutionary giving and atonement by sacrifice. He seldom thinks of it as God does, therefore much of its basic meaning, the glory of self-giving has been lost. Often because of the death involved in sacrifice it is only with difficulty that the altar can be thought of as a revelation of a principle of life. This is simply because we do not view death aright; we do not understand what it means. Death as men know it is horrible, dark, dreadful and mysterious, something to be feared and evaded as much as possible. That is because death came to man by sin. All too often it comes finally as a result of disease or accident or war or some kind of tragedy attended by pain. However, what is known to man as death is really nothing other than a principle of life in God, and for that reason was originally very good.

The Everlasting Burnings

It is quite impossible for any principle fundamental to the function or 'mechanics' of any person or thing to exist in this universe except first it existed in God. Evil itself could never have existed except, in another form, it had first existed as good. Evil is not an eternal principle, it is the perversion of an eternal principle. Its author, the devil, could never have existed if he had not been originally created good Lucifer by God. Death came into the world by sin as by one man, Adam; but God did not create Adam in sin, nor sin in Adam. The man was created to pass on fullness of life to his progeny and if he had abode by the true principle of self-sacrifice as demonstrated in his Creator he would have succeeded. Instead of doing so, however, he co-operated with the devil and received and operated the power of sin from satan the pervert; consequently he was the human instrument who introduced present death into the world.

The article of death itself as known among men is simply the act of final departure of the spirit from and cessation of personal conscious being in one particular state and form and passing into another. Death is not annihilation, a going out of existence in one form and for ever ceasing to exist in any state or form; it is an experience, and a state or condition and a destiny. Since the entrance of sin, the ultimate terminus of all unregenerate spirits is the state of death; this condition is entirely irremediable; it is unending existence in a state strangely like — yet absolutely opposite to God's.

'Our God is a consuming fire' — so, apparently, is hell. Just what is the difference between these two states we will not discuss here, but simply note that whether in heaven or hell, men finally have to dwell with everlasting burnings. It would seem that the difference between these two destinies lies as much in the kind and quality of spirits that reach them as in the fires themselves. This in turn brings us to consideration of the life of God, the original consuming fire.

The Lord Jesus found no difficulty in suffering death. He only found the death of the cross so distasteful and revolting because it was associated with the God-forsaken condition of sin. He had always been familiar with that death which He called 'laying down His life'. He spoke of this with joy; it is the principle of life. His Father loves Him because He laid down His life that He might take it again. He loved the thought of doing that; He was only going to repeat as Son of Man on earth what He had ever been doing as God the Son in heaven. He had ever done it there as God for God, so on earth, while still doing it as God for God, He was going to do it also as man for God and God for man. He was going to do it because of sin also, but chiefly for men and for God and at His Father's commandment.

That which is known and called death by man has only become an enemy because of sin. To understand this properly it is necessary to master Paul's argument in Romans chapter 7. That which is good can never be made death to us, but sin that it might appear sin to us. Its exceeding sinfulness lies partly in that it makes something which is good and beneficial appear evil. Sin turns friends into apparent enemies and good into apparent evil, because to the mind it loads the innocent and innocuous with the vicious and harmful. That which is called death by men is only the enemy of the body. It debases this temple of the Holy Ghost to worms and dust; truly is the body called the body of humiliation. For the children of God it never need be the body of sin, but it has ever been the scene of man's humiliation.

What is now humanly known as death is quite an involuntary act among normal people; but in its perfect form it was originally known and still is functional in God as the voluntary act of laying down one's life for sheer love to another. In Him this is an eternal principle of life. It did not then, nor does it now, entail cessation of existence, or mean ceasing to exist or be manifest in one form and changing into another. Following Lucifer's fall and the later creation of physical existence it did come to mean that and still exists as that among men, but it was not so in the beginning with God. In the eternal love of God in heaven it meant that one Person of the Godhead, in His humility, by an act of will, laid down His life in order to promote the glory of the other.

Self-sacrifice is an indispensable condition and a basic principle and practice of eternal life; without it, it cannot be. Humility is a state of mind; it is also a condition of spirit: it results in a permanent attitude, innocent of pride and precluding self-exaltation. It brings about that state of selflessness which enables love to seek not its own but always another's glory and promotion, giving itself constantly to work to that end. This state of lowliness to the point of nothingness, so characteristic of God, has been warped and changed by sin and transplanted into the human race as death, but with this difference — in Him it is a necessary causal virtue, but in men, because it came via Satan and Adam, it is a noxious perverted result. Nevertheless, the virtue is so real that any person displaying absence of self-seeking and concern for others' good is sometimes spoken of as being dead to self. Thereby we reveal that unconcern for self is thought of and described in the same terms as is death to the physical body. Such selflessness or freedom from self-interest always leads to self-giving, developing into acts of self-sacrifice.

It must not be inferred from the above that any person of the Godhead thinks of Himself more highly than He ought to think. Self-worth or any kind of self-evaluation is never taken into consideration in the act of self-sacrifice. The thought of personal value does not lie at the root of sacrifice in God; self-esteem is not part of love. Not one of the persons of God counts His life dear unto Himself or thinks He is of greater worth or of more importance than the others. One does not think that He must sacrifice Himself in order to impart His life or devote Himself to the other in order to give Him some worth, standing or being. Sacrifice only came to bear that meaning and assume that character when it was later adapted to man and applied to his spiritual needs, but it was not so originally with God.

This may at first appear very strange to us, but the eternal Life which is God, is this kind of life and can be no other. Therefore, because sacrifice is basic in the highest form of life, it is necessary to all other which is made in its

image. As already mentioned it was incorporated in an adapted form into creation when God made man and woman, the highest form of animate life on earth.

Sacrifice is sacred offering. Among men it is always looked upon as sacred offering of something or someone to some higher being, greater in degree or power than the person making the offering. In scripture it is associated with the ideas of approach to God, as in 'approach' or 'ascending-offering'; it is always linked with the altar and fire, so that we read of the burnt-offering or offering made by fire.

These are to be carefully distinguished from the sin-carcass. This had to be burned without the camp because it was totally unacceptable to God and could not be brought into His presence. Unlike Jesus, of whom it dimly spoke, being made sin it remained sin for it had no power to overcome sin. In the type the animal passively received sin by an act of transference from the sinner by imputation through the laying on of hands accompanied by confession of the sin over it. It had no active righteous life which of itself could combat and overcome sin, nor could it rise from the dead to confer its victorious life upon others for justification. But the Lord Jesus rose from the dead triumphant; His life had overcome the sin which He bore in His own body on the tree. To this day His life is the active combative force which overcomes sin in whomsoever He now dwells by the Spirit. This is only possible because of who He was and what He had always done in the Godhead before the world was, or ever the need arose among men for sacrifices to be offered to God.

That it should be the Son who offered Himself to the Father is only right and proper; Jesus said, 'my Father is greater than I'; so the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world. The Father person of God begat the Son person on earth and then had Him slain by man so that, without intermission, under all circumstances, the Son could offer Himself in perfect love to His Father. In this way the eternal principle of life and the everlasting order of love was established on earth among men also. According to the will of God these things shall remain for ever the same among the redeemed.

The Voluntary Submission of Love

Everything was committed into the hands of the Son. At no period of His being and life in any form or place did He count that equality with God was a thing to be grasped at. He knew it and understood all it meant, but deliberately humbled Himself from it. He was content to give all to the Father who gave all to Him. 'In Him most perfectly expressed the Father's glories shine; of the full deity possessed, eternally divine'. God's act of putting Him to grief was incorporated into man's act of putting Jesus to death. It entailed unspeakable pain and suffering, made possible only because of His complete self-denial. Total non-existence of desire or will or word or deed to obtain, attain or promote His own right to recognition or glory is as utterly natural as it is eternal in Jesus.

In God equality does not breed over-familiarity, for over-familiarity destroys sacredness. It is a noxious poison, vitiating relationships and attitudes of men; it is an evil leading to worse evils. One of its worst manifestations is the way it has tinged expressions of praise and worship of God in the churches. True sons of God must reject these repulsive expressions; they show bad taste, rising from the natural annihilism of untaught minds. Equality can only exist by the kind of self-sacrifice which is advised among us by Paul, 'love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, seeketh not her own', 'in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than himself' — this is true humility. Jesus said, 'my Father is greater than I I and the Father are one'.

This always was and still is His attitude — 'He humbled Himself'. Father, by whose will His Son was slain, did not need to slay Him Himself; Jesus Himself did it. In scripture this fact is so evident; He said of Himself, 'I lay down my life that I might take it again', and others said, 'He offered Himself without spot to God, He gave Himself a ransom for all'. It is true that He said His Father had given Him commandment to lay down His life, but that was not because He Himself was unwilling to do so, nor was it because He was inferior to and only a mere subordinate of His Father, it was the crowning glory and visible point of voluntary obedience rendered in true filial love.

Father's — the Greatest Sacrifice

Great though this sacrifice of the Son is, it must not be thought that among the persons of the Godhead the Son is the only one who makes sacrifices; the Father makes them also. This ought not to be any surprise to us for it is brought out most poignantly in the saga of ABRAHAM and ISAAC on Moriah. In the end of the drama enacted there, it was not the son who was slain but the ram which was caught by its horns in a thicket. What thoughts and

emotions rent the hearts of father and son as they undertook the journey to the mount we are not told. Nevertheless we may well imagine what mental torture wracked the heart of Abraham who faithfully led his son to the slaughter. He fully believed he must slay his son and was purposed to do so. Therefore, before he reached the mount, in heart he faithfully did it, receiving him back again from the dead as a gift from God.

Undoubtedly the Lord, by this incident, has taught us more of the truth about that loving self-giving and painless sacrifice in God which is hinted at by death. In order to have God's eternal life, man must know death and resurrection, for only resurrection life is eternal life. But Isaac did not die, Abraham did not slay his son; so also is it in the Godhead: the Son never dies, the Father does not slay Him. Abraham and Isaac were stopped short of death — it only took place in a figure. So God has demonstrated for all time that with Him all is voluntary and therefore real; by this sacred enactment the principle of eternal love and life has been revealed, and it is the Father who is seen to be the one who makes the greatest sacrifice; it is He who slays the Son.

The Conquering Lamb

At the same time the Son is shown to be the one who makes the sacrifice, for unnoticed at first, though at last revealed, He is seen as the ram caught by the horns (symbol of kingship and power) of His own manhood and Godhead in the impenetrable thicket. He stood awaiting death as a result of man's intrigues and hatred entwined with God's simple, determined love. The Man — Jesus of Nazareth — the 'animal' side of the lamb-like life of Jesus, was especially assumed for the purpose of death. However, even in its worst power and at its greatest degree, death did not mean extinction to His spirit. He never saw death although He died; at that moment the Principal of Life applied the principle of Life to death and destroyed it. Hallelujah!

Although Jesus' death on the cross embraced into itself the principle of sacrifice as its principal factor and deepest foundation, He accomplished far more than that there. Sacrifice and offering are not the only glories of the Man of the cross. Those horns, curled and inoffensive as they may be, represent His twin powers of kingly authority to destroy satan with his kingdom and host. However, in this contest the horns are not as prominent as the ram that grew and bore them.

The Lord came to deal with the vast maze-like thicket of man's complicated needs, and He engaged Himself with them for man's deliverance. So being held by them, He was taken and led as a lamb to the slaughter, and being slaughtered He slaughtered His and man's enemies. Dying, 'He destroyed him who had the power of death, that is the devil, and delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage'. He also conquered adverse death itself, leaving His people with nothing else to do but engage themselves with the eternal beneficial aspect of death. This is a side and meaning of the cross which for the most part has not been understood, therefore to our loss it has been left unexplored. This has caused incalculable harm, for it is related to the demonstration of pure sacrifice known in God.

This aspect is unfortunately often overlooked when men view the cross only, and fail to see the Jesus of the cross. We mostly hear of the shame of the cross and in our thinking this is usually associated with cross-bearing and following Him. It is often illustrated by the incident of Simon of Cyrene, the coloured man coming up from the country, who was conscripted and compelled to carry the cross of Jesus enroute to Golgotha. There is a verse about it in the Hebrews letter, 'looking unto Jesus, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross despising the shame'.

The endurance and shame are very real to our hearts as they were also to the sensitive Hebrew hearts to whom the sacred writing was first entrusted. But long before the author spoke to them of these things, he spoke of the Jesus of the cross like this, 'we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man'. To suffer that death He had to be lowered beneath the angels' state to men's that He should taste death for them. But for personal sacrifice in heaven He needed neither to be lowered in form nor to assume any other relationship than that of God with God. In the Godhead He was only crowned with glory and honour because of it. He suffered no pain while making love's eternal sacrifice, nor endured any mockery; He only gained more glory and honour. This is why we are informed by God that by dying on the cross Jesus was crowned with glory and honour. He despised the shame; there is no shame attached to heavenly things.

The Man Jesus was not degraded to earth when He came to die on the tree as the dishonoured man cursed by God. By appointing His Son to the cross and not taking it upon Himself to do so, the Father honoured and glorified Him. In more senses than one it was a real sacrifice for Father to do so, but He loves the Son deeply, so He found no pain or jealousy growing at His heart about it. That man should hate and curse and wilfully reject His Son hurt and grieved Him, but He knew there was no other way; sacrifice is absolutely indispensable to God's life. By all this, light is cast upon the fact that the altar is more valuable to us as a symbol of what goes on in God than for the actual function it has as an instrument of death and sacrifice and offering among men.

The Altar — A Basic Principle in Man

In whatever age they have lived, the idea of sacrifice has always pervaded men's minds. So strongly is this rooted in their thinking that even the heathen build altars and offer human, animal or vegetable sacrifices to their deities. These people have no bibliographical reason for doing this; it is natively embedded in their hearts to do so. The power that motivates them is mostly fear, and the purposes behind their sacrifices, though very mixed, are generally associated with appeasement. Sometimes these may be defined as either placation of wrath or atonement for sin, or persuasion to certain kinds of action, or seeking a favour of the spirit or spirits (beings) to whom they sacrifice. The idea of payment to a superior powerful spirit being or force is seldom missing from the ceremony. Whatever is offered is sacrificed only as a token payment and is brought and given as a material substitute for the person who actually makes the offering, or on behalf of some other person for whom the offering is made.

Altars and sacrifice however have not only been associated with the heathen; throughout recorded time they have also been part of the life of the true saints of God. The Old Testament scriptures are replete with records of men and their altars. Long before God's portable altar was made, men of understanding and faith erected and used their own. Wherever they lived, whether in the shape of a mound of earth or a cairn of stones, the little hill of sacrifice was raised to God and offerings made by fire ascended as sweet savours to Him.

Referring again to ABRAHAM, who is often spoken of as father of the faithful and quite probably was the greatest man of the Old Testament, we find that he built many altars. In fact, as already noted, the most famous story about him turns around the occasion when he erected the altar on Moriah; altars were undoubtedly one of the most outstanding features of this man's life. It is significant that there is no record that his life had been in any way directly connected with sacrifice until he responded to the call of God, yet he was seventy five years old when he entered into the land of Canaan. It seems that as soon as he obeyed God and left the land of his nativity he built an altar to the Lord. Without doubt altars are deeply involved in the call of God to a man, for this became the first of many altars which marked the route and progress of his pilgrimage and the places where he dwelt. Wherever he pitched his tent for any length of time he built an altar; moving on he left it behind as a testimony that he had been there. Anyone who had a mind to do so could have traced Abraham's movements by these altars.

At the beginning these altars bore witness to the reality of communication between God and man; it seems that Abraham built them at the exact spot where it took place between them. The original altar was built in commemoration of the first time God spoke to him in the promised land. The second fixed the place and proclaimed the occasion when he first called on the name of the Lord who appeared unto him. Soon after that occasion, as the record goes, there was a famine in the land and Abraham went down into Egypt. As a consequence of moving out of the land of promise, which was the chosen place for the outworking of God's call, things soon went wrong with him. However, according to His covenant with him, throughout this period God preserved Abraham, but he built no altar to God at that time. Sadly enough Abraham left no testimony in Egypt; he went up out of it very wealthy in goods but sorely reprov'd in soul. Chastened in spirit, he retraced his steps to the place where he had last built an altar; standing there he again called on the Lord. So the life of Abraham continued, until finally the Lord led him to the highest mountain and greatest altar of all.

It is a remarkable feature of Abraham's altars that throughout all this time there is no record of sacrifices being made upon them. His predecessors, Cain and Abel and Noah, each in his day built an altar and sacrificed offerings of one kind or another to God; it seems however that, unlike them, Abraham built his altars but offered nothing thereon. He, as they, knew that the whole purpose of building altars was as a means to an end; they have no other function and are not of any use except as places of sacrifice and offering, yet apparently he never used them for

that purpose. He had come from a heathen culture wherein sacrifices were quite commonplace; moreover, in common with all mankind, he knew in his heart that some kind of expiation or expression of desire to approach God was in order and therefore required of him.

Why then an altar without a sacrifice? Every other altar which had been erected throughout the entire length and breadth of Canaan would have been stained with blood and blackened by fire, but not so Abraham's. All those other altars were testimonies to the devil; Abraham's were easily distinguishable from theirs. Everybody knew the difference between Abraham's God and theirs, but none could have given a satisfactory explanation as to what it was or what unused altars signified.

We do not know much about the original revelation from God to man of the mystery of redemption and substitution and expiation of sin. Just how it was that God communicated His wishes and commandments to men in the beginning of time we have no information. After the passage of centuries He brought His people out of Egypt and informed them, through Moses at Sinai, of His wishes concerning sacrifice. All He said then is plainly set out in scripture, but how people knew in the very beginning we are not told.

It may be assumed that Adam was told after the fall but we do not know that he was. Certainly God would not have told him before then, for there was no sin to expiate, beside which death was not known in Eden. Death, we are told, came by sin and Adam and Eve were sinless, so Adam had no reason to slay any of his fellow-creatures. During communion with God he may have been told of the vital necessity of the principle of sacrifice in the eternal life and being of his Creator, but nowhere is this recorded. It has been thought that God's provision of skins instead of fig-leaves for clothing after the fall of Adam and Eve is an indication of death. It is said that this implies substitutionary sacrifice made necessary by their sin, that in order to provide their coats for Adam and Eve lesser creatures had to be slain by God. It is commendable to some as an indication that substitutionary sacrifice was practised by God immediately sin was manifest by man, but it is an unproven theory and only a remote possibility. It no more follows that in order for God to provide His creatures with animal skins, animals had to be slain than that in order to supply wine for a wedding God had previously to grow and crush grapes.

What preceded light at creation? Or from what matter did God create stars? It could be suggested as a premise that the clothing of the pair in Eden and the turning of water into wine at Cana should be equated as being the first miracles of two different eras. Should this be acceptable, the episode in Genesis is almost certainly a miracle requiring no more naturally related matter of its kind for its basis than did the miracle at Cana of Galilee. Whence came the sight that was given to the man at Siloam? From God the Creator. Natural explanations for Bible mysteries need not be sought; as the hymn says, 'God is His own interpreter and He will make it plain' — if and when He will.

The offerings of CAIN and ABEL heighten the mystery still more, for reading the Word we do not find any record of Adam and Eve making any similar or comparable move toward God. Those boys were evidently not instructed by their parents concerning sacrifice and offering; the simple if not sure reason for this may well be that no instructions had been given to them by God. It must surely be that Adam and Eve did not know how to regain favour with God, for is it not to be taken for granted that if they had known how to do so they would have done anything within their power to regain it if it were at all possible? We know that upon his fall Adam became a spiritual force in the world. His name has become a patronymic, conferred by God upon the evil sin-potential / fallen nature with which all the sons of men have since been born.

Nevertheless, before He expelled the pair from the garden God made promise to them that the woman's seed should bruise the serpent's head. Therefore, when her first child was born, Eve thought and said she had gotten a man-child from the Lord. Probably they pinned upon him their hopes of restoration, believing that he would know or somehow discover and show them the way back to God. Of expiation and forgiveness of sin they had no knowledge; there was no reinstatement for Adam and no tuition in the ways and order of sacrifice for his sons either; this the boys, becoming men, had to discover for themselves. That they did so is now common knowledge.

The Unacceptable Sacrifice

The story as it is recorded in Genesis reveals that Cain and Abel did not at first know what was acceptable to God. Upon the occasion mentioned they each brought to God the results of their own particular labours. Cain being a

tiller of the ground naturally brought of the fruit he had produced; Abel being a shepherd just as naturally brought of the increase of the flock. Each offered his gift to God, who had respect to and accepted Abel's offering, but had not respect for Cain's offering and rejected it. At this Cain was filled with wrath, 'and his countenance fell'. He was evidently expecting God to accept his offering; he obviously did not know beforehand that it would not be received by God, for if he had known that he would not have offered it. He would already have been familiarised by his parents with the dire consequences of deliberate disobedience of God's expressed instructions. If he had persisted in bringing fruit contrary to God's ordinances passed on to him by Adam he would have been guilty of trying to force his own will upon God, and he already knew that was utterly impossible.

Why then did he not bring a lamb or a kid from the flock which crouched around his tent? Simply because he did not know what God wanted. Abel did not know either. None of those four human beings knew; they were each equally ignorant of God's requirements. That is why God spoke to Cain as He did. There was no censure in God's voice, only concern and grace when He said to Cain, 'Why art thou wroth and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well shalt thou not be accepted?' At that point God did not blame or rebuke or punish the man because He knew that Cain had made a genuine mistake. The man was only punished finally because he refused to obey.

Following his first failure, God showed Cain what was acceptable to Him and invited and exhorted him to copy Abel's example, assuring him that by so doing he would be accepted equally with his brother, but he would not do so. Instead he awaited an opportunity to vent his jealous rage against God and Abel and slew his brother. But not before Abel had discovered and revealed the secret of the way back to God. Adam and Eve did not know it until that moment when Abel their son found it by offering a lamb. Whether the parents ever followed Abel's lead we are not told; we do know however that Abel paid for his discovery with his life. God had to punish the murderer; the mark of God upon Cain was God's testimony against the rebellion and stubbornness of a man who, when he knew the truth, refused to obey God. It was also an act of grace; as yet the legal dictum of 'eye for eye, tooth for tooth' had not been uttered so Cain's life was not forfeit. In mercy the Lord forgave him the crime, but whether he repented and later turned to God with the correct sacrifice we do not know. The whole episode does not make pleasant reading.

It is recorded in Hebrews that 'by faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts, so he being dead yet speaketh'. Abel's parents had truly brought sin into the world. Its dreadful consequences must have struck horror and terror into their hearts as they beheld their son lying murdered upon the ground, slain by his own brother, their other son. Although he was born following the advent of sin and his parents' expulsion from the garden, Abel was nevertheless a righteous man. He did not know the righteousness of Christ but God is his witness that he was righteous. God testified to Cain of his brother, saying that he had done well and he and his gifts were acceptable to Him.

Cain and Abel were sons of the same parents (some have suggested that they were twins) and had equal opportunities; what is it that makes one man's gifts more excellent than another's? Primarily the faith of Abel lay in the fact that he made his offering, not in what he offered. Cain also offered, he also had faith; his sin lay in the tragic fact that, despite God's counsel, he still refused to offer the correct sacrifice. Abel's more excellent sacrifice lay in that fact that he brought both a lamb (or kid) and fruit, while Cain brought only fruit. Both are acceptable to God providing they are brought together; this was Abel's excellence; fruit by itself is unacceptable; this was Cain's mistake. What is dead Abel yet speaking to us? To arrive at an answer we must search the scriptures.

Man's Inescapable Responsibility

PAUL, in his Roman letter, is quite clear that, when born into the world, even heathen men show the work of the law written in their hearts and to some degree are able to do things pleasing to God according to nature. He also makes statements which give ground for believing that God shows to every man certain things for which He holds him responsible. These things are apparently invariable but not inviolable in each of us, whether saint or sinner. Speaking of the celestial bodies which God made and set in the heavens for signs and seasons, Paul, quoting from David, says their lines run into all the earth and there is no speech nor language where their voice is not known. So he concludes from this that all men are equally without excuse, and are answerable to God on at least three counts:

(1) The work of the law written in their hearts to which their own conscience reacts.

(2) What God has done and shown in them individually.

(3) The testimony of the heavenly bodies.

Luke in Acts records Paul as saying that God left not Himself without witness among men by supplying food to fill hearts with joy and gladness. So we may add a fourth to the apostle's three counts above stated.

The witness of these four may have been to a large degree dimmed in some due to the growing depravity of the race, but nevertheless men's unbelief and rejection does not affect the faithfulness of God or the responsibility of the race. But men are not equal and will not be held equally responsible before the Lord. In the day of judgement when God judges the secrets of men by that man Christ Jesus.

Beyond these four basic things, some men, like Noah and Abraham, have had personal visits and instructions from God; others received His plainly written law and were privileged to build a house for Him to live among them on the earth. Still further, some in their generation actually had the incarnate Christ with them and witnessed His life and death and resurrection. Others of us have been privileged to hear the gospel and have received the completed canon of scripture and know the Baptism of the Spirit and have become members of the Church of Christ. In these things all men are not equal and cannot be held equally responsible, but on the other hand those who have had the greater privileges and received the greater revelations also equally share the identical four basic blessings with the whole of mankind. Therefore their responsibility is so much greater than those less-privileged who have been denied these blessings; they will be judged upon that basis. God is just with all men, as well as the justifier of them that believe in Jesus.

We are again indebted to Luke for another insight into apostolic understanding and statement; this time it is Peter's. When speaking to Cornelius he said, 'I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him'. Until that occasion when he had to use the keys of the kingdom to open the door of faith to the gentiles, Peter had thought that except they had previously been proselytised to Judaism it was quite impossible for gentiles to be saved. Unless God had shown him that great vessel full of unclean animals coming down from Him and caught up again into heaven, he would never have found it possible to believe that unregenerate gentiles could work righteousness, but God said that they could. Prior to that he could not believe that gentiles to whom the law had not been given and who had not as yet been privileged to have the gospel preached to them on an official basis, could possibly do things which made them acceptable to God, but they could.

Peter had been wrong; His use of the word 'but' is the plainest proof that he had arrived at new conclusions. He revised his whole thinking as a result of the vision at Joppa and the commandment of God. If he had used the word 'and' instead of 'but', he would have revealed that he had always understood that gentiles could do righteousness and be acceptable to God, even though they had not been proselytised to Judaism and were unregenerate. What a revelation this is! Reading the whole tenth chapter we find that Cornelius was a man of very fine character indeed. The mounting summary of his many virtues is most impressive, and yet he was a heathen, though perhaps he may have been mistaken by many for a Christian. Like the heathen women who gathered for prayer by the river at Philippi, he was not saved, but his heart was toward God.

This word of Peter's is profoundly revelatory, for it also shows the principle of righteousness upon which God Himself acts in His dealings with all men; 'that word ye know', is the basis of all His judgements. How we act upon knowledge imparted, inwrought or revealed to us is the criterion of judgement. Because Cornelius responded properly to what he knew by whatever means he knew it he was accepted of God as being righteous. He had walked in all the light he knew. That did not mean he did not need to be born from above, he did and eventually was. It does mean that he did not have the absolute righteousness of Christ imparted to him and that he did not know the righteousness which is in the law; it also means that he had the righteousness of a heart that perfectly responded to all he believed and knew. Whether or not he had ceased from all his heathen idolatry we are not told; we do know however that Peter did not challenge him on the ground of knowledge equal to all men but on his advanced knowledge of the word of God in and through Jesus of Nazareth. If he had not responded to that he

would have been guilty of Christ-rejection and would presumably have lost all claims to righteousness upon former grounds.

In exactly the same way the Jews (even if they were Hebrews of the Hebrews as was Saul of Tarsus, 'and as touching the righteousness which is in the law perfect'), from the moment they were challenged with the gospel immediately forfeited all claims to justification upon legal grounds of righteousness; if they rejected the gospel they became totally unrighteous. This is why Paul so severely reprimanded Peter at Antioch for compelling gentiles to live as Jews. He had been shown by God that the Jews' religion was now void of righteousness, but through fear of man he had gone back on his revelation.

In the gospel which He has commanded to be preached to all men God has revealed His righteousness according to a higher law than that of Moses. Much of our thinking and therefore our theology and many of our doctrines need reformation. Our preaching has been too severely narrowed by: (1) falsely limiting the purpose of Christ's death to atonement, (2) failing to understand the exceedingly greater truth of redemption; (3) confusing the whole nature and scope of regeneration and (4) inexcusably overlooking the full import of reconciliation; this despite the plainest expositions of these mighty truths in the New Testament scriptures and the many allusions to them in the vast scriptures of the Old Testament revelation.

The Glorious Cross

We have been told by Paul that we are not to look at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen. By refusing to look at the things which are invisible and seeing only that which is visible, men cripple their understanding of God and man. The reason for this is simply because the things which are seen are temporal (and therefore have only temporary existence in this world) but the things which are not seen are eternal. The temporal things of God can only give temporary expression to things which are and have been and shall for ever be; even now they are better expressed in invisible, eternal reality in heaven and God.

As an instance of this let us take the most precious thing of all, the crucifixion of Christ itself. The four Gospel writers faithfully record accounts of the actual happenings at Golgotha. Beside these, there are also frequent allusions to the historical event of the crucifixion throughout the length of the whole New Testament. To such good effect is this done by the inspired authors that our gaze is for ever firmly focussed upon that vital, indispensable and unique act. Yet it was only temporal; that is to say, although its import and implication and effects are eternal, it was enacted in all its tragic glory and outwardly seen by man only for a brief moment on this earth.

Necessary as it was, planned and prophesied in all its detail as it had to be, what was seen at Calvary was emphatically not the most or most important part of what took place there. If one may be permitted the use of such a phrase here, it was only the tip of the iceberg. As a matter of fact it was only the enactment and revelation at a certain point in time on the earth of the combined principles of love and sacrifice at the heart of the eternal being of God. It was a reproduction by God in flesh in history of what He had previously specifically done, and in principle had always been doing in another media, from and before the foundation of the world. The life continually yielded, the person continually sacrificed, the Lamb continually slain, became the Man eventually crucified. Beginning and end He is; His crucifixion was a manifestation of a permanent pattern of life in God; Calvary was the outworking and adaptation of Himself and His will against sin in perfect love for mankind.

Perhaps our limited grasp of eternal truth may be due to the fact that we have been habitually taught that all the righteousness of God which was imputed to ancient Israel was only as it were the shadow of the good things to come. This view presents the crucifixion as though it was the substance from behind which the sun shone, casting its beneficial shadow backward to Israel; it says that what God accomplished at Calvary covered all the millennia of sin since the fall, as well as the centuries of sin following the resurrection. The truth of this is vast beyond degree. It satisfies the understanding, explaining the whole range of repetitive temporal sacrifice throughout the ages. Moreover it has the backing of the scriptural words, 'the law having a shadow of good things to come and not the very image of those things'. But it fails to grasp the greater truth that long before ever an altar stood on the earth, whether built of earth or stone, or forged and fashioned from brass in fire, God had already slain His Lamb. All sacrifice since then, including Calvary itself, has been because of that original act and has significance

only because of it and no value except in spirit it conforms to it. This is that which is invisible and eternal; all the other was temporal, even though it witnessed of the eternal.

Understanding this we see that all the righteousness imputed by God to man since the commencement of sin in the earth was projected forward from and was a result of the prehistoric sacrifice of the Lamb, as well as being a projection backward from Calvary. True it is that Jesus said, 'Abraham rejoiced to see my day and he saw it and was glad', but whether Abraham understood all he saw is another thing. The patriarch built an altar, bound his son and laid him upon it, heard a voice from heaven, saw a ram caught in a thicket, slew and sacrificed it instead of his son. The sight and experience of it all brought him joy and gladness, but it was all so very temporal and momentary. Did his inward spiritual eye look forward to see Him who is invisible die in His day and rise again? Or did his faith look backward to see the slaying of the Lamb at the world's foundation? Is the working of this principle the hidden secret of light and day and is this what is alluded to by 'the dayspring from on high'? I wonder, but do not attempt to answer the question.

The whole enactment at Moriah was prophetic of Calvary; whether Abraham saw it all does not for the moment matter. It was most truly as much a reflection of the beginning of the earth age as a foresight into the end of the age of law. Altar and lamb were there on Moriah, but except it be dimly prefigured by the wood first laid upon Isaac and upon which he was later laid, there was no cross. Perhaps it teaches hearts eager to learn every precious lesson and to note every slightest token of Calvary that the cross became an altar. Even so, every foreshadowing sacrifice and every drop of blood spilt or burnt in promise of Calvary love could only be because the bodyless, bloodless sacrifice of deity was made before ever a body of flesh and blood was created or earth itself was formed.

The Just Shall Live — by the Faith of the Son of God.

Everything, all creation, flowed from that; it was not only anticipation, foresight, foreknowledge, incredible wisdom and infinite love, it was also immeasurable grace and promise and inexhaustible provision; the Lamb slain was an application of a principle of law of divine life and being. Because of this, righteousness did not become immediately extinct on the earth following the advent of sin. Depravity set in and with the multiplication of men on the earth became almost total, so that by Noah's time he only was righteous in all his generations. The line of righteousness which had continued down through Adam's third son SETH (born after the death of Abel) had preserved its purity, but the progeny of Cain deteriorated with every successive generation throughout the centuries, until by Noah's day it was ripe for destruction.

Being themselves fallen, men did not wish to retain the likeness and knowledge of God, nor would they worship Him as God, but without restraint changed His image into the likeness of corruptible beasts and birds and creeping things and worshipped them. Doing so they became inwardly like them. Without contesting their impudence, God's Spirit strove with them to no avail, until at last He gave them over to their contemptible lusts and abominations. The result of it all was that in process of time everything within them became twisted and perverted to wrong uses and ends. Sacrifices and offerings were made to devils, the work of the law written within them became bias and power to sin and corruption of the vilest order and in the end God repented that He had ever made man. The knowledge of the principle of sacrifice and acceptability which God originally made known to Cain did not die out in his strain — on the contrary it became perverted. They deliberately prostituted everything to satan, therefore God decided to destroy them by the flood.

Through the Seth line however this principle was retained as it had been originally discovered by Abel and upon Noah's exodus from the ark following the flood it reappears on the cleansed earth. What Noah did was quite voluntary; he did not receive commandment from God to sacrifice to Him and the offering was entirely without reference to sin. He did it in faith; he was just acting in harmony with his conscience in accordance with his inward knowledge of God, therefore he was righteous.

At this point care must be exercised to distinguish between different kinds of faith lest we fail to grasp the reason why there is so much difference between one man and another. This distinction is nowhere brought out more clearly than in the great section on faith in the Hebrews letter, which commences at the end of chapter ten and continues unbroken into chapter 12. In chapter 11 many of the famous worthies of the Old Testament are named,

together with the great variety of works they accomplished by faith. It is a portrait-gallery filled with word-pictures which men have studied for centuries to their eternal profit. But when we reach chapter 12 we are told in no uncertain terms to take our eyes from these men and women and to look off unto Jesus. All these others are but a cloud, He is the sun. They witness to faith but He is the author of it. That is why we are to look off and away from them all unto Him. He, (not they) is the author of all faith, especially the faith of the New Testament saints.

Paul in the Galatian letter clearly speaks of a time which he describes as 'before faith came' and contrasts it with 'but now faith is come'. He is plainly speaking in terms of B.C. and A.D. There is obviously a distinction being made. Seeing that Hebrews 11 is filled with the faith exploits of men and women who lived B.C., 'what manner of persons ought we to be' who live in the age of the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ? Again the apostle deals with another aspect of faith in Romans 10, where he says that by some means or other every person in the world has heard the word of God. Referring to the heavens and the heavenly bodies, he declares that by them all men have heard the word, therefore they have no excuse.

DAVID speaking in greater detail of God's handiwork in the firmament says 'their line is gone out into all the earth, there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard'. We may therefore conclude that there are different kinds of faith, yet all are developed from a common root:

- (1) That which observes nature and deduces the existence of God and seeks to find Him.
- (2) That which comes by hearing the word of God, responding and living according thereto.
- (3) That which is spoken of as the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ which is imparted to us.

These may be described as: (1) natural faith, (2) limited faith, (3) original faith.

Abel's faith may be described as 'natural' in that, although he offered to God the correct kind of sacrifice he did not do so in response to a direct word from God. Unlike present day heathen, he did know of the true God, for his parents were His direct creation and had known Him intimately over a period of time before their expulsion from the garden. It would be totally unreasonable to assume for the sake of mere literal accuracy that Adam and Eve had never spoken to their children of the former life they had lived with God in Eden. Reason has it that, as with all parents, they would most surely have instructed their sons about the ways of the Lord with them and taught their boys all they knew of their own personal creation and the Creator. Many hours must have been spent with their children recounting the anecdotes of a lost communion and sharing with them the facts of creation as told them by the Lord. The eyes and hearts of Cain and Abel must indeed have seen that the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork.

However, Adam and Eve could not tell their sons how to regain lost Paradise. The angel with the flaming sword kept the way of the tree of Life — there was no way back. Nor could the parents instruct the boys in the order of sacrifice and offering, for they themselves had never made any. They had never built an altar in their past life, nor did they do so following their fall. There had been no need in Paradise for there was no sin until the day they were expelled; worship and communion had been as natural a process as was walking with God. Except perhaps in the limited sense with which inanimate vegetation and floral life in process of time renews itself, they had never witnessed death; they had slain nothing and had never seen the expiry of any animate creature; everything in the garden was glorious with the beauty of life, unmarred by corruption. They knew nothing of death or of ways back from death to God; how then could they tell anyone else?

Therefore on the day Cain and Abel brought their offerings to the Lord neither of their parents could give them any guidance even if they offered advice. They could no more assist Abel with a clear word of guidance from God than they could restrain Cain with a word of warning. Not one of those four knew the way with certainty; Abel was a pioneer. Thank God he discovered and led the way for us all.

The knowledge he gained was passed on and as time progressed successive men of faith also built altars unto the Lord in their day. These were sacred spots of earth, places of elevation, platforms to heaven and to God to which they often resorted to worship. Abel's original discovery bore fruit. He did not die in vain, for, smelling Noah's

offering after the flood, God was at rest. But He could not let the matter rest there, nor allow the continuance of this highly personalised manner of approach and worship, for it did not best exhibit eternal truth.

Only One Altar

Thus it was that in Moses' day God set about a complete reformation. First He prohibited the random building of altars and men's desultory manner of approach to Him. In addition to this He regulated the offerings, both in kind and procedure, making some obligatory and leaving others to be given at men's freewill. He also had an altar made and placed just within His courts at the entrance to His tent. By this means He finally established the altar as the sole official way of access to and acceptance with God. The altar of men to the Lord was now the altar of the Lord to men; it was the Lord's own altar, specially made by a man filled with wisdom and skill by the Spirit of God for the purpose.

Long before this, beside Abel, Noah and Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses also had built altars to the Lord. These all were built under the most significant circumstances and for very important reasons. Isaac's was built at Beersheba, to him forever a place of poignant memories. From there, years before, he had set out with his illustrious father upon the never-to-be-forgotten expedition to Moriah, where he had watched his father build his last and greatest altar to God; to Beersheba they had returned following the miraculous happenings which took place on the mount.

What experiences they had shared together then! With a submission born of long discipline he had co-operated with his father to make the supreme sacrifice; lying there bound upon that altar waiting for the terminating knife he had heard the voice of God speaking. Never-to-be-forgotten words of acceptance and approval flowed to his father's heart and had brought assurance and consecration to his own. He had seen and heard and experienced it all, but what he had seen and heard he did not quite know: he did, however, know that the altar was as much his as his father's. Abraham had called it Jehovah-jireh. It was the first time he had ever heard Abraham name an altar. Everything about it was new; but then Moriah's altar was the place of the vision and the voice and the vow. In a new and special way Isaac was God's; he, as well as his father and God, knew it.

Whether or not Isaac ever returned to Moriah is a matter for conjecture; what we do know is that he certainly did go back to Beersheba — congruously enough its name means 'well of the oath'. By this time Isaac was a mighty and prosperous man. Since Moriah and the death of his father he had passed through many troublous times; he had to live in the presence of his enemies, but despite all, God had made room for him and he had become very fruitful in the land of promise. During the whole of this period of passage through Canaan, he had pitched his tent in many familiar places where he had previously lived with his father. At that time he re-opened some of his father's wells; perhaps his father's altars still stood by those wells, but there is no record that Isaac built any altars beside them.

Not until he came to Beersheba is Isaac's name connected with any other altar than that of Moriah. Sowing, reaping, prospering, digging, striving, moving to and fro, all are there in the narrative; but there is no altar-building until he reaches the well of the oath, where God appeared to him. There he built his altar. There is no record that he had built one upon the occasion when God first appeared exclusively to him. Perhaps already an altar had been built at that place by his father and he used it, or perhaps some other person had built one since that time, but he would never have used that. But when the Lord appeared to him with renewed promises, he did not rely upon nor look to anything of the past, he builded his altar, called upon the name of the Lord, pitched his tent and digged a well. In due course Beersheba, the place of the oath, became a city called by that name.

Again we notice that although the altar and the oath and the well and the city are mentioned, sacrifices are not referred to. Weren't Isaac and the lamb the sacrifice and were not identity and substitution combined in one offering? Was there any difference now? Had things changed since his father's day? Had not the offering been given first and then the sacrifice made in that order? If that had been established between God and man by God Himself, what was the point or where was the need for anything less or other? Isaac understood. An altar, yes, but no sacrifice. The altar was an acknowledgement and a testimony; a sacrifice would have been almost a blasphemy, certainly a tragedy, as well as a superfluity; in any case the word sacrifice has not as yet appeared in scripture, only the word offering.

The idea of sacrifice itself is not introduced into the text until the later activities of Isaac's son JACOB in relationship to God are revealed. Until then the only two thoughts presented directly to us by the use of the word offering in connection with the altar are: (a.) (making) a present or a gift, or (b.) to cause to go up (in flames and smoke); upon consideration this is quite significant.

Along this line it is also of some significance that when Jacob made sacrifice he did so following an oath he had taken to man, swearing upon 'the fear of his father Isaac'. He did not build a special altar, but sacrificed upon 'the mount', which was nothing but a great heap of stones which he and his servants had built in conjunction with Laban and his servants. They all sat down on it, made their covenant upon it, ate and drank on it and finally Jacob slaughtered his sacrifices upon it; it was a heap of witness' or a watch tower. It was no altar of the Lord but seemed more a symbol of mistrust, for it was raised in the belief and for the desire that the Lord would 'watch between me and thee while we are absent (hidden) one from the other'.

Laban and Jacob, each a party to the oath, swore according to their own beliefs, and it is evident that neither of them had a clear faith in God, for each swore upon the deity that somebody else knew. It may perhaps have been perfectly described in words then unspoken, but which centuries later Paul immortalised — 'I saw an altar to an unknown God'. But He of whom Jacob was in ignorance and had described in an oath as 'the fear of his father Isaac' was planning to meet and make Himself known to Jacob. Within less than forty eight hours the Lord was wrestling with Jacob at the fords of Jabbok and Penueel. There the change took place — from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, from Jacob to Israel.

Following this and other closely related incidents, upon arrival at Shalem Jacob bought a piece of ground. It was outside the city and after spreading his tents he 'erected there an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel — God the God of Israel'. Right there in full view of the city he raised testimony to his recent discovery of God and showed his intention of making his testimony permanent by calling his altar by that name. God and he were identified with the altar. Of offering and sacrifice there is again no mention. The means not the end is being presented to us. The purpose and use of the altar are not emphasised; Israel set forth the principle, not the practice. The names of God and Israel are linked at the altar, not the names of animals.

Only once more during Jacob's lifetime is the altar mentioned. This time he is commanded by God 'go up to Bethel and dwell there and make there an altar unto God that appeared unto thee'. Without hesitation he went and did as he was told, whereupon God again appeared unto him and renewed with him the covenant He had made with Abraham and Isaac. This time Jacob/Israel named the altar El-Bethel, 'God of the House of God'. To him God and the altar were one. Not that he thought that God and an altar are literally one, he was not an idolater who believed that God could be made by men's hands. Nor was his action merely the result of an association of ideas; it was the recognition and demonstration of an eternal principle, as well as a confession of ignorance of God's wishes. He offered no sacrifice — instead he raised a pillar there; he was no architect, but it was he who had originally renamed Luz 'Bethel'.

Whether or not the stone he raised for a pillar was the one he had earlier used for his pillow we cannot tell. We do know, however, that Bethel was the place where he had dreamed his famous dream and upon waking had been convinced that he was at the gate of heaven and that the place was the house of God. Now again, upon his return to the very spot under God's orders to erect an altar, he raises a pillar. It was to be his mute testimony to the fact that he believed God wanted a house on earth. On the pillar he poured a drink-offering followed by oil; the house of Israel he erected was offered and anointed to God.

So there they stood together, altar and pillar, one representing the God of the house of God and the other the house of that God. What could be more fitting? Jacob did not worship the altar as God, but in some way he recognised the impossibility of God being God apart from all the altar symbolised. He also dimly pictured, even if he did not fully see, that there could be no house of God apart from the altar. This is probably the most important part of the reason why God ordered him back to Bethel. Jacob had called the place 'God's house'; if this really was to be so, then God could not allow him or anyone else to be under any illusions about it. Everyone must know that He Himself could not be, nor could possibly live anywhere, except by the altar principle.

He was preparing for a future which Jacob could not visualise. If He was going to build securely the foundations must be well laid. He could not allow Israel to think that there was any way of approach to Him or any possibility of entering into the life to which their name referred, apart from self-offering upon the well-understood basis of giving by self-sacrifice. It had all happened in this man. When Jacob stopped wrestling and resisting in fear and yielded and clung to the Lord he became Israel, the prince who had power with God and man. This was the story told by the two pillars. The first was fearful Jacob, the second was powerful Israel. The first had stood on its own without the altar, the second could only stand by it. The first was anointed, unoffered, the second was offered and anointed. What a historical, prophetic place Bethel was. On the day Jacob raised the altar and the pillar he not only made history, he also established eternal principles of truth.

MOSES, the man raised up of God to take the place of honour among the great patriarchs of Israel of whom he wrote, was also a man of the altar. He actually built two and supervised the making of a third. At this point we will consider the first and then pass to the third, leaving the second for later consideration. The first was erected at Horeb following a battle between Israel and Amalek at a critical point of Israel's history. The entire nation was then enroute for Canaan and had just been miraculously supplied with water by God. From the smitten rock living water was gushing out and down the hill to Rephidim, the waterless land below and Israel was at rest. Just as they were enjoying this, Amalek suddenly appeared to contend with them; they wanted possession of the waters, but God had not provided water from the rock for Amalek to drink.

The name Amalek means 'the people who lick up' and true to their name that was precisely their intention in attacking Israel, but the Lord did not allow them to lick up His people. He had led them to Horeb for the purpose of the miracle. They were as much the people for the water as the water was for the people. Amalek would ever rue the day they sought to interfere with God's plans; for daring to attack His people God said that He would destroy Amalek, blotting out their name from under heaven.

There are many lessons to be learned from this incident though, one of which is that danger lies in Rephidim, which by definition is the land of 'reclining places'. Amalek will always invade and attack those who lie at rest, drinking at the fountain, if they do so supposing that there is no need to watch for and repel the incursions of the flesh. Rejoicing in the abundance of waters bounding down the hill it is easy to forget that continual vigilance and prayer is necessary if enjoyment of the privilege is to be maintained. This truth is strengthened by observing Moses sitting on top of the rock with the rod of God in his hand and his arms supported heavenward in prayer. With Aaron and Hur in support he keeps constant vigil, while Joshua below wages war to the death against Amalek. Conquest gained, Moses is told by God to record in a book that He 'would utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven'. God had taken Amalek's invasion of Israel as an attack upon Himself and His throne, so the result was a foregone conclusion. Moses built an altar of victory, calling it Jehovah-Nissi, 'the Lord is my banner'.

This whole incident is an analogy of absorbing interest full of spiritual meaning. The rock cannot be other than a representation of CHRIST; the rod first represents the sovereign power of God that smote Him on the cross; the water represents the life-giving Spirit that was poured out as a result. The name Aaron means 'enlightened' or 'illuminated', while Hur means 'noble' or 'free-born' or 'fine white linen'; Moses first standing and then sitting on a stone on the rock, with the rod of God in his hand, represents the enthroned CHRIST. At present He is engaged in ceaseless intercession and the rod is now revealed to be His sceptre, the symbol of majesty and authority by which He rules. Last and greatest of all, the altar once more brings to our notice the basic principle upon which all life depends. In this case it displays utter devotion and complete self-dedication to God, by which alone life was maintained for Israel.

It is noteworthy that the altar stands on top of the hill, as though crowning all, plainly setting forth the position the altar principle holds above the actual bodily sacrifice that may be offered thereon. Jesus Himself sought to fix our attention upon this truth when He asked His famous question, 'which is greater, the gift or the altar which sanctifies the gift?' There is only one answer to that, 'the altar', for the altar had power over the gift to turn it by fire into a sacrifice and offering in an acceptable form; the sacrifice had no power over the altar. It is surely extraordinary that an absolutely inanimate object such as an altar should be called by Moses 'Jehovah is my

banner'. We may ask 'and what is inscribed upon this banner?' With equal certainty the answer would be 'ABSOLUTE LOVE'; fixed self-devotion to the desire and will of another.

Reflection upon the discoveries made so far about these named altars gives rise to the conviction that by them in a special way God has revealed His plan of salvation. Beginning with Abraham and his altar on Moriah we are introduced to 'JEHOVAH-JIREH — THE LORD WILL PROVIDE'. Upon that occasion Abraham said 'IN THE MOUNT OF THE LORD IT SHALL BE SEEN', and so it was. As we have formerly noted, Jesus said 'Abraham rejoiced to see my day, he saw it and was glad'.

The whole pattern of divine life and eternal love related to salvation was unfolded there before the Lord that day. No human eye saw it; all was enacted in secret; it has only been related to us by God through Moses in order that we may be allowed to enter into some of the most important things of salvation which no-one but God sees and knows. These may be listed as follows:— utmost union, unquestioning obedience, unresisting submission unwavering determination, uncomplaining trust, unswerving faith. On Moriah the life was offered to God; the seed was preserved; the son rose from the altar; the substitution was made; the blood was shed; Isaac returned from the dead; in a figure Abraham received him and the promise was made sure to all the seed. So perfectly in the type was the foundation laid that we can joyfully proclaim that we have clearly seen it from this mountain-top of truth.

The Outpoured Gift

Passing on to Beersheba, we find Isaac's altar built by 'THE WELL OF THE OATH'. This is a remarkable connection, laying emphasis upon the altar with the water of life. It is a most important link-up, bringing to our notice the truth which Paul states for us in Galatians 3 v.1 ,2. Presenting the crucifixion in verse 1, he puts the question about receiving the Spirit in closest juxtaposition to it in verse 2: 'received ye the Spirit?' he asks. The death and resurrection of Christ and the outpouring and gift of the Holy Spirit are found together in: (1) the Old Testament in type, (2) the New Testament in print, (3) in fact in history and (4) in experience in truth.

The unfolding plan is made yet plainer as we observe Jacob's emergence into spiritual clarity. Establishing the altar at Shechem, he gave testimony to his direct personal encounter with the Lord at Jabbok. He had emerged from the uncertainty of his former trust in One who was 'the fear of his father Isaac', into a new direct knowledge of God and himself. When he named his altar 'GOD THE GOD OF ISRAEL', he was drawing attention to this. God and he who had first met and wrestled and then clung together at the waters of Jabbok and Peniel, were declared by him to be permanently joined together at the altar of Shechem.

Upon the basis of Jacob's newly-discovered reality God commands him to go back to Bethel, the place where he had been granted his first revelation of God. Purging himself and his household from the last remnants of idolatry, he obediently went up to Bethel and there built another altar as commanded by the Lord. He had not built one upon the first occasion but had simply interpreted his dream to mean that Luz was the house of God and had therefore renamed the place Bethel. Raising his pillow into a standing memorial, he anointed it for prophetic significance and passed on into Syria.

This time, however, Jacob, in the light of the new day now dawning, with clearer understanding, built an altar there calling it 'GOD THE HOUSE OF GOD'. Once more he raised up a pillar of stone, but before anointing it he poured upon it the drink offering of wine. Usually the drink-offering was made to the Lord as part of a sacrifice embracing some more substantial offering, which constituted the major part of the whole. In a special sense it represented that degree and quality of the outpoured life which God deemed could not be properly typified by the flesh and blood of the body. It really showed what was in the blood, what it represented — that is the soul-life, the spiritual and moral beauty and calibre, or character and disposition of the life. This is what God drank in.

Animals and birds had no virtues of spirit and soul to offer to God. They compulsorily lost their existence, they had no life to give. By command their meagre qualities had often to be augmented by the blood of grapes, the wine of life. But even then all was woefully short of that which their combined powers so poorly symbolised.

Jacob left the altar empty, but saturated and anointed the pillar with wine and oil. The altar was of many stones, the pillar was but one. Perhaps Jacob saw it all in a very personal way and meant it to represent himself, Israel

and, hopefully, all who according to the promise should proceed from him through his twelve Sons. Prophetically, however, they were to be God's house of Israel; God had planned it so and later they did make Him a house to dwell in. How much of it all Jacob foresaw we do not know. To us he has left the message of his altars, 'God the God of Israel' and 'God of the house of God'.

Linked with the altars of Abraham and Isaac, Jacob's show the development of the line of spiritual truth which God first began with Abraham, Jacob's grandfather. Death and resurrection of the Seed, followed by the giving and receiving of the Spirit, accompanied by abundant fruitfulness, logically eventuates in the building of the house of God — the Church — 'the pillar and ground of truth'. If it were by the message of the altar alone, God is indeed seen to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Much more than this lies to hand and will repay patient search, but let us proceed yet further to consider Moses' altars.

Before doing this we ought here to notice that, unlike his patriarchal forbears, MOSES never once built an altar for himself alone. In this matter he always acted in a national capacity; he built altars for Israel. When Abraham, Isaac and Jacob raised their altars they were acting as individuals. Although prophetically and typically their actions have wide and varying implications, they did not build for the nation. The nation did not exist in their day; they were the fathers of it, so they could not act mediatorially as did Moses in his day. But, even so, Moses could have built an altar for himself or just for his family but there is no record that he did so. He always acted for the family of God, the nation of Israel.

Moses was commanded by God to direct Israel to make an altar of brass. This was to stand within His courts to be the altar of the Lord and of the children of Israel from that time forward. The altar that Moses built at Horeb was Israel's also, but in another way. Having earlier noted the details leading up to and surrounding that episode, we will not again go into them, except to underline one or two points. At Horeb Israel was presented with a vision of itself. Soon they were to be given instructions to provide living-accommodation for God. When they did so they became in a more visible way the house of God, for then God dwelt in the midst of them and walked among them; from then on they were God's Church in the wilderness.

So, beyond Horeb's mute testimony to the Christ, its voice speaks no less strongly to His people themselves. On the day the great miracle was wrought, Moses was acting for God. According to His word, there on the top of His own handiwork stood God. At His Command the rock was smitten; unto Him Moses had stretched forth his hands and built his altar; it was He who had allowed Amalek to attack Israel. His people had much to learn of their heredity and pre-destiny and He had brought them to Horeb to teach them many things. Not only must they learn the facts of Calvary and Pentecost and the relationship between them, but they must also be taught the difference between the flesh and the Spirit. They must also be shown the likeness between themselves and the thirst-quenching rock.

Jacob's pillar was a piece of rock; it was raised up to be the first intimation in scripture that the Church is God's house, the pillar and ground of truth. Without flesh and blood that pillar was offered to God as representing the solid, righteous, eternal character of God's people. Over this the drink-offering was poured and the anointing applied; it stood there as a permanent testimony to God for His purposes in the earth. Now the Lord is showing Israel that, beyond anointing, the rock must know a smiting that the river of living waters might gush forth from it.

Beyond indrinking the Spirit to become a well within for the quenching of its own thirst, the Church must also know a great outpouring from itself, that all may come to the waters and drink. It must wrestle in prayer continuously, going on far beyond its own strength, enduring and outlasting its weariness; mediatorial in intercession, with princely power and priestly devotion, it must hold up the sceptre of the cross, that Jesus (Joshua) may win the battle for victory in the lives of His people. The house of God is a house of prayer that it may be a house from which the living waters flow out from under the altar.

If we would desire to have Jehovah as our banner we must live a life upon the altar principle. Amalek can never be allowed to drink of the water supplied by God for His people or all will have been in vain. The Church may recline to drink the Spirit but they must stand up to wage war against the flesh. What a wonderful symbol of the cross is that rod of Moses; it fills so many roles. Here it appears in the unusual symbol of a flag staff from which streams the banner emblazoned with an altar bearing the words 'Jehovah my banner'.

Twelve Pillars of Witness

As referred to earlier, before making the brazen altar to God's design, Moses also built another of his own — this time in the desert of Sinai, in fact right under the hill. At that time, by God's command, the mount had been bounded off; it was prohibited territory, sanctified from the people and enveloped in the cloud of God. Moses had been up and down it, to and fro between God and the people, carrying the word from the one to the other. During this time such supernatural demonstrations were taking place that it was evident something was afoot of a most extraordinary nature and the people were very frightened — even Moses said that he exceedingly quaked and trembled.

Upon returning from his latest journey up the mount and announcing to the people all the words that God had given to him for them, Moses also informed them that it was God's intention to enter into covenant with them on the terms stated. Hearing these, the people reaffirmed their former consent and intention to do all that God said. This secured, 'Moses wrote all the words of the Lord in a book and rising early in the morning builded an altar under the hill'. Having done so, in much the same manner as Jacob before him, he raised up twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel.

Lonely Jacob's solitary pillar at Bethel was prophetic of the twelve pillars of Israel at Sinai under the hill. Builded of stones, these twelve stood grouped around the altar of stones in solemn order, mutely testifying to God's faithfulness. Moses was showing them that Israel were to be a people of the altar. What a long way they had come from Egypt. The distance must be measured in terms of spiritual pilgrimage rather than in miles. There had been no altar there and only one had been built between there and Sinai.

Over four hundred years had passed since, at the first, Abraham had laid out his animal and bird covenant victims upon the ground that God should cut His covenant with him. During the whole of that time not one altar had been built unto the Lord in Egypt; Abraham had not built one there and neither had they. Now out of the land, soon they were to have a permanent altar of brass for the Lord of the promised land. As yet they had no knowledge of that fact, but by this one that Moses had now built God was going to prepare them for it. In that land the brazen altar was to be dedicated unto blood, specified offerings, ceaseless sacrifices and the continual fire of God.

A Covenant of Blood and the Fire of God

In Canaan the Lord was going to dwell among His people upon the ground of a blood covenant and upon no other. Since the days of Abraham and Isaac at Moriah not a word about sacrificial blood in connection with altars has been mentioned in holy writ, but now Moses sends young men to the altar with offerings and sacrifices to burn for acceptance and peace. The gathered people standing around the stone symbols of the nation, facing the altar, watch him as he catches half the blood of the animals in basins and sprinkles the other half upon the altar. This done, he read to the people all the words written in the book. Again receiving their affirmation of obedience, he sprinkled the book and all the people with the other half of the blood, saying to them, 'Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words'. The same blood was both God's and the people's, though neither had shed it. Moses, the man of God, the mediator between God and man, had provided it, saying, 'this is the blood of the covenant which God hath enjoined unto you'.

Having accomplished his immediate task, from the ground of the blood-sealed covenant Moses again ascends into Sinai, accompanied this time by Aaron and seventy of the elders of Israel. The blood-sprinkled people standing around the smouldering altar watched them go, but did not know for what reason they went nor what the future held for them all. They knew that they were heading for the promised land, but they had yet to discover that they were to be the host nation to God — that He was planning to come and live among them.

When Moses finally reached the Lord at the top of Sinai he was given instructions to make Him a house and how to assemble and distribute the furniture. The altar of burnt offering was to be placed at His gates. It was not to be built of stone or made of earth as formerly, but of metal. It was to be different because it was to have a different function from any which preceded it; it was to be the altar of the blood of atonements. No previous altar had been built for that purpose; hitherto the idea of sin had not been introduced at any altar, but this one was deliberately ordered by God that it should be used for sacrifices for the coverage of the sins of Israel committed within the covenant. It was to be a kind of means for the continuation of the Passover, the logical conclusion of it

under that covenant. Obedience to the Lord in the matter of remission of sins by means of the brazen altar resulted in entire forgiveness — the Lord regarded their sins as covered by sacrifice and would pass over them because they were covered by the blood.

This altar was the seventh since Abraham's on Moriah, but it was not to be the last one made in Israel. This may seem strange, for with the making and positioning of the brazen altar God had finalised all His demands concerning it and therefore would not accept any other. Notwithstanding this, the final altar made in Israel at that time was the one erected entirely without instruction, simply for the purpose of witness. Existing jointly with the brazen altar, this one was never used for sacrifice; it simply bore testimony to the unity of the nation and of their total acceptance by the Lord. The Lord fully accepted this uncommissioned altar. Standing there in all its unused glory, it existed solely as a symbol and confession of man's understanding of the principle of eternal life.

There is no clearer testimony to man's firm belief of this than the great altar which the two and a half tribes of Israel built upon the borders of their inheritance. The motive behind their action was completely misunderstood and misinterpreted by the many and caused so much alarm to the greater part of Israel that they were prepared to go and destroy both the altar and those who built it. However, the retributive action was averted because upon arbitration they learned that, although the altar was built, it was never to be used. Their brethren had erected it purposely to let everyone know that, although they were not living in the mainland of the inheritance of the Lord, they were still God's people.

Perhaps they may have chosen any one of a half dozen other things to set up as their particular emblem of unity, but they built an altar. There can scarcely be clearer evidence than this that they understood the significance of it, though to what measure who can say? To be cut off from God's altar was the worst punishment which could be inflicted on anybody in Israel; it meant that God had completely rejected that person and had cut him off from His inheritance and all hope of salvation.

It is significant that those men did not attempt to erect another tabernacle. If they had been guided by purely human, aesthetic desires they might have done so, but they knew that in that event both it and they would have been entirely unacceptable to God and their brethren. The altar was a different proposition however, it was theirs, it belonged to all the people, it was as necessary to their life as it was to God's. When it was erected no-one but they who built it seemed to appreciate it and perhaps even they did not understand the deepest significance of the gesture. They sought for some symbol of the unity they felt with their brethren and their God, a real testimony to the corporate life of the nation, and without division decided upon the idea of the altar. To the majority of Israel it seemed blasphemous and divisive, portending disinheritance and destruction, and who can blame them? No-one, not even Joshua, had been given any instructions about it, but the minority built it and God accepted it. The thought that had inspired their action was God-given, the expression of their desire was perfect; that small group had arrived at truth, they were right. The altar must remain.

Once again as it had been at the very beginning with Abel, without divine instructions, though not without divine aid, men had arrived at divine truth. In them also we see repeated the same kind of thing that Abraham did in his day. With united voice these all say that the first and most important thing to discover is the meaning of the altar, not the sacrifice laid upon it. They were confessing that Abraham, who left his bare and unused altars all over the land, was their father.

It was as though with this man God began all over again. Abel, who had made the original discovery, lost his life in doing so, but not in vain. The truth for which he was martyred, though lost sight of for centuries, was preserved through those years, reappearing on the purged earth following the deluge. But as time progressed and men continued to degenerate and turn from God it is lost sight of again and again; Babel is an example of this. By that time men had completely forsaken the earthly symbol of heavenly life; endeavouring to reach heaven by their own powers they started to build their own tower brick by brick. To frustrate their efforts God confounded their language and curtailed their labours; He also scattered abroad those men who tried to substitute a tower for an altar, but the judgement never cured their hearts of waywardness nor turned them back to God.

For this reason God chose Abraham, a descendant of Abel's brother Seth through Noah and Shem, and started again. By Abraham God restored the altar to the permanent place it must hold in a man's life and what it should

symbolise to his heart. It is not surprising then to discover that the only blood to stain any of Abraham's altars was the lamb's which was shed on the holy mount. There is no record that the patriarch ever shed another's, though he built altar upon altar. It is remarkable how purposefully and completely God took hold of this man. Undoubtedly He did so that through him, who was the 'father' of the Seed, He should reveal the needful truth.

As we have already seen God had something greater to show us than the doctrine of atonement for sin. This He unfolded later to the fullest detail through Noses; but by this man Abraham, the father of the race, He revealed the deeper secret of the life principle of God. Because this man refrained from offering to God that for which He had not asked, and refused to act in presumption to give the impression that he already knew what God desired, he was granted at last the revelation of what God actually wanted. How great was Abraham's patience that he never once asked God what he should offer Him, and how much greater is God's wisdom that during this whole period He never once told His chosen one what it was He wanted of him as sacrifice. So Abraham continued faithful in obedience to his inward knowledge, firm in his convictions about the altar, yet fully content to rest in his ignorance of God's mind.

The Eternal Elements

The patriarch was probably helped and confirmed in his beliefs by an incident which took place fairly early on in his pilgrimage. This event was one of the most notable experiences of his life, indeed of the whole Book. It happened one day when he was returning from a victorious battle over the world powers of the darkness of the age. Tired and battle-weary as he must have been, he was met by a couple of kings, one of whom was named MELCHIZEDEK — whom Abraham immediately accepted as his own high priest. As far as we know the patriarch belonged to no religious order; he had built many altars but had never made one bodily sacrifice. Without a system of religion he had no priest and in his humility he made no pretence or attempt to be one. Whatever passed between him and Melchizedek, Abraham meekly recognised and accepted this man's claims and ministry. From him Abraham was to discover the truth of eternal sacrifice and true priesthood in the spirit of which he had already been moving for a long time.

This Melchizedek was then reigning on the earth as the priest of the most high God. Whether there were other priests of this order on the earth at that time we do not know. That other men with other priests served other gods is certain, but Abraham had nothing to do with them. He was great, but great as he was, Melchizedek was a greater and far more important person than he.

Seeming to appear from nowhere, Melchizedek approached Abraham and offered him bread and wine. No word passed between them; there was no temple, no tabernacle in evidence; he built no altar, slew no sacrifice, shed no blood, lighted no fire, burned no incense. There was no ceremony, Melchizedek came from God to the patriarch; he neither preached nor prophesied, neither did he catechise him or inform him of God's requirements for sacrifice; there was no knife in his hand. He did not reprove the man for his bloodless hands or fireless altars, Abraham neither needed nor deserved it; instead Melchizedek blessed him and gave him the now familiar tokens of a past sacrifice. He brought him nothing of man or man's labours, but the twin elements and age-abiding memorials of the sacrifice of God.

Abraham had been right, all along he had moved in the obedience of a little child, knowing nothing, attempting nothing, waiting to be shown. Just how much he understood or was told of these secrets of God, now so well known to us, we cannot guess, but our understanding is sufficiently enlightened to see that those symbols testified then, as now, that the great sacrifice had already been made. Redemption had already been achieved by God; even at that early hour of the world's history its day had long since dawned in eternity and by Melchizedek God displayed to Abraham the evidence of it. There never had been, nor was there then, any need for Abraham to make a blood sacrifice; the Lamb was slain by the Father from the foundation of the world.

Melchizedek's ministry to Abraham was absolutely confirmatory, a testimony to his faithfulness: Abraham's procedure at the altar had been quite correct throughout; what a confirmation! He could and did retain the altar, for that must for ever stand among men as the pointer to God and the skies; that for which it representatively stood was precious and eternal. Its chief function was to reveal the life-principle of God. All we understand by the cross was originally developed from that. Finally it was brought forth as from God on earth.

Eventually, because he had not forced animals upon the God Who had not forced them upon him, Abraham was led to Moriah, the place where he discovered the knowledge of God and true sacrifice. But for the time being we will reserve any attempt to assess and evaluate it; instead we will trace some further developments and outworkings of the altar theme in scripture.

DAVID, who was raised up of God in the fourteenth generation from Abraham, was taught much of God about sacrifice and offerings. Following in the footsteps of his father Abraham before him, though under completely different circumstances, he also was led of God to build an altar on Moriah. The importance of his action can scarcely be overemphasised for this was the place where Solomon his son later built the temple; perhaps he even placed the altar upon the exact spot. What an example of divine planning this is! God carefully marked the spot in Abraham, re-marked it in David and permanently fixed it by Solomon.

All of this shows that in God, long before the earthly temple and all that went on in it existed or could exist, the altar was and had to be. What an order and what an emphasis. The temple system included an altar for men, but long before that existed the altar paved the way for the temple.

It is true that David, like Abraham centuries before him, offered sacrifices on his altar. Both these men were commissioned by God, though at different times and for different reasons, to go and do so; but neither of them was under any delusions about them. When the command came, David, as Abraham before him, could do no other but obey; therefore he went to the mount and responded to God in the manner commanded him. It was absolutely necessary, but his heart-knowledge concerning the whole matter of sacrifice and offering is revealed in Psalms 40 and 51. He knew that God did not want those as such, He neither had desire for them nor took pleasure in them upon an altar. He originally made animals and birds for His own and man's pleasure; He did not make them to be slaughtered.

God first allowed and afterwards ordered the sacrifice of living things, because only by having them slain and offered to Himself could He teach man the lessons and truth he needed to know. David seemed to understand this perfectly; he saw and said that God did not want sacrifice and offering as much as He wanted His will done on earth. 'The sacrifices of God' he said 'are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart O Lord thou wilt not despise'.

David knew that what was sacrificed and offered on the altar meant nothing to God and was of no avail to man unless his heart be pulverised into purity and his spirit broken from sin. The events which took place in his life leading up to Ornan's threshing-floor furnish evidence of this fact. When he built his altar and sacrificed there David was indeed a man of broken spirit and contrite heart, wanting only to be obedient before God. His sacrifices were only outward means and tokens of giving himself afresh to the Lord, who had been more merciful to him than he had right to expect. He had fallen and he did not try to hide it; undeservedly and mercifully enough he had not fallen out of the Lord's hands but into them and O how gracious he had found Him to be. David ascended Moriah, purchased the spot where the angel stayed his hand from slaughter and built his altar in a threshing-floor; he knew his need to be threshed by God. With deepest penitence he submitted to it; in the end the man is found to be pure wheat. As far as we may judge this episode marks the time of his final defection from the path of righteousness. It was a period of unspeakable tragedy, but the building of the altar marked his return to the paths of righteousness and his complete acceptance by God.

With inspired foresight David saw that this very spot was the place where the temple should be built. Therefore, with equally inspired zeal, from that time onward David devoted himself almost entirely to the task of preparation. Plans were drawn up and materials assembled for building an 'exceeding magnificent' house for God on the site of the threshing-floor in which the altar stood. With the direct intention of facilitating this, during his last days David made his son king and, soon after his father's death, in compliance with his father's wishes, Solomon built the temple with the materials which David had prepared.

All of this further points the lesson that God is not, nor can be, without sacrifice; it is not only a principle of eternal life, it is also a domestic necessity apart from which He cannot abide anywhere. Even if only temporarily, wherever He dwells there must be an altar to symbolise the spiritual sacrifice so vital to life and without which it cannot be.

Beside signifying this principle, to men of spiritual perception like David the other purpose of the altar was its functional means of offering visible sacrifices to God. In paradise there was no altar, nor could be, consequently God did not live there; He only visited the place in the cool of the day, for He cannot abide anywhere at any time apart from sacrifice.

We know that sacrifices for sin must always be made from the broken spirits and contrite hearts of the sinful men who offer them. Perhaps it was in fulfilment of this aspect of sacrifice that, before rising and going to hang broken-hearted on a cross at Golgotha, the Lord Jesus went to Gethsemane and did what He did and said what He said there. There is no aspect of sacrifice which the Lord did not fulfil; Gethsemane's awful, mysterious events seem most likely to furnish the proper testimonials to the brokenness of spirit which God required of Him on behalf of man. There had never been, nor is there now, neither can there ever be sorrow like unto Jesus' sorrow. He did not only sorrow personally, that is to say because of the unwarrantable injustice and utter rejection He received from man, but also vicariously and representatively. In this capacity He sorrowed: (1) as penitentially for all convicted men who have been made aware of the heinousness of their sin, (2) profoundly as God for His creatures.

Beside this, He delighted also to do God's will and this pleasure swallowed up all the sorrows in joy. This made His spirit whole and healed His aching, breaking heart, so that He could gather all sacrifice into one and give His all as a great ascending offering to God. His sacrifice and death for sin was so perfect and all-inclusive that it ended all further need for outward physical or inward spiritual sacrifices for sin for ever. Jesus' sacrifice and offering as Man for men is as complete as it is comprehensive.

Living, Spiritual Sacrifices

Yet the writer to the Hebrews tells us that we have an altar and Peter tells us that we are to offer up spiritual sacrifices. We know therefore that, although we are to be sacrificing priests, we are not to attempt to offer to God any kind of sacrifices for sin, whether they be physical, material or spiritual. In any case we have not been given any physical equivalent to an altar upon which to offer any such sacrifice. The Lord Jesus offered one sacrifice for sin for ever and sat down, and we are told to enter into that rest.

Under the Old Testament constitution, annually on the day of atonement, the Lord accepted blood freshly sprinkled upon His throne from the hand of the High Priest. It was a token offering speaking of Christ's blood. The action signified the people's deep repentance and total renunciation and confession of sins. The result was the remission and riddance of twelve months of sins 'that were past through the forbearance of God'. Only under these conditions could He continue to sit there and reign over His people and be their God. Under the Old Covenant this had to be continuously repeated, because forgiveness then was only by an arrangement of repeated coverings or atonements. But now, reconciliation being brought in, we may enter through the rent veil and sit down with the Lord in perfect rest. Concerning this aspect of His sacrifice there is no more to do, it has been eternally accomplished by Jesus so we sit down with Him. Never again is there to be any daily standing for ministry and offering by Him or anyone else along that line.

However, under the NEW COVENANT there is still desire and expectation in God's heart, as well as a place and need for gift and freewill offerings and sacrifices to be made. Unlike the one eternal sin-offering these must be made eternally, repetitiously. It is to this class of offering that the following verses refer:

(1) 'present your bodies, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto Him, which is your reasonable service';

(2) 'by Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise, the fruit of our lips, offering praise unto His name'.

The former verse is statedly connected with service and has directly to do with the particular function of the Aaronic family. It was their duty-service in the age of law to present to God the bodies of the living animals which were brought by the children of Israel and were slaughtered beside the altar for sacrifice. The final act of presentation to God by fire upon the altar was the priests' reasonable service because that was their duty.

It would have been most iniquitous and utterly unreasonable of those priests if, after their brethren had bred and brought their sacrifices to the altar at God's command, they had refused to make the final act of presentation that made them acceptable in His sight. That age is now past but God is still calling for bodies to be presented

sacrificially to Him. Not as formerly, dead upon an altar, but nevertheless as truly given over to do the will of God as were the bodies of Jesus in His day and Paul in his.

At the end of his life Paul could write, 'I am ready to be offered', or better 'I am already being poured out'. Once he wrote to the Philippians exhorting them to rejoice with him 'if I be poured out upon the sacrifice and service of your faith'. He lived a life of continuous sacrifice and so also did many in the early church, such as Epaphroditus of whom he wrote in high commendation. Likewise Luke tells us of Stephen who offered up his body first unto the Lord in selfless service as a deacon and then with equal devotion in final sacrifice as a martyr. Paul said that he himself sought only to fill up that which was behind of the sufferings of Christ in his body of flesh for the Church which (he recognised) is His body.

These are the kind of bodily offerings and sacrifices the Lord is expecting from His people today and if the altar principle be in their lives as it is in His He will not be disappointed. In view of these things we all ought to ask ourselves, and perhaps each other, to whom are we sacrificing ourselves? For what are we sacrificing our lives? Are we all now wholly presented to God? If so by whom and to what purpose?

The second verse quoted above is undoubtedly connected with the tabernacle-temple service of the Sons of Asaph. The book of Hebrews is largely linked with David; quotations from his psalms abound everywhere throughout the epistle. The writer was obviously very familiar with the ancient writings of Israel's poet-king; those sacred songs had been incorporated into the religious life of the people and had always held a place of honour in their worship. David had written many if not all his psalms with the direct purpose of training men to sing them accompanied by 'the players on instruments' in association with the functions of the priests. The two forms and means of service were combined by David and were each the respective duties of those appointed to participate in them.

A reading of the psalms, especially those that in the title are designated for singing, ought to give us instruction in the kind of things which are acceptable to God as sacrifices of praise. Perhaps we may find it instructive that they do not all consist of 'Hallelujah, Hallelujah, praise the Lord', but the greater number are categorical statements of historic or devotional truth. Sometimes they are revelatory, sometimes prophetic, or they may be eulogistic, or hortatory, doctrinal, Messianic, explanatory, penitential, judgemental; they are variable in pattern and length, thoroughly reflective of the writer's character and all inspired of God. In the daily ritual of the temple service, as the bodily sacrifices were made so also were the verbal ones; in the temple sacrifice and offering was attended with song. People who dared not touch the altar could nevertheless engage in singing psalms.

So also it is with us today. We dare not touch the altar in relationship to the one full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice and oblation for sin, but we can stand and offer the accompanying sacrifice of praise, and because we can we must because we ought; it is all part of our reasonable service.

Beside this, let us remember that praise must not always be thought of in terms of singing. STEPHEN would hardly be thought of as a psalmist, but thinking comparatively about his great 'apologia' it would not be very difficult to liken it, at least in parts, to a psalm. In much the same way as David did at times, he makes a historical survey of God's covenant dealings with Israel, then with inspired power he applies a singular, unforgettable lesson to the hearts of his hearers. He paid for his boldness with his life; so we see that both kinds of sacrifice are offered by this great saint and martyr — he offered his last great sacrifice with blood and praise and prayer.

The other principle was finely manifest in Stephen's life — he was and still is a living sacrifice. When God receives into His hands our spirits, will He, as was the case with Jesus and Stephen, receive a living sacrifice as well as a living son? If the living God lives by the altar principle, ought we who are His people to think that we can live by any other?

A Consuming Fire

One of the great cries that ELIJAH the prophet of God made against Israel was 'they have digged down thine altars'. It was a terrible indictment calling for severest punishment, yet for the sake of the remnant in Israel and by the faith of the prophet, the Lord spared the people. The story of the contest on Carmel makes tremendous reading. At the crucial point we are introduced first to hundreds of the prophets of Baal building and leaping on

their cold altar, mingling their own blood with the blood of their sacrifices, all to no avail. Then we behold the lone, brave prophet of the Lord, triumphant in faith, building his altar of twelve stones to the Lord.

Elijah was more than a prophet at that moment; he reigned over his circumstances like a king. Like the high priest of God he would make the sacrifice for all Israel; the altar upon which the offering would finally be laid should be the whole nation, each stone must represent a tribe. Needless to say God was entirely satisfied. Upon Elijah's altar the all-consuming fire fell; it devoured the sacrifice, the water that saturated and surrounded it and also the very stones upon which it was supported, elevating all to God.

The key to all lies here before us. Elijah was a man of great faith. The abundant rain, the revival of life, the fruitfulness of the land, the ultimate overthrow of the demonic despotism of Ahab and Jezebel, all came as a result of Elijah's faith. The prophet is a greatly admired man among us to this day, but great as he was, and however greatly we admire him and seek to emulate his faith, we shall miss the greatest lesson of all if we overlook the fact that everything sprang from his spiritual insight into the ground of truth in God. Like David and Abraham, and perhaps an unnamed host of others, he was a man who understood that the visible altar was but a symbol of a spiritual principle of God's life.

His main function that day on Carmel was to represent to the people what they were. He showed them that they were the altar people of God and drew attention to the means of their real spiritual life. The genius of the man lay in the fact that he saw and understood that to be God's people men must live as God. At the hour of national crisis the altar on Carmel was nothing other than the way into the Temple, the gate of heaven and the entrance into the house of the Lord. Saturating the sacrifice and thoroughly wetting the stones, Elijah precluded the possibility of ignition by any fanatical false prophet seeking to create false fire in an attempt to destroy the purposes of God. The water was poured in until it filled the trench; it flowed round the base of the altar until it completely isolated it. At last there it stood alone, the object of everyone's gaze and Elijah's expectation, separated from the surrounding earth by its moat like an island separated from the mainland by the sea.

Israel was for God and God was for Israel. That day, by God's grace and faithful Elijah's symbolic act, God and His people were isolated from sin and heathendom by the sea of love, joined by sacrifice and consumed together in one fire on the mountain-top of His kingdom. Israel had digged down God's altars, but Elijah built them up into one altar again, placed the sacrifice upon it and the fire fell. But they could not retain the blessing; the desires of God and the intentions of His prophets could not withhold them from their folly. Despite the unforgettable lessons, Israel did not learn the truth which Elijah knew and so singularly taught on Carmel.

A Husbandly Covenant

HOSEA, another mighty prophet of similar insight and understanding, says of his people that since altars had been to Israel to sin, then altars should be to them to sin. What a dreadful state of affairs this was. That which had been revealed to them as a means of blessing had irretrievably become a means of causing the absolute opposite of God's original intention. Instead of the altar being the place where sin was forgiven by atonements, it was the place where their sin increased. They were using all kinds of self-made illegitimate altars to offer many sorts of self-chosen abominable sacrifices to a variety of different self-devised idol-gods in increasing numbers of self-built temples. All of these were expressions of self-willed sin and studied insults to God. The opening chapters of the book make it very plain that Israel were living in spiritual harlotry.

Yet God loved the people and regarded Himself as married to them. He had entered into spiritual covenant and union with them by a great oath that He would be their God and they His people, so He felt that the onus lay upon Him to act toward them as a faithful husband. Although Israel's behaviour toward Him merited punishment and He would have to administer it, He would do so in love and mercy. At the worst it would only be corrective, He could not bring Himself to be altogether destructive toward them. He would limit His anger, directing it to the elimination of the divisive abominations which had become such a barrier between them and their God.

He loved them dearly and felt jealous and hurt over their conduct as would a faithful husband over the behaviour of an unfaithful wife; He would therefore punish them, but He would not divorce them. His covenant and oath to them had been sealed with blood; He had meant every word of it. When He made His vows He did so without any desire or intention in His heart to break or deviate from them, nor would He. But on their part Israel did not see or

know, nor did they seem to understand in any degree that their relationship to Jehovah was to be as a wife to a husband. Isaiah had cried it out to them in his day, but whether they had ever read or still read his prophecy is very doubtful.

Their history is one long story of almost unrelieved backsliding. It is almost certain that their forefathers had never understood the full meaning of the events recorded in Exodus 24. Events proved that they never grasped the full implication of God's covenant. Why, even before the tables of the covenant were in their hands, they were making a golden calf and wishing they were back in Egypt. At that time, by a series of unparalleled miracles, the fathers of the nation had but lately come out of Egypt across the Red Sea and were gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai. Having earlier briefly referred to this, we will consider it now more fully, for here it finds its natural place in the exposition.

At the call of God, Moses, their saviour, leader and mediator had been up and had returned from the mountain with instructions to inform the people of the covenant God wished to make with them. At this juncture the ten commandments which were to form the basis of the covenant had not been written. As recorded in chapter 20, Moses had already received them from God whilst in His presence under the power of His Spirit, but as yet God had not inscribed them. So, descending the mountain under commission from God, Moses gathered the people together and reported to them what God had said to him. The object of this was to acquaint them with God's terms so that they could voluntarily enter the covenant of love with understanding. When the people heard God's terms they unanimously promised, 'all the words which the Lord hath said we will do and be obedient'. Well pleased with them, Moses accepted their vow and in God's behalf took them at their word. Not until then did Moses commit the commandments and ordinances he had so far received to writing.

This sacred writing was the first 'Bible' ever given by God to man. We now know it was really only the first instalment of the inspired Word. Viewed in the light of all the foregoing, it is surely a most remarkable fact of great importance to us that the first thing ever to be put into writing by God should be this covenant. It is perhaps as remarkable also that around it the other great revelations should be later assembled. Just how and when the rest of the Pentateuch was received and written and ordered in its entirety we cannot be sure. Whether Genesis came last and was placed first we do not know; we can only thank and praise God that we have it.

We do know practically to the point of certainty however that the Book was commenced under the shadow of Sinai and that the first words written down by Moses were not 'In the beginning God created...' but these which now comprise chapters 20-23 of the book of Exodus. 'I am the Lord thy God thou shalt have no other gods before me'; what a beginning — God, just God, all God, only God. From this ultimately flowed the words of Genesis 1 — 'In the beginning God'. But let us see how Moses continues with his first great revelation from the Spirit: 'I the Lord thy God am a jealous God ... thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. God is come to prove you ... an altar ... if they will make me an altar'. Thus the writing continues, but what a surprising course to take. 'I am the Lord thy God ... if thou wilt make me an altar'; who would have expected that?

By this we can see most clearly into God's naked Spirit; by saying such things He has revealed Himself. Right from the beginning the Lord's primary insistence to Israel was that they were to be the people of God and the altar. The commandments were given to keep them from sin, and the altar was devised to reveal both the principle of life and the way they could offer themselves to God. The wording is significant, 'thou shalt not come up by steps to my altar'; note that the Lord does not go on to say 'to offer thy sacrifice'. The whole implication is that the sacrifice is the person, not something the person offers.

The Pattern of the House

When saying these things the Lord was also intending to show Moses very shortly the pattern of the house and furniture which He wished His people to make for Him. As we have already seen, one of those pieces of furniture was a large brazen altar which was to be so positioned that it should be to man as the doorway through which the first step should be taken to approach God. But even before He stated His requirements for that, or time be found to make it, He wanted His people to know the importance of the altar to Him and to them. The order in this chapter is: God, the people, the altar, God's altar. The great link between God and His people was to be the altar.

The interim period between the giving of the law and the building of the tabernacle at Sinai was to be the altar period. The command was clear, 'an altar of earth thou shalt make unto me and thou shalt sacrifice ... in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee and bless thee'. The altar, the earth, the sacrifice, the name, the blessing. God left them no option, they were to make an altar. If they wished to continue and keep in touch with Him as He did with them, it could only be upon the condition that they made His altar.

The ten commandments were connected with the altar. To Him it was as important as the bow in the cloud at Ararat and the blood upon the houses in Egypt; the altar must be His symbol upon the earth. Even though the significance of it be not grasped nor the principle understood by those who obeyed Him, the wish must nevertheless be acknowledged and the symbol accepted. True to the original order of creation, God's first thought and instruction in giving command concerning the altar was that it was to be made of earth; only as of secondary importance was instruction given about building an alternative altar of stone. In doing this the Lord was following the principle of the plan He had employed when making man.

As Adam and Eve were one, yet two slightly though obviously different people, so the altar symbol was one, though obviously of two slightly different materials and erections. In Eden Adam was first made entirely of earth; some time after that Eve was made / builded from one of his ribs to be a help, meet for him. God in giving instructions about the altar carried through this method exactly; the altar of earth, made: the altar of stone, made/builded.

As we read the Book of God's words and works and ways, the basic simplicity of the Lord in all things utterly amazes us. His profound ethics, His undeviating laws, His methods of procedure, His unshakeable righteousness upon which all is founded, and the scrupulous care with which He fashions the whole, all flow together into the enlightened understanding as a mighty river; the heart thus filled expands into immensity like the sea which never overflows nor bursts the living spirit within, though it swell with unspeakable wonder and divine rapture. Without controversy surely meditation and understanding are the deepest fountains from which the river flows with grateful love in ceaseless praise.

This chapter of the covenant, which is the beginning of all scripture, holds the key to that which by rearrangement is now read as though it is the beginning of scripture. Logically Genesis takes its place at the beginning of the Book because it gives the narrative account of the commencement of creation. It records the beginning and therefore bears that name; but in keeping with the truth that God is the God of second things, that which is recorded in the second book was written first and holds the key to creation. God made man of earth first and next builded woman from a rib taken from man, as a stone taken from earth, and this He did to show us that man must be an altar of sacrifice and offering to his maker and God.

Something of the vastness of this unchangeable truth comes through to us from Abraham, of whom the writer to the Hebrews tells us that 'he looked for a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God'. Like Man, the eternal city must be an altar; and so indeed it is; it is God's temple city, His tabernacle. For foundations it has the twelve apostles of the Lamb; men who in their lives were altars upon which the Lamb was offered to God. Upon their lives was built the Church, which upon inspection is found to be nothing but the altar of God.

Right there in the midst of all, eternally held in the heart of New Jerusalem, are God and the Lamb. New Jerusalem is the Eve of the heavenly Adam coming down out of heaven from God; she is the bride, His wife, a help meet for Him to show forth the secret of God and eternal life and pure everlasting love. She is one with Him, helping Him to reveal that God is Life and God is Love; by it and because of it she is pure, simple, transparent, glorious, eternal light.

The principal principle of God who is Life and Love and Light Eternal is sacrifice and offering; apart from it neither Man, nor the City, nor God Himself can possibly be. In God life and death are one. That is why Paul so emphatically says that neither life nor death shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. To be in His life we must be planted (eternally) in His death, for He is Resurrection. We, like Him, must be crucified ones, lambs as they had been slain; called lions by angels, sons by the Father, bride and wife by the Spirit, body by Christ, house by God, Israel of God in scripture, inner heart-temple by insight of His lovers.

Concerning these things and in a way suited to their day and age God sought to bring Israel into covenant with Himself at Sinai. So writing down the terms of the covenant, Moses rose early in the morning to build an altar under the hill and set up twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel; having done so he sent twelve men to offer sacrifices to God. As yet the priesthood had not been elected, so in a manner Moses was putting Israel to their fundamental business of national priesthood unto and before the Lord unto whom they were gathered.

Following this he took basins (perhaps one each for a tribe) in which he put half the blood of the offerings, sprinkling the other half on the altar. Then he read the book of the covenant to them and, having received their affirmation, sprinkled both it and the people so that the blood was now on the altar — first: the book — second and the people last (see Hebrews 10 v.17-19). Proceeding to the actual marriage oath he pronounced these words, 'Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words'. By the blood of the covenant the whole nation was joined as one with God.

The altar symbolised God's basic principle of life, the book symbolised God Himself — John 1 v.1,2; the blood symbolised their incorporation into and union with God; the people represented God's house. By these things Israel should have seen God, how He lived and where He lived and why He lived. Only after this could men see God and live; not until the marriage vows were taken and the sacred covenant sealed did God give Israel His own writing in stone and ask them to make Him a tent to live in. He had no wish to live with and be as a spiritual husband to Israel unless they covenanted to belong solely to Him and to love Him as He loved them. He knew also that they could and would never do that unless they understood the principle of spiritual sacrifice and self-offering upon which all life is founded. So He tested them by asking of them the sacrifice of love, 'speak unto the children of Israel that they bring me an offering, of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering'. The heart must be in and with everything that is given.

The symbolic altar involving flesh and blood sacrifices, real though it was, is not in view here, but the actual altar is very much envisaged. God was calling for extremely sacrificial giving by asking such things of a nomadic race. He was taking from them the things by which they spoiled the Egyptians ere they left Goshen, probably the only valuables they had. Were they willing to give sacrificially to Him? Moses, speaking from behind the veil that covered his shining face, spoke unto all the congregation of the children of Israel saying, 'this is the thing that the Lord commanded, take ye from among you an offering unto the Lord, whosoever is of a willing heart let him bring it an offering of the Lord'.

'They came everyone whose heart stirred him up and everyone whom his spirit made him willing and they brought the Lord's offering'. So vast and spontaneous was the response that it was reported to Moses 'the people bring much more than enough'. They gave, and giving gave themselves, 'the depth of their poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality'; that is the principle of the altar in man and in God. In a way these words are as true of God as of men, for rich as He is, He only had one son. When giving Him He was impoverished in sonship, for there was not another to give: behold then His liberality in giving Him up for us all. What riches of love and grace!

The unvarying principle of life and love runs through all these sayings, 'we, through His poverty have been made rich'. Ancient Israel never heard or read them; Paul was not their apostle. What a wondrous insight he had into spiritual truth which they apparently did not see. Until Hosea and Jeremiah voiced it, Israel did not appear to understand their God to be a lover and a husband who had espoused the nation to Himself through the blood and the lamb in Egypt, and who had married them at Sinai. He said He was a husband to them, taking them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt; Israel were holiness unto the Lord then and went after Him in the wilderness, but they broke the husbandly covenant. Despite that, He loved them with an everlasting love, and at one time asked — 'how can I give thee up?' At another He asked, 'where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, or to which of my creditors have I sold you?' But no bill of former legal divorcement could be found, nor was there any evidence of a present bill of sale into slavery.

God's love is based upon self-giving by sacrifice; so is all true love. He cannot deny Himself, so He caused Hosea to record His promises of future restoration. By their own wishes the people were now no longer to Him as a wife; they had estranged themselves from Him and He could no longer be to them as a husband. But in the justice that demanded they be punished He remembered mercy and graciously told them that there would come a day when

He would betroth them unto Himself for ever. The basis of that betrothal will be righteousness, judgement, loving-kindness, mercies, faithfulness and knowledge of the Lord. They had been unrighteous, unjust, brutally unloving, unmerciful, unfaithful and ignorant; a shifty, shallow and transient people. God had 'desired mercy and not sacrifice and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings', He said, but they had other desires and preferred the outward show of ritualism. The real root of their terrible behaviour lay at the point God laid bare here, 'they like men (Adam) have transgressed the covenant, there have they dealt treacherously against me'.

Adam in the garden, Israel at Sinai, Ephraim and Judah in the land all broke covenant faith with God; the issue was the same every time. Old Adam always does this; in Eden Adam broke the covenant by failing to be a faithful husband to Eve; therefore he became as a faithless wife to God, his husband and maker. Israel did it at Sinai by failing to be as a true wife to God, making an idolatrous golden calf to replace Him; Ephraim and Judah also did it quite openly in Canaan by playing the harlot with other nations to go after their goods and gods and accept their standards of living. Multiplying altars, idols and temples with religious fervour, they finally succeeded in selling themselves into slavery in foreign lands as a result. Having first made themselves slaves estranged from God while yet in their own land, they were eventually cast out and carried away captive to serve the devil in another.

All this happened to them because they failed to recognise what the altar symbolised. They saw the outward altar, the blood and the bodily sacrifices, but they had no spiritual insight or heart-grasp of what these things represented. Israel were a complete spiritual failure, therefore they became a national failure and an international disgrace.

The Cross and the Altar

Spiritual blindness is a malady by no means limited to olden days and ancient Israel; it is a widespread modern disease too. Few there are who recognise the Christ or understand His meaning or the import of His apostles' words. Consider this statement by Jesus, 'if thou bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift'.

The altar is an expression of a basic principle of God's way of life; it symbolises unity by union based upon the sacrifice of self-giving. How then can He possibly accept a gift upon His altar if it is offered in face of possibility of disunion between brethren? First go and be reconciled to thy brother, then come and offer thy gift, He says.

Too few have fully grasped: (1) the difference between the cross and the altar, and (2) the identity of the cross with the altar. In material, shape, size and purpose the Roman cross was as different and distinct from Israel's altar as it could possibly be. One was an instrument of punishment and shame devised by a barbaric heathen nation to apply civil justice to extreme criminals, the other was a piece of religious equipment whereon gifts and offerings could be given to God. One was the place of rejection, the other the place of acceptance. In some ways they are alike, even as regards their physical associations, for the altar, like the cross, was a place of physical death and each was a representation of sovereign power, the first God's, the second Caesar's. There the resemblance ends.

There is that about the cross of Christ which in no way resembles the altar because of its association with sin. The cross was the pillory upon which God chose to identify His Son with old Adam; He impaled Him there in order that He should thereby be punished to death without mercy. In that respect therefore Jesus had no place at the altar and was cut off from it. The cross was the direct antithesis of the altar; it points to God's judgement on sin and the sinner and the whole rejected manhood of sin. But having conquered in that sphere and finished that part of His work on the cross, the Lord then proceeded to use it as an altar whereon He offered Himself without spot to God. This done, He had completed His work and He dismissed His spirit.

In fulfilment of His own statement, on behalf of mankind with its age-old rivalries and divisions and enmities, at Calvary He did five things: (1) He brought His gift to the altar and (2) (so to speak) left it there while He (3) went to the cross of and for reconciliation and (4) having accomplished it in one body, (5) came and offered His gift. By so saying and doing He made sacrifice the primal life-principle of the Church as well as of God; it was in view of the cross that He made His earliest statement about the altar. That was His art. He who knew no sin was made sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

In the midst of all that sin, right there at the heart of it, was righteousness, for He remained righteous throughout. This is the great mystery which resolved the problem of sin and iniquity. By this God was able to deal with the impossibility of redeeming, reconciling and regenerating and receiving man and at the same time, by one act, righteously finalising and eternally dispensing with the temporary measures of atonement and the need for man-made altars.

The Throne and the Altar

The whole principle is divinely laid out for us in fullest detail by the exactitude of tabernacle typology. The tabernacle was assembled for this purpose and is scientifically precise in all the details of Redemption and Atonements it presented to Israel. It was really a house of God adapted to Atonements. The throne upon which He sat under the cloud, manifesting Himself in glory beneath the wings of the cherubim as the Shekinah, was only called the Mercy Seat because upon it every year was sprinkled the blood of the Atonement and for no other reason. By bestowing upon it this name, the Lord deliberately related the throne to the altar whereon blood was daily poured and burnt. The blood was the link between the two and by this means God was trying to show Israel the indispensability of the principle of sacrifice; how far He succeeded who can tell?

The throne and the altar were one; they still are and always have been one. In the same way that sacrifice is the basis of the one life in the three persons of God, so also sacrifice had to be both the basis of the national life of Israel and the basis of relationship between God and each individual Israelite. God was showing them that He could only live and dwell on earth with men upon this principle. Therefore He ordered them to sprinkle blood upon His throne that it may be turned by them into an altar for Him. This being done, He abode thereon in living glorious fire among them. By night over the top of that throne, towering away into the heavens as an immovable pillar and suitably adapted to human vision, that fire could be plainly seen. By day the glory was clouded and veiled, by night the fire was in full view.

It was the sacrifice being consumed under that column of fire which caused it to burn with such eternal intensity. But there was no body of animal or man within that Holiest place; why then this steady, unending, powerful fire which seemed to leap so spontaneously from earth to heaven? Whence came it and how? The answer is Jesus. There was no body of flesh and blood and no fat to burn within the sanctuary of sanctuaries; that is why the pillar, though of fire, was not of smoke. Instead, isolated in splendour within the veil of inward holiness right in the centre and at the head of all, stood the Ark of the Covenant of God. It represented Christ Jesus: He was the altar there just as He was the altar of the Court gate.

Altar and throne are one, all is Christ. Out there at the gate, the flesh and blood and fat could be seen and smelt, the body could be handled and the fire heard, but in the Holy of Holies there was no voice or smell or sight of burning, it was a different altar; God's is an eternal sacrifice; everything there was spiritual, original, unchanging, fundamental.

The Union of the Altar and the Sacrifice

O God, wilt Thou not give us all eyes to see, ears to hear, senses to smell, hands to handle and a heart to understand, lest seeing we see not and hearing we do not hear, nor taste nor handle nor believe; lest our hearts feel nothing and we be all as cold and dead as bodies of useless animals. Of old the Lord did not adapt and accommodate Himself to man by inanimate things, on the contrary He took of man and things and adapted them to Himself. He lost no glory nor laboured in vain when ordering His tabernacle, but, consistently with His being and true to Himself, He accommodated all that He commanded of Israel to one invariable principle of eternal life.

This He did, that by many things He should speak of One only and continuously until He should come Who is the fulfilment of them all. The multitudinous details scrupulously and repetitiously practised were imposed under the limitations of the system of atonements then in force. At that time, because of the nature of the covenant, the Lord had to deal with different issues separately in order to distinguish them; but by the reconciling Christ He dealt with all things at once.

Christ has made the altar of God plain and meaningful and absolutely indispensable to us. He has explained and interpreted it; in His own inimitable way He has forever established it in the midst of the churches and has had the fact recorded for us in the last book of the Bible. The revelation of Him given in the first chapter is of the Voice

speaking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. John turned to see and describe for us the vision he saw. It was of the Lord Jesus; standing there as the Son of Man all-glorious, He was shining, flaming, burning fire. His feet supply the clue to His whole stand on the various counts concerning which He has come to judge in the churches — they were like fine brass as though they burned in a furnace, says John. He appeared to be exactly what He is — the apotheosis of sacrifice.

In Israel the only furnace that counted with God was the one which stood at the entrance of His courts. It was the altar of Israel and God. At His commandment it was made of brass and the fire that burned in it was as a furnace that never went out. So fierce was the fire and so intense the heat that it withstood all the tempestuous winds that blew and the rains which torrented upon it summer and winter. Fed by the countless offerings of the myriads of Israel, that fire ate its way through flesh and bone and lapped up the blood of the carcasses heaped upon the altar in fervent devotion. Under such power the bodies quickly turned to ashes, which in turn ultimately found their way on to a heap outside the camp where they lay, grey and dead, far away from the altar. Lying there, mute and lifeless, they gave testimony that the sacrifice had indeed been made; it had ascended up as a savour of love in fire to Him who sat upon the Mercy Seat. And the heart of Him who watched and smelled and tasted the sweet savour rested upon the Christ represented in, though yet unknown by, His people. The Father heard and handled the Son who, all unawares, they offered to God.

It had to be like that. Ignorant as they were of the Christ, they could have neither national nor individual existence or acceptance except He be their all. He it was who symbolically rose up in all His self-sacrificing beauty and glorious love from Israel's brazen altar and stood before God in the midst of His people. If it had to be so for those, how much more must this be also for the Church.

So it is that, burning as fire, with glowing feet, the Lord of love and glory presents Himself to His churches. At first He stands still, right in the midst of them, mutely symbolical, holding before our vision the testimony to the supreme sacrifice still ascending in love to His God and Father on our behalf. Then, in complete accord with His visual manifestation to John and us, He becomes vocal and reveals the reason for His coming to the churches in this form and manner; it is to recall His people to first love. Well may He do so, for who as He should, or is able, or is more prepared to do this? It is of incontrovertible significance that, of all the manifestations of Himself He vouchsafes to John in course of the unfolding revelation, the first should be in connection with the altar in pursuit of first love.

The second vision of Him is as THE LAMB upon and in the midst of the throne. The altar and the throne. This is nothing other than a repetition of the order and connection we observed in the tabernacle — the altar and the mercy seat. It was the same in John's day as in Moses'; it is still the same now and always will be; it cannot change, for this is the eternal order with God. The form or manifestation may, indeed must, change; but in whatever form it may appear, love and sacrifice cannot exist apart from each other, any more than water can be, apart from being H₂O — they are one and the same as are substance and analysis.

So we have laid open for us to see what first love is; it is that quality of love which is in God. He is that first love, and 'He first loved us' says John, and from this source all that is good, pure, holy and beneficial flows, and basic to it all lies sacrifice. The Christ of the churches stands as though rising up from the altar fire, the living sacrifice in a furnace of love. The Vision Glorious manifests the reason for the call and is its reward. If we love Him and would respond to His call we must first acknowledge the eternal sacrifice, repent and count all things but loss to gain Him in life, join Him on the altar and pass into God.

Hearts may well wail who never were shown this, who have wasted life, time and effort to achieve that which, when gained, is only ashes and has passed from them in the gaining. All that is not motivated by sacrificial love and founded upon the altar life of Christ is rejected by God, for it is a denial of His very life.

'I AM' says the voice that speaks from the altar in the midst of the churches, 'the beginning and the ending, the first and the last, He which is and which was, and which is to come'. His face shining like the burning sun and His feet glowing like the fiery furnace surely testify to the point of moral certainty that His body also must be burning fire too. How could His face burn and shine so that His eyes are leaping flames and His feet glow with the intensity

of furnace-heat because of the fire that burns within, and His body not be fire also? It is covered for God's good reasons, but it is surely an open secret.

Truly enough the churches are veiled fire, lamp stands only, but how can the lamps shine except they burn? Surely the Lord is telling us that the light of the churches is Himself as He here manifests Himself to be. If this be not their light, then there is no light for the dark world. The light of the churches is not for themselves but for mankind.

If we will join ourselves to our Lord in sacrificial love, then we shall know exactly what first love is; we may only join Him in first love in order to give ourselves constantly in self-sacrifice to Father. Only then shall we be light and be able to show that kind of light He wishes to shine in this world. Failing to do so, churches will be removed. Organisations created and sustained by men's will and considered by them to be churches may continue as substitutes for genuine churches and be thought to be what Christ instituted, but the true Church will not be there.

Apart from first love there can be no Church nor any churches, for the Church is nothing other than an embodiment of Christ; it is His Body. It embodies and is all that He is — all that He ever was and shall be; it can be no other; if it differs from that, whatever it is it is not the Church. The Church is here to be in and to this generation what Jesus was in His day to His generation; but not only so, it is also here to display and be a continuing manifestation in and to this age of what God ever has been and shall eternally be.

Way beyond demonstrating the life and powers of Jesus' manhood which every man saw and tasted while He was on earth, the Church has to be a manifestation of His Godhead also. She has to reveal what He eternally was known to be in God and seen to be before angels before He came to earth. The Church throughout its many churches must reveal its God-head or head-ship in God, for He in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily is the Church's head. The Church is the body of Him and because of this is the embodiment of all that. This is its greatest mission in the world.

This is why the Lord appeared as He did to John. He wanted the revelation which God gave to Him of Himself and the future to begin on this note, 'Let love, first love, be in you, consume you, burn you up, keep you eternally alive, as it has been and has done in me from the very first; come, join me on the altar; to sacrifice self is no pain. There is no hardship or suffering here; all that could have felt pain is now dead, only that which lives and rises eternal lives here; you are come to God by me. I have shown you the principle of life, abide here in me, and I in you, on the altar of God, always ascending with me in this love-life to my Father and your Father; I am the resurrection and the life. I am He that liveth and was dead and behold I am alive for evermore and so now are you, for I am this in you and you in me. All that I manifested and revealed on earth I am and ever was and shall ever be. I did nothing new on earth, nothing new to me. What I did was new to men under the sun on earth but there is nothing new under the sun; all that men can know as newness is above the sun, and what I show you now is eternal. As it has been so it is now also; the cross is an altar for you too; come my beloved, join yourselves to me here, offer yourselves also with me without spot to God'.

The Lord emphasises these things with tremendous power when He breaks the fifth of the seals with which the seven-sealed book was so securely closed. When He does this we again see the altar, and under it the souls of them that were slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. From the following verses it is unmistakable that those who suffer martyrdom for the reasons stated have been slain because they have lived upon the altar. Many who have been put to death and called martyrs for reasons acceptable enough to men are not accepted as such nor called martyrs by God.

The Lord states very clearly the ground upon which He classifies men as martyrs. These are they who have lived upon the altar in self-sacrifice which is borne out by the word of God which is in them; that is, they have received, held, lived and spoken the Word of God and their testimony has been that with the Son of God they also are sons of God. These and only these are called martyrs by God. Death by torture or persecution or murder for any good work or cause, wrong as these things are, are not ipso facto classified by God as martyrdom.

Martyrdom as considered by and accepted among men entails physical death, as it does also in the verses in Revelation 6 v.9-11, but originally the word translated witnesses in the New Testament is the Greek word 'martus',

and occurs in various grammatical forms in connection with the subject of being a witness and bearing witness or testimony. To be a martyr in this sense did not always result in undeserved and premature death, but it did and still does entail living on the altar. True witness to Jesus Christ cannot be borne by any person except that person lives a life of loving self-offering to God through personal sacrifice. The reading leaves no doubt that this altar principle shall endure until the end of the age, for those slain at the time of which John writes are told by the Lord that they must wait for others to be killed as they, and for the same reason.

However, the altar we have is not the same as that which Israel after the flesh knew; ours is only for those who are after the Spirit. Looking at it through the enlightened eyes of John we see that there are no ashes under this altar; instead gathered there are the souls of the martyrs. What an altar, what a gathering! At the point of death the spirits of that brave and noble army, men and boys, the matron and the maid, departed to be with the Lord, ascended in the sacred flame and their souls remained under the altar. The soul in which the Spirit was revealed and by which it was manifest in the body rests and awaits the reward and shall receive it when finally placed among the glorious company of its peers.

So we see that the Lord is not seeking ashes of dead bodies, but the souls developed by human spirits united with Him on the altar while living in their bodies on earth. Keeping ourselves with Him on the altar, ascending in constant spiritual love to God, ensures that the soul eternally lives the spiritual life of Christ indestructible on the earth among men. This must be the residual remains of every one of us; then, whether or not we die a martyr's death in the flesh, our souls in white await their investiture, which shall be bestowed upon them in the future day of the coronation honours of the Lamb.